

# Perennials: The secret weapon every company needs

By [Andrew Robinson](#)

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Perennials: an evergreen generation who remain curious and relevant despite their advancing age. This generation is energetic, switched on and most importantly, employable.



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Perennials are born between 1930 and 1950 and some would say that they incorporate the best of the boomer traits (hard-working, value-based), and those of millennials (curious, tech-savvy). Perennials, unlike younger generations, tend to focus on a company's values and will often be more loyal to a business that matches their own. While a millennial will jump from company to company to satisfy intellectual curiosity, a perennial may stick around longer because they just like the people they work with. Perennials also pride themselves on being savvy, from pop culture through to the latest gadgets, you're going to be hard-pressed to find the purported knowledge gap between perennials and millennials.

Perennials are challenging the myth of 'old age'. The idea that we all have a sell-by date is quickly becoming an old-fashioned notion. A recent article in MIT Technology Review has shone a spotlight on the fact that the idea of old age, the body running out of vitality (a mysterious, make-believe energy), is a piece of 19th century science that has long since been debunked. While there may be some physical deterioration as we age, modern humans tend to stay quite healthy well into their twilight years.



## Don't retire, *unretire*

Michelle Moss 1 Mar 2017



Historically, when corporate masters wanted to crack the whip, they found that getting rid of their older employees created a surge of productivity inducing fear down the line. In order to justify these retirements, the idea of the aged (and therefore useless) worker was introduced.

But times have changed. The digital age has brought with it instant access to information, communication, productivity tools, and a host of other benefits that are useful for both young and old. The older generation is adopting and using these technologies with a degree of ease that is both surprising and helping to keep them relevant in the workplace. As an example, in the Netherlands, at least 75% of perennials are active on Facebook.

Recently, the advertising industry has also been shifting away from staff complements entirely made up of younger minds. The industry is currently undergoing massive changes, and the experience that an older staff member brings to the table has become invaluable.

## **Increase in retirees seeking jobs**

But it isn't all good news. The older generation is facing many challenges in their re-entry to the workplace. In many countries, the number of newly retired people attempting to return to the workplace has grown, with some countries reporting a 20% increase in older job seekers. Many of these job seekers are struggling to find employment for one reason alone: ageism. Leave your age off of your CV, you're more likely to get an interview. In a world that glamorises youth, it has become difficult to demonstrate your value past a certain age. In South Africa, ageism is illegal. It still happens but fortunately unions and/or the CCMA will gladly represent an older worker should they feel discriminated against.

Another challenge is that Silicon Valley is full of 25 year olds solving problems for other 25 year olds. Ever notice how technology aimed at the youth is slick, black, and sexy while technology aimed at the aged is beige and bulky? While most perennials make adopting new workplace technologies a priority, they often find that features they would find useful are just not present, simply because they are left out of the tech development cycle.

## **Age is merely a number**

The fact is perennials are a great addition to any workplace. The reality is that the concept of 'old age' is fading away and society has to catch up fast. We have seen that in countries with more established economies (like Japan), older people far outnumber the youth. With that in mind, it is in our best interest to start working on legislation, processes, and technologies that will facilitate our older workers while we reap the benefits of their innate loyalty and experience.

The perennial in a business is a secret weapon. There is so much we can learn from a generation that has made their mistakes. History repeats itself and those who choose to ignore the benefits of engaging with and learning from those who have been there and done that are simply foolish business leaders.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Andrew Robinson is co-founder and executive director of SiSebenza.