# BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GENERATIONAL GAP: COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SENIOR AND MILLENNIAL ORAL SURGEONS

## Abstract

As digital technology has become more prevalent in oral surgery, the digital divide between senior and junior surgeons has continued to grow. However, through collaboration, senior and junior surgeons have the opportunity to foster practice growth and expand their market share in implant dentistry.

Dr.Hamid Shafie, CEO & Principal

hrshafie@olulo.com

**What is the Digital Generational Gap?**

The phrase "digital generational gap" refers to common differences in the use of technology between Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964) and Generation-X (born 1965-1981) oral surgeons compared to their younger, Millennial (born 1982-1999) counterparts. While these differences—like all stereotypes—will not apply to all oral surgeons, they can be useful for understanding how generational differences may impact digital transformation, and how senior and millennial surgeons can work together to achieve the best results. The digital generation gap can be defined as follows:

• Millennial surgeons are classified as "digitally native," or people born during or after the rise of modern technology. Boomer and Gen-X surgeons, conversely, are classified as "digital immigrants," or people who were born before the rise of modern technology.

• Boomer and Gen-X surgeons believe strongly in the value of experience and hard work, and take pride in long hours spent in the office. Millennial surgeons are protective of their leisure time, and believe strongly in using technology to reduce their overall workload.

• As digital immigrants, Boomer and Gen-X surgeons are more likely to operate an analog, non-digital practice. Millennial surgeons believe in the value of innovation, and are more likely to adapt new techniques and technology.

**Why Should Oral Surgeons Bridge the Generational Gap?**

As technology has continued to evolve, the digital gap between senior and junior oral surgeons has continued to grow. As a result, many surgeons in both cohorts are finding it increasingly difficult to work within the same practice. Nevertheless, there are important benefits to cooperation. Age-diverse practices continue to exhibit more competitive advantages over more homogenous offices.

For junior surgeons, joining a senior practice ensures that they will have access to the necessary infrastructure and referral sources to be successful. It allows them to begin generating revenue without the financial burden of setting up a new practice. For senior surgeons, adding junior, digitally native associate surgeons and staff will allow them to integrate new technology into their practices without as significant of a personal time commitment. In other words, everyone benefits from the other's strengths and experiences, and are therefore able to offer improved patient services.

Failing to cooperate and bridge the gap will also inhibit both groups of surgeons from pursuing digital solutions. Successful digital transformation requires practices to leverage assets of both groups. It is crucial for digital immigrant senior surgeons with established practices to provide necessary financial investments as well as dedicated staff and leadership to execute a digital plan. Simultaneously, digitally native junior

surgeons must demonstrate a high level of interest in technology, experience with software and hardware, and the drive for innovation. These factors, when combined, create an ideal environment for digitization.

**How Can Oral Surgeons Bridge the Digital Generational Gap?**

Bridging the generational gap to build a cohesive, digitally transformed oral surgery practice requires a strategy that reflects the vision and capabilities of the entire team. Regardless of their technology background, all team members, whether digital native or immigrant, must be treated as valuable assets, and incorporated into the process of digitization.

*To bridge the generational gap and achieve successful digital integration, oral surgery practices must:*

• *Address the relationship between digital technology and existing work habits.* For Millennial team members, tech-enabled work environments and digital collaboration may reflect existing priorities, including flexibility and innovation. In contrast, senior team members are more likely to prefer traditional work models, and may therefore be more resistant to the incorporation of new technology. Practices must address these differences in preference by developing a flexible workflow that anticipates generational differences and accommodates the needs of all team members.

• *Manage people, not stereotypes.* While generalizations can sometimes be useful for predicting attitudes and behavior, it is important to recognize that not all members of a practice will adhere to these expectations: not all senior team members will be tech-resistant, and not all Millennial team members will be tech savvy. Understanding the limitations of stereotypes enables practices to develop effective digital strategies that draws from the strengths of different team members and successfully leverages all available human resources.

• *Offering diverse training opportunities.* Regardless of their existing technological knowledge, all team members involved in digital transformation will require some level of training. Training opportunities must be readily available, reflect skills gaps within the practice, and flexible enough to cater to the unique needs of each team member. The goal of training initiatives must always be to empower team members to achieve their personal professional goals.

• *Create a cooperative learning culture.* Training, while individualized, should not occur within a vacuum. Team members of all ages and skill levels must be encouraged to work cooperatively and to be involved in the training of others. This not only encourages communication between staff, but also ensures that training efforts are reflective of broader practice goals.

**Conclusion**

To remain competitive, digitally native millennial and digitally immigrant senior surgeons must collaborate to establish new, creative ways to engage with patients, staff, and referring dentists. Age diverse practices not only combine the strengths of each generation, but can also enable surgeons and their teams to pursue innovative, digital solutions. Through bridging the generational digital gap, senior and Millennial surgeons have the opportunity to foster practice growth and expand their market share in implant dentistry.

*Related Readings:*

- *Medical professionalism and the generation gap*
- *The Next Generation of Physicians: Embracing Change in our Workforce*
- *The digital Generation Gap*
- *From Gen X to Y and Z: Technology and the Generation Gap*

# White Paper

## olulo

www.olulo.com