Net Generation

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INTRODUCTION

The Net Generation refers to the description given to young Americans born from 1976 to 2001. Although the individuals of the Net Generation (or Net Gens) are the last generation of the 20th century, they are considered the first generation to grow up in an Internet culture and a multimedia driven environment.

BACKGROUND

In *Growing Up Digital*, Don Tapscott (1998) coined the term "Net Generation" pointing out the significance that individuals born between the years 1976-2001 were the first group of people to grow up immersed in a digital world. Other popular terms that have been used to describe this group of people include: Generation Y, Digital Natives, and Millennials. While Net Gens are primarily the children of Baby Boomers and older Generation Xers, Howe and Strauss (2000) suggest that the attitudes of Net Gens best resemble those manners of their grandparents' generation, "The Greatest Generation". However, Taylor (2002) argues that despite the perceived similarities between the two generations, Net Gens are perhaps "the most disengaged" of all generational groups.

As a cohort group, Net Gens are seen as the first true "multi-tasking generation". The process of communication for this generation has included such behavior as instant messaging, "texting" instead of talking on the phone, and sending pictures of real-time events instead of describing the details in person. In turn, this group has a need to be connected to information continuously (hence, fostering the concept of "24/7"). For the most part, Net Gens have been raised in an environment of instantaneous responses: fast food services, instant banking, and touch button technologies. Raines (2002) notes that the Net Gens have become the "busiest generation of children" because from the moment they were born, their lives have been micro-managed. In her research of Net Gen lifestyles, Raines notes that this group has had very little "unstructured free time" from the moment they have been born citing examples of schedules for "play dates" and extended day programs. The managed lifestyle of this generation has placed greater social pressures of this group to meet parental expectations. In turn, peer social interaction often occurs in more readily in cyberspace environments rather than traditional spaces.

FOCUS

Since generations are often defined by the world events that make an impact on them when they are young adults, it is no wonder why Net Gens are advocates of patriotism and globalism. The September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the subsequent war in Iraq, and the conflicts in the Middle East have shaped the social-political mindset of this generation. In addition, the Columbine shootings, the Oklahoma bombing, and the Hurricane Katrina and tsunami disasters have shown this generation that security is transparent. Hence, this group of young adults is more apt to depend on its parents more so than any other generation for direction and guidance. Yet, the rise of service learning and sense of volunteering has also increased with this generational group. Research on civic engagement indicates that Net Gens are very much involved in community service projects.

Some of the collective philosophies of this generation have arisen from various cultural and social ideologies that emerged during their formative years. The legislative concept of "No Child Left Behind" has led many of the Net Gen individuals to believe that education is an entitlement rather than a privilege. As students, this group desires customer service in their educational experience. Oblinger (2003) notes that many colleges and universities are individualizing their student services and academic affairs departments to meet the needs of Net Gens. In turn, many admissions departments have gone to the Web to target and recruit this incoming group of new students. Applications and

information about the colleges are now available for instant access on student Web portals. Likewise, the Patriot Act has given this generation the sense that government intrusion is acceptable in terms of securing the country. Privacy issues seem unimportant to this group who makes use of blogs and Web communities to share information about their personal lives and beliefs with others across the Internet. Finally, it appears that Net Gens tend to be more supportive of multi-culturalism.

Since Net Gens are the first generation to be immersed into Internet culture, they see the Internet as their primary source of information and major communication resource. The rise of interactive technologies that provide immediate access without the need for a manual or instruction has transformed the ways in which companies do business with Net Gen consumers. Trends in digital media have transformed the manner in which this group accesses music, film, research, and other materials. Digital cameras, scanners, and other simulation software enable people to manipulate reality. Often referred to as the "Google" generation, Net Gens expect to find anything they need through the Internet. In turn, the consciousness of this generation has influenced many companies and industries to develop more interactive Web-based advertising and marketing. Online purchasing, online banking, and the culture of eBay have transformed the way in which services are provided due to the extensive use of the Internet by this demographic group. In order to understand the social reality for this generation, Jason Frand (2000) describes ten attributes of the Net Gen mindset:

1. Computers aren't technology.
2. The Internet is better than TV.
3. Reality is no longer real.
4. Doing is more important than knowing.
5. Learning more closely resembles Nintendo than logic.
6. Multitasking is a way of life.
7. Typing is preferred to handwriting.
8. Staying connected is essential.
9. There is zero tolerance for delays.
10. Consumer and creator are blurring.

In similar fashion, Net Gens have transformed the foundations of education. For Net Gens, relationships, and not technology is the driving force in the learning process (McNeely, 2005). Collaborative learning, group

think, and social interaction are motivating factors in educating this generation. In terms of their attitudes toward education, Taylor (2002) argues that this group of students shows the following characteristics:

*   **Consumer Orientation:** "Students seek instant gratification, look for the best deal, want to negotiate, and might become litigious if disappointed" (Raines, 2002). Taylor (2002) has noted that there exists a prevalent attitude that "I paid tuition, now provide me with knowledge" (or a grade) approach.
*   **Entertainment Orientation:** Taylor (2002) cites that students do not accept the lecture-based methods of traditional education because they have been culture into thinking that everything they do must be fun.
*   **Entitlement:** Students think that they deserve a certain grade for a class because they paid for it. They believe they deserve extra credit, extra time to complete assignments, and any additional tutoring to ensure that the grade they receive meets their expectation. Students also think that instructors are there to provide a service (in this case instruction).

Given these ideas, Net Gens are more inclined to look for experiential, interactive, and authentic learning environments. As these students come to campus, they are transforming the lecture-driven traditions of colleges and universities. In fact, in many instances the presentation of linear content has been transformed into a more interactive display that includes simulations, gaming, and instant feedback. The concept of "edutainment" has begun to be linked to some teaching methodology.

The emergence of the Web-based classroom has also increased connectivity for students and expanded the diversity of classroom culture. Yet, this group is also more likely to cheat and engage in plagiarism using technology. Students are apt to download papers from the Internet, "cut and paste" text from the Internet or electronic articles into their documents, and even help text each other the answers on a test. File sharing is seen as collaborative work rather than academic misconduct. Students e-mail or text message each other information about the class, the assignments, and even the instructors. Web sites that describe the teaching styles of instructors as well as the assignments of the

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