



Attracting the Next Generation Worker

Prepare Now, Benefit Later

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With the massive Baby Boom generation (born 1946-1964) approaching or already at retirement age, and the Millennials (born 1985-2004) entering or nearing their working years, everyone from human resource experts to behavioral scientists is postulating on how the “handoff” between generations will affect the workplace. Most agree the effect may be profound, especially given the difference in attitudes towards technology between the two groups.

Various studies predict that many companies will face challenges attracting “rising star” Millennials, who studies show are radically different in many ways from their Baby Boomer parents. However, companies need not be caught unprepared for this new generation. Careful planning and execution of tailored strategies, especially those relating to technology, can substantially increase a firm’s odds of hiring—and retaining—the best Millennial candidates.

The Current Picture

Is your company confident about the future of its hiring prospects? Do you assume there is no labor shortage? If so, think again. Even at the current unemployment rates, high-quality workers are in great demand. Furthermore, Baby Boomers currently make up approximately 40% of the workforce.

Yet, 10,000 Baby Boomers reach retirement age every day (per the Pew Research Center), and Generation X (Gen X) cannot replace them. This small generation, born between 1965 and 1984, accounts for about 16% of working adults. As a result, by 2025—long before the oldest Gen X worker will retire—Millennials are expected to comprise 75% of the working population.

Although 2025 is more than a decade away, experts caution companies not to take a “wait and see” attitude. Some studies, such as the [Metlife Study Of Baby Boomers](#) at 65, suggest that an increasing number of Baby Boomers, reasonably confident the economy is not going to derail completely, are opting to retire after all—in some cases, early. These workers are taking with them a half-century’s worth of knowledge. With Gen Xers being in short supply, firms will need to begin hiring

and training increasing numbers of Millennials within the next few years if they hope to maintain a high level of talent in their organizations.

Complicating matters, employment among Millennials dropped by 13.7% during the recession. More of these individuals are looking for work than the older generations, but they also have less experience, due to their higher rates of unemployment and relative youth. Consequently, it will likely become even more imperative for companies to identify and attract the real stars of the group.

Three Radically Different Generations

So, what do Millennials—especially the future stars of the generation—want in an employer? The answer is simple: **technology, instant, advanced and in generous proportions.**

Of course, there is no “official” list of the characteristics of these three groups. However, the Talent Management Team of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund [commissioned a comparative study](#) on the three generations that resulted in some interesting and insightful observations.

The report noted that Baby Boomers are optimistic, big-picture team players that “bring fresh perspectives.” Among many other attributes the report listed, one was

conspicuously absent: passion for technology. For Gen Xers, the report cited positive attitude, goal orientation and multi-tasking, but also noted a strong preference for flexibility and freedom. With this generation, technology enters the list of descriptors. Regarding Millennials, the report commends them for their heroic spirit and tenacity, but also notes they share GenXer’s love of multitasking, flexibility and freedom—and technology.

These differences in approach to technology really show up in the report’s chart on communication and computing. Whereas Baby Boomers prefer the phone for office communications and Gen Xers like email, Millennials prefer email and text. Baby Boomers use email to communicate from their office workstations, and many restrict web use to research (the report cited Google). Gen Xers and Millennials use mobile devices and laptops to communicate, use the web for

	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Millennials
Office Communications	 Phone	 Email	 Email & Text
After-Hours Communications	 Mobile Phone	 Email	 Email, IM & Text
Use the Web for	 Research	 Research & Task Mgt	 Research & Task Mgt

Primary Technology Usage Across the Generations
Source: United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund

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research and task/document review, and in the case of Millennials, for just about everything else. Gen Xers and Millennials also consider email and mobile devices to be 24/7 workplace communications vehicles. (Millennials also appreciate IM—instant messaging—and text as forms of 24/7 office-connection methods.)

Of course, these characteristics are far from absolute, especially for later-stage Baby Boomers who grew up with computers. Nevertheless, the point is clear: Millennials, and to a slightly lesser degree Gen Xers, expect technology to be ever present and available, and they rely on it continually to perform their work. They also expect to have the flexibility and freedom of movement to perform that work whenever and wherever it best suits them.

Replacing the Baby Boomer Workforce: Technology Holds the Key

The observations in the U.N. report aren't merely conjectural. According to the results of a survey

commissioned by networking giant Cisco Systems, young professionals under 30 and college students (Millennials) place a high value on unrestricted technology access—specifically freedom in choosing their mobile devices and using the Internet and social media. Rather than keeping their work and personal lives separate, or focusing on work-life balance (a term that is now nearly three decades old), they yearn for a blended approach.

This generation also wants working flexibility, with 69% (workers) and 70% (college students) in the Cisco survey reporting it should not be necessary to be physically in the office regularly with the exception of important meetings. Access to corporate information is another top perk—approximately 64% of respondents want access to corporate data on their home computers; 51% want it on their personal mobile devices. Additionally, this technology-centric group wants to be trusted to use social media in the workplace. They view social media as a cornerstone of communication and collaboration, not a toy.

As a bonus for companies struggling with labor expenses, more than 40% of these college students and young employees said they would accept a lower-paying job that had more flexibility of device choice, social media access and mobility over a higher-paying job with less flexibility. This is good news for companies, because they will need those extra dollars—not only to establish mentoring programs for knowledge transfer between Baby Boomers and Millennials—but also for the technology upgrades it will take to keep the latter group happy.



Transitioning Your Firm to a Model for Tomorrow

Now that you know what to expect from the “Next Gen” worker, what can you do to prepare for them? Rosy plans and promises of future upgrades might get Millennials in the door, but it won’t keep them there. At least one report found that Millennials are **twice as likely to quit a job** they do not find satisfying as are their Baby Boomer co-workers. (Some experts estimate the figure is closer to five times as likely.)

The reality for companies—especially small and medium sized businesses (SMBs) without high-end technology and intra-company job mobility—is that Millennials have high expectations they may not be able to meet. Not only does turnover erase the benefit of hiring younger workers, but it can make your hiring expenses go through the roof. Companies that don’t evolve to retain Millennial workers will see their brightest and best workers in this group leave for a position with someone else.

Fortunately, companies can attack this situation proactively and in a way that benefits their firms now—and ensures the stability of the future workforce. To accomplish this, they need to develop and implement a well-crafted, sufficiently robust plan that shifts their firms into an advanced, competitive IT stance. This may sound like an expensive, arduous proposition. However, if companies create a viable

plan for the effort, then break it down into its individual pieces and execute each in a controlled, targeted fashion, they can accomplish the necessary improvements in a surprisingly short time span.

Assess Your IT Systems

Creating a baseline for where you stand today, technologically, is the first step in devising a realistic plan for meeting the Millennial challenge. Qualified IT providers can help you evaluate your infrastructure (hardware and network), software and current state of mobility. With an assessment of this type, you should receive reports that clearly benchmark your IT systems against industry standards and trends.

With an assessment such as this you do more than start the process of deciding what you need to improve. You'll also gain valuable inventories of servers, applications and network devices (including mobile devices operating on your network), discover key points of security vulnerability and potential equipment failure, and receive a permanent, in-depth record of your existing network setup that will reduce the cost and complexity of resolving network issues.

Plan for Upgrades

Assuming you work with a knowledgeable, full-service IT provider, the firm should also be able to help you determine what upgrades and improvements will position you to capture a workforce that expects 24/7/365 access to company

systems via high-speed connections, wants to be equipped with the latest mobile gadgetry, and views communication and collaboration via "social" solutions as a given.

Armed with the list of upgrades you will need, you and your consultant can begin to develop a cost-effective road map to achieving those improvements. Not only will you be able to budget for Millennial-grade technology, but you will also achieve lasting system productivity and stability benefits along the way.

Embrace Mobile Computing

Mobility is a key attractant for Millennials—and for Gen X workers, as well. By mobility, we don't mean simply handing them mobile devices. They want to be mobile—they see a real benefit in conducting business wherever they happen to be and whenever it is convenient. That might be in the office, at home, or even at a coffee shop or while standing in line at the supermarket.

This approach requires companies to adopt secure, cloud-based solutions for enabling access to corporate data without making the company's network and intellectual assets vulnerable. There are several approaches to achieve this stance. One of these is to implement a secure, cloud-based "portal" to shared company assets. Another is to build a secure, accessible cloud, either behind the corporate firewall or hosted with a trusted IT provider.

Let Them “Bring” It

BYOD—Bring Your Own Device—is also an important component of mobile computing. These young workers want to use their own devices at work, and they will be even happier if their employer reimburses them for a portion of the cost. BYOD brings with it security challenges, as well, which companies must address.

If you haven’t already adopted—or at least planned for—BYOD, you are doing your firm a disservice. Already, the majority of enterprises (76%, per a 2012 [Good Technology study](#)) formally support BYOD in the workplace. Firms cite productivity leaps and worker satisfaction as just two of the benefits that accompany this approach. Companies not comfortable with full-blown BYOD can explore the newest iteration of mobility—CYOD (Choose Your Own Device). With CYOD, the employer offers a palette of secure devices from which employees can choose, but does not allow workers to bring their own onto the network. However, the verdict is still out on whether or not Millennials will embrace or reject this more restrictive approach.

Explore Social Media

Social Media is perhaps the most challenging new technology for business owners to embrace, and it is something that many Millennials do not consider negotiable. In the Cisco survey we cited earlier, 56% of young workers and college students indicated they would

either not accept a job offer from a company that banned access to social media—or they would find a way to circumvent the rule.

Furthermore, they don’t want social media available only as a tool to collaborate with co-workers. They want permission to log into their accounts and connect with friends and family during the day. Whether it’s because they grew up in an age of uncertainty (think 911), or need feedback from peers (another Millennial trait cited in the U.N. study), this generation craves near-constant connection with those they like and trust.

It’s a given that success with Millennials will likely require companies to accept social media and make allowances for it in their firms. However, truly savvy companies will do more—they will implement social enterprise and collaboration platforms (e.g. Yammer; Chatter) for their real-time connectivity benefits. Social enterprise platforms foster collaboration and connectivity in a company-controlled that everyone can embrace. Savvy companies are already using such platforms to create “corporate brains” that connect younger workers with seasoned, highly skilled employees, encouraging mentoring and knowledge transfer. (Some experts estimate that as much as 70% of corporate workforce knowledge resides in the heads of its “elder” workers and is not written down.)

The Payback is Real Now

Adopting the technologies we've detailed here provides enumerable advantages to SMBs now—not only the specific benefits we mentioned earlier, but others, as well. Functional, up-to-date IT systems, including mobile and social solutions, will drive workforce productivity for all three generations. They can also help close the gap between Baby Boomers and Millennials and facilitate the knowledge transfer that is crucial to helping companies thrive over the next few decades.

Furthermore, moving to a more advanced technological environment will help firms move from Information Technology to Business Technology. With business technology, companies make their IT systems and operations fundamental components of the business equation, benchmarked in terms of business key performance indicators (KPIs) rather than network uptime. This approach enables firms to calculate the value technology should deliver and then evaluate the outcome against those projections. It enables them to move technology and business goals forward in tandem for the benefit of the

bottom line. However, such a forward-thinking methodology requires companies to refine their planning processes and update their thinking—exactly the activities they'll conduct as they move to greet the Millennial generation.

An Eye on the Future

The upcoming hand-off of corporate America from Baby Boomers to Millennials (and to a lesser degree, Gen Xers), is going to have profound impact on many firm's business continuity. Once the "silver tsunami" hits, companies that have not learned how to hire and retain Millennials—and even promote them into leadership positions—might literally be washed away. Taking steps now to accelerate technology development in your firm will fight this wave on two fronts.

First, it will put cutting-edge tools into the hands of your most "tech savvy" Baby Boomers (and hopefully, encourage them to connect with Millennials for knowledge transfer). Second, it will help you land and keep the new generation of workers upon which your company's future might literally depend.

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