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Dishing social media: You're wrong about millennials - by Diana Podaski

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Diana Podaski, Linear
Retail Properties

After recently attending the ICSC New England Conference and Deal Making show in Boston last week, one of the hottest topics was “millennials,” (or by some on stage, “millenniums”). Older generations in the CRE community are constantly talking about who millennials are and what they want; it's leading to a lot of misconceptions.

First, millennials don't even have a set established range of birthdates that I can find, but are seen as being somewhere between 24 and 37. Though this is a group of people around the same age, you can't generalize them as having one set of opinions on everything. There is a huge difference in attitudes, goals, and responsibilities of those in this age group, especially those that are single vs. have young families. However, I want to address some of the common generalizations about millennials and give some further insight from an actual millennial.

Millennials did not grow up with technology. We, like other generations have adapted to technology. I can remember our first Brother word processor in high school with the black screen and green blinking cursor. I could never figure out what happened when I accidentally pressed the insert button and suddenly my text was being erased, we had to learn it too! The younger generations that actually grew/are growing up with technology are called, “Digital Natives” as I first learned from Alan McKeon of Alexander Babbage years ago. This group is born with smartphones already in existence.

Millennials have brand loyalty and love shopping in stores. Omni-channel retailing has changed the industry and millennials take advantage of all types of ways to buy and return. It seems we do more research and ask more friends about making a purchase than past generations who relied on one sales person. If we find a product we like, we tell everyone and explore the rest of the brand's line of items. Uniqueness and personalization have been huge drivers of sales from our generation. We stray from some of the older larger brands because everyone else has it, it's mass produced. If a brand creates a product that you can personalize, we'll keep coming back. I think millennials love shopping more than anyone, and this includes meeting friends and shopping in stores. The retailers that up their game to create a more memorable and helpful experience, along with non-stationary

check-outs and more personal service, are going to take the win. It's great exploring a brand online and later walking into the shop, feeling the materials, smelling the products and taking pictures.

Millennials are not lazy; they work all hours of the day. Most millennials I know are pretty tied to their phone which connects to their company email and social media accounts. Millennials are checking their work email directly after shutting off their alarm while still lying in bed and check in again before they go to sleep at night to be sure everything is in order and are ready for the next day. If we love our job we will stay and work hard at it, if we don't we won't wait around for five, ten, twenty years before moving on. Life is short and we are typically authentically engaged in what we're doing and want to do a good job.

Millennials have a new view on what success is – we crave experience not stuff. Society is just different today and what constitutes success has changed. Because of the development in social media, it seems more important to many millennials to have time off to enjoy life, exercise, travel the world and talk about all our experiences. It's about making every moment count with the people we love, not about the biggest house and highest salary. Millennials with families will rent a place if there is a better school system but still bring their kids to Night Shift in Everett or Slumbrew at Assembly Row for a play date and restaurant hopping. We also want to build on our career and learn from those around us in hopes to teach a younger generation; we want to leave a positive mark on the world. Our minds are constantly turning with ideas on how to do things better.

Diana Podaski is VP - marketing and social media at Linear Retail Properties, Burlington, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540