

# THE NEW TRAVEL REALITY BY GENERATION

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A brand-new, research-based look at the wide intersection between generational consumer demands and travel consultants



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Research Presented By:

**Signature Travel Network and The Center for Generational Kinetics**

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Generational Kinetics®

## AUTHOR'S FIRST WORD

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“Leisure travel has changed drastically in the past few decades in terms of consumers’ ability to shop, book, and purchase independently. But this has not rendered the role of the travel consultant irrelevant. In fact, more than ever, travelers of **every generation**—including Millennials—are interested in experiencing the type of travel that calls for the help of a travel expert. The time is right for travel consultants to capitalize on the trend of travelers hungry for better, more unique, and more personally fitting leisure travel experiences by acting on the findings in this study.”

-Signature Travel Network and  
The Center for Generational Kinetics







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# WELCOME FROM THE AUTHORS

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## April 2017

Welcome to the 2017 National Study on generational traveling and travel consultants.

Traveling today is different from in years past, when travel brochures opened the potential traveler's mind to new destinations and travel agencies were the ticket to realizing these experiences. But the landscape has changed drastically, and would-be travelers need look no further than a friend's social media page to be enticed to lands beyond their own and search no further than Google to be presented with a myriad of travel options.

This new travel reality has many in the travel industry wondering about the relevance and appeal of the travel agency, a service deemed vital to leisure travel only a few decades ago. This study is a search for answers to this exact question, particularly for travelers who have never really known travel before Internet searches and online booking services.

What exactly do travelers of every generation think about travel consultants? What is standing in the way of using them? And what messaging or incentives will overcome these objections in a way that inspires travel consumers to reach out for travel expertise?

This study is a response to the urgent and growing need for the travel industry to understand the motivations of and barriers between travelers and travel consultants. To effectively grasp the mindset of travelers and introduce the unique advantages of travel consultants into the equation is to capture the attention and loyalty of a generation of consumers who value custom experiences and find them worth the money.

Signature Travel Network and The Center for Generational Kinetics are pleased to partner on this groundbreaking national research and its exciting discoveries. To schedule a media interview about the study and its findings, please contact Karryn Christopher at [karryn@signaturetravelnetwork.com](mailto:karryn@signaturetravelnetwork.com).

Best regards,

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# FIRST TRAVEL STEPS AND ROADBLOCKS TO USING A CONSULTANT





# HANDS DOWN, THE FIRST TRAVEL STEP IS TAKEN ONLINE

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For nearly every industry, the consumer journey has changed considerably over the past few decades. Where potential customers once frequently began considering their purchases through the physical act of reading a newspaper ad or walking through a retail store, this has frequently been replaced with a digital experience of some kind. This shift is no different for the travel industry.

Twenty years ago, would-be travelers started planning a leisure trip by first picking up a travel brochure or contacting a travel agency, but for the most part, this is no longer the case. In fact, the national study found that **69% of American leisure travelers take their first step toward researching travel online.** They may very well contact a travel consultant along the way toward purchasing a trip, but digital research is where the journey begins. The probability of a leisure traveler beginning to gather travel information online is high across generations, but it is especially true for women. In fact, **74% of women, compared to 64% of men, start researching travel options online as their first step.**

Interestingly, though, Millennials are twice as likely as those of other generations to contact a travel consultant as the first step in their research process. The national study found that **14% of Millennials, compared to 6% of Boomers and 7% of Gen X, say that their first step toward gathering information about a leisure trip is to contact a travel consultant.** The knowledge and experience of travel consultants can be appealing to Millennials, who have fewer years of travel under their belts than older generations.

**Bottom Line:** Travel consumers are won or lost online. While it's true that loyal customers are likely to keep coming back to their trusted travel consultant regardless of the consultant's online presence, this is nonetheless where the battle for the vast majority of travel consumers begins. This is because the vast majority of potential travelers start to search and gather information about their potential trips online, so if there is any hope of catching them, it must be done at this point.

Travel consultants must have a strong and appealing online presence not only because most Millennials are starting to research online but also because they are not opposed to using travel consultants and are even more likely than older travelers to *start* with an agent. A consultant's online presence signals an open door to Millennials.



# PERCEIVED COST IS THE BIGGEST BARRIER TO USING TRAVEL AGENTS ACROSS GENERATIONS

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Travelers, particularly younger travelers, are open to the idea of hiring professional help for travel, but actually using travel agents for trip planning is also not at the top of the mind for many of them. They love to have experiences, travel, meet new people, and see new places. But even though travel consultants are trained to facilitate these events, travelers often plan or expect to plan them without the assistance of a travel professional. The match seems perfect, so what is standing in the way?

There is a real concern among travelers, particularly Gen X travelers (born 1964-1976), that they will end up paying more for travel through a travel consultant than if they simply plan the trip themselves. **In fact, the national study found that paying more for leisure travel is the top concern of travelers when it comes to using travel consultants.** Fifty-one percent of travelers overall and 61% of Gen X travelers say this.

But cost isn't the only barrier.

The perception of “one-size-fits-all travel” is another barrier to travel consumers choosing to use travel consultants. In fact, **the national study found that nearly one-third of travelers list the inability to customize their trips the way they want as a top concern with using travel consultants.** Travelers of all ages want to plan a trip that fits them uniquely. **The national study also found that 28% of travelers are concerned that using a travel consultant means they will be sold a travel package that isn't unique to them.**

While it's true that travel packages by their very nature are not 100% unique, consumers want assurance that customization is not only possible but is also a huge advantage to using a travel consultant. This message is particularly important to convey to Millennials because **85% of these travelers say it is important that their travel experience be unique and custom to them.**

**Bottom Line:** Travelers of all ages, particularly those in Gen X, cite cost as the factor that most concerns them about using a travel consultant for their leisure travel. Travel consultants have an opportunity to ease these concerns by communicating not only the cost-saving measures of using a consultant but, just as importantly, the added value of extra amenities, upgrades, complimentary meals, etc., that can only come through a travel professional. Assuring travelers of the vast customization options available will lessen their concerns about purchasing a trip that doesn't really meet their unique needs.



# MILLENNIALS DON'T WANT TO BE “TOURISTY”

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The easy-to-spot tourist visiting well-known destinations may be a favorite persona in television and movies, but it is not a desired role for travelers, particularly Millennials. Instead, the goal for Millennials is to have more authentic experiences when they travel. But they may not know that this is possible with a travel consultant.

In fact, **the national study found that 26% of Millennial travelers list having an overly “touristy” trip as one of their biggest concerns about using a travel consultant.** But it isn't just a matter of seeming touristy that concerns Millennials. They truly want to see and encounter local life. This is much more important to them than to those of older generations, but they aren't sure that this can happen if they use a travel consultant.

**The national study also found that Millennials are more than twice as likely as Boomers and Gen X to list being unable to experience the local culture as a top concern about using a travel consultant.**

This makes messaging about the experience of travel consultants and their ability to help travelers break out of the classic tourist mode particularly important.

**Bottom Line:** Experiencing the local culture while traveling is very important to Millennials, far more so than to those of older generations, and many say that the inability to do this is among their top concerns about using a travel consultant. Assurance that travel consultants can facilitate experiencing the local culture will go a long way toward winning Millennials. This, coupled with messaging around the fact that leisure trips don't have to be “touristy” will influence the nearly half of Millennials who list these two factors among their top concerns.





# THE ART OF ATTRACTING TRAVELERS' ATTENTION ACROSS GENERATIONS





# DEALS AND MEALS CONVINCING TRAVELERS TO CONTACT A CONSULTANT

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It is rare now to find a business that does not have some sort of digital presence, particularly in the form of a website, as this has become as pertinent in modern business as the storefront placard of bygone days. This does not mean that websites are always inviting, useful, or easy to navigate. But when done correctly by incorporating the right elements, websites serve as a gateway, drawing consumers into deeper connection through contacts, foot traffic, or purchase.

This process is no different for the travel consumer, who is drawn to a travel consultant's website by a variety of factors. Some of these factors will actively prompt a potential customer to reach out for more information. At the top of the list is saving money.

**The national study found that 52% of travelers say that special pricing on trips will absolutely convince them to contact a travel consultant to get more information, and 44% say that information about how much money can be saved by using a travel consultant will convince them to do the same.**

But it isn't just dollars off the cost of a trip that will inspire potential customers to contact a travel consultant. They are also very interested in amenities. In fact, **37% of travelers say that special amenities such as free breakfast or other upgrades will convince them to contact a travel consultant.** Even just the offer of a quote is enough to pique the interest of travelers.

**The national study also found that 85% of travelers would be more likely to contact a travel consultant if they knew they could get a quote for their trip.**

**Bottom Line:** Travelers love to get good deals, and knowing that this is possible will convince more than half of them to contact a travel consultant for more information. Other website features, such as showing how much money can be saved by using a travel consultant, detailing possible amenities that travel professionals can obtain, or offering a free trip quote are also very effective ways to inspire potential customers to reach out for more information.



# MILLENNIALS PREFER HUMAN CONTACT WHEN TALKING TRAVEL

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The common perception of Millennials is that the only way to communicate with them is through a digital screen. While it is no secret that Millennials, far more than those of any previous generation, feel comfortable and happy with digital communication, this isn't necessarily their first choice in every situation.

It turns out that travel is just such a situation. **The national study found that 32% of Millennials prefer to make an appointment to sit down and talk to a travel consultant as their initial contact.** This is more than any other generation. The other ways of contacting the consultant, such as calling, exploring the website, or emailing directly, score much lower. A face-to-face conversation with an expert is ideal for Millennials in this situation.

When it comes to continued communication, such as updates about specials and deals, Millennials join the other generations in preferring email. **The national study found that 54% of Millennials prefer email to receive updates from travel consultants.** But even here, Millennials' desire for human contact shows up. **The national study found that, after email, Millennials prefer to be contacted by phone to receive updates on travel specials and deals.** They say this much more often than those of other generations.

**Bottom Line:** The assumption that digital communication is always better for Millennials is incorrect when it comes to initial contact with a travel consultant. In this case, Millennials prefer, by a wide margin, to sit down and talk with the consultant. Additionally, while most prefer to receive updates through email, Millennials are much more likely than those of other generations to say that they would like a phone call.





# SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE WAY TO MILLENNIALS' HEARTS

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There is a notable amount of hype around Millennials and social media. One can walk away with the impression that to be Millennial is to be glued to an Instagram feed or a Facebook page around the clock. In many cases, Millennials do in fact spend a significant amount of time on social media, but this is certainly not the case for every Millennial and not for every occasion.

But does social media influence Millennial travelers? The answer is a resounding yes.

Aside from the varied ways in which social media influences how, when, and where Millennials travel, it also heavily influences their interaction with travel consultants. **The national study found that the number-one way to catch the attention of Millennials who are thinking about leisure travel is through social media ads.** In fact, 38% of Millennials say that these ads featuring fun places to visit or special pricing will absolutely catch their attention.

But it isn't just ads that get traction on social media. Millennials are very open to following travel consultants on social media, especially if they are exposed to different travel destinations.

**The national study found that 58% of Millennials would be convinced to follow a travel consultant on social media by great photos of places to visit, while 56% would be convinced by links featuring cool places to visit.** Fifty-seven percent would be convinced to follow because of special social media deals. A social media presence on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter is a quick and easy way to catch the attention of the travel-loving Millennial generation.

**Bottom Line:** When it comes to attracting Millennial consumers, travel consultants can't afford to ignore social media. Social media ads are the number-one way to catch the attention of Millennial travelers thinking about taking a leisure trip. Simple additions to social media pages such as great photos or links featuring places to visit will convince more than half of Millennials to follow a travel consultant.



# THE APPEAL OF TRAVEL CONSULTANTS ACROSS AMERICA





# TRAVELERS PASS ALONG CONSULTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

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Word of mouth, the apex of advertising, presumably comes from an unbiased, experienced consumer who gains nothing from the recommendation, thereby making it more credible, authentic, and reliable. But these referrals must also be earned.

Travel consumers are ready and willing to pass along the name of a good travel consultant, and there are actions that will absolutely convince them to do this. **The national study found that 46% of travelers would tell their friends and family who are planning a leisure trip about a consultant who can add special amenities to their travel that they otherwise would not have gotten.** This is even more important to women, 53% of whom say that this would prompt them to pass along a recommendation.

Travelers are also appreciative when a consultant contacts them when a price changes and they are able to get a better deal. **The national study found that 45% of travelers would recommend a travel consultant who did this.** Again, this means even more to women, 49% of whom will refer friends and family to a consultant who does this.

**Bottom Line:** Travel consumers are ready and willing to pass along recommendations to their friends and family and the good news for travel consultants is that there are concrete actions that will drive these referrals. Chief among these actions is the ability to add special amenities to a trip that that traveler otherwise would not have obtained.





# TRAVEL CONSULTANTS ARE WORTH AN ADDED COST, ESPECIALLY TO MILLENNIALS

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There is a perception among travelers about the additional cost of professional travel planning help and a perception among travel consultants regarding consumers' uncertainty or even wariness about this added cost. Travel websites are plentiful, and consumers are savvy online shoppers, so are they willing to even consider paying for someone to help them with what they can presumably obtain on their own?

The answer is yes.

Some things are just worth an added expense, and this appears to be the attitude of most travelers toward travel consultants. **The national study found that only 34% of travelers say they would not pay extra for the help of a travel expert in planning the day-to-day itinerary or activities of their leisure trips.** The rest would pay an additional cost in some form, ranging from a small flat fee to a percentage of the entire trip cost.

Millennials are much more likely than those of older generations to think that the added value of travel planning help is worth the return on investment. In fact, **the national study found that 8% of Millennials (compared to 2% of those of older generations) believe that a travel expert's help is worth a premium flat fee such as \$500.**

**Bottom Line:** Travelers see value in the help of a travel expert, particularly in planning activities or an itinerary that will appeal to an entire group. This is especially true for Millennials, who are more likely overall to believe that travel expertise is worth an added expense and much more likely to place this added expense at a premium.





# RESEARCH CONCLUSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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Travelers are approaching leisure travel from a digital starting point, with the majority saying that this is where they begin gathering information when they want to take a trip. While many move on to using travel consultants for help with the planning, others do not because of barriers, including concern about paying more and having a “one-size-fits-all” travel experience that lacks customization, personalization, or the ability to experience the local culture.

Despite these reservations, travel consultants offer enticing features that can move the bar with travelers, even convincing them to reach out and contact a consultant. Primarily, these enticements involve deals and meals because travelers are particularly interested in special pricing and added amenities such as free breakfast or other upgrades. These same features will absolutely convince travelers to recommend a travel consultant to a friend.

Interestingly, despite all the talk about the digital preferences of Millennials in particular, this group is the most likely to want to make an appointment to sit down with a travel consultant as the initial way to make contact. Afterward, every generation prefers email as a way to receive updates and special deals. But consultants cannot afford to ignore social media because this is an important way to reach Millennials. Millennials themselves rank social media as the number-one way to catch their attention and are very inclined to follow travel consultants on social media.

Most travelers believe that it is worth an extra cost to have a travel consultant’s help in planning the itinerary for a leisure trip, and Millennials are the most likely to place a premium on this service. The bottom line is that, overall, what travel consultants offer is very much in line with what travelers want for their leisure experiences.



# RESEARCH CONCLUSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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Here are three quick takeaways from the study to understand the opportunity that exists for travel consultants:

- 1. A unique, custom travel experience is widely valued.** American travelers of every age value a travel experience that is unique and custom to them. This is a very important part of messaging because what travelers want least is a package that feels canned or built for someone else. Emphasis on the customization within packages is a way to incorporate uniqueness without offering too many choices. Travelers aren't innately opposed to packages; they just want to be able to tweak them sufficiently enough to feel like they have a custom experience.
- 2. Being overly "touristy" is not appealing.** Millennial travelers in particular are not interested in being overly "touristy." Instead, they are very interested in experiencing the local culture and are even more likely than those of other generations to be concerned that this isn't possible when using a travel consultant. Messaging around travel consultants' expertise in helping to plan trips with plentiful local experiences is important and will go a long way toward winning Millennial travelers.
- 3. Social media is the top way to catch Millennials' attention.** Social media could become the travel consultant's new best friend. It is the number-one way to catch the attention of America's youngest travelers and a fantastic way to continue interacting with them. Millennials will even follow a travel consultant on social media when they are enticed by things such as special social media deals and great pictures of destinations. This cost-free, powerful marketing should be in every consultant's tool kit.





# ABOUT THE STUDY'S AUTHORS

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## Signature Travel Network

Signature Travel Network® is a member-owned, travel cooperative, headquartered in Marina del Rey, California, with a regional office in New York City. The network was established in 1956, and today, includes 209 member agencies with 492 retail locations in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and Brazil.

Collectively, Signature members generate more than \$7 billion in annual travel sales. Signature's objective is to serve the needs of its members: boutique specialists, internet-based marketers and multi-location agencies, among others. Signature members include successful travel consultants who proudly serve a diverse group of clients.

Learn more at [SignatureTravelNetwork.com](http://SignatureTravelNetwork.com)



## The Center for Generational Kinetics

The Center for Generational Kinetics is the leading research, speaking, and consulting solutions firm focused on understanding and winning Millennials, Generation Z, and each generation of customers.

The Center's team of PhD researchers, strategists, and keynote speakers helps leaders around the world solve tough generational challenges in areas ranging from employing multiple generations or recruiting Millennials to selling and marketing to Millennials and across generations.

Each year, The Center works with over 150 clients around the world, from car manufacturers and global hoteliers to insurance companies, hospital chains, and international software firms. The Center's team is frequently quoted in the media about the effect of generational differences on everything from shopping and parenting to work style and social media.

Learn more at [GenHQ.com](http://GenHQ.com).



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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Signature Travel Network and The Center for Generational Kinetics jointly led this research study. The survey was administered to 1,000 U.S. adults ages 21-65 who have taken a leisure trip in the past 12 months or plan to take one in the next 12 months that involved (or will involve) lodging, transportation, or activities such as tours, excursions, etc. The sample was weighted to the current census data for age, gender, and region.

The survey was conducted online from January 27, 2017 to February 1, 2017 and has a margin of error of +/-3.1.





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