



BANYAN TREE STRATEGIES

THE GREAT AMERICAN STANDOFF

Drew Sanders, April 2013





The Great American Standoff!

By Drew Sanders



CAUTION, there is a standoff occurring at the corner of 3rd and Main St. in your town. On one side of the street armed with the collective wisdom of all past human experiences in their brains stand “Generation X”, “The Boomers” and “The Builders”. These three generations have formed a formidable unit that understands decorum and how people are supposed to collaborate within institutions to run our world. They stand together resolute with searing eyes focused on their collective foe.

Across the street a crowd of twenty-something “Millennials” gather in various stances and attitudes. Indifferent to the sets of eyes a fixed upon them from across the street; they are consumed by their smart phones. It would appear their need for the institutions of old is dropping by the day as Google is their teacher and there has to be a game or app that will solve any challenge they encounter. They are not sure why everyone over the age of 35 doesn’t get it, but when they need something they text their friends and immediately tap into information that is relevant and safe to them because a friend found the answer on Wikipedia.

So there they stand, two groups occupying two different worlds both on the same planet. One group holds all the power, but is losing a battle with time, and



the other appears powerless, but also is extremely capable of collaborating with each other without the need of an “institution”. The ensuing conflict between these two parties should be epic. A great way to get a glimpse of the future is to look at how each of our parties is adapting to the offerings from three of the largest tech companies in the world. Our analysis shows that it might serve the older generations well to take a curious point of view towards the Millennials.

Consider this, Apple, Google and Amazon have at their core a heart for the individual and for the first time in history we have a way to collect the passive volunteer knowledge of the world without any institutional friction. This new climate is allowing the Millennials (our first digitally native generation) the opportunity to create new norms, wealth and new institutions without as much as a tip of the cap to the old ways.

To understand phrases like “passive volunteer knowledge” and “institutional friction” let’s turn to Clay Shirky, a thought leader in the space of online collaboration. His prescient Ted Talk in 2005 “Online Collaboration vs. Institutions” spoke to a future in which systems were being created that allowed individuals to contribute a small amount of value to any cause or venture and another individual or entity could capture it and share that value with other parties.

His prime example of Wikipedia is just the beginning. Today online forums have gone well past the hobbyist crowd and offer significant resources to their communities. Just ask anyone with a serious illness where they are getting their information, many will tell you that they found an online forum of others in the same situation from all over the world. The sharing and input from others who have real first hand experiences to share is of incredible value. Shirky has recently published “Here Comes Everybody” and “Cognitive Surplus” to further outline his view of the future. Sharing is not a generational trait, of note is that the Millennials have grown up with the online forum, while the rest of us are stuck adapting. [ADVANTAGE MILLENNIALS](#)

Apple

No company in the world today has more people who identify part of themselves with its brand than Apple. I.T. departments around the world have had to change their stance on corporate policies because the entire leadership team has insisted on using an iPhone, iPad, or both. The result of this shift is that an enormous marketplace has been born to put products or services on these Apple devices. Other platforms have been formed as well and Cisco recently released research that by 2016 there will be more devices than humans worldwide.



Somewhere up in the cosmos the spirit of Steve Jobs must be smiling, because he just engineered the biggest end around in history on the enterprise community and he did it on behalf of you, the individual! Apple's mobile sharing device is now ubiquitous and no institution has control over how we use it. For the older generations adapting to this is going to be a challenge, for the Millennials, it will be a snap. ADVANTAGE MILLENNIALS

Google

Google's founders publish a letter to shareholders each year and in its IPO letter from 2004 the phrase "Don't be evil" became a tagline for their business ethos. This is important because the simple white screen with a box for your query has become the great provider of all knowledge. Google's ability to give you what you want when you want it and in seconds is its base value proposition. Because of its consistent performance, we the collective world have been ok with the results having two sets of answers to our questions. One where Google tries to point you to the answers on the web on its own, and a second answer where businesses get to pay to be there based upon the "key words" in your search. Billions of times each day Google delivers on its promise and because of this is often called "the world's proxy".

So what does this have to do with our generational conflict? Quite a bit actually, because in order to deliver on its promise, Google has to know more about what is on the web than anyone and they have consistently invested their dollars to make their answers relevant and timely. Google like Apple has a bias towards the individual. Google has given the small contributor of authentic content a global platform for their thoughts and products all the while creating a global exchange for allowing advertisers to buy exposure to their potential customers. Google wants to be in business with anyone who wants to advertise and if you want someone to find you or understand your skills, you need only allocate the time to creating something and the cost of building a website. Once on the web Google will find you and you may end up in someone else's search. Thinking back to our generational standoff, which group has more time and is more comfortable sharing things in public? ADVANTAGE MILLENNIALS

Amazon

Amazon is our final company to analyze and like the river it is named after it has become the life blood for millions of entrepreneurs around the world. Amazon's founder Jeff Bezos has made his mark by entering markets with systems that have been in place for hundreds of years. His storefront has displaced kings of capitalism on the distribution side and empowered artists to create and share with freedom. The result is a consumers delight, choice abounds.



Amazon is also known for making huge capital investments that take years to bear fruit. Far from the public eye Amazon offers businesses a ground breaking service in the area of data storage. Amazon Web Services (AWS) has allowed companies to spend much less on infrastructure as they have made a major investment in cloud computing. This is another example of a large corporation empowering the small entity. Amazon's polestar appears to be let people create, and then let the market decide the winners. Of course being the host of the party always has its perks. I have a personal story about working with Amazon that shows some advantages that the Millennials have in their corner.

This past summer I gave our 3 interns one week to write a 2000 word story, publish it on Amazon.com, build a website about the book and then build out an Adwords campaign at Google to drive traffic to the site. They were different genders, different races, and all went to different schools and had known each other for less than 10 days. None of them had ever done any of the tasks I gave them. I told them to "make it happen" and to help each other.

What were the results? The three books are all still up on Amazon and here are the websites and the names of the authors, www.indiangirlproblems.com by Simrin Jhangiani, www.experience-of-an-international-student.com by Toan Tran, and www.collegeathletetips.com by Donald Wishom. In short, I was blown away. They collaborated, identified each other's strengths and divided the work. They worked hard and they had no apprehensions about putting their own writing on the web for all to see.

Compare that to my own writing experience. I had talked about writing a book for 5 years and done nothing but talk. Inspired by their efforts and following some of their steps with the vendors at Amazon I published www.changedoesntbite.com this fall. My effort took me 3 months, and yes my book was 25,000 words to their 2000 and yes I worked alone on the weekends, but this team of 3 Millennials CRUSHED IT!

Attention Generation X, Boomers and Builders, the caution flag is up for us. We may be the only ones who think there is a conflict at the corner of 3rd and Main. The Millennials are too busy creating a new way of living and building the future to notice. My advice is to take a page from Boomer Eric Schmidt the CEO of Google. Engage a millennial, seek to understand them, then partner with them so you both can work together to create our joint future together. Or you can just sit there in your chair like Archie Bunker and come up with names for that guy who wants to date your daughter!