



MILLENNIAL LEADERS

Success Stories From Today's
Most Brilliant Generation Y Leaders

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Bonus Chapter

MediaSnackers: DK

“The world is changing and it’s not turning back.”

The “new media” — Internet, mobile technology, interactive television — has redefined mass communication. While older generations are trying to learn, adapt, and basically keep up with youth in this area, Gen Y’ers are taking to all these formats seamlessly. Blogging, podcasts, and vodcasts (video blogs) are supplanting traditional channels. The speed with which these messages are delivered feeds right into the Gen Y desire for instant gratification.

But with all these advances happening overnight, training in the technology has become a must. MediaSnackers has risen to the challenge, incorporating the “quick bits” learning and processing style of Gen Y. The company works with young people to train them to use the new media, as well as instilling a sense of responsibility about the global impact of their efforts.

The company’s founder is as unique as the organization itself. DK — that’s his entire moniker — knows how Gen Y’ers learn, what they expect from technology, and how the new media unleashes their creativity. The colorful UK native works within the gap between the Gen Y’ers, who are embracing this technology at the speed of sound, and their confused managers, who are still stumbling with new media.

Gen Y Project:

Where did the idea for MediaSnackers come from?

DK:

The idea came about through my previous business, PhatGnat, a youth consultancy working with people on their corporate social responsibility youth projects. More and more of this work was in the new media field. “New media” is mainly online, mobile phone technology and interactive TV, etc. I started to see that this youth culture is very tech savvy and media literate. MediaSnackers was the term I coined because these young people are “snackers” on media; they don’t consume it the way you and I did when we were kids. They just snack and constantly graze, going from medium to medium and using the different technologies.



Gen Y Project:

So, MediaSnackers is both the name of the company and the term you apply to this Gen Y cultural characteristic.

DK:

The company side was almost an add-on. I wanted to explore what young people were doing in this new media field and suddenly, as I started talking about it, someone said, “Do you want to train some young people? We have youth volunteers and we’re starting a weblog, but we don’t have a clue what we’re doing” Many organizations don’t know how to train them in this skill set. So, very quickly, because we started to offer this type of training.

Gen Y Project:

Specifically, who are you training?

DK:

I work with anybody that works with young people in a public sector setting. Now I’m doing work for corporations well. I just did a piece for BBC last month, training their old-school journalists in how to utilize new technologies in the field.

Gen Y Project:

What training do you offer and what outcomes do you see as a result?

DK:

We offer three training opportunities. One is the youth training where we take on a group of people and train them on weblogs, podcasts, and vodcasts. We give them not just the skills, but also the understanding about responsibility and impact, because obviously, if they’re blogging or podding or vodding, they have a global voice instantly.

Then we do a more intense training with the youth professionals. It’s a two-day course where we have them develop a podcast and actually join a few social networks. We do a lecture through MSN — for most of them, it’s the first time they’ve ever done that — and we also give them tools and experiences in new media so they can use it for their own professional development. We teach them to use wiki’s, ListServes, mailing groups, etc.



The third arm is the corporate stuff. It's going to brand planners and marketers, giving them a flavor of the trends and the cultural norms around technology. A bit geeky, but it's fun.

Gen Y Project:

I've seen a couple of the training vodcasts on your website and you do more than just provide technical training. You also help Gen Yers understand who they are.

DK:

The understanding is not just giving them skills and letting them walk away. We're trying to contextualize it as much as we can, and with the youth professionals as well, we do a whole session within the two-day course around inspiration. We talk to these young people about why they do the jobs and inspire them as well. All the time I'm telling them that this new media and all this technology is nothing if you're not doing the job you want to be doing.

Gen Y Project:

What attracts these young leaders to want to spend time with you in the training room?

DK:

New media is not a passive media. We don't just sit down in front of the TV anymore and consume and just go away to our lives. I call this generation the "red button generation" because on all remote controls, you press the red button to go interactive. So, if they join youth organizations or youth organizations are approaching youths to join them and these groups don't have that interactive element, straightaway they've lost that conversation. The new media is a very simple, low-budget way to open up that conversation. For young people, that's the sexy element.

Gen Y Project:

We're hearing the trend is that Gen Y wants to have an impact, interactivity, and quick bites of information. I think older generations are accustomed to having people come in and sit for eight hours of training. This generation does not seem to respond to long hours of training. As you pointed out, they're snackers. They're more attracted to small bites of information.



DK:

Exactly, and when we do the training, we keep it piecemeal. We jump from skill to skill and I'm always there to give flavor. Like any good training, it's supposed to leave more questions than answers because you're supposed to go away and think, "Now I have this skill. Where am I going to apply it?" That's when you see the brain cells ticking and their eyes lighting up because you can see them thinking, "I can use MSN here," or "I can use Flickr there." They're already seeing where they can apply it, and that's the good stuff for me.

Gen Y Project:

This audience is already so savvy. What knowledge are they looking for?

DK:

With the youth professionals, it's more about illustrating how to use this media; again, it's about inspiration and making it real for them. Young people will find their own way, but with the youth professionals, they have their protocols and such and they need a little more help. They understand that this is something that they're lacking in their personal portfolio and something they can also use on the professional side. Most of them go away wanting to know a little bit more.

Gen Y Project:

This training is delivered in person, yet this generation is so keyed into online networking. Why not provide this training over the Internet?

DK:

My gut says you get more inspiration if you're standing in front of people. Let's be honest, nothing replaces face-to-face interaction.

Gen Y Project:

Why do you think Gen Yers are so successful at grasping the training you offer?

DK:

Young people are more adept at picking up new skills, and they're not scared of trying things or of falling over. I think you lose that when you get older; you have your boundaries, protocols, and frameworks, and you don't really step out of them.



Gen Y Project:

So, you're seeing the generational barrier that exists in the workplace as a result of the technological divide.

DK:

It's been really interesting because you can see where the barriers now are; it's nothing to do with the youth or their skill levels. It has to do with the organizations that are supporting them. Suddenly, they've realized that these young people can say what they want, and they're somewhat reluctant to give them that voice. It's interesting to look at how it's affected an organization and usually, it's the organization's culture that is causing a barrier — not necessarily the generational gap.

Gen Y Project:

There seems to be a territorialism within businesses and organizations that set boundaries for Gen Y workers. How are the organizational leaders responding to that?

DK:

Very, very badly. They don't understand the consequences of failing to empower their workforce. I've trained young professionals at a fantastic organization, but weeks later, I'm getting emails back from these youth saying, "We can't access our RSS feeds because our IT department won't allow us to go on specific sites that are interactive." What was the point of paying me to come in then? It's just a fear factor. They think if they give them access, they'll say something bad or they'll run away. Well, you have to trust your workforce to get the best out of them.

Gen Y Project:

Does Gen Y's skill level pose a threat to the people that make their living on technology?

DK:

I can imagine there are many sleepless nights across the world in old-school media institutions. TV is the most obvious one that's dwindling. Print is another big one. They're very much shaking in their boots at the moment. Although we do have some old stalwarts saying, "Look, we're never going to be truly digital; we've got to assimilate our cultures to their way of thinking", and some big, old-school conglomerate leaders now actually sticking their hand up and saying, "We don't know enough about this digital age. We have to get involved."



Gen Y Project:

We are hearing that Generation Y will dominate the business market by the year 2012. What do you think is going to happen to the old-school thinking and how much longer can people live in that space?

DK:

The old big guns are going to be like Titanics. They're going to be big ships that see the iceberg, but they're not going to be able to get out of the way. The smaller ones can change their focus and strategy quickly because they don't have the large infrastructure that will get in the way of change. In terms of this generation, I think it's going to have a huge impact — not just in our media culture, but our landscape is going to change because, from my perspective, they're going to define a lot of where the media is going in the future.

You see the figures saying only 20 percent are watching shows online, but five years ago, there was no percentage for that. Every couple of years, things are going to change from now on. It's an exciting world to live in. It's continually evolving but at a pace that we can't fathom yet. We're all going to be learning the rules as we go.

Gen Y Project:

We are hearing that print media is taking a big hit. What is the biggest change you see happening in this medium?

DK:

Just go to www.lulu.com and find the answer. Anyone can go to that site and publish your book. You can also set your own price for your book. It's produced and printed and ships out — it's like eBay but just for your books. That's the point; every medium has been democratized, to a degree. You still have to have access to the technology, the hardware and a bit of know-how, but the resources are now out there to allow people to do things on their own that they could never do before, such as publishing their own book through a service like Lulu.com.

The knowledge economy is now "Googlized." I can find out how to pick a lock or put up a picket fence because it's all online, so knowledge is not power anymore. I think power is creativity. I think when you get young people with a lot of time on their hands and technology, that's where the fun starts. That's why you see YouTube and MySpace exploding, because they can define their own media and see peer-created media.



Gen Y Project:

One of the concerns that keeps popping up in the media is that kids spend more time online, and parents are concerned that it's not the best use of time for kids. Is the material that you're reading in blogs or watching on vodcasts good for you? How do you address both of those media concerns?

DK:

In terms of the content online, it's just like anything you flick through, like cable or Skybox. It's empowerment to Gen Y as individuals, but it's also up to the parents or guardians to define the rules. Online is harder because sometimes computers aren't in the living room where parents can monitor what their kids are doing online. That comes down to education then — education rather than legislation, which we're seeing a bit. Government is trying to legislate certain spaces on the Internet, which is difficult because of the open-source nature of it.

In the UK, the majority of the media is now a mix of old-school and new media, so we need to start educating our kids early about this subject. If we're not teaching it in schools, where are they going to get it? Most of the kids get it through peer education. So, how do they learn to operate their mobile phones? They don't read the manual; we know they don't. Their mates show them. That's the same thing with online and media access. And if their friends show them this stuff or share stuff, how do you stop that? Through education. It's like the gun discussion where they say, "Guns don't kill people. People kill people." Guns are just the in-between really, and technology is like that.

Gen Y Project:

We know Gen Y are practically born with tech skills, but as far as learning how to build a budget or learning how to communicate better or how to speak in public, what kind of life skills are you seeing Gen Y is most interested in?

DK:

There's an argument that technology will drive away the need for face-to-face public speaking, because if they want to speak or have a voice in the public, they can use a blog. Penmanship will go out the window because they use tech-speak so much. You have all the smileys and icons and symbols, so Gen Y uses a great deal of shorthand communication. But there's also a lot of positive stuff going on, and that's what I like to highlight with MediaSnackers. You can always find the negative out there in the public domain, and positive stuff is like when I talk about MSN as a fantastic tool to empower young people to talk to other people from different cultures.



For example, in the UK, you have a town you can twin with in other countries. As an example, you may have a youth-work leader who's talking to a group in both Portugal and in France, and then they're all going to connect through MSN and facilitate a group chat — and maybe move that up to a web chat so they can see each other online. In a way, we're breaking down virtual but also geographical and cultural barriers. In some cases, with the translation services available online, we can also remove language barriers. You can also communicate via pictures with something like Flickr, so you can actually use the technology to embellish your life skills somewhat — it goes back to that creative element again.

Gen Y Project:

You bring up a point here about Gen Y. They are truly adept at multi-tasking with numerous conversations happening at once.

DK:

You know, the old multiple thread conversations — I'll have Skype open and also be talking to someone by instant message and may have two or three other windows open and chatting with other people, too, while I'm editing an email or downloading something off YouTube. Kids just embrace all of the online communication tools and run with it.

Now there's another discussion about the focus of that. Are they becoming unfocused? Are they becoming disparate? And then there's the whole discussion about attention deficit.

Gen Y Project:

One of the things we are hearing about with Gen Y is procrastination – waiting until the very last minute and then doing an assignment as fast as you can. They use technology to put themselves into that pressure cooker and actually seem to work better this way.

DK:

They have access to the information right away. They don't have to go to the library and pull out some books and do research. They know that they can just go on Google and find the stuff, and they know how to multi-task and use online tools to get answers from their friends quickly to pull the project off at the last minute.



Gen Y Project:

DK, you make your living as a trainer with a generation of people who are active learners. What lesson would you like to share with people outside of Gen Y about connecting with this incredible knowledge base?

DK:

I learn more from young people than they do from me. You always have to open yourself up to learning from other people, regardless of their age.

Points for Reflection

- 1) As you begin blogging, podcasting, and vodcasting it is important to understand that you will instantly have a global voice, so be responsible with the messages you put out to the world. You never know who is watching what you are writing and talking about.
- 2) Technology is a great tool, but only if you are applying it to work that you love. Look at technology as a tool that allows you to enhance work that is meaningful to you and others.
- 3) A great training session should prompt you to walk away with more questions than answers. As soon as you complete a course or a day of training, ask yourself this question: “How am I going to apply this training?” Then use what you’ve learned.
- 4) As you are choosing developmental training for the future, ask yourself what benchmark skills and attributes you want to display in the next move in your career. Make a list of those skills and attributes and find a training course that meets those needs.
- 5) As a member of Generation Y, it will be important for you to be exposed to a variety of training venues, including both online and face-to-face interactions. The more you experience a variety of training delivery methods, the more permanent your learning will be.

About DK

The man known simply as “DK” launched MediaSnackers in June 2006 with an educational background in communications and media, plus a professional background in local government. He was the UK’s first and only Corporate Youth Officer. Although his work spans many facets of training in the new media and he has assumed many roles, DK’s deepest passion is reflected in his work with young people and youth professionals — a role he has embraced for the past eight years. For more information about his training opportunities, visit www.mediasnackers.com.

For more information on the book *Millennial Leaders: Success Stories From Today’s Most Brilliant Generation Y Leaders*, visit us online today at <http://MillennialLeaders.com>