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How cruise lines can capture millennials – the selfie generation

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MILLENNIALS

Generation game

Millennials are the future of everything – even the cruise industry. **Sam Ballard** finds out what is being done to cater for them and looks at ways of getting them on board



It seems like you can't attend a conference, watch the news or even read a copy of CRUISE ADVISER these days without someone mentioning millennials. We are told that this mysterious group of young people are the future. However, given that they operate like no other group before them, how do you get them on board?

Millennials – typically counted as those born between the early 1980s and 2000 – are the first generation to have grown up with the internet. They are “digital natives” who are used to sharing their experiences on social networks. Goldman Sachs, the financial services firm, says that millennials are more likely to live on their own than any other generation before them, which partly explains the growth in the solo travel industry.

According to the research, millennials are also more unlikely to buy products like cars or music – instead using services to access them, like Uber or Spotify, in what has been dubbed the “sharing economy”.

A strong brand is no longer enough to secure a sale and millennials often look towards their own peer group for advice when making a decision. That being said, their buying decisions are governed by quality over price. Eating better and wellness are a huge part of their daily lives, rather than a chore.

So, given all of the above, what is the cruise industry doing to attract millennials? And how can you, as agents, better suit your business to the needs of this younger generation?

“The traditional way we offer a cruise will be interesting to a millennial for about 30 seconds,” explains Stuart Leven, vice president EMEA and RCL Cruises managing director. “We need to start looking at life through their eyes.”

So they did just that, hiring a group of interns from Chester University during the summer holidays and giving each of them a project: how do we attract millennials onto the ships?

“They came up with two genius ideas and we've implemented them both,” Leven explains. “The first is to get rid of traditional photographers and put people on the ships with iPhones, because millennials don't want staged, cheesy, airbrushed shots.



Clockwise from above: Transatlantic Fashion Week onboard Cunard's Queen Mary 2; a 4D cinema on MSC Splendida; cruise has plenty of photo ops to share



“The second idea is to use the sports staff on board, who are mostly millennials themselves, to set up a Snapchat group at the start of every cruise. All of the millennials can join and learn about what's great, and what's not so great, on board.”

For Antonio Paradiso, managing director of MSC Cruises, the huge investment the line is making in technology that has meant it is already reaping the rewards.

“The age of the average cruise passenger is mid-50s,” Paradiso explains. “For us it's already mid-40s. Our new ship, MSC Meraviglia, was on the TV show *Cruising with Jane McDonald* recently and it was the perfect opportunity to showcase the innovation we have on board. It was about getting the wow factor across.

“We've got flight simulators, bowling alleys, kids' clubs and LED screens everywhere. The programme was a great way for us to highlight the incredible technology on board. And technology is one of the main drivers of this generation. It is all about highlighting the way in which the industry is investing in its future.”

Richard Twynam, the managing director of Azamara Club Cruises, adds that for many millennials it is about having authentic experiences from which they can generate content across their social media channels.

“The key thing for millennials is to build their status through the quality of the imagery that they share,” he explains. “By delivering a destination experience they can get those bragging rights through social media.

“It might be: ‘Here I am doing a bike tour through Sydney’. Or, ‘Here I am doing a zip line through a Costa Rican rainforest’. That photo will then go on Instagram and Facebook, and talk to other millennials.”

Another company that has an offering ideal for millennials is Scubaspa. The line has two 40-guest yachts based in the Maldives and offers passengers a choice between exploring the marine life of the Indian Ocean, with up to 17 scuba dives, or indulging in onboard spa treatments.

Barty Olejniczak, the company's business development manager, explains: “We have intimate ships

sailing the beautiful waters of the Maldives. We offer experiences such as yoga at sunset or sunrise and scuba dives to see nurse sharks at night.

“Guests can choose whether they want to explore coral reefs or the biggest open-air spa in the Maldives. We’ll host fishing competitions and have barbecues on desert islands. It really is something special.”

The week-long tours offer dozens of opportunities for millennials to experience the region – and share them on social media. The product is sold through Original Travel.

It would be a mistake not to also mention U by Uniworld (see Interview, p16), the luxury river company which is now targeting millennials with their own dedicated brand. The move involves a massive amount of investment from Uniworld and highlights just how important millennials are to the industry.

As cruise lines tailor their offering to suit young people, what can agents do to help get that message across?

Engagement is top of the list. While enterprising travel agents may previously have booked a stand at a nearby cruise show, golf club or garden centre – that’s not going to be enough to get in front of millennials. Why not pick itineraries or ships that would better suit younger people? Fitness has become such a massive trend, why not select a few cruises – such as CroisiEurope’s CroisiBike holidays (where passengers can cycle up to 65km a day on European rivers) – and try and organise a mailout to a gym’s membership? Or even ask if you can set up a stand in reception on a Saturday afternoon.

You could show similar initiative with anything from music to food.

Another facet of a cruise to play up to millennials is the idea of a “digital detox”. While it is true that technology is incredibly important, for a lot of younger people the idea of being able to upload one picture to social media and then be “disconnected” is pretty appealing too – and with it lose the temptation to keep checking your emails. Cunard runs a Transatlantic Fashion Week cruise between New York and London



With Scubaspa you can cruise the Maldives in total luxury



that seems to have been made with millennials in mind. The line also offers other themes including cartoonists and wine.

Investing in social media training is one way of getting out to a wider audience. Companies such as Ginger Juice specialise in social media training for the travel industry and regularly speak at industry events. If you haven’t got an Instagram page why not set one up and post shots of destinations and spas on board ships? Learn what hashtags you can use to start drumming up business.

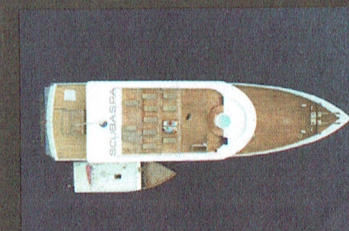
“Travel agents looking to engage with millennials should focus on two main things: authenticity and experiences,” says Bruce Martin, founder of Ginger Juice. “Millennials devour online content, and the more authentic and trustworthy it is, the better. Millennials also crave ‘bucket-list’ experiences. Help them ‘feed the FOMO’ and encourage them to brag about amazing experiences.”

Selling to millennials is not rocket science. Like every generation, they want to be different from their parents but essentially the end product will stay the same. They want authentic experiences. They want the ability to relax by beautiful swimming pools or indulge in spas. They want to eat incredible food.

You just need to learn how to sell it in a language they understand. **CA**

THREE MILLENNIAL CRUISES

Seven nights in the Maldives



Scubaspa - Scubaspa Ying
Malé (round-trip), July 7, 2018
From £2,465pp

This seven-night trip includes all meals, dives, daily yoga, flights and transfers available through Original Travel. Guests also get the use of a GoPro for the duration of the holiday.

14-nights in Central America



Azamara Club Cruises - Azamara Quest
Caldera-San Diego, January 25, 2018
From £1,695pp

Millennials will love the AzAmazing Evening, which includes a Day of the Dead celebration in Mexico.

11 nights in the Norwegian Fjords



MSC Cruises - MSC Meraviglia
Hamburg (round-trip), June 10, 2018
From £1,999pp

This cruise, through the stunning Norwegian Fjords, is an incredible opportunity for millennials to experience all the technology that MSC Meraviglia has to offer.