The young are the most connected generation in history. For many decades being overseen by cameras was considered a 'big brother' exercise, to be opposed and indeed feared. Despite the obvious intrusion of privacy, the millennium generation which has grown up with Skype and MySpace has a different viewpoint and even brings the camera into the living room.

The future seems Orwellian

For business leaders, strategists and marketers the last twenty-five years have been pretty tumultuous. The location, the language and much of the process of business have changed.

So what will the next twenty-five years bring for the activewear industry? One big issue is to know where and how to talk to your audience. For the last few hundred years, communication tools have at least been obvious to the extent that broadcast medium allowed marketers to identify where and when to find their target consumer audience. Now two major factors are also influencing marketing communications today:

- Fragmented mass markets
- Computer and information technology

This can make it harder for companies to target their market segment cost effectively and has changed the way many companies deal with their marketing communications since, given this communication environment, markets need to move towards integrated marketing communications.

A consequence of this is that there will be some readers of this article who have not heard of the Renault Logan, Keen Footwear, or the Toyota Scion. Yet all three have been considered successful products of the 21st century. For those who do not know of these products the companies can perhaps celebrate that they have not wasted communications on an audience which might never buy the product, but have found routes to deal specifically with their target segment.

Four adults, a pig, 100kg of potatoes and a kitchen sink

Renault started the Logan as a €5,000 car for 'people stuck between a rock and a tough spot in the car market', to be built in its Romanian Dacia plant. The Logan was conceived with an emphasis on space – designed to comfortably accommodate "four adults, a pig, 100kg of potatoes and a kitchen sink," according to one Logan manager. The target audience was obvious and indeed the plan was to try and keep the car out of richer markets to avoid the cannibalisation of its more expensive models. It



A glance at the current prototypes reveals a "Know Where Jacket" with integrated GPS from Interactive Wear.

Interactive Wear

has been exceedingly successful and is now sold in Morocco, Russia, and Iran with India, Brazil, and China following closely behind.

We have of course already discussed Keen footwear in these columns and it is now used as an example of an 'instant company' moving from a start-up to $100 million in just three years, using a mix of direct marketing, product placement and word-of-mouth without any advertising expenditure.

One big issue of the present time is marketing to the younger generations and one the automobile industry is especially concerned about. Every time it launches a small car targeting this segment it is purchased by older people looking for inexpensive motoring — and its image for the young is at once spoiled. Toyota avoided this by designing a vehicle that was unattractive to the elderly and launched it through channels such as discotheques and a specialist website with no mention of the Toyota name. Sales exceeded expectations.

In different ways all three of these products have mixed the basic rules of marketing with a detailed understanding of what is happening in this new world. The Toyota Scion targeting the younger aged market directs us to another major aspect of change today and that is the huge difference in the way the younger generation chooses to handle communications.

Fragmented communications – shifting generations

So this fragmentation of communication now goes hand in hand with generational shifts in the way consumers use mobile phones, Blackberries, and the Internet. This means that it easy for things to happen in marketing of which older generations are entirely oblivious. Hence classification of society into analogues, digital converts and digital originals slips neatly into age brackets with the elderly analogues particularly likely to have difficulty in understanding so much of what is happening.

There is huge concern about how to deal with younger people, with conferences and seminars focusing on the issue. The BBC World Service recently had a week dedicated to what it called 'generation next'. The outdoor world is also interested to know how the next twenty-five years will look and so brought Neil Howe, author of a series of books on the generations, the most influential of which is Millennials Rising (2000), to speak at the Outdoor Industry breakfast at the Outdoor Retailer show.

According to Howe, each generation transforms what it means to be young. The G.I. generation was the first to define the great outdoors, and undertook it by staying in camps and driving there in cars. Places such as the Roosevelt Camp in Yellowstone Park were typical of what became available for America's youth. The Silent generation came of age just after World War II and did not want to change the system. As a risk-adverse group their first question was about 'the pension plan'. They were the earliest to get married and have children. For the outdoors this is a significant generation that developed breakthrough technologies such as nylon and fibreglass. As Howe put it, "James Bond meets camping." Outdoor gear started to move towards complexity and specialisation. It is from the Silent generation that we get Phil Knight, co-founder of Nike, and the start of the environmental lobby with Ralph Nader.

The Boomer generation has been much discussed. These are the Dr. Spock babies who grew up with a strong value orientation. Howe asked his audience to think of Forest Gump. This generation pushed the active outdoor experience as self-oriented, escapist, and anti-conventional. "The wilderness is of spiritual significance", and boomers have become a target for emotional branding. According to Howe, "boomers don't buy a back-pack, they buy a backpack experience."

A great deal of time has to be spent on Generation X, which is described as the 13th generation since the presidency of Sam Adams. By the early 1960s, children had fallen to the bottom of the pile in importance after lifestyle, and we began to see the disintegration of the family. This is a dynamic and entrepreneurial group who wants to be well off. In one study, students in this generation placed financial wellbeing ahead of having a meaningful philosophy of life. A number of their views and approaches created real problems for the outdoor industry. These included their fast-paced, urban, pragmatic lifestyle, their demand that leisure be efficient, modular, action-oriented ('Xtreme'), and limited time and money.

Recent American Generations

Generation	(Born)	Childhood Era	Coming-of-Age
G.I.	(1901-1924)	World War I Roaring 20s	Great Depression World War II
Silent	(1925-1942)	Great Depression World War II	American High
Boom	(1943-1960)	American High	Consciousness Revolution
Gen X	(1961-1981)	Consciousness Revolution	Culture Wars '90s Boom
Millennial	(1982 -2006+)	Culture Wars	'90s Boom

The Millennials are different again

Generation X is the group that provides the majority of the 'digital converts' although some exist in both the boomers and the early years of what is defined as the Millennial Generation. There is a big change in the handover to the Millennial Generation and it is here we find the 'digital originals' who have grown up with the toys and tools of increasingly joined up digital communications. This is a large group and, in most developed countries, especially the USA, much more ethnically diverse. Indeed there are quite wide variations within this group, hence the various names given to them from 'Generation Y', 'Echo-boomers' to 'iPod Generation' evidencing the fact that use of the Internet, PDAs, digital cameras and mobile phones has continued to evolve quite rapidly over the last few years. With broadband and WiFi recent students find that owning a laptop and being on-line continuously is a requirement of student life.

This generation came with parents who attached 'baby on board' stickers to their mini-vans. These were 'good kids' who inspired parents to be better people, yet when the parents could not protect them themselves they demanded that the government do it for them. This generation is one dedicated to service, which likes to plan ahead, with career deadlines and strong ambitions.

For this group, the outdoors has to be planned in and Millennials expect it to contribute to their overall wellbeing. Going forward, Howe expects them to be less interested in extremes and more conventional. This is a group which is special, sheltered, family-oriented, and pressured.

The issues that arise are two-fold: how the industry needs to respond to the changing attitudes of youth, and how it will communicate with them. Connecting activities to community service, arranging for feedback from credentialed organisers, offering many prizes, and providing good, well-made products start the process.



Integrated iPod remote control has also found its way into rucksacks and bags, as in the iBlaze from Simpak.

Simpak

These same young people are adept at using media, constantly on-line and sceptical and are increasingly immune to prime-time television, newspapers and radio. On-line, however, they receive advertising, if it is unobtrusive, relevant and fun. This may come as advertisements, viral marketing, or via influential blogs, podcasts, or shops on Second Life.

The next twenty-five years is clearly going to look different from the last.

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