

## The new work force of "Generation Y" or "Millenials" need special handling

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Shafiq Lokhandwala, CEO of Wilmington-based NuView Systems, says that workers born in the PC era provide valuable technical expertise, but their demand for instant access to information presents staff-retention challenges.

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The generation of people who grew up with the Internet and PCs and retain them; they expect more, in demanding a work-life balance, rapid promotions and a fun environment.

Generation Y (Gen Y) is defined in several ways by various experts, but generally includes those born between 1980 and 1994, a period extending from just before the launch of the IBM PC through the birth of the World Wide Web. They know no other way than having the Internet in their homes and a world of information at their fingertips. In fact, nine out of 10 Generation Y-ers own a PC, according to a study from Cambridge-based [Forrester Research Inc.](#)

To attract and retain these employees, companies have to morph their training and development programs into something far different from what worked for generations who grew up without the Internet, said [Jeff Kristick](#), senior vice president of marketing at the workplace talent management software and services company [Plateau Systems Ltd.](#) in Arlington.

Kristick leads employees spanning several generations on his team of 22 people. He said, "The (team members) who are right out of college are very different in their approach to learning and training. The older generation is comfortable with academic training in classrooms, where the new generation is more comfortable with on-demand learning and videos they can access when it is convenient for them."

Kristick added, "A new engineer goes online to find information when they have time, and the paper training manual is the last place they go for the answer to a technical question."

Gen Y-ers also have a different collaboration style fewer older workers, Kristick said. "They aren't bashful and are more casual. They seek out information when they need it and might yell a question out from their office cube to someone across the room. It can make some of the older generation uncomfortable, because they are more used to a structured work environment."

[John Ambrose](#), senior vice president of strategy, corporate development and emerging business for Nashua, N.H.-based [SkillSoft Corp.](#), said ubiquitous access to the web has

bred a generation of multi-taskers with little patience and high expectations.

“This generation is used to writing term papers while listening to their iPods and browsing the Internet, which poses challenges with how to teach them,” Ambrose said. “They have absorbed more information at their age level through their ears and eyes than any generation in mankind, and that impacts their learning preferences.”

The web has made people impatient learners, so any company looking to engage and train Gen Y-ers should have a multi-modal approach to training and have small chunks of content available 24/7, Ambrose said.

*“The older generation may have read training manuals, but that doesn’t work with this generation. If you hold training in a stuffy classroom ... they won’t go. They want content in the form of podcasts or online courses. They expect compelling graphics. Mixing up the learning modes is really appealing to this generation,” Ambrose said.*

*Impatient as they may be, tech savvy Gen Y-ers find solutions to problems quicker than employees who did not grow up with PCs and Google, according to [Shafiq Lokhandwala](#), CEO of Wilmington-based [NuView Systems Inc.](#), which provides employee management software tools.*

“From a technical perspective, this generation is more versatile in researching problems. They are good at scouring data for useful nuggets of information to execute solutions,” Lokhandwala said. “In the technology field we depend on these people to make our products better, and they are really valuable in that respect.”

[Jackie Breslin](#), director of human capital consulting for the payroll, human resources and benefits outsourcing company [TriNet Group Inc.](#), which has offices in Boston and throughout the U.S., said “There is no doubt that their technology knowledge adds value to the workplace. They are always on the lookout for the next hot thing, and they bring that into the workplace.”

*In return, Gen Y-ers expect a lot from their employers, Lokhandwala said.*

*“Everything has happened so quickly for them and they are used to getting every bit of information they want in an instant. The negative there is that they are also more likely to move to another company, because information on other job opportunities is so readily available to them,” Lokhandwala said. “Retention is an issue with this generation, which can be costly when a company invests in training and development for the employee.”*

Kristick agreed. “The new generation in the workforce is looking for new challenges; every two years they are looking for a new job. As a manager, you have to provide a career path for these folks to move around, move up, and stay challenged within the company. Even lateral moves are exciting, because it keeps them engaged.”

[Leanne Furman](#), a TriNet spokesperson, said Gen Y-ers aren’t loyal to employers that don’t allow them to grow. “I see with our clients that this generation is hard to retain, because they are looking to make their mark — they learn skills quickly and want to move on, where older workers value their employer more and are a bit more loyal,” Furman said.

To increase retention, companies are adopting a more flexible style. More companies allow telecommuting, compressed work weeks, and encourage continuing education, Breslin said, noting, "Our clients are putting a lot of effort into attracting talented workers, and also working hard to retain them... with good benefits, vacation policies, and making sure the workplace culture is satisfactory."

Ultimately, GenY-ers want the same things as any other generation. "As we look at generational differences and what people look for in a career, they (all) want to be recognized for the hard work, compensated for it and they want to be challenged," Kristick said.