# Gen Y: Coming to your place - ready or not!

By Nathan Chanesman

People born between 1982 and 2000 - the so-called Generation Y - represent 28% of Australia's population and worldwide, are the largest generational sector since the post-war baby boomer explosion of 1946-1964. It's important, therefore, to understand who they are, why they are different and how this will impact your business.

## Generations defined

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| Veterans | 1926 - 1945 |
| Boomers | 1946 - 1964 |
| Gen X | 1965 - 1981 |
| Gen Y | 1982 - 2000 |

These are approximate dates as some demographers define the above differently. Whatever the period, all agree that Gen Y is different to all the previous generations and these differences will change the way we think about staff, job satisfaction, retention, customers and patients. So ready or not, you are going to face new challenges on how you communicate and do business.

## Generational diversity

All four generational groups are represented in your business and your patients. Each generation brings its own distinct set of values, view of authority, global outlook, sense of loyalty and work expectations.

The oldest generation grew up to respect authority, law and order, had a strong work ethic, carried with them experiences of economic depression and wartime shortages. They are the generation who keep reminding their children that "in their day" they had none of the luxuries. They grew with a view that nothing came easy; you had to work and importantly save and not squander your money.

The Baby Boomers had no such restraints. Boom times were on, unemployment was low, if you went to university and got a degree you were assured of a good paying job and career future. This group was rebellious, introduced music and fashion that "shocked" their parents, smoked cannabis and discovered promiscuity. It's as if the end of the war wiped the slate clean and this group was redefining civilisation. What kept most in check was their respect for their parents who kept telling them of the deprivations they experienced in their youth.

Gen X were different again. Most had both parents working thus they became more resourceful, self-reliant and focused their more on themselves which made them easy to employ but hard to retain. They were not interested in long term careers and university was not that important in order to get a good job. They made their own decisions. Gen X were creative and not regimented in their thinking and as a result, produced innovation the likes the world had not seen before. From dentistry to space travel; from digital devices to computers. The range of technology products, internet and online shopping were mind boggling.

Now we have a new generation, GEN Y, who have been technologically-based their entire life. This generation has grown up with a computer, Playstation, iPod and mobile phone. Technologically the most savvy of all generations to date, GEN Y's are refining new frontiers on how we communicate: Text messaging, Email, You Tube, Facebook, MySpace, Podcasts and the list goes on. In fact, to earlier generations, there's a new language being spoken that they have no clue as to what it means. In 2006, the University of Melbourne conducted a study of first year students. 56% had a laptop, 90% accessed the internet at least once a day, 90% checked their email every day, 96% had a mobile phone and 40% owned a device with wireless internet access.

## Characteristics of Generation Y Employees - The Pros

1. **Adaptability:** Gen Y is used to adapting and being comfortable in various situations.
2. **Technologically savvy:** Growing up in the age of technology and taking advantage of it.
3. **Ability to grasp new concepts:** This is a learning-oriented generation.
4. **Efficient multi-taskers:** They will do it faster and better than their competition.
5. **Tolerant:** Generation Y will make the increasingly diverse workforce feel at home and comfortable.

## Characteristics of Generation Y Employees - The Cons

1. **Impatient:** Raised in a world dominated by technology and instant gratification.
2. **Sceptical:** In recent years there has been more scamming, cheating, lying and exploiting than ever from the major figures in the media. This includes everyone from rock stars to the president.
3. **Blunt and expressive:** Self expression is favoured over self control. Making their point is most important.
4. They are **image-driven:** Making personal statements with their image is very important.
5. They are still **young:** Although they have a "seen it all, done it all" air about them, lack of life experience means that they don't know everything yet. They are aware of this and are not afraid to ask questions. For this generation, it is better and more time-saving to ask questions, than to waste time trying to figure it out.

## GEN Y - want the best, demand the best, expect the best, be the best

Where GEN X moved in an out of the workforce to accommodate kids and outside interests, GEN Y doesn't distinguish between work and home. They just want to spend their time in meaningful and useful ways no matter where they are. As children, the GEN Y's have been helped by their parents more than any previous generation. Parents are involved in decisions regarding schools, subjects and careers. They have given them a strong belief in themselves and their self worth - "you can do anything you want" mentality. They have been raised by active parents. From a young age, they've been told both at home and through the media that they can have it all. This generation has a strong sense of entitlement. They strive for a quality of life only known by the rich and famous, wanting the best and thinking they deserve it. This makes GEN Y driven and ambitious with high expectations.

Having access to a wealth of information available in micro-seconds, more TV channels to choose from than ever before and an unending supply of DVD's and games produces a notion that if they don't get what they want from one source they can immediately go to another.

## Why?

It's not a coincidence that this generation is called Y. The question they will ask most is "WHY?" They need to know why things are important and how they fit in to the whole scheme. They need to understand how everything works so whether they are staff or patients, help them to understand the context and big picture.

## Employing GEN Y - "they want a life"

For most employers this can be hard work. It requires constant feedback and encouragement. It requires clear goals and objectives. It requires that you demonstrate a care for the environment and how you are "saving the planet". Remember as children, they were told that it wasn't important if they won or lost; they were all winners and could be what ever they wanted and whatever they did was good as long as they gave it their "best shot". This unrealistic expectation is carried over to the workplace where they face the "real world". They can't be the boss after two weeks. Gen Y's want to start at the top, or at least climb the ladder within six months.

GEN Y's are into work life balance. Friendship is such a strong motivator for them that they will choose a job just to be with their friends. A GEN Y researcher said *"they don't want to sacrifice everything for a job - they want a life. They've seen the toll workaholics have had on their home life and are unimpressed"*. These demands are forcing employers to re-think their hiring and retention practices.

GEN Y are not against hard work by any means. This is not a lazy generation, just one that expects immediate gratification due to a childhood of receiving it. GEN Y employees want to do the work better and faster than their co-workers and being competitive with themselves and others is in their nature.

## On the move

Don't expect GEN Y's to stay in the job forever. If you get two years you'll be doing well. They're a generation on the move and with low unemployment they have always experienced job opportunities. They are flexible and open minded to career change. Job security does not rank high. What ranks higher is opportunity. So to keep them, you've got to challenge them -new projects, new assignments, new skills and so on. This is a generation that likes to learn and is respectful of information passed on by older people. Coaching has become the new management buzz word. Mentoring works better than telling. Don't expect blind acceptance. GEN Y will challenge your decision or instructions and "do it my way cause I'm the boss" will have them out the door faster than a Google search result.

If you would like to read more about GEN Y, send me an email: nathan@employnow.com.au and I'll forward you an excellent paper that cover all aspects of GEN Y including recruitment, retention, attitude to work and much more.

## About the author

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