Teenagers and twenty-somethings have been dubbed the millennial generation, millennials, or generation Y. More and more books, studies and articles are being released about this group of people born between the 1980s and early 2000s.

Millennials are a highly-influential consumer group, with a vastly different set of values and attitudes from any previous generation. They don’t dream about owning a sports car, but probably share an economy car in the same way they may share their job.

The flower power or love generation may have flocked to Woodstock and India, but they usually came home sooner or later. Millennials, or ‘digital natives’, have been pampered, protected and programmed from birth, and raised by parents telling them they are very special. Today, they are faced with the fact that life is not a bed of roses, making them unhappy and frustrated.

The millennial generation is also known as generation Y because it comes directly after those born between the 1960s and 1980s – better known as generation X, as popularised by author Douglas Coupland in his novel of the same name.

Generation X-ers have been born into an affluent society that allows a largely carefree life. Their grandparents (and my father as well) survived the Second World War. After the war it was all about reconstruction and economic growth.

The baby boomers (born from the end of war until the 1960s) made careers and earned good money. Today they approach retirement – an ideal target group for the travel industry, cruise lines, and spa and wellness resorts.

Generation X is the first generation to grow up with IT playing a significant role
The essential title for the foodservice industry in print and digital

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in their everyday lives. A large number of our customers, hoteliers and managers, but also many of our colleagues, are among this age group, some celebrating their 50th birthday this year.

**One generation Y or two?**

After a discussion I launched during sessions at the SpaCamp trade event in Germany in November, I suddenly realised generation Y is not a clearly defined group. The media tends to focus on those who are online 24/7. But there are a growing number of young people who want to embrace other values and real needs. Many decide to go offline during holidays, enjoy a nice dinner with friends, or go away for a weekend.

A further distinction should be made between younger and older millennials, especially for the second group where two hearts beat in their chests. “Sometimes I am acting completely as generation Y, and the next day I decide it’s more reasonable to act as an X,” one delegate of the SpaCamp confessed.

Moreover, we must not forget that the part of this generation, who are well-educated, is only part of the equation. What worries me is the large group of young people who are unable to speak complete sentences and are poor at spelling. They are used to communicating in fragments, by text and WhatsApp.

Some of my clients no longer want to consider the type of employee who might conceivably resign from their job via text at short notice. But what will these kids do when they apply for a job they really want? No wonder there is a storm under the surface.

**Invest or wither**

You could ask: “why should I care as a hotel manager, operator or consultant?”

Very simply, generation Y is a double challenge for you, both as an employer and a business. Let’s start with the employer situation. Firstly, there are difficulties in finding well-trained and qualified staff, as I’m sure you are aware. The western hospitality industry is experiencing a shortage of skilled professionals due to its poor image and competition from other sectors. Speaking about German cities such as Berlin or Munich, as well as seaside resorts, it is a struggle to find a suitable chef or apprentice.

“In competition with other sectors and industries for the best minds, only those who are investing in their attraction as an employer of choice will be successful.”

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Feedback won’t be positive, take care not to kill the motivation inside the young mind. It might be a good idea to say: “You are doing fine, but you could do a little bit better.”

Trying to be “everybody’s darling” is a mistake. In social media, it is better to tackle one thing well, than to deliver half measures on many issues.

Changing expectations
Most of us will remember times when a pay rise could be avoided by giving the person a title as a job promotion, including a nice business card – from waiter to chef de rang, from sales manager to director of sales, and so on. Sorry, this won’t do for generation Y. They are much more concerned about content and personal challenge.

Employer branding is the magic word used to describe a human resources strategy to differentiate brands. Individual hotels and privately-owned chains have followed in the footsteps of this strategy. The way this works is described in The Upstall Bloom Story, a film that documents the efforts of a German hotel chain to transform its corporate culture. An innovative work and partner, it has been widely praised for the visual and emotional strength and partners, it has been widely praised for the visual and emotional strength and partners, it has been widely praised for the visual and emotional strength and partners, it has been widely praised for the visual and emotional strength and partners, it has been widely praised for the visual and emotional strength and partners, it has been widely praised for the visual and emotional strength and partners, it has been widely praised for the visual and emotional strength and partners, it has been widely praised for the visual and emotional strength.

A brief recognition of employer branding has only developed recently. “When I had my first speech about employer branding in 2006, many in the audience looked rather confused,” remembers Klaus Hack FCSI, coach and chief executive of Hommequadrat. To increase awareness of the FCSI among students, different campaigns on Business schools for the Hospitality Industry will be organized. Kick off for the first FCSI Project Speed Dating is 16 April at the WIHOGA Campus in Dortmund. A jury of FCSI consultants will listen to 10-minute presentations from the students. They will get 20 minutes feedback from the experts, including tips regarding the concept, economical potential and possible aspects that may have been neglected. This will enable the students to implement the professional input into their project at an early stage, and improve their performance.

This “project dating” will be a new offer for students, as we felt the FCSI Junior Champion’ launched in 2008 is outdated and we experienced problems getting enough applications in 2012 and 2014. Presumably generation Y measured the balance of benefits and burdens, fun and risks, and decided against participation. Let’s wait and see what happens to the FCSI Young Students Award.

Digital added value was the central theme of the Germany-Austria AGM held in Hamburg in November 2014, and this could not work without a glance at the next generation. Keynote speaker Constanze Ochs was able to discuss everything about “generation CHA CHA” because she is part of this generation. For her “CHAinge, CHAllenge and CHAnce” are the keywords to understand people of her age or younger. Before joining Ernst & Young in Zurich, Ochs studied and worked for McDonald’s Germany, giving her boss lessons in how to better handle employees of her generation or younger.

Business opportunities
Success and sustainability of your company or your hotel not only depend on human resources, but most importantly on your clients. They are of different age, but the millennials are not only on your doorstep, there are already omnipresent and will be your future customers – if they want to be. Be aware, however, that many of them are online 24/7, so they expect service 24/7.

Generation Y is a challenge for target marketing, because they can be as difficult to grasp as a wet fish. To continue that metaphor, always remember the saying: “the bait is for the fish to like, not the fisherman.” I am sure the rules of communication will change from “how do we catch our clients?” to “how do our potential customers reach us?”

It is certain that online bookings are increasing – 85% in Germany during the last year. The net generation needs more than 10 touch points to make a travel-related decision – and no guide book. They are used to having information and answers immediately available.

“Being social is a must, but it has to be planned,” is the good advice from Andreas Romani FCSI, a consultant and self-confessed “social media freak”, based in Munich. “If the first impression is not good, the chance has been missed. Always be honest and look for clear and appealing content.”

Remember, pictures tell better stories than words and, last but not least, the time required should not be underestimated. There is one other point, trying to be “everybody’s darling” is a mistake. Whoever wants to please everyone risks gambling away their future. In social media, it is better to tackle one thing well, than to deliver half measures on many issues.

So, how to get started? It may be time to take a long hard look at website – after all, it is your shopfront. It’s incredible how old-fashioned some websites still are in German-speaking countries. Also, think about a mobile phone app to provide better access to your offers. Telling stories is a good idea, but you must talk the language of the new generation. It might be worth considering asking a suitable generation Y-er from within your office to help you (much better than spending a lot of money on an agency). Let them know that your product or business is conducive to their changing lifestyle, or attach a language of the new generation. It might be worth considering asking a suitable generation Y-er from within your office to help you (much better than spending a lot of money on an agency). Let them know that your product or business is conducive to their changing lifestyle, or attach a language of the new generation.

The hospitality industry cares for other people. That is what makes it so special. We are used to listening to our customers, and we should listen even to the next generations.

With regard to the question: “Will generation Y be able to change our industry sooner or later, with respect to employers, suppliers, hosts, consultants?” I am sure top-down hierarchies are over and out. When it comes to hotel guests, it looks different: Changes of generations have always existed. Even the web has undergone generational changes during the last two decades. Take a look at some of the luxury resorts in Switzerland, Austria and Germany. Some properties have successfully managed to appeal to younger clients. Guests can enjoy their stay in a relaxed atmosphere, with casual attire and Wi-Fi everywhere.

This could be a guideline for the whole hospitality industry. In Germany we have a saying: ‘macht mit Werkzeug was aus gekocht wird – nothing is eaten as hot as it is.’ Appealing to generation Y seems to be a daunting task, but there is a great chance for the hospitality industry. If you get the attention of generation Y than maybe they will lead your business into the future.