

3 Ways Millennials Have Changed Back-To-School Shopping

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Back-to-school is one of the most important seasons for footwear retailers. A weak b-t-s could foreshadow a tough holiday, while a strong b-t-s could save back-half sales.

As back-to-school changes with every generation, the millennial mom and dad are setting a new tone for shopping and bringing their firm buying preferences and habits to one of the biggest moments in [retail](#).

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Certainly millennials are delaying certain major milestones such as marriage and having kids and buying a house, but those who do have kids are definitely guiding significant changes in the back-to-school shopping market. Here are ways the millennial parent is shaping the b-t-s season now and in the future.

Mobile & Digital

Mobile is mainstream. Millennials turn not just to their phones for price comparisons; they also look for trends, browse stores and social media, and have conversations about purchases. Brands that want to capture the millennial mom's dollars need to have full customer support available online and through in-store apps and recognize she's going to be using her phone throughout the research to purchase process.

"For a while now, millennials' shopping patterns have been distinguished by a greater use of digital for doing brand and product research before, during and after visiting a store," said Denise Lee Yohn, a retail consultant and author of "What Great Brands Do."

Seasonless Shoppers

Another big trend on the runways is seeping into b-t-s: seasonless apparel and footwear. [As designers start to play with fashion](#) and pare down shows, shoppers are looking for immediacy in what they're buying. Millennial parents are putting off the purchase of winter boots and dress shoes until they're needed, unlike previous generations, who treated back-to-school as a moment to stock up.

"I think you'll see an influence of continuous shopping and this idea of buy-now, wear-now," said Cowen & Co. analyst Oliver Chen. "That's a factor because of the volatility of the weather and merchants needing to change assortment for that habit."

Time Is Money

One major lesson of millennials is that they're seeking value in nearly everything, whether that be money or time. "[Millennial parents are] becoming more price-sensitive and pragmatic as they face the budget realities of parenting," said Yohn. "Increased constraints on their time has meant their shopping is becoming more efficient as well, with millennials buying from only one to three retailers for all of their [back to school needs](#)."

Another top issue for retailers, which is likely also being pressured by the value-seeking millennial parent, has been the continued backlog of inventory as shoppers stayed home during the first half of the year. It means shoppers are seeing deep discounts earlier — and hopefully buying more. "I think there was a race to take market share as

retailers tried to cut early for a deep markdown. The efforts there are really to clean inventory so the back half is better prepared,” said Chen.

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