

Introducing Gen Z to the workplace

By [Fatima Moosa](#)

7 Nov 2017

As the South African legal industry seems to be making some headway in understanding and adapting to the needs of Generation Y (those born between 1984 and 2004), another generation is entering university and will be taking the workplace by storm in only a few years. Considering that many large law firms are already recruiting for their 2020 CA intake, understanding Generation Z (those born after 2005 - although there is some debate as to which birth year marks the start of this generation) is certainly not an item that can be moved to tomorrow's agenda.



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Whilst Gen Z's, or Centennials as they are sometimes known, have not yet entered the workplace and we cannot be sure of the impact they will have on South African Law Firm culture, understanding their behaviour as consumers and through tapping into the research conducted by retailers and advertisers, we are empowered with the knowledge and insight to at least hypothesise typical Gen Z traits and expectations. Through an understanding of what motivates this generation and how they view the world, Law firm Talent Teams can assist the organisation in proactively planning for their arrival.

So who are these new kids on the block (forgive me for the Gen X wordplay, I can't help myself)? Initially, theorists viewed Gen Z as Gen Y (also known as the Millennials) on steroids, but the Centennials, as this generation has been nicknamed, are in many respects very different from their older siblings.

Whilst both generations are techno savvy and digitally astute, Gen Z's are the first truly digital generation, born into a world of smart phones and social media. Viewed through a talent attraction and employer branding lens, one of the most important differences between Gen Z and the preceding generations is their immunity to advertising. Be it the traditional form of paper, billboard and TV ads to the more modern medium of online adverts (modern, as judged by a Gen X'er), Gen Z has been avoiding these since they first started navigating techno devices, which for many, dates back to the days before they came off nappies. It is not surprising then that they are more dismissive of any form of advert when compared to the Millennials.

Compounding this challenge is the finding that Gen Z's seek uniqueness in everything they interact with. With over 90% of this generation digitally active, and consuming the benefits of Artificial Intelligence, they seek personalisation and customisation of brand experiences that speaks to them. In contrast to what we would expect, despite intimately engaging with apps, their need for tactile experiences outweighs that of their Gen Y predecessors.

To appeal to this generation, marketing and corporate branding strategists have to employ innovative, personalised messaging that speaks to the individual needs of each Centennial. Strategies that are focused on experience will trump those focused on traditional marketing.

Contradicting the prediction that University Career Fairs in their current form are headed for extinction, this surprising finding serves to emphasise the importance of the Career Fair as a means of selling the Firm's value proposition.

Having done their due diligence on line, through accessing the Firm's website and browsing its social media pages, the Gen Z students will then head for the Career Fair not only to top up their stationery supplies but also to gain further insight into the Firms that have piqued their interest. The student's experience interacting with the Firm representatives will no doubt play a critical role in the decision to apply to a Firm. Further experiences, such as Job Shadow and Vacation Programs will serve to reinforce the applicant's view of the congruence between his/her needs and the Firm's culture.

It is also no surprise that this generation who entered University during the era of 'Nenagate', state capture and ratings downgrades are a lot more financially insecure and cautious than their millennial colleagues. Centennials are expected to be more focussed on earning a good salary as opposed to their predecessors who value work life balance far more than financial reward (or at least theoretically, as many Employers have come to realise at the first increase cycle).

It is safe to predict that this ambitious generation who offer long hours and hard work in exchange for good salaries and job security would be looking to leapfrog their Gen Y colleagues in the race to the top. We wait impatiently to see the response from Gen Y who at least theoretically are more committed to changing society and saving the world than to sacrificing themselves for financial gain.

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