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Millennial Movement
Designers Discuss Some Of The Different Ways To Appeal To These Travelers
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When it comes to hotel design, you won't get deep into the conversation without talking about the Millennial generation. As such, the recently concluded HI Connect® in Nashville played host to a panel discussion entitled "Designing for Millennials" during which a handful of design professionals discussed a range of related topics from technology to international differences.

However, the discussion began with each of the designers providing their own definition of this group of travelers. Rob Laschever, principal, Cauhaus Design, offered his perspective. "Truly you could kind of define it as an age group, but for me it's way more than an age group; it's a mindset. I think we all tend to talk about Millennials like its one generic group across the board, but it really isn't. I do tend to characterize it more as an attitude and not just someone who was born in late 80's or early 90's and happens to be coming of age now. I think it's a little bit more of an attitude and some people who are a bit older have maintained it and some people a little bit younger are grabbing onto it," he said.

Tom Horwitz, EVP, FRCH Design Worldwide, commented, "I think Millennials are ready to adopt a fight club mentality. The first rule of Millennials is 'stop calling us Millennials.' The second rule might be assuming we all want the same thing is like assuming all Republicans are going to vote for Donald Trump. It's a big group and I think they do have some habits worth taking note of. My generation goes sightseeing, they go sightdoing. So it's an experiential thing; they're really in it for that engagement and experience," he said.

Dave Weinstein, VP, Kube Systems, a company that provides product with charging capabilities, agreed the group is defined by more than just age. "It leans outside of when they were born. For us it means enabling their mobile lives, which has now sort of become enabling all of our mobile lives. Everyone's life now lives on that mobile device, whether it's Gen X, Gen Y or Millennials. It's been said that automobile sales are starting to suffer or are projected to suffer because Millennials report to their phones. They commune and talk to each other digitally," he said.

Scott Rosenberg, president, Jonathan Nehmer & Associates/HVS Design, talked about some of the differentiators from his perspective. "I think it's service and other things. Millennials are really unloyal and unloved and up for grabs…They are starting to have money, so it's truly a demographic that needs to be looked at economically," he said.

Horwitz underscored the point. "From the money standpoint, the barometer I would watch is the hostel movement. If you look at this generation they take over in 10 years monetarily, but right now their wallets aren't as fat?? What they're doing in hostels is spending very little money on the room itself. They have great public spaces, great bars, and they're going to spend most of their time out. They might share a room with 2, 4, 6, or 8 and they spend their money carefully saying 'I'm not going to spend a ton of time in the room.' If you look at Hilton, IHG, and Marriott, none of those guys have a big presence in lower cost hotels. Will they all

wake up to that?" he said.

One of the trends within design that has really changed in recent years is the strong emphasis on public spaces. Laschever offered an explanation, "It may because there a lot of Millennials in urban places now, but people are spending more time out in public spaces. In a way it's like the early 60's and early 70's with shopping malls, they went from a bunch of stores and a place to grab a bite to a town center or a place to hang out, and hotels have been doing that for a while. So Millennials are perfect for that. They treat these public spaces as their living room or their den. In fact, from a design standpoint, we're getting a little bit more casual; a little more comfortable; and more flexible...I think the design direction we're using for Millennials adapts well to everybody," he said.

Of course, technology is front and center for this generation as well. "This so-called Millennial generation will get older, and their needs and wants and habits will all mature," said Weinstein. He added the company partnered with Marriott International a few years back on its Travel Brilliantly campaign as the brand created a social hub called the Great Room. Weinstein noted, "The feedback they solicited from their guests, some of whom were Millennials and I'm sure tons of whom were not, was that we need to be able to get power wherever it is that we are on the property."

"Millennials also like to shape their own environments in their own world. Every generation probably doesn't like to be told what to do, but this generation, in particular, it seems really likes to shape their own world. With technology too it really has to be light, adaptable, flexible and changeable. That's a big part of it all," said Laschever.

The question was raised to the panelists if there was a big difference between Millennials in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world?

According to Horwitz, "Everybody [in Europe] is so much more comfortable with tighter and smaller. I think the Millennials there are not distinctly different but probably more aggressive travelers, and aggressive risk takers. The experimentation here doesn't seem to be as mature as the experimentation there. I would take more risks there," he said.

Rosenberg added," I think America is too conservative sometimes. If you look at Citizen M and Yotel these brands that are coming from Belgium and London. So whatever happens in Milan happens in New York three years later in fashion. And what happens is interior design picks that up three years after that," he said.

Laschever concluded, "I actually find one of the big differences of young people in Europe is they're out in public spaces. They're actually meeting face to face and hanging out with each other. I actually find that the tech aspect is a little bit different and less. You have to remember America is the great experiment and we're kind of a young country. Europe is so much further down the road before, they've gone past the Millennial phenomenon we're talking about," he said.

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