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# RECRUITING GENERATION Y

They are 70 million strong and the fastest growing segment of the workforce. Do you have the right tools to recruit them?

By Ken Stellan

**Y**ou have a problem. You can't find qualified candidates to represent your business. Don't feel bad, you are not alone. Recruitment and retention of frontline service-based sales representatives are two of the most common challenges for small, mid-sized and large businesses alike. The good news is that qualified workers are out there and want to work.

Many recruiting opportunities can be found within the latest wave of workers: "Generation Y" or the "Millennials" generation. This group is the fastest growing segment of the workforce.

Understanding this pool of potential employees will help you attract a stronger work force, enhance your customer's experience and help drive your service-based sales revenue.

## Who Is Generation Y?

Gen Y represents the 70 million Americans born from 1977

to 1994. It is slightly smaller than the Baby Boomer workforce. Gen Y is the most ethnically diverse generation to date. More than one third of Gen Y workers are non-Caucasian. About one in four was raised in a single-parent household, and three out of four were raised by two working parents.

## What Drives Them?

They are less cynical than previous generations, more socially aware and willing to act.

Unlike past generations, Gen Y has been pampered, nurtured and programmed with activities since they were toddlers. They know what they want and are quickly informed. Although they are technically advanced and tech saturated, they prefer personal contact when in a work environment. They want to belong to a working community that places a high value on recognition and work/life balance.

## Are They Right For Service Based Sales Positions?

Because of their overindulgent parents and hyper consumer habits, Gen Y is extremely motivated by incentive. Therefore, having a clearly defined incentive plan that pays well for top performance will attract them to your organization.

Their ability to multitask through many different forms of communication and tech resources will allow them to adapt to high-pressure working environments. Because they are the first generation to truly master the Internet as a research tool and information source, they place a high value on product knowledge and concise information contained in sound bytes.

Compared to previous generations, ideas of entrepreneurship developed at an earlier age. Some of this enterprising spirit comes from the mastery of eBay and Craigslist as a buying and selling tool and doing things on their terms when both parents were busy working.

### TECHNIQUES FOR RECRUITING GENERATION Y

Applying these Gen Y specific recruiting techniques will help you more effectively communicate to this new working demographic, become more mindful of the value of a good frontline representative and understand where to source them.

You already have Gen Y employees in your company, and whether you like it or not you'll be hiring more.

### Stress the value of their role in the organization.

Communicating the importance of a frontline service-based sales representative and management team is vital to the recruitment process.

People want to understand why the company is approaching them. If you fail to stress their value in terms of company profit, customer experience, the team dynamic and their role as a professional they will not appreciate their new position.

Build into your recruitment message the importance of their role in the company's growth.

Give an estimate of the investment in training and development the company will make in them in the first two years.

Show them the company's annual revenue

and the overall annual industry revenue to which they are contributing. Give annual examples of realistic earning opportunities. This will show them that although Gen Y's may think short term, you value them on a longer term basis.

For example, a car rental service-based sales associate is not just part of a 400-car company, but part of a \$22 billion dollar per-year industry.

### Diversify your recruitment sources.

The days of getting a good response on an ad in the Sunday paper and posting a Help Wanted sign are over. In addition to these traditional sources, companies have to view their sourcing efforts as a "recruitment portfolio."

Effective recruitment portfolios include internal references, business community sourcing (universities, community colleges and other social networks like church groups) Internet postings (Monster.com, Career Builder, Craigslist, MySpace and Facebook) and traditional in-store postings.

Going to the same "recruitment well" too often will produce the same result. Like any business investment, check for the return on each source after 30 days. Assign someone to track the number of quality applicants and successful placements per source.

Design recruitment ads to depict a "community/network" image with team members of a diverse background. If applicable, have one of your top performers profiled in the recruitment ads with a testimonial of why the company is a great choice.

Place Gen Y hot button issues in the ads, such as flexible work schedule, fun and fast-paced environment, diverse work group and performance based incentive plans.

### Define a recruitment team leader. Establish a candidate profile, recruitment goals and incentives.

It is amazing to see how many other business initiatives have goals, budgets, "owners" and deadlines. This can be witnessed in sales, marketing, IT integration and even accounting.

## Gen Y Recruitment To-Do List

### Research:



- Research your competitor's recruitment ads on popular Web sites. Look for the gaps in their ads and make a commitment to develop a more professional and motivational ad.
- Implement anonymous internal surveys rating your work environment, leadership team and current incentive plans. This exercise is an effective step to understanding where you can make the quickest improvements.

### Recruit:



- Develop a relationship with professors at local universities and ask to conduct a brief class presentation on why your company has a great opportunity for the students. Come to class with "leave behind" materials.
- Post a career opportunity on Craigslist. Many of the postings are free.
- Create "You Impressed Me" business cards with your logo, unique company benefits and contact information. They are ideal

to leave with anyone in a non-competing business you may want to interview.

### Interview:



- Create unique interview questions for each of the three stages. Gen Y's don't mind a challenge as long as it is not boring. Establish a "no comment" system between the first and second interview. After the second interview have the team discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. Having this discipline will not place any pre-conceived notions in the second interviewer's mind.

### Follow-Up:



- Mirror their preferred communication styles via text messages, voicemail or emails to set up the next steps.
- Create a polite turndown letter for the applicants you don't hire. Remember Gen Y's have a powerful voice and could one day become loyal customers.

A recruitment initiative deserves the same focus and attention to detail.

Establish an owner for a recruiting initiative and give that person a deadline and goal. This helps make your entire team more productive.

Establish the candidate profile, then the recruitment goal. Train your internal team on your unique recruitment message. Examine top performers in your company and create the profile around them.

Set an incentive for staffing completion by the target date and place an internal incentive for any existing team member who delivers a candidate who passes the six-month point with the company.

Set the deadline of hiring candidates two to three weeks before the anticipated need. This additional time will allow the new team to get up to speed with the customer base and new point-of-sale system.

## Who Are the Millennials?

### Defining life events

- Columbine High School
  - 9-11
- Enron, WorldCom, etc.
  - War in Iraq
- Nuclear threat from North Korea
- Emerging nations—China, India

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### Impact of technological advancement

- Never experienced life without computers
- Reverse accumulation of knowledge—the younger you are, the more you know
- All information is a click away; so is the competition
  - The world is a click away

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### Millennials at work

- Work well with friends and on teams
- Collaborative, resourceful, innovative thinkers
  - Love a challenge
  - Seek to make a difference
- Want to produce something worthwhile
  - Desire to be a hero
  - Impatient
- Comfortable with speed and change
- Thrive on flexibility and space to explore
  - Partner well with mentors
  - Value guidance
  - Expect respect

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\*Gen Y snapshot information compiled by Deloitte Consulting LLP, a division of Deloitte Touch Tohmatsu. ("Who Are the Millennials? a.k.a Generation Y" 2005)

### Don't rush the selection process.

Regardless of the candidate's background or generation, don't make the interview too easy. When a candidate goes to a screening interview and is hired on the spot or in a day, he or she will lose an ap-

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preciation for the position.

In many cases this rushed hiring process is a result of "reactive recruitment." Many businesses either staff too tightly or begin their recruitment process too late. This lack of planning forces the company to compromise on the quality of applicant.

Establishing an "active recruitment" process will allow the location to constantly source qualified candidates and become more selective in their hiring. Starbucks, Cold-

stone's Creamery, Enterprise Rent-A-Car and Southwest Airlines all have a multiple interview process. As a result they boast lower first- and second-year turnover than their competitors.

The most effective selection process for any service-based sales environment involves three stages of interviews:

1. Screening interview conducted by a top performing frontline team member and supervisor. Have one team member of a similar age take part. This will make the Gen Y candidate more comfortable and allow them to see themselves as a part of a business network.
2. Open-ended discussion interview featuring role plays and behavioral-based questioning with the location's frontline manager.
3. Discussion with the most senior leader

of the location. In this discussion the general manager or the owner should stress the vision of the organization, the candidate's professional and financial opportunities and the importance of his or her role in the organization.

### Understand the reasons for your company's turnover.

Analyze your current environment. Is the reason for the turnover because you settle on weaker candidates during recruitment drives? Or is it a matter of lack of motivation with your frontline incentives or recognition?

If a team member is leaving on professional terms conduct exit interviews. ■

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*Ken Stellan is a business unit leader for the Khoury Group. The Khoury Group specializes in creating sales cultures for any business with a frontline profit opportunity. For more information on this topic, Stellan can be reached at 630-788-2879.*