

THE 4 MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS

to Market Your Addiction
Treatment Center to Millennials

activemarketing

Introduction: Know Where Millennials are Coming From

Millennials (born 1981 - 1996) are disillusioned in ways that previous generations did not experience. The Harvard Business Review suggests that today's youth are suffering more than previous generations¹. They were taught from a young age that "hard work pays off" and that they needed to go to the best college and a great job would be guaranteed to them when they graduated.

So they studied hard in high school, got good grades, went to the best school that accepted them, took out student loans to pay for it, and graduated. It was time for all the hard work to pay off with that good paying job and the American Dream to begin.



Recession Leads to Dreams Denied

In order for addiction treatment centers to effectively market to millennials, they should address the underlying issues of unmet life goals and aspirations.



Millennials entered the workforce just as the recession of 2009 hit which according to the Deloitte Millennial Survey had a significant impact on their economic security as well as their mental health².



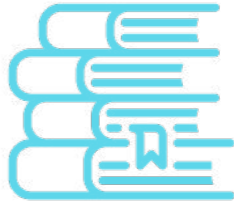
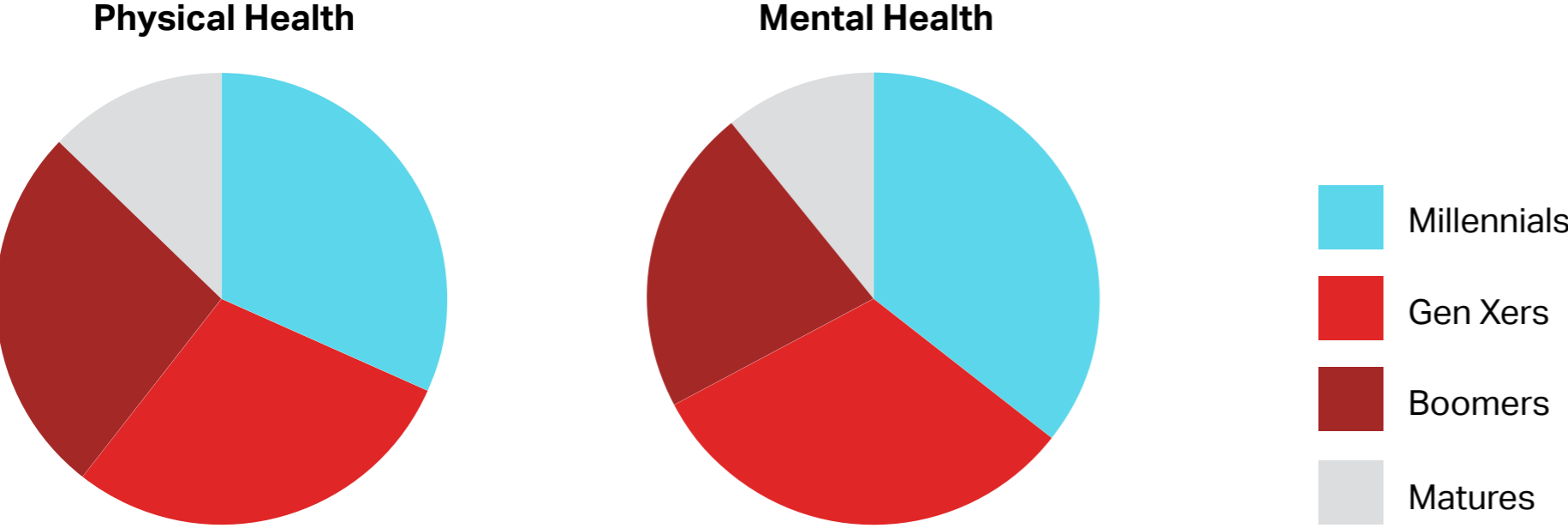
Everything they had been promised and had been working toward didn't happen. And instead of a comfortable, well-paying job after graduation, they received hefty student loan payments and a dismal job market².



This led to an entire generation of frustrated and disillusioned young adults who were searching for ways to deal with the rug being pulled out from under them. Many turned to destructive behaviors that led to addictions².

Stress from Higher Education Without Higher Paying Jobs

According to an American Psychological Association 2015 report on Stress in America, “Millennials are more likely than other generations to say that stress has a very strong or strong impact on their physical (30 percent vs. 27 percent of Gen Xers, 25 percent of Boomers and 12 percent of Matures) and mental health (37 percent vs. 33 percent of Gen Xers, 23 percent of Boomers and 11 percent of Matures)”³. Where does all of this stress come from? The center of it is missing economic opportunities.



“Millennials also happen to be the most educated generation in history where 34% of 25 to 29-year-olds hold a bachelor’s, master’s, professional or doctoral diploma and yet, they are severely underpaid.”⁴

Millennials were told from an early age, coached by helicopter parents even, that if they kept their focus and did well in school a nice, safe, well-paying job would be waiting for them. Instead, they were faced with looming student loan payments and a decrease in earning potential relative to their parents.

“Millennials coming of age during the Great Recession faced a rude awakening when the high cost of an education didn’t lead to higher earnings,” Shannon Insler wrote in an article for Student Loan Hero. “Underemployment and living costs coupled with student loan payments have made it difficult for millennials to get ahead.”⁴



According to information published by Business Insider, the average Millennial makes \$35,592 a year. Even adjusted for inflation, that's 20% less income than for a Baby Boomer at the same age⁵. And to make it more difficult, the rise in housing cost and college tuition far outpaced the rise in income. While millennials saw a 67% increase in income (not adjusted for inflation) as compared to income since 1970, college tuition has increased 260%⁶ and housing costs have increased by 107%⁷.



Student-loan debt has reached record levels because of the cost of college, which has more than doubled since the 1980s⁶. As of 2019, student-loan debt reached a national total of \$1.5 trillion, according to Student Loan Hero⁷. Millennials in the graduating class of 2018 have an average student-loan debt of \$29,800⁷.

When Stress Relief Leads to Addiction

If you understand the body's dopamine response, you understand how this is rather like starting the game with a stacked deck. According to Psychology Today, "regular" behaviors like eating a delicious dinner, laughing with friends, or physical exercise should raise dopamine levels to a "happy" state⁸.

However, if the person in question is starting with a bigger deficit, as are millennials, more dopamine is required to reach a "happy state"⁸. People with lower dopamine levels are more prone to addictive behaviors, they turn to more dopamine-inducing activities to offset the deficit, which often involve substance abuse.

Medical News Today published findings that stated "Substances produce a euphoric feeling by triggering large amounts of dopamine in certain regions of the brain responsible for the feeling of reward. Addiction occurs when the act of using a substance takes over these circuits and increases the urge to consume more and more of the substance in order to achieve the same rewarding effect."⁹

If you want to reach millennials who are in need of addiction treatment, you need to speak to the things that are causing them to partake in destructive behaviors. It may be in large part because of the rampant disillusionment in this generation.

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Marketing to Millennials

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Marketing to Millennials

For savvy addiction treatment centers who are trying to reach the millennial demographic there are several strategies that work well. When combined, these four marketing strategies will deliver higher admission rates, a more loyal and engaged customer base, and an increase in referrals.



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Market Using Their Ambition

To market to the millennial demographic, savvy addiction treatment centers will address the common issues that this generation faces. High stress levels, disillusionment, and importantly - their aspirations are the key influences that they are facing¹. Marketers who are trying to reach this demographic should strongly consider identifying with millennial aspirations to increase admissions.

Treatment centers wanting to reach this demographic should identify and illustrate ways that an addiction treatment center can help to elevate their life to the level that they aspire to.

Millennials are not particularly happy with their lives as they currently are. They also have big, ambitious goals they want to fulfill. Connecting your addiction center treatment program to their life goals will gain their attention and make them identify your business as a solution. By positioning your addiction treatment center as the answer to the millennials' disillusionment and discontent with their lives, your practice will increase admissions and boost revenue.

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Using Positive/Authentic Messaging

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Use Positive/ Authentic Messaging

According to a 2014 study on brand authenticity by Cohn & Wolfe, the number one quality or behavior which people demand of brands is communicating honestly about products and services¹⁰. This is followed by not letting customers down and acting with integrity at all times¹⁰.

Traditional marketing spoke to things like innovation, superior products, and having a well-known brand as the cornerstones of an effective brand strategy. It appears that is no longer how consumers judge brands.

Today's customers expect a more open and honest relationship with brands which is based on truthfulness and integrity¹⁰. They also expect there to be mutual respect and responsibility between brand and consumer¹⁰.

This change in consumer preferences came about after the internet and social media opened communication up to the masses. This meant that companies could no longer conceal information, providing only what they wanted to be known¹¹.

The evolution of the internet has given a voice to everyone. This means that anyone with access to the internet or a smartphone can now be a potential reporter and create a message that can reach millions. A single person having that sort of wide-spread impact would have been unheard of 15-20 years ago.

Developing a high level of trust and transparency is particularly important for businesses such as addiction treatment centers where their services are for people who are feeling particularly vulnerable.

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Include Their Families

In 2016, about 21 million people aged 12 and older, or almost 1 in 13 people in this age group needed substance abuse treatment¹². An estimated 3.8 million people aged 12 and older received treatment. This means that only 18% of those who needed treatment received the help they needed¹².

In order to capture a larger market share, those in the addiction treatment industry should consider marketing that highlights emotional ties to family values to their audience. Effective marketing showcases solutions to create emotional connection and increase motivation to purchase.



Family is the Catalyst for Conversion

Family is often the factor that causes people to reach out for treatment. This can be because of stress caused by family members or because a family member is the one suggesting that someone needs help.

The millennial demographic is almost as likely to rely on family and friends (25%) as physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals (27%) for information about their health¹².

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Contrary to Popular Opinion, Family is a Millennial's Priority

Millennials also prioritize their families in a way that previous generations did not. Modern parents spend more time with their children than parents of any other time since the 1960's¹³. In 2015, mothers spent an average of 15 hours a week and fathers 9 hours a week caring for their children. In contrast, in 1965 mothers spent 10 hours a week and fathers 4¹³.

Millennials have been labeled as self-involved and selfish, but as they have aged that has proven to be incorrect. Millennials were born 1981-1996 and grew into adulthood just as the recession of 2009 hit¹² which has delayed a lot of the traditional milestones such as marriage and starting a family¹⁴.

In 2016, 48% of Millennial women (ages 20 to 35 at the time) were moms. But in 2000, when women from Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) were the same age, 57% were already moms, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey data¹⁴.

While they appear to be delaying having a family, that does not mean that millennials don't value family, it appears to be the opposite. More than 52% of Millennials said being a good parent was a top life priority¹⁴. 30% rated having a good marriage as one of their most important life goals¹⁴.

Healed Family Relationships is a Treatment Goal

Frequently, a family member is the reason for an addiction sufferer to seek treatment. In our 2020 Millennial Insights Research Report, we found that the desire to improve their relationships with family is an important factor in choosing to seek treatment.

The reasons that people seek treatment are often emotionally intertwined. There may be a loved one, a parent, spouse, or child asking the person to seek treatment. There may be some self-worth issues tied up into that as well. The person who needs the treatment usually has to reach a state of emotional turmoil that will motivate them to make a change.



A substance abuse counselor that we interviewed for that report said,

“There are definitely some clients who their parents say, “you have to get sober or you can’t live at my house anymore.”



Another clinician we interviewed said that most people in treatment made the decision because their family was pressuring them to get help:

“There’s a few percentage that come in on their own, but 90% of them come from their family wanting them to get clean.”



A third clinician said,

“Sometimes, even some of the younger fellas that are married, they’ve been pushed by the wives to come in. So, it might be, a lot of times, we’ll see like a threat of a divorce or even a separation that’s occurred. And so, the motivation is coming from loss of family.”

Destigmatize Relapse

For many of those searching for addiction treatment, this isn't their first rodeo. The situation they are commonly facing is that they or a loved one have relapsed, and they are looking for the treatment provider that is going to help them get back on track with their recovery. This is an opportunity to increase admissions that many treatment providers do not fully realize.



The Need for Treatment

There is a large market for addiction treatment services, and it is a sad reality that many patients will relapse and need additional services. According to 2017 research by The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

Approximately 13.6 million adults aged 26 or older struggled with a substance use disorder.¹⁵

The same study reports that about 10.6 million adults aged 26 and older had an alcohol use disorder and about 4.3 million adults aged 26 or older had an illicit drug use disorder.¹⁵

In 2017, an estimated 20.7 million people aged 12 and older needed treatment for a substance use disorder.¹⁵

The Gap Between Need and Treatment

But of those people, not all of them received treatment. In some cases, treatment was not available, but in many cases the stigma attached to substance abuse treatment prevents people from engaging with treatment centers.

Only 4 million people received treatment, or about 19% of those who needed it.¹⁵

In 2017, of the more than 18 million people who needed but did not receive treatment for substance use, only 1 million, or 5.7%, of those people felt they needed treatment.¹⁵

In 2018, among the estimated 18.9 million people aged 12 or older who needed substance use treatment but did not receive specialty treatment in the past year, about 964,000 perceived a need for treatment for their use of illicit drugs or alcohol. These individuals who perceived a need for substance use treatment include 392,000 who made an effort to get treatment and 573,000 who did not make an effort to get treatment.¹⁶

An inability or failure to obtain treatment reinforces destructive patterns of low self-esteem, isolation, and hopelessness. Stigma tragically deprives people of their dignity and interferes with their full participation in society¹⁷.

Stigma results in:

- Prejudice and discrimination
- Fear and shame
- Distrust and disgrace
- Stereotyping and rejection
- Anger and frustration
- Avoidance of treatment and inadequate coverage
- Ostracism and denial of rights



Prevalence of Relapse

Nearly half of those seeking treatment relapse according to drugabuse.gov¹⁶. The relapse rate for substance use disorders is estimated to be between 40% and 60%. This rate is similar to rates of relapse for other chronic diseases such as hypertension or asthma¹⁶. This is an unfortunate reality, even for those with the best of intentions, substance abuse is an ongoing addiction that can require more than one treatment cycle.

However, addiction is considered a highly treatable disease, and recovery is attainable. About 10% of American adults who are at least 18 years old say they are in recovery from an alcohol or drug abuse issue¹⁶.



Demystify Treatment and Recovery

Many people believe that recovery is a pass/fail concept. Education that recovery is a dynamic process with multiple phases that is measured by improvement, which is often incremental.



Humanize Recovery

Put a human face on the recovery concept by featuring real people. Have them share their stories, complete with successes and set backs.



Address Relapse

Mention relapse not as a failure, but as a stepping stone. Relapse is undesired but common among chronic disorders, including addiction. Mentioning it does not indicate treatment failure but rather, a chance to identify areas where treatment needs to be strengthened.



Identify Positive Outcomes

Focus messaging on rapidly achieved positive outcomes that are smaller than full recovery. Benefits like self-awareness, healthier personal connections, and fun in sobriety are just a few ideas.



Conclusion

The millennial demographic is often misrepresented as lazy, entitled, and dependent on their parents. In reality, they are ambitious and family oriented. By recognizing their values and communicating in the way that speaks to them, your business can increase admissions and revenue.

Active Marketing: Proven Game Changers

Active Marketing has transformed addiction treatment businesses with our strategic horsepower. We have proven experience developing and executing marketing strategies that get your brand's best messaging in front of the right people at the right time and place. Our impact on our clients' bottom lines changes the way they do business. We'd love to talk to you more about your potential.

Give us a call today: (877) 814-5716

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