

CHARMING GENERATION

Casie Millhouse-Singh takes a deep breath.

She downs a shot of plum wine.

The timer starts: the pink-haired, former gymnastics coach has three minutes only to wow the judges in a make-or-break presentation.

Her opening slide flashes on screen: “The Art of Figuring (Stuff) Out”. She follows that with a surprise handstand, executed flawlessly, to gasps from the audience.

The speech then follows. The 34-year-old Singapore-based American is happy to sprinkle profanities throughout, and has no issue sharing some frank stories of her own failures.

Millhouse-Singh is not auditioning for a reality show. Rather, she is pitching herself to the likes of Netflix, Uber,

before stepping through the office door of their first job.

“Before *Pitch Perfect*, there were no platforms for millennials to showcase their personality and talents, most of which don’t come across on a résumé,” Venn CEO Candice Aw says. From the pitches, employers can see right away if a candidate is a good cultural fit, she adds.

Millhouse-Singh’s job search since June had been centred around job boards. “But this event makes it more real for me and gives me confidence, even though I have no relevant work experience and didn’t go to university,” she says.

The world of recruiting has evolved, and employers being able to meet 13 people in an hour used to be unheard of, says Sunita Kaur, Managing Director

potential talent and post stories about happenings at work.

Jaclyn Lee, SUTD’s Senior HR Director, says career talks are also promoted on social media, while Skype is used to screen overseas applicants.

Although social media offers extra scrutiny and more personal data about candidates compared to the average résumé, SUTD typically does not use the information against them, Lee says.

In addition, when hiring faculty members, the university has used a unique “360-degree” interview process for the last six years. This entails the candidates giving a presentation on their research, followed by evaluation from their peers and a team of senior faculty. Afterwards, the HR team invites the candidate for dinner with their peer group and head of department, to assess their interpersonal skills and ability to socialise with their future team members.

“For millennial faculty candidates, we do a lot of networking, group interviews and peer interactions to ensure they’re able to work across teams in a multi-disciplinary environment,” says Lee.

Dutch electronics giant Philips is currently relooking at how it can better attract, assess and engage millennial candidates. A spokesperson for the Asia-Pacific region says it is aiming to place more emphasis on social media platforms and online tools, and build a more robust talent programme in the region.

“We recognise the importance of engaging this generation, given their go-getter personalities, creativity and technology know-how they bring to the business,” the spokesperson says.

Sky picnics and pop-up cafés

Some companies are also using creative techniques and more informal settings to engage potential candidates and build their talent pools.

At JP Morgan, the HR team has enhanced its engagement strategies with students on university campuses in Singapore in particular. Chew Ying Ying, Head of Campus Recruiting for Asia-

As the tide of millennials rushes into the workforce, employers are getting creative to reach out to and hire these new kids on the block

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Spotify and Chope, to convince them she deserves a job on one of their teams.

Millhouse-Singh was one of 13 hopefuls at the inaugural *Pitch Perfect* event on August 18. Targeted at Generation Y jobseekers, the unique recruitment platform was organised by online job-matching company Venn to let shortlisted candidates skip the traditional job application line and pitch directly to hiring managers from some of Singapore’s best-rated employers.

Pitch Perfect is just one of several new, unconventional hiring strategies tailored to the millennial generation – those born between 1980 and 2000.

By 2025, millennials will make up 75% of the global working population, according to Deloitte. Characterised as ambitious digital natives who crave purpose in their work, they are already shaking up traditional HR practices even

at Spotify Asia, who was one of the panelists at *Pitch Perfect*. “I believe there is really something here.”

Leveraging social media

Employers are fast embracing social media tools when it comes to recruiting technology-savvy younger staff.

OCBC Bank, for example, advertises jobs on Facebook. “To attract millennial candidates, we have to widen our reach and showcase our employer brand on social media, so that they know more about our purpose, values and culture,” says Jacinta Low, Head of HR Planning at the bank.

The Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) also has a strong focus on social media for recruitment. As well as Facebook and Twitter, the university uses LinkedIn aggressively to suss out

Pacific, says there are renewed efforts to help students understand what it is really like to work at the company, instead of just connecting with them at the surface level during recruitment talks and events.

In particular, JP Morgan introduced pop-up campus cafés at high-traffic areas on university campuses earlier this year, for staff to mingle with students and explain job opportunities and what JP Morgan stands for as a firm.

“Millennials tend to want to know the company and its people well before deciding to join,” Chew says.

Picnics are another unique method. In July, OCBC Bank hosted 90 Singaporean undergraduates for a casual lunchtime sharing session at the highest level

far earlier in their university lives.

“We found that millennials respond better to more frequent and longer engagement as compared to the earlier generations,” says Low. “Hence we’ve also been organising more talks and engagement events at campuses, such as pre-talk teasers, career fairs and career talks.”

To ensure its strategies stay relevant, OCBC Bank also engages its existing millennial employees to find out what other candidates of their generation are looking for, and how it can fine-tune its approach to better connect with millennial-age recruits, Low adds.

Spotting talent

Some younger companies, especially

Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, the SGAG recruiters trawl social media to find potential hires most of the time.

“This has been a very effective way for us to hire the best talent,” Mak says. All of his 15 staff members are from Generation Y, and the team is still expanding.

The SGAG websites allows people to submit their own content, which means the company can identify regular contributors and ask whether they are interested in working there. “That’s an even better filter because these people already love our work, and are passionate about submitting content,” Mak adds.

Previously, SGAG tried looking for content creators using recruitment

very differently and are disillusioned with existing search options,” she says.

Revamping interviews

Employers are also changing how they interview young candidates, developing strategies to make sure they ask the right questions in the right ways.

In August, KPMG shortened its lengthy graduate recruitment process after surveying 400 millennial applicants and learning that more than a third were annoyed by the several weeks involved. Instead of holding three separate assessments on different days, the whole process now takes place in one day. Candidates will also know within two working days if they have landed a job.

The accounting firm’s move comes in the wake of US investment bank Goldman Sachs’ changes to its own graduate hiring process. In July, Goldman Sachs began replacing face-to-face interviews with video interviews for first-round undergraduate candidates, aiming to attract applicants from a wider range of disciplines.

At present, JP Morgan is also piloting video-recorded interviews to replace first-round phone interviews, Chew says.

“As millennials are collaborative in nature, we have also incorporated tangible case studies during interviews to observe how candidates work with each other to solve business problems.”

“It’s important for HR to also remember that company legacies, deep smarts, and intrinsic historical knowledge exist with older staff”

Jaclyn Lee, Senior HR Director, Singapore University of Technology and Design

“Sometimes they give up too easily and don’t have the traditional mindset of slogging it out,” he says. “Millennials can learn to put in the effort and grind it through, and understand that you may not always have things perfectly the way you want them.”

Importantly, Aw points out that younger jobseekers also need to learn that some of their managers will hail from a different generation, and might not understand them at all times.

“It’s important for millennials to communicate with their managers, instead of just dismissing them as ‘uncool’,” Aw advises.

workers getting drunk on a work day.

Within hours of the invitation going viral and being mocked online, Microsoft issued an apology for the gaffe.

Aw from Venn says it is definitely possible for an employer to try too hard to cater to millennials.

“Communicating with them is not just about adding hashtags to everything, and trying to use buzzwords to sound cool,” she says.

“Millennials are a smart bunch and doing that without actually understanding their mindset just comes across as condescending and trying too hard.”

Sharing the same sentiment is SUTD’s Lee. While it is essential to recognise that millennials will form the bulk of the next generation of workers, she advises organisations to be careful not to over-cater to them.

“It’s important for HR to also remember that company legacies, deep smarts, and intrinsic historical knowledge exist with older staff,” Lee says.

Chew from JP Morgan points out that regardless of age, every employee wants to do meaningful work, have ample learning opportunities, and do well in their careers of choice.

“Millennials are not that different from the other generations,” she says. “We just need to recognise their drivers for motivation and communicate effectively with them.”

Beyond recruitment

Employers are not simply focusing their millennial-engagement strategies at the hiring phase. Instead of tweaking its recruitment measures, electronics and furniture retailer Courts is focusing on talent management initiatives that it feels resonate more with millennials. For instance, its personalised career development plan has been well-received by younger workers, who proactively seek autonomy over their unique career directions, says Kiran Kaur, Chief Talent Officer of Courts Asia.

“Millennials are an increasingly important talent pool that needs to be stimulated, engaged and incentivised,” she says.



of the 50-storey OCBC Centre. The undergraduates and current OCBC interns gathered at the inaugural *OCBC Sky Picnic* to network with the bank’s senior management and division heads, and learn about the OCBC Young Bankers and Postgraduate Management Associate programmes.

Rocco Hu, a second-year student at Oxford University, found the picnic more personable and friendlier than other recruitment events. “It was rather unlike what we usually think of a bank,” he said. The event was also an example of the many activities OCBC Bank is opening to not just final-year students but also second- and third-year students. It is hoping to engage students

those founded by millennials themselves, have had youth-focused hiring processes since their foundations.

Consider SGAG Media, which produces localised, digital content for a number of online platforms in Singapore. The four-year-old company has close to 500,000 Facebook fans. Co-founder Karl Mak says the company relies on its content creators to be good storytellers and able to consistently come up with viral posts. As such, it does not use any traditional modes of recruitment.

“Instead, we first spot content that’s going viral, then approach the person who created it to discuss opportunities with them,” the 28-year-old says. Because viral posts usually trend on

websites. While there were responses, the conversion rate to a good hire was close to zero, Mak says. “Traditional methods don’t work for us; they’re a waste of our money and time.”

Over at four-month-old startup Venn, Aw is now planning more pitch events similar to *Pitch Perfect*. She says the format could suit other sectors, such as e-commerce, opening up the scheme to a greater variety of both candidates and employers.

Venn’s website matches young professionals to career opportunities using its proprietary algorithmic matching technology, which Aw says was inspired by dating website OkCupid.

“We realised millennials look for jobs

Give and take

At the same time, many employers believe it is up to millennial candidates to also adapt their job-search strategies and expectations.

While companies are busy creating work environments conducive for their unique qualities, millennials should likewise be proactive and seek to understand as well as adapt to the work and communication styles of other generations, says Chew.

Mak from SGAG thinks many younger employees have a high tendency to jump ship in the first few months if they do not feel comfortable with a new employer.