

Is the Younger Generation Better at Using Technology?

An eye-opening look at how 20-somethings and 50-somethings differ in their views of technology, business relationships and work ethics.

By: *Nancy A. Shenker*

December 1, 2007

When I told my 20-something business associate Keith that I was working on an article comparing how millennials and baby boomers view technology in the workplace, he immediately offered to help me get quotes from his peers. (For those of you not in the know, millennials are those people born between 1980 and 2000). After a few text messages on his iPhone and some well-targeted e-mails, responses started pouring in from his age group.

Inspired by his resourcefulness, I polled my own sources. We categorized responses based on two generational categories: digital natives (DN), those who have known technology practically from birth, and digital immigrants (DI), who are generally 28 years old and older and were not born into the digital world but have adapted well to it. Here's a sampling of what we found out:

Technology: What do you think is the difference in how the two generations view technology in the workplace?

"Older generations are better at using technology to solve problems, rather than technology for technology's sake. I'm impressed by boomers' ability to identify really useful gadgets."

—James Reagan, Group Product Manager; Amazon Web Services (DN)

"A younger worker may not know how to do something with his hands that an older worker could do in a flash."

—Danielle Loefflad, Intern, Raw Media (DN)

"I was once accused of playing on MySpace during my workday, even though I was using it as a tool to gather sources for the story I was working on."

—Merisa Beyerl, Web Content Coordinator; Food for the Poor (DN)

Relationships: How has technology affected the way people relate to each other?

"The older generation has been rooted in face-to-face communications, whereas the digital natives can have a co-worker or client whom they've never actually seen or spoken to. The importance of personal relationships has begun to dwindle, and this can lead to a disconnect in the client/professional relationship."

—Leah Minium, Project Assistant; Workhouse PR (DN)

"[The Internet generation's] ability to connect with each other online, all the time, makes for a highly social orientation. My employees are texting and IM'ing all day long. The amount of information available online overwhelms them. So they focus on the entertainment... rather than the analytical."

—Indra Gardiner, Chief Operating Officer; Bailey Gardiner (DI)

"Why, why, why must [younger workers] talk/text on their cell phone every five minutes. I remember when you only made personal calls on your lunch break (and I'm only 29) and would never talk on the phone in front of a client."

—Jeffrey Deeken, Managing Director; Mightier (DI)

"We just had a discussion about writing 'personal notes' (like thank-yous). The oldest group – the pre-boomers – loved it! The boomers thought it was too much work, and the Gen X/Y didn't know how to write or spell with a pencil and pen."

—Adam Rich, Associate Broker, Manager; Long & Foster, Inc. (DI)

"I disagree with my peers' time obsession with social media and networking sites. Grab some dinner once in a while – don't stalk people on Facebook."

—Lauren Clapperton, Account Executive; Bailey Gardiner (DN)

This article was originally published in the New York Enterprise Report.