



# Marketing to Millennial Business Travelers

By Sara Ecclesine

**Millennials are forecast to make up 50% of the U.S. workforce by 2020, and in five years millennials will account for 75% of the global workforce.** Fortunately for the travel goods industry, millennials would rather spend money on travel and experiences than a house or other material possessions, according to multiple studies commissioned by Gfk Global, Eventbrite, Redfin, the Census Bureau and Realty Mogul. “Millennials are all about life experiences, and those experiences include travel,” said Consumer Anthropologist Georganne Bender. And as the oldest millennials turn 37, that passion shows no sign of abating. Millennials are either delaying homebuying or buying a cheaper home specifically in order to have more money to travel.

Millennials extend their enthusiasm to business travel, prizing work trips above other job benefits. A recent survey

by Hilton Hotels and Resorts found that 75% of business travelers aged 23 to 35 see business travel as a significant work perk, and 39% said they wouldn’t take a job that didn’t let them travel for business. “Millennials appreciate travel as a job responsibility,” said Nicole Leinbach Reyhle, founder of Retail Minded.

For travel goods merchants, this presents an opportunity to cater to this desired lifestyle among millennials. Adam Schoenberg, co-CEO and chief creative officer of Hook & Albert, is bullish about the millennial business traveler market. “Business travel is surging and projected to accelerate. It’s estimated that by 2022, \$1.7 trillion dollars is going to be spent on business travel. Within this growing market, millennials are taking more business trips than any other generation,” said Schoenberg. Willy N. van Dooijeweert, CEO of URBAN Traveler, is also enthusi-

astic about his millennial business travel customers. “The millennials that come in tend to be business people,” said van Dooijeweert. “They’re looking for really super high-quality products and they don’t mind spending more for it.”

But while some segments of the travel goods industry are successfully selling smart backpacks and artisanal messenger bags to 20 and 30-somethings, many are still struggling to market to millennials. When we talked to those brands, retailers, influencers and travel agents that have found success, the consensus is that digital marketing is key.

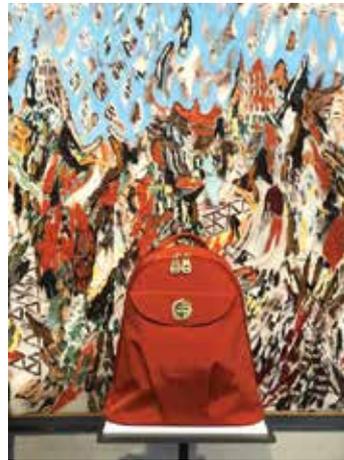
## ENGAGING THE DIGITAL NATIVE

**“Millennials definitely have a different style of shopping, compared to the baby boomer habit of going into a brick and mortar store, browsing around and then making a purchase,”** said van

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URBAN Traveler keeps its website updated with new products.



Index Urban's sales displays include original artwork by owner Jon Cantwell and son Jordan Cantwell.

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Dooijeweert. “They do an incredible amount of research on the internet and then come in. Sometimes they will even get on the phone in front of me to verify my recommendations of the product.” Van Dooijeweert’s experience is in line with the “ROTH Millennial Survey,” which found that two-thirds of millennials research significant purchases online before buying the item in-person. The cut-off price is \$100 and up (about the price of a smart backpack or a better power bank), which is good news for travel retailers. “The savior for travel goods retail is that we are a touchy-feely industry. You can’t try on a backpack on the internet,” said van Dooijeweert.

Van Dooijeweert has developed a tight, focused digital marketing strategy, aimed at introducing millennials to URBAN Traveler. “Our web-presence is how customers find our store,” said van Dooijeweert. “We work hard to maintain almost a 5-star rating on Google, update our Shopify-powered website with new products, and post on Facebook.”

### DOUBLING DOWN ON DIGITAL

**Jon Cantwell and son Jordan Cantwell** of Index Urban have gone all in with digital marketing. “I’m 33 and I research everything online,” said Jordan Cantwell. “For anyone 21 to 35, that’s how they get their information.” Index Urban maintains Instagram and Facebook pages, plus an Etsy account for their luggage tags. “It’s really helpful to have a digital native on staff,” said Jon Cantwell. Their digital marketing strategy extends beyond social media to online reviews. “We advertise a little on Yelp but not on Google, but we manage our Google business profile,” said Jordan Cantwell.

“If younger people find out about you it’s either Yelp or Google. Yelp is especially important, that word of mouth is critical. People can do so much now on their phones, and they want some verification that they’re going to have a good experience before they actually physically head out.”

The Cantwells have enlisted another millennial to help with their consumer outreach: influencer Angel Castellanos of the Travel Ambassador, Inc. and Angel’s Travel Lounge (see sidebar). Castellanos has presented multiple travel seminars at Index Urban. “It’s just a matter of getting the word out to our customer,” said Jon Cantwell. “I’ve sat through five of them and each time I learn something new, it’s really enjoyable.”

Like van Dooijeweert, the Cantwells chose Shopify to create their website. “Our new Shopify website is almost done. It’s an affordable way for us smaller players to look professional,” said Jon Cantwell. “To have a sale on our website is almost gravy, we invest in our website because a decent percentage of customers want to know a little bit about you before they come in.”

### MANUFACTURERS AND TRAVEL AGENTS MARKET TO MILLENNIALS

**Hampton has positioned BenjiLock** to appeal to millennials, and BenjiLock founder Robbie Cabral is the quintessential millennial business traveler. Randy Voss, Senior Director, Portable Security at Hampton Products, has been involved in BenjiLock since the earliest days. “Robbie wanted to create a lifestyle brand. He’s a millennial guy, very entrepreneurially oriented, and he found ways to innovate in a space that’s been around for 150 years,” said Voss.



Millennials expect, and are willing to pay for, elegantly simple tech solutions like The BenjiLock By Hampton Fingerprint Padlock.



Hook & Albert merges both function and fashion with the pioneering garment-first functionality of the Garment Weekender Bag.

Working with an exciting new brand has meant this venerable company has had to step outside traditional hardware outlets and marketing strategies.

“We’re working with different kinds of distribution and we’ve partnered with social media influencers to help evangelize. We’re a 30-year-old hard-

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ware company and Robbie has helped us break out of our shell. We're growing into things we never thought we'd be a part of and that's really exciting for us."

Mary Beth Buchanan, founder of travel agent franchise GOwithHIPPO Travel, reports that GOwithHIPPO travel advisors have embraced social media and messaging apps as a way to attract clients and book travel. "I'm a 50-year-old woman, and six years ago I booked my first client by text message – and I thought I changed the world," said Buchanan. "But now direct messages (DMs) through social media are standard."

Increasingly GOwithHIPPO franchisees are themselves digital natives who are looking for a side hustle or need a home-based job while their children are small. "WhatsApp, WeChat, Workplace by Facebook and Instagram – pick an app and we have a travel advisor who specializes in finding clients on that app," said Buchanan. "Here's what makes me chuckle: Millennials say Facebook is only for old people. But the truth is millennials lurk on Facebook to check out our reputation, and then they'll DM us on Instagram. They think if a business has been around on Facebook for a while it must be legitimate."

### CONSIDER AMAZON

According to the "ROTH Millennial Survey," a stunning 62% of millennials are Amazon Prime members. One of the toughest decisions for a brick-and-mortar retailer is how to respond to Amazon. Do you try to beat them – or join them? Index Urban is fighting back with personalization and merchandising, and some selective price matching. "The custom luggage tags are great, that's one of the ways we can separate ourselves from stores like Macy's and all the players on Amazon," said Jon Cantwell.

The experiential aspect of the store is also important. As with van Dooijeweert, Jordan Cantwell has had a customer double-check him on their phone during a sale. "When someone gets on their phone in the store they are mostly looking at prices, and we do try to price match as much as possible," said Jordan Cantwell. "If it's \$10 difference we explain that we give them a customized luggage tag, we warranty or



Addressing the dual trends of minimalism and bleisure, the HEX Medium Gym Duffel is designed to be the one bag for work, hobbies, and travel.



Thule's Crossover 2 Collection is the perfect business-casual blend of understated design and outdoor-brand cool.



Today's millennial business traveler is ready-to-go, self-sufficient, and travels minimally, with a laptop or tablet safely stowed in BOCONI's Tyler Slim Mailbag Messenger.



With a design aesthetic, packaging, and size that is reminiscent of noise canceling headphones or snowboard goggles, the bullbird BR2 is aimed squarely at millennial gearheads.

repair your bag for you. A lot of brands have a MAP policy so that's helpful."

If a retailer does decide to sell on Amazon, it can be smart to lawyer up. CJ Rosenbaum is a founding partner of Rosenbaum Famularo, P.C., the law firm behind AmazonSellersLawyer.com, which provides advice and protection for stores trying to navigate labyrinthian Amazon requirements or respond to complaints. "Retailers, especially small- to medium-size brands, should look to sales on Amazon but only after they protect their intellectual property rights, including trademarks and design patents. We suggest that the intellectual property rights be maintained in a separate entity than the one actually selling on Amazon. It sounds complex, but it is quite easy and inexpensive to set up."

Millennial lawyer and Rosenbaum Famularo associate Rob Segall warns that "retailers catering to millennials on Amazon need to create near-perfect customer experiences. Anything that the customer wants must be addressed with a consumer-centric mentality. It is what Amazon demands and millennials expect."

### MILLENNIAL MERCHANDISING

Creating a millennial-ready store means stocking stylish, high-quality tech-enabled backpacks and messenger bags, products with an eco-story, and high-quality electronics accessories. Bobby Williams, founder of BOCONI bags & leather, has a personal connection to millennial business travel, and millennial product development. "My wife and I were together for 11 years prior to having kids and during that time we lived the 'bleisure travel lifestyle.' Instead of millennials, we were called Yuppies. We too approached business travel as a perk of the job – to enjoy where we were going and to rack-up miles to go other places."

Today Williams folds that experience into his market research, as he develops BOCONI into a lifestyle brand. "I see women flocking to Nashville, our hometown, weekly," said Williams. "They travel with just a backpack, like the BOCONI Bryant LTE City Pack, and a carry-on sized rolling trolley. Right behind them are the guys with sleek crossbody messengers, like the Tyler Slim Mailbag Messenger, and a

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carry-on duffel, like the Bryant LTE Getaway Duffel. Men tend to treat weekday and weekend travel a bit differently – I still see guys with a bag versus a wheeled trolley on their getaways.”

Dan Maravilla, co-founder of HEX, views millennial product design as an intersection of two trends: minimalism and the de-segmentation of life. “Business, work, personal, family, hobbies, career, interests – it is all life now and we want it to all work together,” said Maravilla. “We want the right product to meet as many needs and functions for all the ways we do life.”

The HEX Medium Gym Duffel is designed to be the one bag needed for

work, hobbies, and travel. The duffel, which doubles as a backpack with hidden packable straps at the base, has a large main compartment for clothing storage, side pockets for shoes and a water bottle and enough padded pockets to fit multiple tablets or e-readers and a 13”-15 laptop.

Luggage from HEX, as well as brands like Hook & Albert, Thule and BOCONI, fit another top millennial product trend: buy it for life (BIFL). BIFL fans have launched Reddit threads dedicated to long-lasting gear, and BIFL is a top niche product category, according to ecommerce marketing firm Metrillo. “People my age invest in quality gear that’s really functional and

aesthetically pleasing with a good warranty,” said Jordan Cantwell. “People want to see gear in person, they want a human being to explain the warranty, not just read all that fine print online.”

Presenting a product as BIFL necessitates a focus on repairs and warranties. “We work hard to repair or warranty the bags we sell,” said Jordan Cantwell. “That’s important to people that are trying to buy long lasting, rather than disposable product.” Van Dooijeweert agrees with the strategy: “Luggage is a durable good and I think if you treat it well your luggage is quite grateful to you. I think it’s very, very important that we give good service on our warranties, and I hope the luggage manufacturers will continue to help our repair people.”

Besides BIFL, Metrillo’s list of top niche products include several often found at travel goods retailers: cool socks, smart backpacks, journal notebooks, special design clothing (such as travel clothing) and sustainable and ethical clothing. Eco-friendly products are a smart strategic focus because they are also a touch point for Gen Z. Samantha Rosenbaum, public speaker and Gen Z founder of consulting firm EcoFriendlySales.com, advises retailers to “focus on eco-friendly aspects. If you cannot make the product eco-friendly, make sure the packaging and accessories are eco-friendly. That is what my friends and I look for: eco-friendly, reusable and recycled goods.”

Millennials also shop for tech accessories that support their smart devices and solve travel problems. They prefer the most user-friendly solution, rather than the cheapest solution, such as a power bank that can charge a phone multiple times. In a neat piece of design and marketing strategy, bullbird’s newest travel pillow creates a high-tech impression in a traditionally low-tech category. With a design aesthetic, packaging, and size that is reminiscent of snowboard goggles, the bullbird BR2 appeals to gearheads who don’t relate to a traditional puffy pillow. Benjilock is a perfect piece of millennial tech because of its intuitive user interface. “This lock only uses fingerprint technology,” said Voss. “No app, no Bluetooth. Why does this engage millennials? Because it’s elegantly simple. It addresses a need: people lose their key, people forget their combination. And that’s generation agnostic.”

## The Travel Ambassador Angel Castellano



I give about 90 travel talks per year, ranging from presentations at national events like The New York Times Travel Show to travel seminars and casual events and meetups, and I offer marketing support through my agency. A very frank question retailers should ask themselves is “am I the center of the travel community in my town?” It’s all about the meetups, events and seminars they bring to the store. Remember to start by talking about travel. Some retailers are so stressed about sales that they go straight to talking about product.

My retail seminars are successful if the store is shoppable after the event. Attendees will think “I want the packing cube Angel talked about.” If they can’t find it because of the store layout or organization, and if the interaction is not easy and personalized, then the whole thing starts to fall apart. Millennials are used to shopping in stores that are clean and user-friendly, like Apple stores. Millennials and baby boomers have similar values. But if a millennial looks around and can’t find something they leave and don’t return.

Retailers need to stock trendy, durable backpacks and messenger bags; a portable charger in the \$100 range and high-end water bottles. I have been in retail stores where they have traditional briefcases, but no messenger bag for my laptop. I’m taking my computer to a WeWork coworking space or a café or Airbnb. So a leather business case isn’t something I need to own or want to carry around.

Recently I did a news segment; instead of budget travel or travel cheaply I talked about getting value. For the millennial business traveler everything has to have a good value. Millennials invest in quality because they’re putting their money into experiences and they want their gear to last. They care about the environment so they buy products that are durable and reusable, not disposable. I just did a collaboration with National Geographic where I made a commitment to use reusable water bottles, and many millennials just participated in plastic-free July.

For the average travel store, the uphill battle is getting their digital marketing in order. My engagement is much higher with baby boomers and Gen X on Facebook, for millennials I need my Instagram account. Invest time into your Google Business profile, Yelp, Instagram, Facebook, and email newsletters. The goal is a comprehensive presence that isn’t focused on brick and mortar, that conveys the store’s service philosophy and product selection, and that eventually leads people to brick and mortar. This is how you stay relevant. And it’s not out of your grasp. This is definitely achievable.