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David Morrison is president and founder of TWENTYSOMETHING™ Inc., the world's first marketing consultancy to focus exclusively on the young adult (age 15 to 34) market. A "born marketer" who started a pencil/eraser exchange as a first grader, David specializes in helping clients gain a deeper understanding of young adults' motivations, and crafting appropriate product development, marketing and communications strategies. His recently published book, [Marketing to the Campus Crowd](#), has been eagerly embraced by entrepreneurs seeking to tap the nation's \$200 billion college market.

Q: How did you get the idea to start TWENTYSOMETHING™ Inc.?

A: When I was a freshman in college, I saw several marketing mishaps that indicated a disconnect between corporate America and the youth market—for example, New Coke. I saw an opportunity to create a unique consultancy that could help organizations successfully align their goals with the lifestyle realities of 15-34-year-old consumers.

Q: Why should small business owners pay close attention to the young adult market?

A: These consumers spend trillions of dollars in the U.S. alone every year. That single data point should be reason enough for most business owners to monitor this age group, whether or not young adults currently comprise their target audience.

Q: Why is it important to understand 15-34-year-olds as early adopters of many product categories?

A: The young adult market undeniably exerts strong influence on mainstream opinion, attitudes, and purchase behavior. Since young adults are early adopters, in other words the first to purchase, they demonstrate utility and attributes to others as well as directly impact brand perceptions. Younger market segments—"tweens," for example—seek to emulate Twentysomethings, while more mature consumers such as Baby Boomers often turn to them for input on "big ticket" purchases ranging from Hi-Def TVs to luxury cars. Simply put, the young adult market can make or break brands.

Q: What are some common misperceptions about the young adult market?

A: One misconception is that the young adult market is static—fixed in

time. It's absolutely critical for businesses to acknowledge that this segment is rapidly evolving in language, attitudes, usage and purchase behavior. You must always keep a pulse on this audience and adjust your strategic and tactical planning accordingly.

Q: Another misconception seems to be viewing today's young adults as a homogenous group. Why is that a misconception?

A: This cohort is, by most measures, the most diverse audience in our country's history based on ethnicity, household income, geography and many other key attributes. If you approach young adults as a monolithic entity, mistakes are inevitable.

Q: Your new book, [Marketing to the Campus Crowd](#), focuses on reaching college-age students. What attributes make that market particularly attractive?

A: In many respects, the college market represents the true heart and soul of the youth market. College students embody several attractive characteristics—exceptionally high discretionary spending, insatiable experimentation, evolving brand loyalties and unparalleled interconnectedness, particularly through online social networks. In short, the campus crowd has an absolutely astounding influence on mainstream attitudes, usage and purchasing. Win their hearts and you have a much greater likelihood of becoming adopted by mainstream consumers.

Q: What are the obstacles to reaching the college market?

A: The campus crowd has its own language and unique lifestyle, is incredibly savvy about marketing and can be extremely demanding. The sheer desirability of this audience has made it tougher than ever for marketers to break through the clutter and form lasting relationships with college students. My book includes several "best in class" case studies, and they all share several common denominators: a willingness to understand the market, sound strategic and tactical planning and flawless executions.

Q: What is the most important piece of practical advice you would give to older business owners looking to attract young adult customers?

A: Understand the market on its own terms. Older business owners often make the mistake of drawing on the experiences of their own youth. As I mentioned before, the young adult market is rapidly evolving, and times do change. Business owners of all ages that fail to adequately do their homework risk quick—and possibly, permanent—alienation of young adult customers.

Q: Can young business owners benefit by working with an experienced mentor such as a SCORE volunteer?

A: Like most facets of life, knowledge is power. Only arrogant young business owners would believe that they have nothing to learn from an older mentor. Even if the business is exclusively young adult-focused, a SCORE volunteer can provide invaluable experience as well as a different perspective to fuel growth in the right direction. A SCORE volunteer should be regarded as a priceless asset to any organization.

Q: Any final advice?

A: Never stop learning. Read the trade pubs, listen to the input of others, go to conferences, and continue taking classes. Even online Webinars can be fantastic in terms of both content and convenience. I ran my company while earning my MBA. It was a tough two years, to say the least, but I was able to further my own professional development and expand my personal business toolkit.

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