



## Engaging Millennials: The Benefits of Online Tools for Research with a Younger Audience

By **Scott Woodward** (Project Manager)

Is your research getting the most out of your Millennial customers?

Millennials are sought after by many brands as they tend to be early indicators of future trends in technology, fashion, and entertainment. At the same time, younger Millennials are perhaps the most challenging target audience to conduct research with and pose unique challenges for traditional qualitative techniques (*they can be less forthcoming with their perspectives, they have shorter attention spans, etc.*). Engaging younger Millennials requires different approaches and techniques that will support a more open and candid dialogue. Aligning your techniques to this target will deepen your insights.

### The Problems with Traditional Approaches

While traditional approaches that incorporate engaging activities guided by capable researchers have proven to be successful techniques (*e.g., focus groups, in-depth interviews, surveys*), these approaches present some limitations among young people:

- Formal research settings such as focus group facilities can limit candidness of feedback
- Peer pressure can prevent the establishment of group synergy (*e.g., better dressed peers*)
- Longer timeframes for live sessions can also cause fatigue/lower attention span and reduce the energy level of the discussion.

### How Alternative Methods can Improve Results

Online forums, such as Online Bulletin Board Groups (*OBBFGs*), Online Focus Groups (*OLFGs*), Online Journaling, and Online Communities can offer more natural and comfortable settings in which to engage young people in research. To anyone who has used a social networking site, it is apparent that people are more candid (*think of status updates on Facebook*) and interact more personably given the higher degree of "psychological anonymity" that these forums provide. The same holds true for the above online methods; young people tend to be more expressive/sincere in their responses because there is an absence of peer pressure, group think or other dynamics that can influence responses.

Additional benefits of using online forums with the younger audience include:

- Shifts the focus from the researcher (*moderator*) to allow a more collective discussion
- More "natural" and comfortable setting/ease of use given familiarity with instant messaging, social networking, blogs, etc.
- Allows younger participants to think and evaluate prior to answering (*less pressure to answer on the spot*)
- Ability to include younger participants from multiple time zones/geographic regions, given the virtual environment
- More interactive tools such as drawing tools, emoticons to aid discussion
- Greater ease and ability for displaying concepts, video and audio for discussion

Online Journaling and Online communities are effective tools when research calls for more immersive day in the life approaches. These tools can provide ongoing feedback about process (e.g., *understanding the process of deciding/buying a new mobile phone*) or co-development of products (e.g., *ongoing testing of mobile phone style and design*). They also enable younger people to express their opinions via different formats such as digital video, web cam confessionals, digital pictures, articles, etc.

When evaluating research approaches targeted at a younger audience, consider using online tools. They present effective alternatives to the traditional methods that continue to be effective with a more mature audience.

### About the Author

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Scott has over 10 years of market research experience with a strong background in the consumer electronics, medical, and technology sectors. As one of KS&R's moderators, he has managed and executed numerous multi-country qualitative studies that have utilized the online approaches described here.



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