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*Ellen C. Wells*



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Are you a Baby Boomer who never really got into bell-bottom jeans, Janis Joplin or the fast-living lifestyle of the 1980s? Perhaps you're a Millennial who doesn't have a quirky mustache, wear ironic T-shirts or make her own vegan baby food in Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighborhood. Maybe you're a Gen-Xer who has never slacked a day in his life. (If so, I'm doing my best eye roll and saying, "whatever" under my breath.)

And here we have the inherent problem with the concept of "generations." I don't mean "generation" as Merriam-Webster defines it, which is "a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously." Instead I refer to "generation" as we've been using it for marketing purposes. You know what I mean, of course. When it comes to selling products and services to customers, we've all become Gen-X like, "slacking" our marketing strategy to assume everyone

of the same age likes and does the same exact thing. I'll tell you this: If you are of a certain age, you definitely know what Felix Unger says happens when you assume.

If you assume Millennials are urban tiny-apartment dwelling singles, then you miss out on the young couples that just bought a lovely ranch-style home in the burbs and are desperate for landscaping help. If you assume Baby Boomers have "been there, over that," you could be missing out on folks who finally have a little time to see what "grow your own" actually means.

Bits of this idea have come to me now and again, especially when people assume certain things about me based on my age. That's why I really liked one of the five key trends for 2018 presented by Max Luthy, keynote speaker at this January's Tropical Plant International Expo (TPIE). As Director of Trends & Insights for Trendwatching, Max knows a thing or two about trends presenting themselves worldwide. What he and his team of 3,000 global trendspotters have realized lately is that the era of defining someone by the confines of her or his generation and marketing to them as such are over. Done. And, it hasn't truly been working in a while anyway.

What's working instead? Recognizing consumers as belonging to "tribes." Max loosely defines a "tribe" as a group of people that shares the same passions, pursuits and interests. A tribe, Max asserts, doesn't pigeonhole a person based on age, like we do when we assume if you're a Millennial you must love craft beer. Instead, a tribe spans generations. Lots of people spanning all the generations love craft beer, don't they? And I'm sure some Millennial out there would prefer a wine cooler if they knew what that even was.

Along with his presentation Max provided a worksheet naming his five trends along with a prompt to get you thinking a bit more about each from your own business perspective. The prompt for “Tribefactoring” asks, “What tribes are out there waiting for you to recognize and serve their values and interests?” Mulling it over a bit, here are a few that might be appropriate:

Plant Lovers: People do love plants, after all. Maybe not as many as we’d like, but we could definitely grow that number if we openly and actively share our own tribe’s passion for green growing things.

Home Lovers: To many, home is where the heart is. Help them express that feeling for home with décor—both living and non.

Nature Lovers: Caring for the world through land stewardship is important for many. We’ve got them covered.

Small-Time Farmers: I’ve been involved in food-centric community gardens long enough to know that there is a cohort of folks who live for the hope presented in next season’s harvest. What do you have for us? We’re waiting.

There are many more tribes just waiting for us to say hey to them, to give them some support and recognition. How many more can you name? Your tribe is waiting. **GP**