

MILLENNIALS SERIES

Recruiting Millennials for a Social Media Management position creates a unique set of challenges. What is appealing to these candidates? Does what they want align with what the hiring managers (GenXers) are looking for? What are the 4 social media business models I identified?

This article is a compilation of what I learned when I conducted a search at the sharp edge where the generational conflict of values between Millennials and GenXers met against a backdrop of change as Social Media has infiltrated and reshaped communications practices. This series of posts combined an analysis of the Social Media (SM) landscape and the profiles of Millennials I recruited for a Director of SM where these issues surfaced.

What are Millennials looking for as they are aggressively pursued and offered multiple job opportunities in the SM space? Is there a major shift in values from GenXers that impacts how Millennials make career decisions? What are the challenges and adjustments that must be made by Millennials when they wish to pursue senior managerial positions where GenXers are the hiring officers and decision makers? The situation is reversed for Millennials when those who were hunted become the hunters.

What are the consequences when the clash of Millennial's values, expectations and behaviors are so off-putting to GenXers that they have no chance of successfully competing for leadership roles unless they fall in line? What impact has SM had on consulting firms as they add new capabilities and create new positions where Millennials are the most qualified?

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WHAT WERE THE BACKGROUND/SEARCH PARAMETERS IN A RECENT RETAINED SEARCH FOR A DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL MEDIA (SM)?

Several months ago, a corporate client asked my firm to begin an exclusive search for a Director of Social Media. This was a management post reporting to a Communications VP with both "hands on" and leadership responsibilities. In this case, the head of Corporate Communications reported to a Chief Marketing Officer. The charter was to build a robust SM program that, until this point, was in its early stages of development.

The Chief Executive of this successful east coast company had determined that the most effective approach to attract clients was via SM. Their business model was based on personal referrals. Recommendations from a friend or a trusted source were what brought clients to the company's doorstep. News media, advertising and feature articles (testimonials) were helpful but only served to support the primary reason for the decision to seek out my client's services.

While the founder of the company knew SM marketing initiatives were critical to her success, she did not have the expertise of a senior SM professional on her team, with hands-on experience, to lead the program. Millennials who lived on-line and had been early adopters with first-hand, insightful understanding about how these tools could be used, would be the ideal candidates. A formal search would be the solution to identify, woo and hire the Director. The objective was to find a manager capable of creating a comprehensive plan and implementing it.

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-1-background-search-parameters-recent-retained-search-director-social-media-sm/>

HOW COMPETITIVE IS THE MARKETPLACE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA (SM) PROFESSIONALS? – WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE HIRING BUBBLE AND THE PROLIFERATION OF ORGANIZATIONS OFFERING SM CONSULTING SERVICES?

The past few years have been a boom time for early adopters of Social Media (SM) who could take advantage of a bubble in hiring. There have been too few professionals to fill the many newly created jobs, primarily on the consulting side initially. In this competitive space, agencies and companies wanted most to hire talented implementers below the leadership (strategic) level. Agencies, in order to compete as SM gurus, needed to be as leading edge as possible in offering SM services and solutions to increase the effectiveness of their messaging.

For the SM Professionals who loved the pace and lack of structure (the field was so new there were no right or wrong ways to define what needed to be done) this was the ideal time to be in the market. These younger professionals were highly sought after. Almost as soon as they accepted one job, they were contacted to consider another interesting assignment. While the pace now is not as frantic as it was originally, the demand for talent continues.

To those working in SM, being pursued for new opportunities, without starting a job search, has been the norm. Personally, immersed in a virtual world where curiosity could be satisfied within a matter of minutes, where a question could be answered in seconds, set the framework for their professional behavior. The emphasis was on the “Now”.

There were no worries about the long term and that affected the values they brought to decisions about staying in their current job or accepting another more interesting one. I’m not using the word career because that implies future or longer-term thinking. That simply was and is not a concern.

The only questions were about: how interesting is the assignment? Do I like the (potentially new) environment and how much more money does it pay? (Note focus on salary—no interest in longer term benefits.) There was no worry about future risk (e.g. job being eliminated or company failing) because they most likely would have moved on by then.

In this competitive space, agencies and companies wanted most to hire talented implementers below the leadership (strategic) level. Agencies, in order to compete as SM gurus, needed to be as leading edge as possible in offering social media “tools,” services and “how to” solutions. This made complete sense to Millennials who were fully engaged in experimenting with these new options. Work was play and play was work. Early adopters are about learning to use new tools and their capabilities.

The value these talented professionals bring is about implementation; it is not about content. Managerial capabilities are not part of the jobs for the early adopters that Millennials were (and still are) being recruited to fill.

The judgment and capability to adapt communications campaigns to take advantage of SM tools are critical at the mid-levels and ultimately impact the highest levels of an organization. The Millennials with the SM expertise needed for this role were not skilled in messaging and longer-term planning and strategy.

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-2-competitive-marketplace-social-media-sm-professionals-impact-hiring-bubble-proliferation-organizations-off/>

HOW HAVE THE ROLES OF SM MANAGERS EVOLVED? WHAT EXPERTISE IS IN DEMAND AS THE FUNCTION MATURES?

Leading-edge agencies and companies are progressing from an initial stage of hiring SM professionals who understand the tools, to creating managerial roles and promoting from within. As the tools become fully integrated in the organization and are accepted as part of how an organization conducts business, it will be time for the innovators to mature into new roles if they wish to advance their careers. Finding capable and ambitious professionals in a relatively small talent pool creates new challenges for these organizations. For now, there are on-going needs to fill the implementation jobs at more conservative (slower to adapt) companies—in addition to these more senior leading-edge roles.

For Millennials interested in becoming Managers, this is a time for a radical shift in values. It will no longer be acceptable to change jobs every time a new and interesting assignment becomes available. The focus on “me first” when applying for a managerial role is a non-starter. The shift will involve committing to stability, learning about an organization and developing solutions around content and strategy that support overall business initiatives.

From becoming sought after no matter how jumpy a track record is, to having to convince a potential employer that those days are over, will create a new series of issues. The leadership roles they feel ready to assume are highly desirable. There are many qualified professionals from a variety of disciplines applying for them. Will these SM gurus have the tools and the right attitude to compete? Will they recognize they are at a crossroads? It may take being rejected as a finalist for several managerial jobs for a normally “sought after” candidate to accept the reality that the recruiting game has changed.

The position my client has filled (since I wrote this series) is an example of the need for both tactical and strategic thinking requiring maturity and longer-term job stability to succeed. It is a hybrid role and will enable a motivated professional to gain the skills and experience to evolve into a higher-level managerial job. Will Millennials reject this direction? What could be next if Millennials don't make this paradigm shift?

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-3-roles-sm-managers-evolved-expertise-demand-function-matures/>

WHAT ARE THE 4 SOCIAL MEDIA BUSINESS MODELS I FOUND? WHY IS THERE SO MUCH CONFUSION AND COMPETITION ABOUT WHAT THEY DO AND HOW DOES THAT IMPACT HIRING?

As I began the research, I quickly realized there were 3 categories of social media consulting organizations, each of which called themselves by the same name but offered different services. (There was also a fourth which was outside of traditional communication industry models.) What the firms in these 3 business categories tended to do was retain their primary identity e.g. Public Relations and then add additional problem-solving capabilities which created confusion for the hiring process.

The first business model was a social media boutique that offered an expertise in executing social media campaigns. These were generally young organizations. In this case, the founders most likely had gained prior experience in a leading communications consulting firm heading up their SM groups. They decided to branch out on their own. Or they had been early adopters and developed an expertise with recognized credentials that established them as leaders in the SM field.

In the second category are the major PR firms that decided to build a sophisticated practice group that became part of the integrated solutions the firm offered to its PR clients. Firms like Edelman, Weber, Finn Partners have invested heavily to build an expertise which has led to reshaping the mix of services available through their organizations. Their repositioning efforts to be top notch in the PR world and not dated or limited by their history has led, in my opinion, to confusion and muddy positioning.

The third category is in the Advertising/Marketing world. This is where social media is valuable for research and analysis using sophisticated tools to assist in understanding how best to shape advertising and direct marketing campaigns, and to analyze customer/consumer preferences. Statistics indicate how billions of dollars are invested in Advertising and Branding campaigns using social media tools to provide effective analysis of buying preferences and brand loyalty. Armed with that information, the agencies craft messages and determine how to invest clients' advertising/communications budgets.

Beyond the Marketing/Communications consulting firms are the 4th category, the global consulting organizations such as Accenture and Deloitte. These companies have organized Digital practices where they define enterprise-wide challenges to tackle and include Marketing and Communications in that mix. In their world Digital Media is a global term and social media is a sub-category where their Digital expertise is available to solve specific issues.

One of the results of having this SM capability is rebranding organizations to indicate the enhanced communications scope of the firm. In this case, the focus of work has led, in my opinion, to a lack of clarity about the nature of the services offered and the overlap between categories. What differentiates a PR firm from a marketing communications firm/advertising agency and from a full-service integrated consulting company with a SM practice?

What these firms tend to do is retain their primary identity e.g. Public Relations and then add additional services. If the goal is to focus on solutions the firm offers, then the word strategic becomes popular. I think the struggle is to define the firm by the tools and practices it offers versus the problems solving capability they have evolved to. What we have now is confusion.

While there has been fierce competition among Marketing and PR agencies for corporate contracts, global consulting groups have an inherent advantage since they win enterprise-wide contracts at the CEO and leadership level. When communications (Advertising, PR, etc.) contracts are to be awarded, the relationship is at the CMO level (reporting to the CEO). By that time, the contract may already be awarded as part of a comprehensive agreement at the CEO level. The challenge of competing for lucrative contracts can lead to serious competition or realignments and partnerships.

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-4-4-social-media-business-models-found-much-confusion-competition-impact-hiring/>

THE MARKETPLACE AND POTENTIAL CANDIDATES: ARE GEN X PROFESSIONALS WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE QUALIFIED TO FILL A "HANDS ON" SOCIAL MEDIA POSITION? WHO WOULD BE QUALIFIED?

Where would I find a knowledgeable professional with sufficient expertise, experience and judgment to succeed in meeting my client's needs? Social media tools are relatively new. Professionals, who over a decade ago in their mid-late 20ties, began using social media in their daily lives would have the expertise. It was not their managers and supervisors, a decade or more or older, that were qualified for this role. The generational gap was obvious.

Gen X professionals holding senior managerial posts (in their early 40ties and older) for the most part, had not embraced the technology. Their expertise was in managing staff and using "traditional" tools of the trade. Their expertise was, for example, media relations, employee relations (top down, controlled, central messaging) financial and crisis communications.

They were educated in an age of "gatekeepers" where messages were shared in tightly managed environments. The free-wheeling world of social media and a level playing field for sharing information was not their paradigm. Certainly, these leaders made adjustments and added SM to the mix of programs and tools they used. However, they simply were not the right fit for a job that required hands on, in-depth knowledge of SM. Unlike Millennials, these senior managers do not live in the world of SM. They lacked an instinctive understanding of the role SM plays in the lives of their target audiences.

Successful careers in that more senior age group are about leadership and strategy. While their resumes would list social media as an area of expertise, the actual capability was in managing and hiring either outside or inside resources to use these tools. For this search, that experience was not a fit for what the hiring organization needed. The professional for this assignment was one level below this profile who could create the work as well as the plan.

Knowing this was the direction of the search also meant evaluating candidates would be a challenge. If they had an excellent portfolio of what they produced, that would only be part of the picture. As essential as that "hands on" experience would be, the problem-solving behind the work product would be key. Their ability to do both would indicate they were ready to tackle this assignment.

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-5-marketplace-potential-candidates-gen-x-professionals-senior-management-experience-qualified-fill-hands-social-media-position-w/>

WHERE COULD I FIND THIS HANDS-ON SOCIAL MEDIA LEADER THAT WAS FULLY QUALIFIED? HOW COMPETITIVE WAS THE MARKETPLACE?

While corporations with specific SM marketing objectives were searching for staff, it also quickly became clear that the major Public Relations consulting firms had been staffing up at a frantic pace over the past few years for heads of SM divisions down to junior level account executives. (See separate discussion in Part 4 about the impact of social media changing the mix of services offered by traditional PR firms.)

The opportunity for these new hires to make several job changes in that short time meant they were quickly reaching manager levels based on their salary requirements. Would financial issues be a stumbling block for a move to a corporate position?

Here is a picture of the marketplace. PR firms were not the only ones building SM groups. It was also clear that advertising agencies and global business consulting firms were also seizing the opportunity to create new practice areas. In addition, another category, boutiques (See SM Business Models that I described previously in Part 4) specialized exclusively in social media consulting services were growing. These firms were founded by highly creative, entrepreneurial professionals. Following prior industry patterns, in just a few years many of these boutiques with a narrow expertise merge with more mature, broadly focused firms. The larger (industry leading) firms instantly solve competitive issues by buying an expertise that would otherwise take years to build internally.

Meanwhile, it rarely is possible to recruit staff from these high-energy, independent firms. The founders commit to investing several years to see if they can succeed. As a result, these talented professionals are no longer available to consider a corporate role.

Now the pace of hiring for these leading edge, early adopter agencies and consulting firms has slowed. The next development in the hiring cycle is on the corporate or institutional side. The hotbed for recruiting SM professionals to fill these posts is from the agencies that earlier in this cycle have staffed their SM practices. Considering Millennial values that focus on the "Now" there is a volatile and approachable talent pool to tap. However, there would be a disconnect as hiring managers struggled to keep up with Millennials' financial demands and yet maintain parity with current salary ranges

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-6-find-hands-social-media-leader-fully-qualified-competitive-marketplace/>

THE RECRUITING QUESTIONS WITH NO ANSWERS AND NO HISTORY – WHAT CAREER TRACKS AND WORK HISTORY WOULD BE DESIRABLE AS PREPARATION FOR THIS NEWLY CREATED POST?

Knowing that my client wished to hire a manager with both the hands-on and managerial capabilities, would I be able to find that talent given the immature marketplace for SM professional? What would I learn about Millennials and how their values would affect their decision-making?

How could I present this opportunity in a way that would be appealing to Millennials? Would they be interested in future growth and stock incentives? Would candidates be capable of providing strategic counsel and building for the long-term?

As I was thinking about these issues, all of which quickly surfaced in this search, I discovered an article in the Puget Sound Business Journal titled, "Rethink Recruiting for Millennials" (Gonzalo Aguero, founder of recruiting tech firm Worcket.) He said, "Recruiting Millennials is harder, slower and more inefficient than ever. Millennials tend to resist what feels to them like an unnatural experience. This is a technology savvy demographic, one in which traditional recruiting methods often don't resonate.

"Yet recruiters continue to rely on traditional hiring tactics, which include making prospects sift through long vague job descriptions and sending resumes that tend to go into a dark hole, with rarely any type of response... Reaching this growing segment, however, has been a challenge for many employers...It is evident that this system is not working. If companies want to tap into the Millennial generation, they must take a new approach to recruiting."

This was precisely what my experience was as I approached potential candidates that I thought would be immediately responsive to my proposition. There was a quick response to the first contact but their attention wandered as the follow-up information was too vague for them to visualize themselves in the job—and they wanted to know if the pay (not benefits) were excellent. I lost them by the second call.

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-7-the-recruiting-questions-with-no-answers-and-no-history-what-career-tracks-and-work-history-would-be-desirable-as-preparation-for-this-newly-created-post/>

WHAT WAS THE BEST PLAN OF ACTION TO ATTRACT QUALIFIED CANDIDATES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA LEADERSHIP POSITIONS?

I developed a plan of action for my client to identify successful leading-edge communicators in the SM space.

The key was to find candidates who had moved beyond a fascination with SM tools and were engaged in using them to execute their organization's messaging strategy.

This new hire would understand that content was key and delivering a targeted message needed to be delivered through the right channels. If a candidate missed the point and jumped into discussing the exciting new SM channels, before asking the Who? Why? questions that immediately ruled him/her out.

Our finalist would understand that being an expert about the tools was one element in a comprehensive campaign and the decision about which SM outlets to use came at the end of the process. It was not the driver. Early adopters who were fascinated by the capabilities of the new tools were simply out of step with the needs of the maturing marketplace. I found that my research results were in complete alignment with the article I quoted in the previous post, Part 7, of this series.

Given my client's goal of building relationships and encouraging personal endorsements from current and former customers, my research focused on professionals who had public relations and reputation building expertise. Healthcare would make sense, among a variety of care-focused industries. One of the recruiting advantages for the company is the unmet need for this healthcare service, and the fact that values-oriented Millennials would be attracted to the mission.

I would be seeking candidates with a track record of committing to the goals and values of an organization and creatively using social media to build communities. The focus of the research would be on top tier Public Relations firms that had established social media practices and/or non-profit or care focused organizations that were early adopters of social media tools.

I begin by researching potential companies/agencies in major markets in addition to the Midwest city where the position was based. I thought mobile Millennials would be more likely to relocate for a compelling new challenge, I quickly found out that was not the case.

There is a reason and it is consistent with their job-hunting expectations. If the likelihood is that a job will only last for a year or two, why uproot for essentially a temporary position? There could be exceptions, if for personal reasons, e.g. the location was desirable for a family. However, for the most part, I focused on candidates who were within commuting distance.

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-8-what-was-the-best-plan-of-action-to-attract-qualified-candidates-for-social-media-leadership-positions/>

WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST MESSAGE TO ATTRACT CANDIDATES? WHERE SHOULD THIS MESSAGE BE PRESENTED?

The key points initially that I thought would be compelling were: the attractiveness of the organization with an exciting growth story, and a job description with detailed explanation about the opportunity.

Also, I assumed the job would appeal to candidates because it had 4 components. It was newly created, the compensation was comprised of base salary that was above the range of our potential candidates, it had high bonus potential and longer-term incentives.

My point of view about job descriptions has been developed from years of attracting excellent candidates. I find that most job descriptions are full of words like challenging, growth opportunity, strategic level and they all seem to run together. After so much overuse, the words are meaningless and so these so-called descriptions are non-descriptions.

To make the point that the job I am filling is important and has some real substance, I always prepare a detailed, thoughtful document that is as specific as I can make it. Frequently the description is 5-pages or more.

As usual, I began the outreach with a highly targeted list of candidates. Some were local (not requiring a relocation) and others were from different regions of the country. All professionals fully met the criteria for being considered for the new role. Because I understood the job so well, each



candidate was a potential finalist.

I used SM to make initial contact. I asked if they would join my network and that I would continue to stay in touch. I also promised to provide additional information once they responded. Of course, I explained that I was a retained search consultant specialized in comms and conducting a search. It was a brief message and virtually all the professionals responded positively, which is normally how these searches begin.

So far, so good. Everything seemed to be proceeding normally. With contact information I was able to send the detailed job description within a day. Would there be any response? As it turned out, there was very little and a different approach was needed. What had to change?

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-9-what-would-be-the-best-message-to-attract-candidates-where-should-this-message-be-presented/>

MAKING INITIAL CONTACT—WHAT INFORMATION CAN BE SHARED AND WHY?

For traditional positions, the information provided to candidates at this early stage is somewhat preliminary with more details emerging as the search is narrowed down to a small group of finalists. However, the targeted group of Social Media professionals for my client's position did not behave as expected. What became clear is that these Millennials wanted complete information "Now." Otherwise, they just didn't respond.

Because hiring organizations generally do not want their identity known, search firms usually do not reveal the name of the hiring organization. There are good reasons for confidentiality, including avoiding being contacted directly by applicants who have already been eliminated from consideration. Or, there are possibly internal sensitivities to the search and the hiring organization may wish to delay announcing the search is underway. So, information provided to candidates at the early stage, generally, is somewhat preliminary with details emerging as the search is narrowed down to a small group of finalists.

That is how I proceeded, once initial contact was made, I sent introductory information along with the salary range for the position. I had moved quickly to this point and expected to hear from many of the professionals who received the descriptive information. I had done my homework and was surprised by the silence in the next few days as I continued to reach out to new prospects.

Within 3-days I realized there was a problem. There were very few responses. I surmised that this group was not behaving at all as I had expected. What became clear is that these Millennials wanted a complete rundown from the moment they were contacted. If they did not see the specific details, e.g. who the company was and what the actual salary range was, they were simply not interested. They felt no obligation to respond and saw no value in building a relationship. If the job were not a fit, no need to put any more time into it.

They wanted to know all they could about the new opportunity because they wanted to find out if it were worth any more of their time. As it turns out, I was "hunting" for the most sought-after group of successful professionals who were relatively early adopters of SM. My contact was one of many they received.

In order to succeed in convincing these professionals to listen to me, I had to change my approach to appeal to them on their terms. I had to present this opportunity in a manner that aligned with their values and offered short term benefits. My “pitch” needed to be attention-grabbing and financially attractive immediately e.g. sign on bonus and high salary (because the future didn’t matter.) Long term stock options, retirement programs were totally unappealing. This focus was out of sync with GenXers who were looking to the future for longer term benefits and had the patience to wait for them to mature. Millennials could care less about vesting and retirement plans. This attitude was off-putting to GenXers who had built a career on stability and investing for the long term.

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-10-making-initial-contact-what-information-can-be-shared-and-why/>

WHAT WAS AN APPEALING MESSAGE TO MILLENNIALS WHO WERE THE TARGETED AUDIENCE FOR THESE SOCIAL MEDIA LEADERSHIP POSITIONS?

If an opportunity were brought to their attention and Millennials thought it was interesting and something appealing, that was all that mattered. They were in such demand that they were constantly being asked to consider new assignments. Employers contacting them were under tremendous pressure to get work done and overlooked the short-term nature of SM career tracks. Of course, moving at this pace, salaries were artificially inflated as increases happened at each move.

With permission from my client, I jumped into the competitive fray and laid out precisely what these potential candidates wished to know. I named the company, revealed the salary range for the position and provided a detailed description about the challenges and innovative potential of the new job. My responses, as soon as candidates replied, were always within 24-hours and most of the time within 4-hours. That worked. I was talking their language. From that point on I was able to attract the candidates most qualified for the job.

To eliminate candidates who were not interested in a management track, I clearly explained that this was a path to a leadership position. I was rigorous during my interviews to explore the motivations of the candidates. In one extreme example, a candidate could not follow instructions about preparing suitable materials for my client, including a resume, and was eliminated. She was an example of a self-made entrepreneur that had no understanding of how to function in a corporate environment despite impressive successes that she achieved for her clients.

During the research phase, I explained to my client that the track record of these professionals was very short-term since they were in such demand. There was nothing to be done about it. Ultimately, as much as organizations are seeking stability, hiring managers recognized the reality of the marketplace. I succeeded in developing a strong group of finalists that were eager to interview for the position. They were excellent agency as well as corporate professionals. As expected, an agency candidate was the most attractive. The issue as anticipated, however, was her salary. She was above the range that fit the company.



From a client perspective, the reality of hiring in this competitive environment means hiring practices need to be evaluated and adjusted. The speed at which interviews are conducted, offers made (at competitive levels most likely above the established range) and accepted require streamlining their processes. This is no easy task and candidates can be lost before the hiring team decides how to proceed.

In cases where there is a learning process about creating a new position, the search may evolve. The position can be redefined and restructured. That was the situation here. The company decided not to hire the finalist. While the need to develop the function continued, reporting lines shifted. The search was discontinued, and alternate directions were pursued successfully.

<http://www.jc-a.com/millennials-series-part-11-what-was-an-appealing-message-to-millennials-who-were-the-targeted-audience-for-these-social-media-leadership-positions/>