The End of
BUSINESS AS USUAL

REWIRE THE WAY YOU WORK TO SUCCEED IN THE CONSUMER REVOLUTION

BRIAN SOLIS
AUTHOR OF ENGAGE!

The End of
BUSINESS
AS USUAL

The End of
BUSINESS
AS USUAL

Rewire the Way You Work to Succeed
in the Consumer Revolution

BRIAN SOLIS

Contents

Foreword

Over the summer I invited a few friends and colleagues to my house for lunch. When they arrived, hugs and greetings were exchanged and my guests headed for the dining room while I finished up in the kitchen, mixing the homemade potato salad, and, well, let's say "supervising" the grilling out on the patio.

While I put the finishing touches on the plates I noticed something strange about the chatter coming from the other room ... there *was* none. They had either all been so bored they dozed off or they had quietly left and stuck me with way too much salmon and salad.

But, in fact, they were still there, seated at the table, one reading an iPad, two texting on iPhones, and one clicking away fervently on a BlackBerry.

I insisted that lunch would have to be a device-free meal.

You notice it at restaurants, at ball games, even at movies and plays. People can't seem to stop letting their fingers do the walking, as the Yellow Pages commercial goes.

Today the digital world pervades every aspect of our lives. I used to wonder what people did before call waiting. Now, phones are tiny laptops, and while you once had to be on a computer to engage online, you can now do it from anywhere, no wires required.

The world has changed at such warp speed in the past decade it's as if Henry Ford, the Wright Brothers, and Thomas Edison had gathered at some cosmic convention and unleashed all of their innovations the very next day.

When I was asked to record a video for YouTube's fifth anniversary, I have to admit my first thought was, "Wow, it's only been five years." After all, it wasn't that long ago that Bryant Gumbel and I had trouble explaining what the "Internet" was to *Today* show viewers. (And yes, I now know what the "@" symbol means!)

The advent of social media has also rapidly changed the way we do business, particularly in my field. Viewers and consumers of news now

interact with information in a much more dynamic way. They aren't just watching a broadcast passively. They tweet about it, post and discuss stories on Facebook, and, yes, send their comments instantly.

I met Brian Solis last year when he interviewed me for his web-show. I have to admit I was a bit intimidated because I consider myself a tech novice, an information hunter trying to find her way through the World Wide Woods that the Web can be. I had begun to engage in social media just two years earlier. First a YouTube channel, then Facebook, Twitter, and webshows of my own. But I certainly didn't, and still don't, consider myself an expert.

When I relayed that thought to Brian, he told me that he some-times feels that way, too. That this change is happening so fast it is impossible to be an expert. We're all just students, literally learning something new every day.

That instantly put me at ease. Some tech experts can be smug know-it-alls, as if only they have the keys to the digital castle. But Brian, in a world of aggregators and content providers, is a navigator, a sort of digital Sherpa who understands we all must climb at our own pace . . . but we do need to climb.

While I am fully engaged in the digital world, I do see pros and cons to our connectivity. As I have said before, the good thing about social media is it gives everyone a voice. The bad thing is . . . it gives everyone a voice.

Other books have been written about negativity, anonymity, and brutal bombs of bad information that can spread like wildfire online.

But I have also seen the very positive impact our global connected-ness has brought to journalism and to information sharing in general.

As a news anchor I could tell my audience about unrest in Iran surrounding the 2009 elections there, but nothing could bring home the struggle in the streets like a cell phone video of Neda Agha-Soltan. This beautiful and brave young Iranian woman was killed at a protest and a citizen journalist captured the horrific images and was able to share them with the world. The anonymous cell phone video went on to win the prestigious George Polk Award.

After the fall of Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt I interviewed Wael Ghonim, the patriot and revolutionary whose Facebook page began a youth movement against oppression in his nation. He told me that Facebook didn't make people brave, it just helped that bravery spread and grow. But it was technology that spread the word and gave voices to millions of disenfranchised Egyptians demanding change.

These are dramatic and powerful examples, but there are many others, perhaps more mundane, that highlight the power of informa-tion campaigns in the digital world.

We each need to find the way to most effectively and productively utilize social media and digital technology in our professional and personal lives. It can be daunting. But Brian is the ultimate technological tour guide, and thanks to his patience, knowledge and understanding, you too can climb to the digital mountaintop and enjoy the view of this brave new world.

KATIE COURIC

Introduction

(R)evolution: How Internet Culture Has Created a New Era of Social Consumerism

This is a book about the new era of business, consumerism, and your role in defining the future of everything. . . .

Let me start by saying thank you for picking up this book. If you read only these few lines, realize that you are part of a consumer revolution that is changing the future of business, media, and culture. You did not intentionally enlist in this movement, but you are indeed part of it.

Consumers are connecting with one another, creating a vast and efficient information network that shapes and steers experiences and markets. Whether you're a business professional or a consumer, you are part of this new era of connected or social consumerism and individually and collectively, the effects of your actions and words are nothing short of extraordinary when concentrated. Together, you . . . me . . . we have the power to change things around us. Every day, we're learning and practicing how to make sense of these emerging privileges. Businesses and consumers have the power to change the course of the economy and it's nothing short of disruptive.

People are now investors in and beneficiaries of a new genre of collective intelligence that informs and guides people in real time. Information, whether we contribute or learn, is now a wonderful commodity that's on demand. Needless to say, people are informing and are informed.

In just a few short years, we witnessed how people-powered Wikipedia displaced industry giant Britannica as the world's encyclopedia. The so-called wisdom of the crowds is now forming a *power* of the crowds, creating a new form of group buying to unlock amazing deals online and in the real world. Groupon, LivingSocial, Facebook Deals, and the countless others that are emerging empower groups of people to buy and save together, and in turn, share these opportunities with those to whom they're connected online and offline.

Simply by discussing the experiences we've had with brands and businesses on review sites, in blogs, and in online communities, we've created a new world of consumer influence. People make decisions based on the shared experiences of others. And that influence is sweeping, as consumers are increasingly connecting to one another.

Remember the Yellow Pages? Websites such as Yelp, Craigslist, Angie's List, and even Foursquare collectively displaced what was once the community staple for local businesses and service providers by moving information and experiences to online communities and social networks.

Once "too big to fail" businesses such as Borders, Tower Records, Wherehouse, Circuit City, and Blockbuster are now gone. Each business is a victim of Digital Darwinism, the evolution of consumer behavior when society and technology evolve faster than the ability to exploit it. Digital Darwinism does not discriminate. Every business is threatened.

This is just a little taste of how consumer behavior has changed the landscape for buying and selling—and this transformation is just getting started. It's nothing new. What *is* different, though, is that change forces just that: change. Those businesses that recognize disruption and develop a culture and process for innovation now and over time will survive the perpetual threat of Digital Darwinism.

The consumer revolution is already underway. The question is: How do you better understand the role you play in this production as a connected or social consumer as well as a business professional? As a stakeholder, it's now your obligation to study how, when, where, and why consumers are connecting and how they're making and influencing decisions. Doing so brings clarity to your work to create and steer consumer experiences to your advantage.

This book reveals how digital culture is changing the landscape of business, consumerism, and the workplace, and what you should do about it.

■ THIS IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, SO MAKE IT YOUR BUSINESS

This book was written to groom a new generation of leaders, people who want to lead and are looking for the answers and inspiration necessary to guide others into uncharted territory. It's an exploration of culture, society, and how to unravel trends and hype to find the meaning in all of this. It's how we'll grow personally and

professionally. For many of us, applying these insights at work will also teach us how to embrace new media in our personal lives.

What are the pillars of a successful business? Competitive prices? Great service? Widespread distribution? Better products? Maybe. But experience has taught us that ambition, practicality, and achievements are the traits of successful leaders. As a result, we sometimes compromise consumer experiences for numbers . . . business goals, minimized expenses, and increases in efficiencies, forecasts, and sales. Find any business owner or executive and they'll tell you that's just good business. But is that enough to survive Digital Darwinism? If marketing and PR departments serve as the voices of companies, how are we to really know?

It's the difference between being market-driven and marketing-driven. The true voice and personality of a company is rarely heard unless a customer calls in to the service department or visits the business in person to demand personalized attention and resolution. Suddenly marking is no longer "the voice." The front-line service representative is in charge of defining the consumer experience and the next steps a consumer may take, including sharing that experience with others. But how are representatives instructed to steer experiences today? How are they rewarded for cultivating memorable and satisfying engagements to encourage the sharing of positive experiences? Representatives are instead often motivated with incentives for increasing sales or churning through customer calls and emails faster than their peers, measured by time to resolution and transactional satisfaction.

Following these interactions, customers would walk away percolating with emotion. Whether positive, negative, or ambivalent, it's human nature to share these experiences with peers and quite honestly, anyone who'll listen. Again, none of this is new. It's human nature. Businesses have long known that a happy customer tells a few people, but an unhappy customer tells many, many more.

But everything was business as usual, until it wasn't. And, that's where this story begins.

Of course, no matter the business, the only factor as significant as customer acquisition is customer retention. But it's exponentially more expensive to acquire new customers than it is to retain them. Some businesses embrace this reality and hold it sacred. Others see the allure of saving money at the expense of positive experiences to placate customers rather than continually earn their affinity and loyalty.

The true character of any business is revealed in the collective experiences of its customers. It's about what people say when you're

not around. With the rise of social media, people are connecting with one another to create vast networks rich with interaction. The social graphs that people create as a result are increasingly becoming interconnected, creating an audience that, too, boasts an audience with audiences. And guess who's in control of the information that circulates within each network? It's not the brand or its clever messaging, attractive promotions, or creative gimmicks. People are in control. The choices they make and the experiences they share through their words, relationships, and actions, influence those around them.

This book will introduce you to the connected consumer and how they search for, discover, and share information, and ultimately, make decisions. In many significant ways, they're not at all the customer you think you know.

Some of us are becoming the very consumers we're trying to reach and as a result, we are changing everything. By placing ourselves in the spotlight, we gain a more personal view of the change unfolding before us, without the obstruction of our business blinders we unknowingly wear in our professional lives. It's this perspective that's usually missing from today's business approach and prevailing philosophy.

Understanding this new connected consumer will help us gain two critical business traits long absent from the hallmark of typical business culture, the ability to feel and show empathy and the ability to change. To best earn residence in the minds and hearts of customers, we must invest in shaping exceptional experiences worth sharing.

Understanding this new consumer and what moves them will help businesses compete for tomorrow, today. It's the acceptance of this perspective that will allow us to uncover and affect the decisions that orbit and define the brands we represent.

The businesses that aspire to a higher purpose will outperform businesses that focus on the bottom line.

People aspire to be part of something bigger than themselves. Give them something to align with to create a sense of belonging. Give them something to talk about. Give them a reason to share experiences. After all, you are part of the new digital culture that is defining the future of all of this. Change is upon us. Change is because of us.

> It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.
>
> —Leon C. Megginson, paraphrase of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*

A Quiet Riot: The Information Divide and the Cultural Revolution

I woke up one morning only to find that the whole world changed around me. . . .

For 20 years, I collected fountain pens. The beauty and shape of the pen, the fine detail of the nib, and the careful balance of the design introduced a sense of importance to every stroke and every word I wrote. Writing to me is an art, but the reality is that I just don't practice my handwriting as I did in the past. The last addition to my collection was just over seven years ago. Not only is my penmanship deteriorating, the pen feels foreign in my grasp. I'm realizing that with every day that passes, I lose simple muscle memory that took most of childhood and young adulthood to train. Now, my thumbs are far more dexterous on a mobile phone than my index finger adjoined to my thumb on the best of my fountain pens.

The reality is that almost everything I write these days is composed on either a PC, mobile phone, tablet, microphone/webcam, or anything with a keyboard. One day soon, I'm sure I will only have to think what I want to say and it will appear before me on screen.

This is just the beginning of how communication is changing. A simple pinch of the thumb and index finger is now more agile and capable, thanks to Mr. Steve Jobs and the iOS team at Apple. The pinch is becoming the standard for interacting with devices and content. While it's something most of us have adapted to, younger generations view this motion as second nature. They don't think twice to pinch a screen to enlarge the text. Nor do they have to think about how to scroll through pages of content. Because the technology is so accessible, it is one of the first methods they learn.

Displacing landlines is one thing. The cell phone's impact on behavior is something different altogether. For years, we frowned on bringing anything to the dinner table that might detract from the interactions that meals foster. But then cell phones quietly took over our attention one by one, until the table was surrounded by people with their heads focused downward and their thumbs texting away. To an outsider, this conduct would appear nothing less than rude. In her book, *Table Manners for Kids,* published in 2009, Emily Post says bluntly, "Do *not* use your cell phone or any other electronic devices at the table."[1]

Unraveling the reasons behind why this behavior has become acceptable will help us bridge the digital and cultural divide. While some people use their gadgets to escape conversation, there are usually other factors at work. In some cases, it's a symptom of introversion or shyness. In other cases, it's simply how certain people cope with a pervasive feeling of missing out. The world moves much faster with every generation, and rapid-fire text messaging and social networks allow people to stay connected. This statement seems contradictory in nature. However, people are balancing virtual and real-world relationships in the moment. Perhaps they need a constant sense of belonging and outside reinforcement to reinvigorate the here and now.

With that said, it is the responsibility of the host to realize the changing nature of human interaction to not discourage outside interaction, but to steer the experience to include everyone in one's own way. Are you encouraging distraction? Are you enabling distraction? You betcha. Controlling the moment is so last decade. It's now up to the host, or in the world of business, the brand, leader, or champion, to create moments that are nothing short of engaging. Yes, that's right. Attention is distracted and there's very little that you can do to reverse the evolution of the human psyche. Instead, you can steer experiences to your benefit by becoming the focal point or creating one.

In these cases, a smartphone can enhance conversations rather than inhibit them. In a piece that ran in the *New York Times* in December 2010, Bruce Feiler explored the advantages of using Google during meals to foster engaging dialogue:

> *If you could invite any five people from history to dinner, who would it be? That game seems to have lost popularity of late, and I'm beginning to think I know why. These days, everybody I know invites the same guest to dinner. Who's this ubiquitous invitee? The answer is sitting in your pocket. Google. . . . What if a few clicks of the smartphone can answer a question, solve a dispute, or elucidate that thoughtful point you were making? What if that PDA is not being used to escape a conversation but to enhance it?*[2]

Banning the phone from the table is easier than it sounds. The need for constant connectedness is reshaping what we consider acceptable behavior. The constant desire for interaction comes down to shared experiences and staying connected.

The truth is that we're always on.

There I was, in Lisbon having dinner with 20 of Portugal's leading digerati. I had no choice but to leave my phone in my bag as the international data functions were down at that time and the establishment did not offer Wi-Fi (but they did serve great food!). Without the ability to check emails, text, or update social networks, I channeled all of my attention on the people at the table. To my surprise, I found a table surrounded by new friends with their heads pointed down toward their laps. Some were live tweeting the event. Others were texting with friends. A few were checking email. Others were checking Facebook updates and searching for real-time mentions of their name online.

Without a phone, I took it upon myself to unite the table around good old-fashioned conversation, but not just with those in the room, those to whom they're also connected online. I asked guests to ask their online friends questions to see how we can channel a discussion with greater reach and input. I also played the role of sociologist and asked questions that explored the reasons why each immediately took to their iPhones and BlackBerrys before placing their napkins on their laps. I learned something interesting. To engage an entire table and prevent them from mobile temptation is impossible. It was the beginning of a realization for me that would affect my work. If I could steer experiences, I could connect with people at the table as well as those they're engaging with on the other side of the device.

Had my phone worked, I probably would have joined them. The fact that we're becoming an always-on society combined with the responsibility of hosting very public online presences (Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter, LinkedIn), we are now all full-time brand managers—even if that brand is just our individual online presence. Now we're paying attention to what others are saying about us.

People will always talk about you, so give them something to talk about.

But this conversation is not just about whether you choose to stay connected through meals. The access to people and information, whenever, wherever is powerful and addictive. Students are focusing more on their smartphones than the lessons they are being taught in the classroom. Drivers are paying less attention to the roads and instead, are interacting with friends and associates at the risk of crashing into those nearby.

Texting was an early culprit. Then the world was diagnosed with BlackBerry thumbs. And now Twitter, Facebook, and other social networks constantly vie for our attention as well. Bringing electronics to the table, the classroom, or our cars is a symptom of our always-on society. We indeed bring our connections with us everywhere we go. The experiences and sentiment we share are just a different, but no less meaningful, way we invest in our relationships. It's how we maintain relevance within our social network, which is our society. The question is, where's the balance? Or, better asked, how can this be used more productively? How can we keep people engaged and encourage the sharing of meaningful and beneficial experiences? How can outside interaction strengthen real world interaction?

Again, this behavior is already beyond the attention Rubicon. As heads of households, educators, friends, and peers, it's our responsibility to find opportunities to stay engaged in person, and when necessary, digitally. But there is an informational and digital divide that still exists within greater society and it extends across generations and demographics. Whether consumers are online or offline, technology is evolving faster than the majority of businesses or consumers can adapt or assimilate.

■ THE HUMAN GENOME MEETS DIGITAL DNA

There's an expression that's often used to explain why we perform the simplest, uncommonsensical, or most mundane of tasks, over and over: it's because "we're just wired that way."

As difficult as it can be to accept, things around us are constantly changing, causing society, life, and humanity to change along with them. We initially question or resist the events unfolding before us until they either recede or prevail. We then adapt, constantly changing our routines, even if in the slightest of traces. Every so often though, the events that emerge and play out before us are so transformative that evolution is disrupted, giving way to a revolution. The effects affect social development, human behavior, and ultimately, the course of history.

How we were wired is quickly becoming outdated. The new models of us are wired for the modern lifestyle. How we interact, learn, and mature is different. Everyone else is left feeling antiquated, out of touch, or simply unaware of the differences. But for those who get it . . . like you . . . you're constantly looking for ways to get rewired to keep up. The simple truth is that things, and people, are changing right before us. We live in interesting times and the change we're experiencing now is nothing less than historic.

The more I study technology and its impact on behavior, the more I find myself revisiting a widely accepted notion: technology changes, people don't. But nowadays, I'm not so sure. Technology is indeed changing, but it is also changing us along with it. Whether it's through social networks or digital lifestyle products such as iPhones, iPads, and Kindles, we are adapting and evolving as a result. Technology has become a form of self-expression. What we use and how we use it says everything about us . . . and we want it to. We no longer live in an era in which we make decisions based solely on form or function; we're moving toward a genre of picking the electronics and online services that define our persona. Are you an iPhone or Android person? Either way, they're extensions of our identity, who we are today and who we want to be tomorrow.

With the pervasiveness of iPods, iPads, and other digital devices, everyday people now march to their own soundtracks, moving throughout their lives quite literally to the beat of their own drummer. In curious ways, we're creating an introverted nation of *earbudsmen*, small armies of people with white earbuds absorbed in what they're listening to, the people they're texting, and the videos they're watching, all while moving.

It's not just about the iGeneration of earbudsmen either. With the universality of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and the rise of geolocation networks such as Foursquare, we are learning to live our lives online, revealing a bit more about ourselves with every status update, check-in, tweet, and social object we publish.

■ DON'T BLAME IT ON THE YOUTH

With the rise of the Golden Triangle of technology (mobile, social, and real-time), technology is not just for the geeks; it's now part of our lifestyle. How we use this technology says everything about us, and we're starting earlier and earlier.

A study by security company AVG and Research Now surveyed 2,200 mothers in North America (the United States and Canada), the EU 5 (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain), Australia/New Zealand, and Japan, and found that 81 percent of children under the age of two currently have some kind of digital profile or footprint, with images of them posted online.[3] Ninety-two percent of U.S. children have an online presence created for them by the time they are two years old. In many cases, a digital presence is born before the child, with sonograms (23 percent) actively published and shared on social networks and blogs. A digital presence is now just

a way of life. For these children, managing their online persona and relationships is all they know.

■ CH-CH-CHANGES

The rapid evolution in technology is completely transforming society and human behavior. Technology is changing us, and as it does, it can improve how we learn, share, and communicate.

The result ultimately affects and alters our personal and professional worlds. Human relationships, interaction, consumerism, education, media, government, and business are all forever changed.

To reach this always-on consumer, we can no longer continue operating under a banner of business as usual. Instead we must appreciate that we don't understand all that is changing, but we must learn to understand and eventually become part of the (r)evolution.

As change is omnipresent and sweeping, time is of the essence. The only way to understand new culture and behavior is to go native. Going native refers to the process of observing, learning, and deepening the involvement of an anthropologist with their hosts and their hosts' cultures through long-term fieldwork and participation.[4] In the process, we become digital natives, uncovering the facts we need to improve our communication, customer relationships, and overall business opportunity.

One way to go native is through immersion.

To best understand the effects of human behavior on business, it is best to be immersed in new consumerism directly. Through immersion, we'll gain perspective and develop the empathy needed to later make meaningful connections and shape productive experiences worth sharing.

Understanding the connected consumer requires sincerity. By identifying their challenges, we actually go beyond observing their behavior to become part of their society. Though this is the end of business as usual, this is the beginning of a new genre of business, one that presents an opportunity to earn customers by becoming relevant to their needs and aspirations.

Centers of Attention

➤ We need to explore avenues to shape and steer experiences rather than discount how technology is changing behavior.

➤ Mobile is becoming increasingly important in how people, regardless of generation, find and share information.

➤ We are becoming brand managers and are responsible for managing our online reputations.

➤ How people are connecting is setting the foundation for a powerful distribution network that rivals the greatest of news and broadcast networks.

➤ To succeed in the business of the future, we have to become the very people we're trying to reach.

Chapter **2**
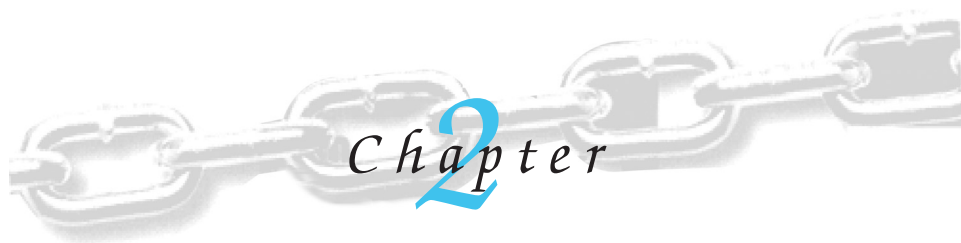
Youthquake: Millennials Shake Up the Digital Lifestyle

The Millennial generation, or as they are often called, Generation Me, represent one-quarter of the American population.[1] Seventy-seven million Americans were born between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s.

In 2011, the youngest of the Millennial generation hit their mid-teens. The oldest Millennials recently entered their thirties. And in between there's an entire segment of maturing adults who are now settling into their twenties. But this generation will also change the world before taking ownership of it.

In February 2011, Edelman Digital published its annual 8095 report—a survey of 3,100 Millennials across eight countries. The report brings to life the greater theme of this book, "Why Millennials matter to every brand."[2] As described in the introduction to the study, "While many still view Millennials as punky kids playing on their tablets between high school classes, the reality is that two-thirds of Millennials are now over the age of 21, and many have established careers, families and an incredible amount of influence."

According to the report, within the past 30 days, Millennials had recommended online that a friend or family member purchase a specific product in the following categories:

Food—54 percent

Electronics—39 percent

Personal care—37 percent

Clothing—35 percent

Beauty—35 percent

Cleaning—24 percent

Cooking—19 percent

Pet—19 percent

Other—13 percent

The most interesting part of the report is of the level of brand loyalty shared among the Millennials. Worldwide, 70 percent feel that once they find a company or product they like, they keep coming back. Fifty-eight percent are willing to share more personal information with trusted brands. And as a brand fits into their lifestyle, it becomes an extension of their persona, creating a personal bond between brand and customer. On average globally, 86 percent will share their brand preference online, creating a new and powerful form of self-expression using digital presences for discovery, articulation, and definition.

While the value of relevant and expert information is hardly limited to Millennials, the Edelman study found that younger consumers seek more product information for purchase consideration—an average of 7.4 times per month. Millennial moms seek additional information 9.2 times per month. When considering a purchase, Millennials will seek input from the following:

Family—77 percent

Friends—64 percent

Search engine—21 percent

Expert website—21 percent

Co-worker—20 percent

Social networks—13 percent

Solo—8 percent

The percentage of people looking to social networks for information on products or services is not indicative of how consumers are seeking information when shopping. Instead, those interactions are often included in the percentage attributed to friends and family. Why? Because friends and family are connected within social networks and also through technology. These networks are merely hubs for insights, both gleaning and sharing it.

It's not just friends and family that Millennials are connecting with, however; they're also forming alliances with brands. Nearly 20 percent of Millennials attended a brand-sponsored event in the past 30 days. Of those who attended, 65 percent purchased the featured product. But that's not all. Twenty-five percent worldwide have joined seven or more brand-sponsored communities online!

This influential generation is moving beyond the role of traditional consumer and assuming the role of self-ordained experts. Forty-seven percent will write about their positive experiences with companies and products online. On the flipside, 39 percent will share negative encounters. Also, 70 percent of U.S. Millennial consumers will try a new product from a trusted brand and most will post a review online to promote the experience. That same number of younger consumers also relies on friends to learn about new trends. A whopping 36 percent said that they purchased a product that was introduced to them by a friend within the preceding week.

When it comes to customer service, Millennials do not see call centers as centers for customer service. Less than 1 percent of Millennials will actually let companies know they have a problem through a traditional call center or email. For them, the first line of resolution is through . . .

The company website—50 percent

Search—48 percent

Store location—45 percent

Friends—30 percent

Family—22 percent

Social networks—20 percent

It's easy to disregard the Millennials as different, but they're the next generation. They were born this way and technology is just part of their DNA. After all, 65 percent are disconnected as little as just one hour per day or less while they're awake because any longer creates an unnerving sense of disconnectedness. Their social network, even while sleeping, is within arm's length.

■ BOOM

When an aircraft hits supersonic speeds it creates a sonic boom. As it travels, that boom becomes known as the boom carpet. Here, it's a play on words, as Millennials *and* boomers are causing shockwaves in consumer markets, creating an economic sonic boom. But they are not alone in the important roles each generation plays in socioeconomics. Generation X is sandwiched between boomers and Millennials and they're connecting with one another online too.

Millennials come after the similarly tech-savvy Generation X, a generation that helped put a smartphone user into the United States White House. This generation, my generation, born between 1965
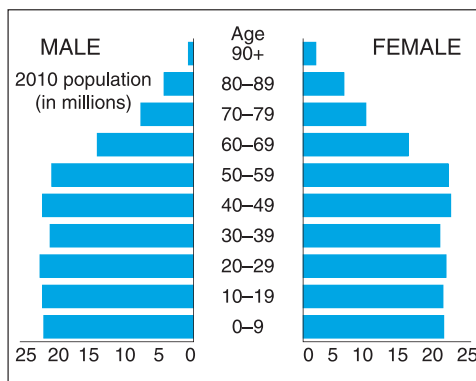
Figure 2.1   The Shape of the United States

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

and 1980, also gets tech: We were among the earliest adopters of new technology and media. With the advent of social media, we were its earliest inhabitants.

The Millennials are juxtaposed against the Boomers, balancing a society divided today by technology savvy and well-established behavior. (See Figure 2.1.) After World War II, the Baby Boom generation numbered more than one-third of the U.S. population in 1965, when the boom had just ended. While Gen Y is similar in size to the Boomers, they represent less than a quarter of the population. Families back then simply had more children. Now lifestyle choices are changing the demographic makeup of the population, transforming the age breakdown from a pyramid to a rectangle.

In the United States, the median age is 36.8, falling squarely in the zone of Generation X. It is this age that divides a population into two numerically equal groups, half of whom are younger (Millennials) and half of whom are older (Boomers) than this age.[3] Around the world, that number fluctuates from a low of about 15 in Uganda and the Gaza Strip to 40 or more in many European countries and Japan. The average age of the world population is 28 and by 2015, it will hover around 25.[4]

In 2010, The Pew Internet and American Life Project, which studies how technology is affecting American culture, revealed that Internet users aged 65 and older flocked to social media, growing by 100 percent over the previous year. One in four people (26 percent) in that age group are now logging in to Facebook or Twitter, among others, to stay connected. Boomers aged between 50 and 64 grew by

88 percent. Americans over 55 who were online grew from 1 million in early 2009 to 10 million in early 2010. This trajectory shows no sign of leveling off. They're learning to connect and communicate as part of a new digitally literate society. And, they're becoming connected customers in the process. As I said in an interview with CBS on the trend:[5]

> *The ability to reconnect with family and old friendships is the primary driver that (causes) Boomers to start to experiment with Facebook. One of the things they learn almost immediately is that when their profile is public they (receive a lot of) inbound connection requests of other friends and family and it takes on a new life for them. It's a baptism-by-friend-request, learning the value of social networking. Social consumerism in general is shifting to social media. Consumers can connect with brands directly. Social media provides access to exclusive content and information, as well as discounts, promotions, and special offers.*

Children, relatives, and friends are flocking to social networks and spending less time sending pictures or calling with updates. As such, moms, dads, grandparents, aunts, and uncles have no choice but to follow their loved ones to these new services. When digital chasms divide you and your loved ones, you find a way to build bridges because you have to, because you want to.

■ DIGITAL DARWINISM: CONTROLLING YOUR WAY TO OBSOLESCENCE

While the Youthquake rocks the foundation of consumerism, Generation X and Boomers serve as the seismic retrofitting that keeps everything together.

This is a global movement that is creating a global culture bound through a series of networks. Buying behavior is indeed changing and the role the customer plays in the greater scheme of business is gaining in prominence. There is a great shift occurring and power is moving away from businesses and toward people, kept in balance through dynamic stabilization. Collaboration, engagement, empowerment, and investment each contribute to the balance in equal parts.

Consumer experiences shared in networking and in review sites create a living *Consumer Reports* study whereby collective intelligence is the new consumer influence. Businesses are no longer the sole creator of a brand; it is co-created by consumers through shared experiences and defined by the results of online searches and conversations.