



Striking the right tone in health communications with digital-savvy Millennials is tricky. **Marc Iskowitz** asks seven experts for some of the keys to facilitating that conversation

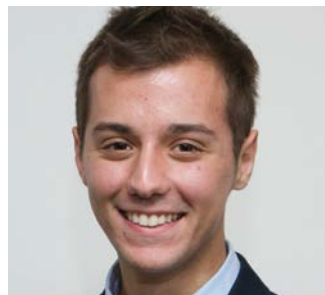
ENGAGING THE **DIGITAL NATIVES**



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ALL PHOTOS: DAN D'ERRICO

Marc Iskowitz (editor-in-chief, MM&M): Just to get things started here, there are 74 million adults aged 18 to 34 in the US, and we know them as the Millennials. They're not only one of the most talked-about generations since the Baby Boomers, but they have different relationships with products and services. What are the cultural trends driving this generation's hyper-focus on health?

John Zatwarnicki (VP of leadership and innovation, Nielsen): Millennials have very specific preferences. They're very health-conscious compared with some of the other generations, especially as it relates to fresh, organic products... They've been digitally enabled since inception, and the idea that they have technology at their fingertips drives a lot of "I can figure this out myself or I can find out information from friends in my social network." In terms of health, I think there is a general mindset that they should be able to address some of the more basic lower-level-symptom types of concerns by themselves. I don't mean major events or major symptoms, but more "can I figure this out on my own?"

Dr. Roshini Raj (internist and gastroenterologist, NYU Medical Center and author of *What the Yuck? The Freaky and Fabulous Truth About Your Body*): I agree with everything you said, and I think there's just so much more health information out there. It's become much more a part of our normal conversation. It's okay to talk about health; celebrities who are very glamorous are talking about their diets, not just their beauty routines. Millennials find

that information and then try things on their own. It used to be that patients were very reliant on the doctor for advice and information. Now, more often than not, they come in having tried things on their own because they read about it on the Internet, or because a celebrity has done it. They're much more proactive.

Danielle Dunne (managing director, Allidura): I have to think our definition of health is a little bit broader than perhaps it's been in the past. Millennials take a more holistic view of health and really think about that mind-body connection, which presents a lot of opportunities, with health but even with food and beverage.

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John Zatwarnicki (Nielsen): Another thing that was interesting about the Millennial work that we did is that Millennials are less likely to say, "I want to take a time-out and reward myself by

having this glass of wine," or whatever. The idea of balance is prevalent in terms of their general mindset and how they live their lives.

Derek Flanzraich (founder and CEO, Greatist): People in this generation are taking their health exponentially more seriously than



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other generations, both because they have to and because they want to. They're seeing their parents get sick or they're seeing loved ones who are in trouble, whether it's diabetes, which a third of the country or more has, or something else. They're really being exposed to this sense of, "Oh, my life might not be as long as I think." It used to be that Millennials felt that they were invincible. I'm not sure that's true as much anymore.

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Danielle Dunne (Allidura): We've seen a lot with the empowered patient movement, and Millennials are already that empowered patient. With Boomers, it was a matter of convincing them to be empowered and push back and take an active role in their health.

Marc Iskowitz (MM&M): For Millennials, it's in their DNA. They've grown up with user-generated content. They have a comfort level with that.

Susan Getgood (VP, influencer marketing, BlogHer): We just finished our 2014 BlogHer Women and Social Media Study, which focused on sponsored content. Overall, the majority trusted content that they read—sponsored content, mind you—that was from a blogger they trusted and about the same percentage didn't trust the content if it came from someone they didn't know and trust. But the same kind of thing—if it doesn't apply to medical information, it ought to, right? As we've been talking, I've been thinking, "Where do you put that trust and how do you validate that trust?"

Derek Flanzraich (Greatist): We do a yearly roundup of the 100 Top Influencers in Health and Fitness, and you've got Jillian Michaels and Dr. Oz on the list, and a lot of the stuff they say isn't true or is true and perhaps biased, but they're positioning it as fact. And that's okay. There's nothing wrong with that. I wonder whether the Internet allows Millennials to know more people, more personalities, more bloggers—to access a larger group of people that allows them to discern among them or maybe just listen to the people that

they already agree with. I don't know whether that's a good or bad thing, but I wonder: Is that true?

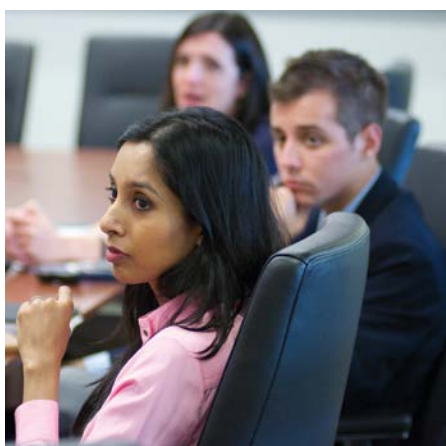
Marc Iskowitz (MM&M): Let's build on that. This generation, of course, has been bombarded with public health campaigns on drugs, cigarette smoking and obesity. They've also grown up seeing health information debunked before their eyes, high-fat diets, all-protein diets, coffee's good versus coffee's bad, Dr. Oz, Dr. Atkins. Have these broad-scale, high-profile campaigns with celebrities helped this generation or hindered it?

Zach Gerber (innovation strategist, GSW): I feel like they're not hurting or helping this generation at all. They're kind of flying 30,000 feet above this generation... Millennials are fact-checkers. They're going to double-check something before they even think about trusting someone.

Danielle Dunne (Allidura): But again, think of the broader view of health and how you engage Millennials in a conversation around it in a way that they want to be a part of it. When we look at pharmaceutical campaigns or OTC campaigns that are looking to reach the Millennial generation, there's a lot of things that you could probably learn from RED—as compared with, you know, the old this-is-your-brain-on-drugs type of campaign.

Derek Flanzraich (Greatist): Millennials also don't just accept that any solution is right for them. With me, it's like, "Okay, maybe coffee is now good for everyone, but it makes me feel sick, so forget it." In health and wellness, we talk a lot about how everyone thinks they are different. Their lives, their situations, their priorities, their challenges are different—and just by thinking that, it's true, because then you can't hit them with the same blanket examples. That forces this different take of "Well, the Atkins diet worked for my friend, so I guess I'm going to keep doing it despite growing information that it's not great."

Susan Getgood (BlogHer): It all comes back to the amount of information and resources this generation has. The attitude that "we're different" was true for the Baby Boomers and the group after that; every group had that feeling of "I'm different from the generation before me, and I'll be different from the generation after me." This one just happens to have this total overflow of information, and it's not stopping, right? I mean, we have new things every week that are



supposed to tell us what's going on. I don't know that they're better at filtering the information than anybody else, but I think that they're aware that they have to filter the information in a way that maybe we weren't as aware of. I don't necessarily need to remind my son that everything he reads on the Internet is not true, but I do have to actually remind my mother of that sometimes because there's a different perception of source of information. So I think that they have that built-in fact-checker thing because there's so much in front of them.

Marc Iskowitz (MM&M): Right, and has having so much information at their fingertips, but perhaps very little insight about it, helped Millennials make better decisions about their health?

John Zatwarnicki (Nielsen): I do think there's a healthy skepticism. Millennials absorb whatever they find online and make their own determination based upon a variety of factors. I don't think it's the case where they find one tidbit and say, "Oh, that's me." It's the same thing with health. If they have an issue of some type, they probably go to more than one place and then make their own determination. So I think, in general, they're probably making better decisions.

Melissa Barnhart (VP of sponsor services, WEGO Health): I would agree with that. I think it's helped. Look at StupidCancer.org, which is all about Millennials living with cancer, whether from a patient perspective or from dealing with a parent going through treatment. Millennials are comfortable with that. It's about being connected, especially with chronic illness. For chronic conditions, being connected through this social sphere is important.

Derek Flanzraich (Greatist): I'm not sure I agree. There's no doubt that Millennials are armed with more information and exposed to more than ever before. When I look up a restaurant, I have five sites to check and three apps or something, but then I'm stuck with information paralysis. It happens with health, the classic sort of looking-at-WebMD, "Oh my God, I'm going to die because this smells funny."

Susan Getgood (BlogHer): Every headache's a brain tumor.

Derek Flanzraich (Greatist): Right, but I see stress. Stress is maybe one of the primary attributes of Millennials. They're probably more likely, if they don't like an answer, to go look somewhere else, but they also have so many places to look.

Danielle Dunne (Allidura): Adult Millennials are one of the first groups to really feel this information overload. They can't turn to their mentors or parents, who didn't grow up with the same thing. They don't have those role models.

Susan Getgood (BlogHer): We do briefing events with healthcare clients and bloggers. We bring in someone to talk about how you decipher scientific and health information and how you actually parse the information, how you determine truth from fiction. What is it? "Figures don't lie, but liars figure"? We try to put tools in our influencers' hands when they're going to be writing about scientific and health topics so that they don't inadvertently pass on bad information.

Marc Iskowitz (MM&M): Do you think the industry is coming up with the right patient educational resources to facilitate that health journey of Millennials?

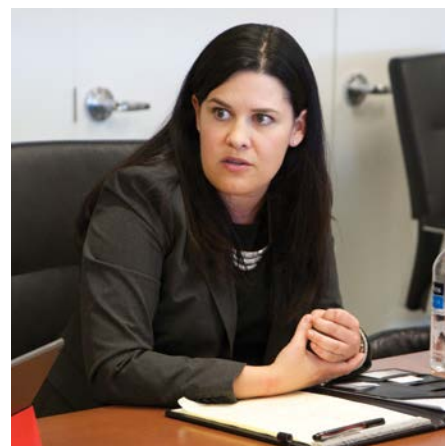
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Melissa Barnhart (WEGO Health): From what we hear from our Influencers, there's definitely a need for more, and it's all about having the dialogue that right now it seems has been very one-sided—talking at people instead of really listening to their needs.

Danielle Dunne (Allidura): Sometimes brands are frustrated by what's fact versus what's sensationalized, fear-mongering, whatever term they want to use. And taking it in a little bit of a different direction, I think one of the things for brands to consider is going back to that notion of the broader meaning of health for this generation. Is there another way to reach Millennials about the sourcing of your products, in terms of the environmental, healthy-minded or the greater-community-good parts? For some brands or for some companies, there's an opportunity to take a look at the parts of their story that might reach this health-minded Millennial in a way that perhaps we hadn't considered before, or that other generations hadn't been open to.

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Marc Iskowitz (MM&M): So in terms of the question of whether all the technology's helping or hindering Millennials, it sounds like it's helping connect them to more information, but then they still have to separate fact from fiction, which is not an easy thing to do.

Dr. Roshini Raj (NYU Medical Center): I always tell my own patients that all of these conversations or interactions you're having online really should be within the context of a conversation with your doctor, who knows you personally, who has laid hands on you, who has looked at your entire history. That's part of the confusion. You can't get that doctor/patient relationship from the Internet. Again, I am biased, but there was still a time where for a few months I was Googling ADHD every five minutes. I wasn't convinced my son had this and the pediatrician was like, "No, he doesn't have it for X, Y and Z reasons." But you look online and he has 10 of the 20 symptoms, just like every four-year-old.

“These conversations you're having online should be within the context of a conversation with your doctor”

— Dr. Roshini Raj, NYU Medical Center

Susan Getgood (BlogHer): Overall, we are better and much more critical consumers of healthcare than we used to be. I think it's better in a way. I mean, I'm older. I can think back to waiting in the lab for hours and hours to get blood drawn—and now I go in and, boom, it's done, and I'm out in half an hour. In some respects, I think our healthcare providers have responded to the fact that we are now smarter consumers. My son's doctor is much different with him than I remember my pediatrician being with me in terms of how she communicates and discusses his issues with him. I don't remember being that open with my pediatrician.

John Zatwarnicki (Nielsen): Dr. Raj, have Millennials come in to see you and told you what they think they have because they did the “research” online?

Dr. Roshini Raj (NYU Medical Center): Absolutely—not only what they think they have, but what treatment they should get and “can you write that for me right now?” Overall, I agree it's a good thing.

Patients are more informed and they're more invested in their healthcare, which makes my job easier. But there is definitely that flip side where sometimes a little knowledge is a dangerous thing—like, say, they've gone gluten-free for no apparent reason, and now I can't test them for celiac disease because going gluten-free affects how I do my testing.

Melissa Barnhart (WEGO Health): Are Millennials more or less adherent than other generations?

Dr. Roshini Raj (NYU Medical Center): That's a good question. I think they talk a good game, but they're not as adherent as they may appear to be. I think in every generation, there's a subset of people who say yes to everything you say and will follow your instructions, and there are people who will say yes to everything you say and not follow your instructions. Millennials are just more engaged. I now communicate through email with my patients, and the Millennials send weekly updates on how they felt or what worked or what didn't work.

Derek Flanzraich (Greatist): Increased engagement among Millennials is maybe great for us, but how will that affect the healthcare space? The more power and awareness, and education that patients and consumers have, the more they expect and demand from payers and providers. When I think about Millennials and how drawn they are to alternative insurance providers, I understand why Aetna and Humana and all these other guys are scared.

Marc Iskowitz (MM&M): How can insurers ensure that they continue to recruit Millennials?

Derek Flanzraich (Greatist): Entrenched insurance companies do things the way they've been done for a long time, and then it's hard to create a new system. We work very closely with Oscar Health, which is a completely new insurer built to target and engage with Millennials. There are simple ways to make it work, like by having an app that actually works and has smart tools and a pretty design. Insurers have to speak to them like they're consumers, not patients, and not ignore Millennials, because the Millennials are valuable, because they cost the least, but they also want to create a relationship, and so part of the relationship I think with most insurers is very negative. ■