Generation Y: Understanding the Trend and Planning for the Impact

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Abstract

Our world is always changing but we are about to experience change like never before. We are now more connected than ever, while at the same time distributed across multiple countries, cultures and companies. There is a new generation of students, employees and consumers pushing much of this change called "Generation Y" (or Millennials or Echo Boomers). This is a specific group of individuals born from 1983 to 1994, and they have never known a world without cell phones, cable tv and the Internet. Their demands and expectations are having a profound effect on academia, work environments and consumer spend. Gen Yers, their use of the internet, along with the "device formerly known as the mobile phone" are pushing changes on all fronts. Understanding this trend is key to adapt to the critical change underway in the way technology will integrate the spheres of work, education and our communities.

1. Introduction

Each generation over time leaves their unique stamp on our society as they transition thru their education, family life and work environments. They shape, mold and change our world. There is one generation of particular interest to those of us in the technology world, Generation Y. Their comfort with technology is second nature, in fact some would argue it's a birth right to use technology as they see fit, and expect those of us in technology to invent, design and deliver to meet their needs today and in the future.

2. Understanding Generation Y

In order to understand the demands and impact of Generation Y, we should examine their overall profile.
- There are more than 50 M in the US alone
- More than 250M in the developed world
- The largest generation in the last 50 years
- Grown up with technology and instant access to information
- Early adopters for many new technologies like podcasting, social networking, TM, IM, Mobile video/gaming, IPTV and many others

In the US Gen Y represent more than 70 million consumers in the US, earn a total annual income of about $211 billion and spend approximately $172 billion per year. They are changing the face of three spheres: work, home and academia.
- Work: Less interested in corporate lifestyle/more likely to become free agents/contractors
- Demand their technologies/resources be supported (social networks, IM, TM, IPhones)
- Home: Demand all on-demand programming
- Desire unlimited choices/want the "Long tail"
- More likely to read/listen/watch using new media (Yahoo News/podcasts/YouTube) than traditional media (New York Times/Radio stations/Television)
- Academia: desire on-demand e-learning with instant feedback via chat
- Integrate learning & technology (Listen to podcast lectures/or iChat videoconference study groups)
- Treat mobile as the most personal device (more important than keys and wallet)

3. Summary

Gen Y will push technology to new levels. There has never been a generation who has simultaneously embraced and pushed the limits of new technologies to this extent. Instead of asking "why", they push current technology and challenge "why not".

This generation will cause the companies and institution who serve them to fundamentally change how they serve them at work, home or in the community. IT networks will need to radically change to provide the personalization, instant access, and seamless mobility of information to meet their needs.