

'Hug a GenY'

By David Bevan, director of communications at InterQuest, the IT recruitment company

According to Wikipedia, Generation Y refers to "the children of the Baby Boomers – the cohort of individuals born roughly between 1980 and 1994". They have a reputation for being peer oriented and for seeking instant gratification, due to being brought up ensconced in technology, which has also earned them the title, 'Digital Natives'.

It is this group of individuals who are now starting to make their way into the corporate world and in doing so, are sending shockwaves throughout it.

To bastardise a slogan inspired by the leader of the Tory party, businesses need to learn to 'Hug a GenY', or, to put it more clearly, embrace Generation Y - adapting to meet their expectations and needs.

However, much like the hoodie community are feared, loathed and misunderstood, the generation of digital natives currently making their way into the world of work, are also facing prejudice.

As digital natives (aka Generation Y) are so au fait with technology, they're increasingly expecting to find the same media heavy portals at work. Reading and study in traditional terms is alien to a generation used to finding information with precision through the Internet or mobile technology, or learning behaviour and study strategies through computer games.

The implication this has on business processes, training and physical set up may not be something organisations have considered, and businesses are often unwilling to satisfy their needs. Traditional employers see their 'new fangled' technologies, as time-wasting social tools.

But it's a plain and simple fact, Generation Y *will* make up the future of the workforce, and if businesses ignore the needs of this demographic they will fall by the wayside of companies that choose to welcome them.

Uncertain times

Recent water cooler conversations are focussing around the current economic climate, what it means for us all, and particularly, new incumbents to the workforce. However, if anything, the millennial talent should have the more secure ground on their older 'I remember when Polos were 9p' counterparts.

This is a generation that grew up with WAGs, reality TV and virtual friendships. But this is also a generation of fast thinkers, innovators and holders of exceptional technological skill, all traits that thrive in a business environment if supported and nurtured in the right way.

If businesses shun or sacrifice their Generation Y employees during a credit crunch, they lose the intellectual property and ability they have vested in them. They may not leave behind huge reports and legacies of new and improved practice, as that is held in their head; nor may they leave behind valuable business contacts, as those are held on Facebook, their iPhone or LinkedIn. But what they may leave is a hole in the organisation's strategy to compete over the next generation.

There is a new Lingua Franca – but what is widely accepted is that the business that succeeds is the one which is quickly able to learn the language of the day, whether it's English, Mandarin or Generation Y tech-speak.

Anti-social behaviour?

Confidence levels of Generation Y as they enter the workplace are high and employers and employees can often interpret this as arrogance. Brought up as the broadband generation, this demographic are used to application delivery at the touch of a button – something which may also be perceived as laziness.

How can a generation whose idea of research is 'Google-ing it' equate to understanding hard graft?

However, employers shouldn't begrudge the fact this is a generation that consists of many graduates, hailing from supremely technically resourced academic institutions. Just because information is at their fingertips, doesn't mean it should be devalued.

The fact many businesses just aren't set-up to integrate Generation Y and their way of life means attitudes need to be altered.

It is because of this that there may now be signs some of the once common Generation Y 'laziness' has been tempered with realism. Those first echo-boomers into the market are reporting back to their counterparts of a world that is much less flexible than they had hoped. This might, in turn, begin to provide some better focus for up and coming talent to be more pragmatic when seeking work.

Embracing change, realising potential

Needless to say, it's a two-way street, Generation Y are here and businesses need to embrace them, or ignore them at their peril. Their aptitude with technology does not mean they're lazy. Being able to sift through a multitude of information and concentrate on what they need actually shows skills of efficiency, prioritisation and focus.

Business must adapt to take advantage of the Generation Y skills set; creativity and innovation are two factors no forward-looking company can afford to ignore.

(779 words)