



Your Top Two Targets

Over the past year and a half that I've been writing this column, I've hammered home how companies that try to be everything to everyone end up being nothing to no one.

Focus has been my main message, as I've extolled the benefits of a "less is more" approach.

I thought I'd drop down from that 30,000-foot level this month and recommend ways to build strong brand relationships with some specific target markets. I've picked two market segments that are particularly valuable to most quick serves: Millennials and moms.

Both of these segments represents a significant portion of quick-serve spending, and each is driven by distinctive needs and desires when it comes to their quick-serve usage. So fast feeders that make a concerted effort to understand what each segment is looking for and meet those expectations will most certainly reap considerable benefits.

Let's start with Millennials. The definition of the Millennial generation varies, but generally speaking, Millennials comprise the group of about 80 million young men and women who were born in the '80s and '90s.

They are responsible for a huge portion of the quick-serve industry.

On average, they visit fast food joints 12 or more times per month, and they spend more of their income on food than any other generation. Generally speaking, they don't cook so they eat out more often than older users. I bet you see these folks in your restaurants all the time.

One of the top things Millennials look for in a fast food restaurant is creativity and innovation. The generation is more ethnically diverse than any other age group, they are regularly exposed to many cultural influences, and they're used to having lots of options whenever they shop. So they are interested in different products and experiences at fast food restaurants.

Ethnic concepts or those that feature unusual items and ingredients have strong appeal. New products, new service experiences, and new marketing campaigns and promotions also feed this segment's desire for change and novelty.

Community engagement is also a driver for Millennials. They expect to be engaged and listened to. So you need to use social media and location-based tools to create and participate in dialogues with Millennials.

But remember, the conversation shouldn't always be about your brand. Like any other generation, Millennials don't like it when someone—or some company—only talks about himself.

Beyond the communication and sharing made possible by social networking, doing sponsorships and getting involved with local groups and making menus and dining experiences friendly to groups are other ways fast food restaurants demonstrate their community-mindedness.

Millennials want the companies they buy from to care about them and their community. They don't judge brands simply on what happens in the store or drive thru; their perceptions are based on everything the company says and does.

The moms market segment is another important quick-serve target with distinct needs and expectations when it comes to fast food. There are nearly 32 million moms in the U.S., and their purchasing power accounts for nearly \$1.6 trillion in annual spending. Moms are the primary decision makers on where and what their families eat, so if they like your chain, you've got a whole family full of diners.

When they consider fast food options, moms are looking for the optimal balance of health, convenience, and value. Health doesn't necessarily mean low-calorie or low-fat—fresh, wholesome, and natural foods are other ways you can appeal to moms' health consciousness.

To moms, convenience involves speed of service, as well as ease of things like ordering, driving thru, carrying group orders, and splitting meals. Fast food should be a reprieve from lives filled with hassles and responsibilities.

Value, now more than ever, is important to moms. They're spending their money more cautiously because of the economic situation, and one way they care for their families is by making wise purchase decisions. As with all customers, value is more than price; it's the total benefit of the visit relative to the total cost. A comfortable experience in which the family can enjoy a tasty meal together is priceless for some.

Like Millennials, moms are heavy users of the Internet and mobile devices. They're likely to engage in social networking, to become a fan or follower of a brand, and to post their own content online. They research companies and products online and rely heavily on reviews and recommendations to inform their purchase decisions. Make it easy for moms to find and share information about their fast food choices.

Mobile devices serve as a command center for on-the-go moms. Create apps to help moms save time and money (their two most precious commodities), like GPS-integrated apps that make it easy to find places, apps that facilitate connectivity with friends, and educational apps they can use with their kids.

Community is as important to moms as it is to Millennials. They're looking for brands that support their beliefs and causes. In fact, almost all moms want to buy a product that supports a cause and will switch brands in order to support one.

They're also interested in participating in forums or panels that enable them to share tips and insights from other moms as well as companies.

To quick serves, Millennials say, "Value me," and moms say, "Help me." To increase your brand appeal to either target, your response should be a resounding, "At your service." 