Optimizing Strategic Research Technology for Millennials

Last year, members of the so-called Millennial generation – people born in the years 1981-1997 – became the largest share of the American workforce, surpassing Gen X'ers (who outnumber Baby Boomers), according Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. More than one in three American workers today is a Millennial; in four years they will cross the 50 percent mark and be in the majority.

Among the implications of this generational evolution of the workforce is the need to adapt business technology and processes to the preferred work style (and the instinctive behaviors) of the new plurality. As Outsell, Inc. wrote in "Tipping Point," its 2016 information industry outlook:

> "When this generation comes into its own and into power positions, sweeping changes will start to affect the information industry based on this group's information use and decision-making behaviors. Successful companies are designing solutions to support these young workers' preferences and their time spent on social networks, with mobile devices, and how they discover, use, and share information in very different ways than generations before."

Here, then, are several factors to consider when designing and deploying strategic research solutions for Millennial users.

When it comes to business research in areas like market and competitive intelligence, Millennials are *collaborators*, not *searchers*. A study publically released by IBM's Institute for Business Value last year concluded that Millennials use recommendations from colleagues and experts over personal research. Therefore the traditional notion (and design) of a "search engine" needs to be re-conceived as something more closely approximating a "referral engine." Millennials live in a thumb-swipe world and prefer a "browse-to-content" model vs. entering queries into a search engine.

Northern Light has seen the impact of this new way of doing market research and competitive intelligence in the work styles of our clients. There are two groups we serve: the experts referred to in the IBM study, consisting of the market and competitive intelligence staff; and what we call the "occasional" consumers of market and competitive intelligence – product managers, marketing managers, sales managers, product developers, and the like. This latter group is much larger in number than the experts, and they need market intelligence to do their jobs, but would be very happy to never have to slog through a page of search results and even

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happier if they never had to write a search query. The group of occasional market research users is often heavily populated by Millennials.

The optimal primary user experience for Millennials is a set of customizable topic-specific dashboards. These strategic dashboards represent the organized presentation of relevant content and are created by the expert market intelligence staff for the occasional consumers of strategic research to use. Rather than putting a powerful search engine out front, it makes more sense to use it to identify and harvest high-quality content to populate the dashboards. This puts more pressure on the search engine to vet the content before a user ever sees it, making sophisticated content aggregation and text analytics capabilities a critical element of the solution.

Experience shows that when large, research-driven organizations implement such strategic dashboards as the primary user experience, *business research content downloads double.* In a few years, such browseable strategic dashboards of targeted and vetted content likely will account for 75 percent or more of content downloads.

Finally, given Millennials' propensity to freely share information, **there is a greater need than ever for an organization's internal information publishing platform to enforce copyright**. The technology platform used to manage access to research should make it easier for users to share information in the right way and harder to share it in the wrong way. One effective approach is to share links and metadata within the portal, which is copyright compliant, while document access is restricted through a robust authentication system. Such an approach protects the organization from potentially costly, though inadvertent, copyright violations of subscription-based premium research content. Even "free" and "openly-accessible" Web-based content typically is *not* "copyright-free" so precautions must be taken there, as well.

Accommodating the work styles and preferences of Millennials will only become more important over time, so putting the right solutions in place now is paramount. As the author of the IBM Institute for Business Value's 2015 paper, "Millennials: The New Decision-Makers," wrote:

> "As decisions become more multifaceted and answers are needed more quickly, having ready access to meaningful data insights is essential for today's decision makers. Millennials, especially, who are accustomed to getting all sorts of data with just a tap of their mobile device, will have little patience with organizations that can't immediately provide the information they seek. The need for analytics capabilities and speed will only increase as more Millennials enter roles where they have sway over key business decisions."

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