

# How to market effectively to Centennials

Source: Warc Best Practice, July 2016

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This article provides marketers with guidance on how to engage Centennials, young people aged between 0 and 19, who already occupy one third of the global population and who have decidedly different attitudes than their predecessors, Millennials.

- Unlike their predecessors, Centennials have a less idealistic and more pragmatic outlook, realising that choices are limited and success is harder to achieve, which makes this cohort an extremely savvy generation.
- Although they are willing and able to spend, Centennials are not the consumption-positive shoppers that Millennials were as teens, and it is important for brands to understand their mindset in order to effectively communicate with them.
- Being inclusive and open, and showing genuine purpose and passion for your market will be key for brands who want to appeal to Centennials.
- The article includes case studies of brands who have successfully engaged this mobile-native generation, such as Mondelez's Sour Patch Watermelon Slurpee and Taco Bell's scholarships programme.

[Mark Inskip](#)

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A growing blindspot in the marketing landscape is the continued association of Millennials with the youth lifestyle. It's a blindspot because, arguably, the era of Millennial youth marketing is over.

As Millennials, i.e. persons born between 1981 and 2000, age (the oldest now being in their mid-30s) a new generation of youth – Centennials – are bringing a decidedly different dynamic to the market, one that will create new rules for marketing and have influence beyond their size and years.

This new generation isn't just an evolution of the Millennials who came before, they're a new generation with attitudes, priorities and consumer behaviours all of their own. This paper draws out the findings from the TRU Youth Monitor to reveal where Centennials are similar to prior generations, where they're different, and how brands can capitalise on this once-in-a-generation opportunity to profit from this monumental change.

## Definitions

Born from 1997 to the present, Centennials, also referred to as Generation Z, are aged from 0 to 19 (in 2016) and currently occupy approximately one-third of the global population and rising, including 25% of consumers in both the US and the UK. For the purposes of this paper the focus is mostly on those aged 13+.

## Where to start

Centennials are a critical and influential generation, which already has a weekly spending power in the US alone topping \$80 billion (The Futures Company Tru Youth Monitor – The Teen Spending Story).

## What makes Centennials click?

Unlike their predecessors, Centennials have a less idealistic and more pragmatic outlook. Facing situations that Millennials didn't have to deal with until early adulthood, and, growing up in graver times when choices are limited and success is harder to achieve, means this cohort is an extremely savvy generation.

Centennials are poised to reinvent what it means to be young. They display different wants and needs from previous generations

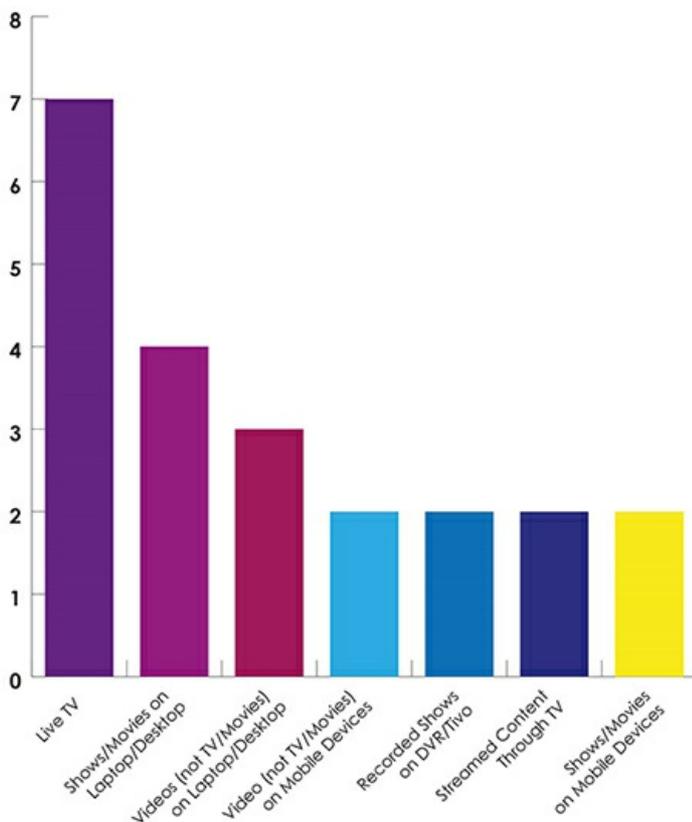
of teens. Instead of struggling to fit seamlessly into the social matrix, they're focused on being true to themselves.

Although they're willing and able to spend, Centennials are not the consumption-positive shoppers that Millennials were as teens. Raised during the fallout of the Great Recession, Centennials are not profligate spenders or easy targets, which means that marketers do indeed have something to prove to this group to win them over. This is all the more reason why it's important to understand their mindset and effectively communicate with them.

Centennials are empowered by mobile access, awareness and acumen. These mobile natives are driving marketplace changes, and virtually no area of society is insulated from their influence. As a result, they are turning products, brands – even whole categories – on their heads. As parents teach them foundational lessons, they're teaching parents lessons in mobile communication. Taken from [TRU Youth MONITOR 2016](#) here's a quick snapshot of US Centennials (aged 12-19) media consumption habits:

### Mean Hours Spent Viewing Over Past Seven Days

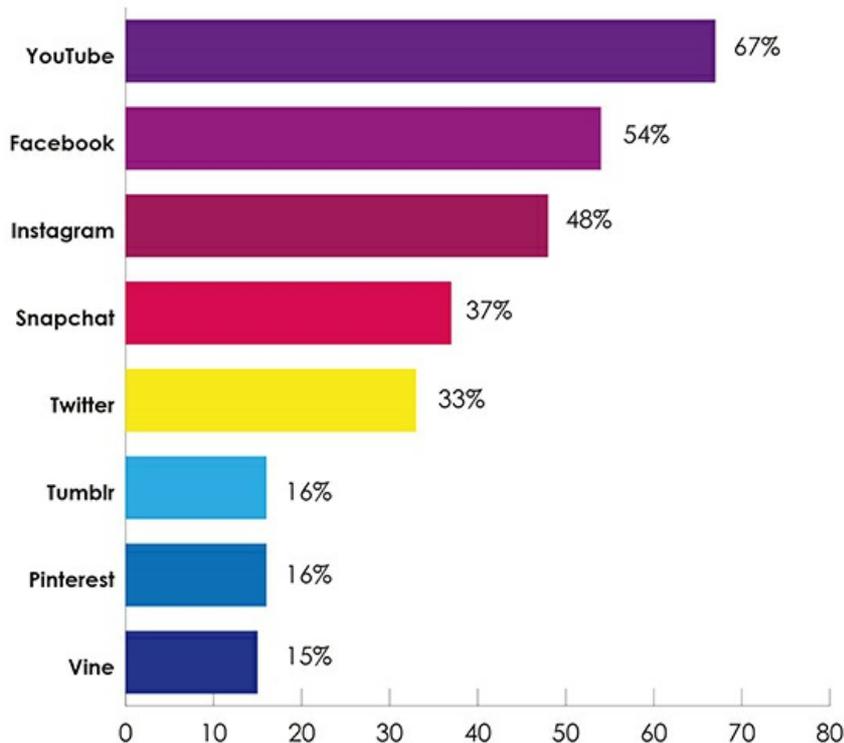
US Centennials (aged 12-19) media consumption habit



(Source: TRU Youth Monitor 2016)

## Social Media Platform Participation: Have Account and Visit Regularly

US Centennials (aged 12-19) media consumption habit



(Source: TRU Youth Monitor 2016)

This context will influence Centennials' approach to the world, including their engagement with brands, marketers and advertisers. Before marketers start to hone in on this new generation, it's important to note that Centennials are driven by three core values:

1. **Openness** – Living by the motto: 'You do you', Centennials give themselves and others permission to be different, and express those differences how they see fit. The latest *TRU Youth Monitor* shows
2. **Resilience** – Coming of age during challenging times has made Centennials learn that hard work and grit are the keys to success in today's world. They know they will face roadblocks, but are prepared to overcome them. Some 87% agree that they enjoy and celebrate life despite its many obstacles and challenges.
3. **Realism** – Well acquainted with limits and constraints, Centennials have grounded, realistic expectations for themselves and the way the world works. For example, 70% agree that it's really hard to get ahead in life without a degree.

The youth lifestage is inherently optimistic, but the context surrounding Centennials' youth has rarely felt more turbulent. An emerging slow-growth economy, political polarisation and the spectre of global terror are tempering some of the outsized expectations built by previous generations. Centennials are forging core values to adapt to today's realities. These values prioritise making personal decisions, reacting and reconciling if those choices go badly, and understanding that the best-case scenario isn't the *only* scenario.

## Essentials

### Engaging with Centennials

So how can brands set about reaching a generation that proudly proclaims itself to be open, resilient and grounded? It kind of sounds like everything marketing is not, and that brands need to get more in touch with reality.

It's abundantly clear that Centennials will give credit to those brands that manage to be both authentic and stand out among their peers. Of course, Millennials today also value individuality and authenticity, but as teens they were more focused on fitting in than standing out. Centennials possess a more mature mindset than teens of the past. They are taking their drive for uniqueness and individual identity to a place far beyond other generations at this age.

The rules that Centennials have set for themselves apply to brands as well. For this new and growing generation, the drive to stand out isn't simply a quest for attention – it's about being recognised as their own person, with unique skills, experiences and opinions. To Centennials, standing out is a way to show that you are comfortable with your individuality.

Marketing with the Millennial mindset just isn't going to cut it anymore, so marketers and brands need to consider these the four golden rules of Centennial marketing:

## **1. Open your doors**

The most diverse generation in history, Centennials have grown up in a pluralistic, polycultural society that values diversity and acceptance of differences. Those brands that emphasise their more welcome, open and inclusive sides will be the ones that are most likely to win over with this demographic.

This can be achieved in several ways:

### ***Inclusion***

Campaigns that emphasise and celebrate diversity will resonate with Centennials, rather than those that pander more to stereotypes or pursue unrealistic aspirational themes.

In 2015, one of the most gender-specific toys, Barbie, launched a campaign featuring a boy for the first time. In an ad for Moschino Barbie, two girls and one boy admire the designer-clad doll's look. "Moschino Barbie is so fierce!" exclaims the boy, before draping a black purse with a gold chain over the toy's arm. The limited edition line sold out an hour after it went on sale.

### ***Purpose***

Some 89% of Centennials surveyed in the [TRU Youth Monitor](#) believe it's a person's responsibility to do what's right – even if they get into trouble. Therefore, those brands that can show their generous side authentically by championing a cause or pushing for positive societal change will prosper.

[Persil's Free The Kids](#) campaign, which highlights the fact that many children in developed economies only go outside for an average of just one hour a day, less than inmates at the Wabash High Security prison in the US, is a fine example of modern purpose-driven marketing. This is the kind of approach that would appeal to Centennials, acknowledging their sense of responsibility to themselves and the world at large.

### ***Personalisation***

Centennials' hunger for individuality and love of diversity means it's important for brands to offer tailored, personal experiences embracing people's particular wants and needs, rather than simply taking a generic approach. However, this is personalisation with a twist, more a demand for choice and guidance, than a call for elitism. Brands must acknowledge that this demographic not only want a unique and personal experience, but also want to belong, and aim to deliver a shared platform in which people can embed their individuality.

Airbnb is a great example of this Big Tent philosophy, creating a platform under which individuality and diversity can flourish. The brand has made global travel affordable for more people, who are able to personalise their trip and get a truly more authentic experience, encapsulated in the tagline 'Belong Anywhere'.

## **2. Anticipate empowerment**

Millennials were largely respectful of institutions and the marketplace, but Centennials may be less patient. An ever-growing number of tools are available that enable this cohort to create their own solutions. If a brand doesn't spot and eliminate friction this group will take matters into their own hands. Thus brands must empower Centennials through:

### ***Intuitive customer experience***

In the [TRU Youth Monitor](#), almost a third of Centennials (59%) said the statement 'High tech is so much a part of our lives' most described their generation, and they expect brands to understand this. They see technology as a way to navigate the world as quickly and efficiently as possible, so will be looking for intuitive navigation and fast smart search from websites, along with responsive customer service, so they can get what they want, when they want it. These digital natives will also expect nothing less than an omnichannel approach.

## Content over sell

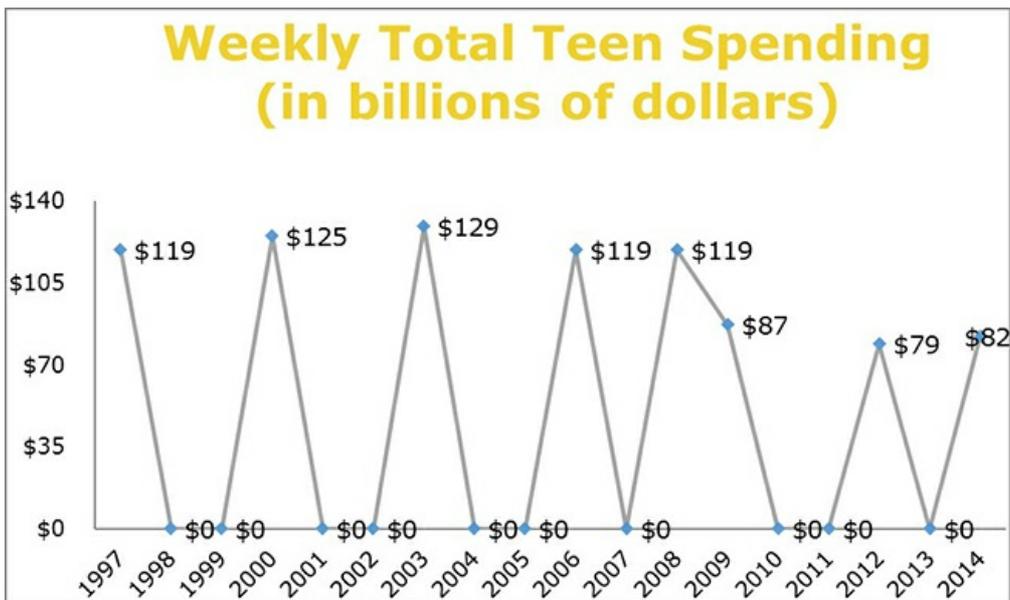
Knowledge is power and Centennials prefer brands that share insight with them that will help them make a more informed purchase or help them live their lives better, rather than simply being repeatedly sold to. They are also looking for brands that value their feedback and act on it, so those that facilitate and encourage user-generated content will be the winners.

## Privacy

Centennials are much more savvy about internet security than previous generations and only too aware of the dangers of social media faux pas, not to mention the normality of ubiquitous security cameras that remind them of a 'Big Brother' presence. Consequently, they have developed workarounds and altered their sharing practices to circumvent monitoring, while showing a healthy distrust of the darker sides of digital life. They will, therefore, expect brands to respect their privacy, and favour those that allow them to set up their own closed discussion groups rather than those that leave them potentially exposed and open to the world.

## Value

Teen spending has dropped by around 30% over the past decade, with Centennials experiencing markedly different conditions than previous generations, including slow economic growth, wage stagnation, consumer debt and volatile global markets. As a result, Centennials have an economically pragmatic mindset, especially among those in their first years of independent living. They like luxury as much as everyone else, but are far less of a slave to labels and fashion than Millennials, and will look to brands to respect the economic challenges they are facing and deliver great value, including a range of price points, discounts, transparent pricing and loyalty benefits.



Source: The Futures Company [TRU Youth Monitor](#)

## 3. Loosen the reins

Mobile-first consumers with a desire to change – not just work – the system, Centennials will use their know-how to gain control if they are left unsatisfied. So although it may take a major cultural shift, this means that brands that are ready to relinquish some control to consumers and work with them to drive strategies or tactics are likely to gain ground over those that fiercely defend their boundaries, which risk being taken out of the equation altogether. Get Centennials involved through:

### User-generated content

Chatting online anytime and anywhere is a way of life for Centennials. As such, marketers should provide the right kind of platform to enable this cohort to connect with each other around a brand. This will encourage brand chatter; it might not all be complimentary, but it will give marketers great insight into the sentiment in the market, a platform to engage with consumers and address any problems directly. Marketers can then use the feedback to hone the offer. Centennials will reward brands for respecting their opinion and their bravery in allowing them to freely voice it.

### Real world campaigns

Centennials are raised on YouTube and reality TV. As such, they want their brands to be real and authentic. They don't want companies to stand out by shouting the loudest or being flashy, but by grabbing their attention through passion for a category. Taking a brand out into the real world allows marketers to show this passion and commitment to consumers first hand and engage directly with them. Capturing the experience and using online social channels and technologies like virtual reality to share it with a wider audience extends the reach and can also create reality TV. There's always a risk in any live experience, but take a risk in the name of your audience and they'll love you for it.

#### 4. Think ethics first

When marketing to Centennials brands should be mindful they are targeting a young – or very young – audience. As such, marketers should ensure they take an ethical approach when marketing to this cohort.

Rules and regulations vary by country – US marketers, for example, should ensure they are familiar with the [Children's Online Privacy Protection Act \(COPPA\)](#) and marketers in Europe should get to know the [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#) rules. Marketers should know the rules and regulations that exist in the country (or countries) they operate in.

Brands that fail to arm themselves with knowledge of what's allowed, and what's not, risk heavy fines, or worse – ethical slip-ups could do damage to a brand's reputation.

#### Reminder checklist

- **Change your strategy**  
Centennials differ markedly from Millennials and demand a new approach to marketing
- **Act now**  
With more than one-third of the world's population already Centennial, there is no time to lose
- **Be authentic and open**  
Take a genuine and honest approach and you'll gain trust and loyalty.
- **Embrace diversity**  
They are increasingly pluralistic and polycultural, so brands need to be too.
- **React quickly**  
They'll let you know if something's not working for them, so take swift action.
- **Share control**  
Give them ownership of your brand.
- **Show passion for your market**  
Know your category, innovate, push the boundaries, show you care.
- **Champion a cause**  
Give purpose as much importance as profit
- **Think ethics first**  
Get to know the rules and regulations when marketing to children

#### Case studies

[Sour Patch Watermelon Slurpee](#), Effie Worldwide, Silver, North America Effies, 2016

Mondelez partnered with 7-Eleven, the convenience retailer, to reignite sales of its Sour Patch Kids sweets. The two brands joined forces to produce one unique limited edition watermelon flavour Slurpee drink. The campaign capitalised on Centennials' aversion to maintaining the status quo and challenged teen shoppers to "Catch Them While You Can". Research showed that Centennials value fun, friendship, and individuality in their lifestyles and actively seek out experiences that are authentic, fresh, and on trend all at the same time. The full-scale integrated campaign inspired teens to "run wild" over 7-Eleven stores nationwide, while a major media outreach push and social campaign had teens sharing their Sour Patch Slurpee selfies all summer.

[Taco Bell reinvests in new marketing skills](#), Event Reports: IAB Annual Leadership Meeting, January 2016

Taco Bell, the US restaurant chain, wants to reward teens who have pursued their passions. It's [Live Más Scholarship](#) will provide \$1 million in scholarships to 220 young adults in 2016 to help Centennials move further down the road of independence, leveraging the skills they've pursued along the way.

#### Chevrolet

Chevrolet, the automotive brand, put teens first in its 2016 Malibu state-of-the-art "[Teen Driver" technology](#), including warnings and safety precautions while the teen is driving, as well as a report card for parents to review after a drive. Its purpose isn't to allow parents to spy on their Centennial drivers or to inspire punishment, but to provide information that allows teens to prove what responsible drivers they are – or to inspire dialogue about where improvements can be made.

## Sprite

Sprite, the soft drinks brand, developed an ad campaign, "[Ambition](#)," that features a teen who rejects a winding route to success by asserting his own individuality in remaking the world. Sprite emphasises that teens refuse to accept the current state of things and instead take charge in redoing them in their own ways, aligning with Sprite's new tagline, "Born to rfrsh."

## Further reading

Warc Topic Page: [Children](#)

Warc Topic Page: [Millennials & Youth](#)

Warc Case Studies: Target Audience: [Children](#)

Warc Case Studies: Target Audience: [Millennials & Youth](#)

MONITOR LME Spotlight

[The Teen Spending Story](#)

[The Future of the Workplace](#)

TRU View

*(available to TRU Youth MONITOR subscribers)*

[Centennials, Millennials & Your Category](#)

[The Future is Bright 2.0](#)

[Why Centennials \(And Other Generations\) Matter](#)

[Gender Bender](#)

TRU Youth MONITOR

*(available to TRU Youth MONITOR subscribers)*

[2016 TRU Youth MONITOR Report](#)

Point of View Library

*(available to TRU Youth MONITOR subscribers)*

[The New Authority](#)

[Inclusion and Fluidity](#)

[Consumer Behavior](#)

[Brand Loyalty](#)

MONITOR Infographic

[Centennials](#)

Other Sources

[Does Teaching Kids to Get 'Gritty' Help Them Get Ahead? \(NPR\)](#)

[Move Over, Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z \(NY Times\)](#)

[Stung by Millennial Misses, Brands Retool for Gen Z \(Ad Age\)](#)

[Generation Z and the Workplace: What You Need to Know \(Inc.\)](#)

[Getting Gen Z Primed to Save the World \(The Atlantic\)](#)

[Move Over Millennials, Generation Z Is in Charge \(Forbes\)](#)

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#### **About the author**

Mark Inskip is Global CEO of The Futures Company (part of WPP's Kantar Group) where he is responsible for global strategy, culture and performance. Prior to his role at TFC he held the post of European Managing Director for Group FMG, a global provider of high impact marketing & media solutions; integrating consulting, content, e-commerce and mobile commerce. Prior to joining FMG, Inskip was Regional Director of Consulting for Ogilvy & Mather. Before this he was at Accenture where he led the creation of its Digital Marketing Consultancy.

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Warc Ltd.

85 Newman Street, London, United Kingdom, W1T 3EU

Tel: +44 (0)20 7467 8100, Fax: +(0)20 7467 8101

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