

Generation Y: The Grammar Geeks?

By Dianna Booher

Consider grammar for old people or your eighth grade English teacher? Think again. If social networking websites like Facebook, MySpace, and Match.com are any indication of what Generation Y cares about, the young texters and bloggers out there might just surprise you by how important they consider such skills.

Recently, on the CNN special report, “Black in America,” Soledad O’Brien interviewed several twenty-something black women who discussed the challenges of finding eligible black men with similar interests, incomes, and education levels. During the interview, one woman searched a dating website and, after a brief look at the candidate’s picture, turned her focus to the profile description. “He’s cute, but... uh oh, he used the wrong word: he wrote ‘whose’ instead of ‘who’s.’ Not gonna happen.” And with a single click, she dismissed the otherwise attractive candidate. The message is clear. A nice smile and warm eyes don’t compensate for the inability to write well.

For many, online networking has replaced the night club or coffee shop as the best “place” to meet *and*—more importantly—to *screen* potential love interests, so the pressure is on to write both creatively and credibly. The examples are everywhere. With 90 million active users, Facebook reports that 50% of users are college age or younger and that there are more than 6 million active user groups. While alumni organizations, fan clubs, non-profit groups, and political activism forums are most common, a simple search on Facebook returns hundreds of “good grammar” networking groups, as well. Several of these groups boast thousands of members, all sharing an interest in preserving proper punctuation, spelling, and word usage. The largest such group, “I Judge You When You Use Bad Grammar,” has 281,000+ members and grows by more than 100 members each day. Members are encouraged to upload photos of grammar mistakes spotted in public places and, as you might expect, poke some fun at themselves, too. The size and activity of the group recently caught the attention of an editor at St. Martin’s Press, who plans to publish the group’s collection in 2009.

Not surprisingly, people who join grammar-oriented networking groups have an affinity for puns and word-play, as well, so the group names alone are worth the keyword search on Facebook: “Comma Sutra (Good grammar is sexy!),” “I Correct Your Bad Grammar in My Head While You Are Speaking,” “Bad Grammar Kills Kittens.” The search on MySpace returns a similar list: “Grammar Geeks,” and “Grammar Rangers—saving the world one vowel at a time.”

Why all the camaraderie and conversation about grammar rules, especially on sites where the presumptive goals are to make new friends, reunite old classmates, and stay in touch with people far and near? The answer is simple, really. Groups encourage like-minded people to discuss anything and everything, from the most serious to the most frivolous subjects; so, why *not* grammar?

Indeed, why not? Good grammar—good communication in general—never goes out of style. In fact, bad grammar can spoil blossoming relationships the way it can dismantle a business—by suggesting inexperience, inattention to detail, and disregard for the reader. Whether young or old, geek or goddess, brushing up on your grammar may help you or your business avoid the dismissive “click.”

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*For more on business writing, see Booher's Rules of Business Grammar: 101 Fast and Easy Ways to Correct the Most Common Errors (**McGraw-Hill**) by Dianna Booher.*