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It's time for change

Millennials and gen z are becoming the majority in franchising - it's time to adjust processes to suit them, says **Penny Hopkinson**

Have you noticed a difference in demographics within food and beverage, fitness, child and education, home services, and pet care franchises? Their owners are no longer just middle-aged veterans but ambitious gen Z and young millennials.

Some 18% of all franchisees are under 30, according to the BFA's 2018 franchise survey. In the coming years, young millennials and gen Z will also comprise a growing workforce in the estimated 48,600 franchised units across the UK.

Franchising offers built-in corporate support, flexible operations, and accessible technology systems with low start-up costs. It's an attractive

option for younger entrepreneurs seeking alternative career paths outside the corporate world.

However, younger franchisees and their teams have markedly different motivations, expectations, and working styles compared to older generations. By aligning with these needs, franchises can thrive with millennial and gen Z owners.

These younger franchisees highly value collaboration, continual learning, and meaningful work where they feel their contributions have purpose and impact. They expect useful knowledge and insights to be shared openly across franchise locations and teams rather than in isolated silos. This generation wants to reinvent the wheel together rather than individually.

As their workforce share expands, established veteran

franchisors must understand how to better connect with younger franchisees and their team members, who will soon be a majority.

Here are some key strategies franchisors can employ to engage and motivate the next generation:

Move away from corporate ladders

Emphasise skills and lateral career development opportunities rather than traditional upward corporate ladders. Provide access to virtual and self-paced training options which align with digital learning preferences. Consider job rotation programmes which allow employees to gain experience in multiple roles to combat boredom and build well-rounded expertise. Implement mentorship programmes which pair younger team members with experienced franchisees for advice and guidance.

Lean into the growth mindset

Structuring promotions as milestones along a growth journey helps reinforce continuous learning. Traditional promotions are often seen as singular events - you work for a number of years and then move one rung up the ladder. This doesn't align with desires for constant learning.

Instead, franchises could reframe promotions as milestones which recognise progress versus endpoints. This ties to the growth mindset. For example, a team member could get promoted to customer services manager as a milestone. However, they would still receive coaching and training to build skills in new areas, which empowers workers to keep developing rather than plateauing in a new role.



Publicly celebrating these milestones also gives peer recognition and motivates others to develop skills for their progress. Plus, tying promotions to ongoing growth trajectories better aligns with desires for continual development and sidesteps perceptions that promotions equal the end of learning.

Embrace digital alternatives

Fully leverage popular digital platforms and social media which millennials and gen Z already use for communication, training, and multimedia content delivery. Equip them with data-driven decision-making tools and autonomy over tech-based processes.

For example, reformat old training manuals into interactive online portals with engaging video tutorials, social discussion forums, and microlearning apps. Create systems where employees can provide real-time input on new technologies or digital marketing campaigns.

Curate a culture of inclusivity

Promote transparency in business challenges, strategy, and performance metrics. Regularly invite input and feedback at all levels to build an inclusive culture. Run regular collaborative meetings and roundtable

discussions to give teams a voice and visibility into franchise matters. They help surface concerns by enabling open discussion and feedback.

Empower younger franchisees to participate in annual strategy planning workshops. Connect individual tasks and franchisee contributions to bigger company goals and community impact. Publicly highlight local franchisees making a difference to showcase their impact.

Reimagine the operations manual

Rebrand the traditional operations manual into a dynamic digital knowledge-sharing environment where franchisees and team members can openly share ideas to improve practices on a continual basis.

Replace dense text-heavy guides which won't be read with digestible multimedia content and two-way collaboration apps. Empower franchise teams to help evolve standards based on actual operational insights. Create feedback loops and version control so best practices spread quickly across units.

This proactive approach pays dividends for both parties. Franchisors receive the benefits of

fresh innovations and renewed energy from highly engaged younger franchisees and their teams. Younger franchisees enjoy ample opportunities to continuously develop skills while actively shaping franchise systems and processes to optimise performance. Their increased engagement and sense of purpose also reduce costly turnover.

The generational shift in franchising provides an ideal opportunity for established brands to tap into younger franchisees' passion and entrepreneurial spirit. Embracing their bold new perspectives can help reinvigorate even mature franchise models while simultaneously fulfilling the needs of these new small business owners. Adapting to new viewpoints and working styles ensures franchise brands will continue to thrive well into the future.



THE AUTHOR

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