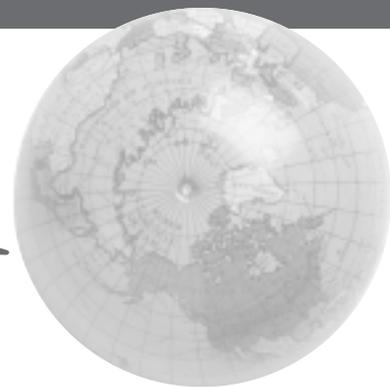


The Millennium GENERATION



Marlene LeFever, Director of Church Relations at Cook, addresses ways for publishers to reach today's young people.

One-third of the world's population, 1.8 billion people, are under the age of 15. In a global study of 25,000 young people on five continents, researchers discovered that these young people, unlike previous generations, are far more similar than different. This is the first truly international generation. And our future business will depend on them.

An overview

Christian and secular young people alike are developing their views of life, values and spiritual realities based on Western TV, music and movies. Teens watch the same movies and television shows in every part of the globe. (American films captured 70 percent of the European movie income in the 1990s.) Ninety-three percent of the world's youth identify watching TV and being with their friends as the two activities they most enjoy. Listening to music came in second, chosen by 91 percent.

This generation has the same heroes. In a worldwide study done by Coca-Cola, teens picked Michael Jordan to fill first place. (God placed second; Jesus was seventh on this secular list.)

Young people around the world even dress very much alike. In a focus group in Bangkok, teens shared their likes and dislikes in clothing. The teenagers' comments were sprinkled with designer names—Levis, Calvin Klein, Adidas, Nike—names fashion conscious teenagers in Italy, India, United

States and Zimbabwe also wear.

They communicate across national borders via the internet. Worldwide, 81 percent of this group uses computers. Without a visa, teens from China can communicate in a chat room with teens in Mexico and Kenya. Even the language barrier is being broken. Uni-verse has a software program called *Diplomat* that has multilingual chat translation at the speed of 20 milliseconds per sentence with about 90 percent accuracy.

This generation is processing information differently than their parents, perhaps due to their early exposure to video, television, and the internet. This new processing is demonstrated in at least two ways. First, many have the cognitive ability to process multiple streams of information at the same time. They study better and get better test scores if there is music in the background while they are working. A quiet environment is distracting. Second, there is some evidence that teens can "parallel think." While their parents think in linear patterns (A, B, C, D), young people are thinking in a pattern that looks more like a mosaic than a straight line. In this process, teens move randomly among a series of points before integrating them into a coherent pattern or drawing a conclusion. In "parallel think," the conclusion isn't as obvious as it would be in a linear thinking pattern. Often thinking takes longer. However, in the end there is a greater absorption of information

than in a linear pattern, and a heightened possibility of creative solutions to complex problems.

The most surprising finding from a Teen Planet Survey of 27,000, 12 to 19 year olds was this: teenagers, unlike young adults in their 20s and 30s, are not pessimistic or cynical about the future. They expect to be happy adults. Family is very important to them.

Ready for change?

Change is mandatory if we are to publish for the coming generation. The saving message does not change, but the way we present that message may have to.

Get ready by learning about the Christian youth culture. John Stott coined the term "double listening." First we listen to the still small voice of God, reaffirming our message of salvation and discipleship. Then we listen to our teenagers, and to the words of their music, to find out their questions, their fears, the things that excite them, the ways they live out their faith.

Topics for youth

Contrary to what you may have suspected, this generation is reading and writing. Spend some time on the internet looking at teenagers' home pages or engaging in their conversations in chat rooms. They are not illiterate. They do communicate, but do so in short bursts of information, with little regard for paragraphing or spelling.

The rules are still in flux for developing books for this genera-

tion, but based on what we know about them, we can begin to make intelligent guesses.

Books need to be short, practical, and targeted directly at them. For example, a book on developing a prayer life might contain web addresses where teens can go for additional information. Those addresses show teens that this book is not for their father's generation.

Books need to have depth. Depth isn't synonymous with long, boring or pedantic. Often a book's design can help. Aim for white space, symbols that help guide readers' eyes, and cartoons where appropriate. To keep up with "in" colors and styles, subscribe to the magazines your young people are reading or study newspaper ads directed at them.

Start a running list of topics that are of interest to teens. Here, to get you started, are some of the issues that are important to young people:

World View: What is a Christian world view and how does it differ from much of what I hear in the secular postmodern world?

Personal Purpose: What does God want me to do with my life? Teenagers aren't interested in superficial faith. But if following Christ is an adventure, an unpredictable, exciting and dangerous way to make life count, they're interested.

Lifestyle Issues: How does a Christian live in today's world in ways that make secular friends yearn to know what makes me different?

Sexuality: How do I use this gift to God's glory? At a recent conference on discipleship sponsored by Cook Communications Ministries, a young man from Uganda said to a group of his peers: "How is a young African leader-in-the-making like me to survive in ministry when our leaders, our models, care most about controlling the money, gaining power and having sex?" How can our books help him answer his question?

Look for writers who love young people and are willing to write *to* them, not *at* them.

Be ready to change to meet their needs. Ian Hoy, a South African youth worker in a Methodist

church, says, "Some of the ideas you come up with may be scary. We may need to lay down some of the things that are dear to us. It could mean that we ditch some Christian language—taking the Good News out in our actions."

In everything you publish for young people, aim for content that is relational, incarnational, and holistic. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 illustrates the incarnational aspect: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the Gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." This generation doesn't want to talk about their faith; they want to do faith. James 2:18 combines faith with works. "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."

Marketing to youth

In addition to traditional marketing channels, market through a site on the internet. Cook Communications Ministries is developing a web site (www.cookministries.org). In order to advertise the address, they printed inexpensive bookmarks on brightly colored paper and gave them to people buying at a traditional bookstore. People without net access now have a simple bookmark, but web literate readers have a new way of learning what Christian resources are available. The Cook site allows people to order over the internet, read excerpts, learn about authors, and share their questions. A portion of the site includes information on Cook Communications Ministries International (www.ccmi.org).

Don't write the internet off as a marketing tool simply because your company has a small budget. A site that contains just excerpts (without ordering or two-way communication abilities) can be developed for free, and will position you as a leader among this cyber-savvy generation. (And www.geocities.com allows anyone to build a free home page.)

Young people will be especially drawn to book excerpts on your

site. They want to try before they buy. They also want the option of changing their minds. They are growing up in a world where fixing a mistake involves clicking the mouse. They assume changing their minds should be just as simple.

Don't assume that because you have developed a site teens will be awed by what they see there. They will choose function over form every time. They are not impressed by technology. They care about what technology can do for them, not the technology itself. Teens who have never known life without computers may not even consider these powerful tools as technology. In the same way, older customers may never have considered the ballpoint pen a technology. It's simply a tool we've always had.

On the net or using traditional advertising, emphasize the value of the book to teens. Be real. Be to the point. If appropriate, be humorous. Sizzle, hype, and clever advertising promises do not impress this group.

George Barna challenges Christian adults to find ways to reach this generation in his book *Generation Next* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995): "[T]hese are the leaders of the coming decades. . . our most significant legacy to the world. . . We will answer to God some day, having been allowed to be stewards of their development. The values, perspectives, beliefs and skills we help to implant in them today will largely determine the future of the world.

"No pressure. . ."❖

Portions of this article were first presented in a "World Teens" seminar, led by the author at the International Leaders for Discipleship consultation sponsored by Cook Communications Ministries in Eastbourne, England, September 1999.