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Nostalgia And Gen Y -- Forget About It (They Already Have)

by [Mike Doherty](#), 9 hours ago

It seems to this boomer that you can't turn around without seeing something from your youth being re-introduced into popular culture. The Old Spice campaign won big at Cannes this year, Google has a Pac Man game and the Karate Kid is back along with the Smurfs.

While my agency has done its share of brand reinventions, it does make me wonder if marketers are just trying to uncover brand equity that's still alive in these old brands or do they think GenYers are more affected by nostalgia than other demographics?

It's true that in bad times people tend to long for a simpler, easier time and brands that remind us of those times can bring a smile to our face and stir up positive emotions. But it would be wrong to assume that GenYers are more nostalgic than the rest of us or that they will immediately flock to anything from their past. In fact, it might be more accurate to define Gen Y as the "anti-nostalgia" demographic for a couple of reasons:

- Because they typically retain close ties to family and friends, GenYers have little reason for wistful memories of yesterday, as everyone from "yesterday" is here today and will likely be here tomorrow.
- GenYers are always on the move, and while they shouldn't be considered emotionally shallow, they make their attachments early in life, and have spent their early adulthood spinning through experiences, trying on identities, and generally discovering what has a place in their world.

It's the second reason that best explains why marketers cannot assume that "if we reintroduce it, they will come." For GenY, the emotional weight of personal history is quantified not so much by nostalgia (which has sort of a negative connotation) but rather in their ability to cherry-pick the best parts of their childhood and brings those ideas and products forward into their adult lives in meaningful ways.

For fashion, Etsy, vintage T-shirts, and Urban Outfitters all represent the best parts of Gen Y's early foray into individualism: fashion that allowed them to craft their own identities without leaning too far outside of what their "tribe" was into is still important for GenYers today.

Fast-forward to the present, with Gen Y entering the workforce as young adults and becoming parents. Both present new challenges to their identities but Gen Y doesn't meet these challenges by feeling nostalgic for "easier" times; rather, they are firmly focused on the future, taking full advantage of how technology makes life easier, how social networking through mommy groups helps them cope with the ups and downs of being a parent, and all of the other everyday issues of adulthood.

For example, minivans, the carpool chariot Gen Yers grew up inside, are relevant today not because of nostalgia but because the vehicles have evolved into mobile living rooms. Their relevance is meaningful and incredibly useful to young parents looking for seamless ways to go from a home environment to another place with all the creature comforts and entertainment options of home. The fact that a GenYer grew up inside a minivan doesn't hurt, but nostalgia alone isn't their reason for buying one.

In fact, in many ways, the idea of nostalgia is something Gen Y might thumb their nose at because they are so adept at multi-tasking and staying connected to what's most important and useful to them at the moment. While a reference to yesterday can certainly add an element of familiarity, finding a way to add value to a Gen Yer's life today is far more important to a brand's success than merely reminding them of their childhood.

This commentary is insightful. I recommend it to others.
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[Kate LaFrance](#) from [Hartford Woman Online Magazine](#) commented on: July 02, 2010 at 1:24 PM

Great article! Thanks!

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MIKE DOHERTY

Mike Doherty is president of Cole & Weber United. He is a marketer with more than 25 years of experience creating effective growth strategies for a diverse group of clients. Working on both the agency and client sides of the business, Mike's passion lies in helping clients find new ways to go beyond the boundaries of traditional advertising to effectively engage customers in branded experiences.

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