Millennials’ Perceptions of Minnesota’s State History: Who Manages It & How Well?

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Background

Millennials, born between 1980 and 1997, represent roughly one-quarter of the U.S. population (Figure 1). Given their proportion & growing influence, serving & engaging with millennials is essential for organizations of all types, including those emphasizing leisure, tourism & cultural-heritage attractions.

Select millennial highlights
• 61% white, non-Hispanic although most racially diverse generation (Fry, 2015)
• ½ college educated (Pew Research Center, 2010)
• Tech savvy (Pew Research Center, 2010)
• Rarely join professional groups (Achieve and JGA, 2011)
• Most likely to financially support causes of social justice (Cohen, 2014)
• 4% visit museums overall (Phillips, 2010)

Baseline information on organizational awareness & perceived quality is important to move forward on effective service & engagement. Brand equity refers to the value of the brand to its owner & includes 4 major dimensions: Awareness, Image, Quality, and Loyalty (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Aaker, 1991; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Armed with details on these dimensions, organizations can optimize marketing, management, and development efforts.

The Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS), a dynamic and widely-recognized leader in historic preservation and education, recognized this informational need & worked with the Tourism Center to assess its brand equity. This poster reports on key questions of millennial Awareness & Quality of MNHS.

Results

Awareness: Who manages Minnesota’s state history?
• 2 of 4 sites were accurately identified as MNHS managed: Mill City Museum and Minnesota History Center (Figure 2). Respondents were divided over the management of both the Forest History Center and Split Rock Lighthouse.

Quality: How well does MNHS manage its historic sites?

The majority of millennials agreed:
• 9/11 programs are high quality Q Q Q Q Q 50%
• They admire MNHS A A A A A 53%
• They are likely to recommend MNHS R R R R R R R R 84%

Discussion & Implications

Despite relative low familiarity with MNHS, Millennials perceive a high level of quality provided by MNHS. This signifies MNHS is recognized as a reputable, trustworthy source for Minnesota history.

Low familiarity with MNHS services among millennials should not be discouraging. As millennials agree that MNHS is a well-respected & important organization, what remains to be changed is a matter of awareness, not perception. Millennials need to be engaged through social media technology. Peer recommendations is the “gold standard” for engagement with this group.

Trust itself is a key component for increasing brand equity. This existing trusting relationship must continue to grow to engage a larger proportion of the millennial demographic. When MNHS targets programs at millennials, the trust component must be foremost in program thinking. Millennials appear to be very cognizant of quality and will expect the best from MNHS services.