

## How to Speak Millennial: Lessons From a B-School Dean

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Perhaps nobody has more experience with millennials entering the career phase of their lives than the admissions director of an MBA program. That's why we asked Peter Johnson, who heads up admissions at the University of California at Berkeley's Haas School of Business, to tell us what profession-minded millennials want and how best to communicate with them. You might just be surprised — as Johnson once was — at how podcasts, blogs, and even an extremely patient phone demeanor can help bridge the gap between members of this generation and their future supervisors.

**BNET:** How do millennials first reach out to Haas?

**Johnson:** They often listen to our podcasts, which we started about three years ago. The idea to create one was suggested by someone in our marketing office. I said, "I can't imagine anyone listening to this." But after two weeks, we found out how many people listened, and the figure was almost a thousand. Being a non-millennial and a skeptic, I made our tech verify the number for me three times. When he did, podcasts became an imperative.

**BNET:** What's on the podcasts?

**Johnson:** They're about the admissions process, financial assistance issues, program content — that kind of stuff. We try to make them conversational. We still regularly get 1,000 unique visitors a month. We also have students writing blogs; the bloggers are given guidelines like "don't use profanity," but we don't censor them, even though I was initially resistant. Now I know it was the right thing to do. If you censor a blog, it sounds like a marketing message, and the millennials can read right through that. We'll probably be adding video blogs.

**BNET:** Blogs, video blogs, podcasts — aren't you going a little overboard? Can't you just send potential MBA candidates a catalog?

**Johnson:** It's not enough to have a printed publication. They'll never look at that anyway. You can't use a single information channel with millennials, because that's not how they gather information. Our solution is to push out our message through more and varied channels.

**BNET:** You made the move to online applications about five years ago. What else is different about the application process?

**Johnson:** The admissions office gets about a dozen calls per week from applicants before everything is due. In those phone calls we get a lot of very specific questions, like what kind of work experience should they go out and get that would be most attractive to us. Or, they'll call telling us they have a couple of potential answers to one of the essay questions on the application, and could they ask me what I think works best.

**BNET:** They ask you to help them with their application? That takes chutzpah.

**Johnson:** At first it was a shock to have that question posed. I would've never dreamed of calling a director of admissions when I was applying to school, because I'd fear that he'd think I couldn't think for myself. Millennials are accustomed to having things explained to them in great detail. They've always been told, "If you don't know, ask." We've created an entire generation of kids who've always been told exactly what to do and how to do it.

**BNET:** So obviously they're not always thinking for themselves. As the gatekeeper for an MBA program, does that scare the daylights out of you?

**Johnson:** Look, they're smart people. Whether I think it's good or bad really doesn't matter; it's clearly a generational issue and a market condition that I have to respond to. I like to think of it as an opportunity to help develop people who have a different style of communicating. Everyone who has contact with folks of this generation should view it as an opportunity to help develop them into the kinds of leaders we want. The transparency that allows them to brazenly ask all of those questions is the kind of transparency they have about everything. In regards to government and corporate America, this generation's values are a very good trend. Hopefully it'll have an enormously positive impact.