

How Millennials Treat Their Pets Versus Generation X and Baby Boomers

And it's going to cause a shake-up in the whole industry, even with these tricks in place to be used against them. The big chains are going to have their hands full trying to persuade them these lies are true.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Millennial pet parents are proving to be “highly resistant” to pet food marketing messages, and in fact tend to avoid anything that looks like marketing
- In response, the processed pet food industry is hoping to use “humanization of pets” to reel in millennial consumers
- Millennials may choose to have pets rather than kids, but they realize there’s a difference and aren’t likely to be convinced to choose highly processed, biologically inappropriate diets in response to “your pet is your family” ad campaigns
- Millennials view learning as a journey and do a lot of research and evaluation before making purchasing decisions, which also doesn’t bode well for the processed pet food industry
- The most valued veterinary service for millennials is 24/7 chat or texting availability, and they’re more likely to make contact using social media or email than older pet parents

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Big pet food companies are extremely successful at dressing up low-quality, biologically inappropriate dog and cat feed in attractive packaging and selling it through beautiful marketing campaigns designed to target the hearts and minds of pet parents. That’s why it’s important for resources like bark and whiskers to help people separate fact from fiction when it comes to nourishing their animal companions.

Millennial Pet Parents Are Proving To Be ‘Highly Resistant’ to Pet Food Marketing Gimmicks

Interestingly, the processed pet food industry is recognizing that millennials (the generation born between 1980 and 2000) are “highly resistant” to **pet food marketing spin**, and in fact go out of their way to avoid anything that even smacks of marketing. Pet food brand strategists have gone back to the drawing board to try to figure out how to capture the attention of this audience, which they believe will eventually become an important customer base for pet food purchases.

According to PetfoodIndustry.com, millennials are putting off buying homes and having children, but they are acquiring pets and may ultimately either replace children with pets, or “practice” being pet parents before becoming actual parents. Takeaway message: more than ever, pets are family to the millennial generation.

Will Big Pet Food Try to Attract Millennials by ‘Humanizing’ Dogs and Cats?

This observation has apparently given Big Pet Food marketers an “aha” moment:

“That humanization of pets may be key to conveying information to millennials, since millennials may care about their cats and dogs the way other generations care about their children.”¹

It’s easy to see where this is going, but they may be headed in the wrong direction if they’re hoping that “humanizing” pets will translate to the “fact-based pet food messaging” that appeals to millennials. Pets aren’t human, after all, and even those of us who refer to them as our “furbabies” realize they’re a different species that require a diet different from ours. So right out of the gate, in their quest to get the attention of millennials, pet food marketers are distorting basic facts.

“... [M]any millennials think of pets as practice for having a child,” says Maria Lange of the market research firm GfK. “Just as parents often care more about the quality of their children’s food than their own, millennial pet owners share strong concern for the well-being and health of their pets. Millennials demand transparency, quality and nutrition in their own food; likewise, they prefer to buy healthy, sustainable pet food.”²

Millennial pet parents are considered a driving force in the trend toward premium pet foods, and are much more likely than older pet owners to use raw diets and pet foods with formulations geared toward enhancing the health of their pets.

Sadly, two things the big players in the processed pet food industry can’t or won’t offer millennials is, by the industry’s own admission, the things that are most important to them — pet diets that contribute to the well-being and health of their dogs and cats, and companies that more than willing to be transparent about their products.

You can call every fresh pet food company and schedule a tour of their facility (and ask questions about raw materials sourcing), which would never be a possibility with the top-selling pet foods on the market.

If millennials are the astute consumers they appear to be, Big Pet Food will have its hands full trying to persuade them that pet feed made from rendered ingredients, processed at extreme heats and loaded with additives coming from who knows where is the proper nourishment for furry family members.

More Fascinating Facts About Millennial Pet Parents

Research suggests millennials (also known as Generation Y) are very different pet owners than preceding generations. The research was produced by Pet Owner Paths and was sponsored by Merck (the veterinary drug manufacturer), Unfenced (an ad agency) and Kynetec (a market research firm).

Trends the research revealed are that millennials are moving away from small- dogs toward medium-sized dogs, and that pet ownership is becoming more balanced between men and women. There are more male dog and cat owners among millennials than previous generations. According to the Pet Owner Paths Report, which was released to veterinary journal dvm360, compared to older pet parents, millennials are:³

- Investing more time in their pets, evaluating their needs more thoroughly and spending more money
- More likely to use veterinary products preventively rather than just as a treatment
- More likely to use products continuously versus intermittently
- More likely to get dental cleanings and use dental rinses
- More likely to see veterinarians as integral to their journey as pet owners

The report also states that for millennials, learning is a journey. Decision-making is "... a long, complex and often iterative journey" that takes substantially longer than it does for older pet owners. And the journey doesn't necessarily end with a purchase, either. Even after much research and evaluation, millennials often decide to keep looking to collect even more information to support a decision. They "... actively gather, curate and assess information from many, many sources."

The report also asserts millennials are "... conscientious and poised to be excellent veterinary clients." They're more likely to involve their vet in their decision-making journey than older pet owners (57% versus 42%).

Apparently millennials are also more likely to follow their vet's advice (50% versus 31% of older pet parents), however, they're also more likely to consult other veterinary staff such as vet techs and front office employees. Older pet owners reportedly rely almost entirely on the veterinarian.

The most valued veterinary service for millennials is 24/7 chat or texting availability, and they're more likely to make contact using social media or email than older pet parents. They're also heavy users of "on-demand information sources."

Interestingly, cat parents of all generations spend more time on the decision-making journey than dog owners. They're also more apt to go online for information, and to read pet product packaging. Millennial cat owners are also the most likely to use alternative communication methods (email, social media posts) to connect with their veterinarian.

Sources and References

[PetfoodIndustry.com June 10, 2016](#)

^{1, 2} [PetfoodIndustry.com, September 28, 2017](#)

³ [dvm360 July 20, 2017](#)
