



Who am I?

Much is written about young professionals, but who are they exactly, and what do they want? BY JILL COPELAND

Caleb is a 31 year old accountant. Caleb is a “young professional” who stimulates the local economy as he lives here, works here, spends here, socializes here, and grows here. He is eager to support the community, but feels underutilized. Businesses, schools and organizations are trying to learn about Caleb and his peers in order to attract and retain this younger demographic.

A young professional is typically a graduate of a professional school serving in a professional, white-collar career. This is the definition used by Ryan Kohnen, author of *Young Professional’s Guide to Success*. He says they are strongly attached to technology and media, and can be energetic with a strong desire to shape communities and politics.

Raleigh-based Fountainworks recently organized a focus group for the city to understand what young professionals value in terms of amenities, and to help businesses market themselves to this demographic. The focus areas were:

- **Earning/Employment:** Many young professionals move where higher-earning opportunities are available.

- **Social Capital/Diversity:** Young professionals want to feel comfortable and connected.

- **Around Town:** Is public transportation available? Are there traffic issues?

- **Cost of Living:** Is housing available that matches salary levels?

- **Vitality/Recreation:** Not only are amenities available, but do those who live and work in the city know about them?

- **After Hours:** Examples are coffee houses, sports bars, ethnic restaurants and dance clubs. Walkability is important.

- **Housing:** Young professionals frequently want to live near schools because they are interested in continuing education or have started families.

The study found a pronounced need for young professionals to connect with each other, often through social media and other community networks. Employers can provide employees an opportunity to get involved in community organizations and connect with peers inside and outside of the office.

The focus group also found young professionals embrace cultural diversity and support diverse restaurants, diverse retailers and farmers’ markets. Big hits with young

professionals are gyms, coffee shops and internet cafes, kid-friendly establishments such as community centers, and after-hours outdoor music.

Young professionals soak up most of their information online. This generation is more likely to use expanded business hours and make store purchases during off-peak hours, probably because they are used to the freedom of purchasing items online anytime.

Many of today’s young professionals have an entrepreneurial spirit and would benefit from start-up business assistance. They have a strong willingness to give back by serving on a board of directors or commission, or helping boost a campaign.

Businesses can benefit from young professional traffic by keeping these characteristics in mind when selling products and services. Engage and use the next generation by encouraging leadership and continual learning, remembering Caleb and his desire to contribute. **BC**

Jill Copeland is the Communication & Workforce Development Coordinator at the St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce.

Next

NEXT-St. Cloud is a networking and professional development group serving Central Minnesota’s next generation of business leaders. Group members benefit from a year of peer dialogues, networking, promotional opportunities, and professional development, and are the first to hear insider news and information. This is your chance to meet like-minded individuals working to advance their careers.

Join a group of highly motivated businesspeople and start building your connections today!

Contact Jill Copeland at jcopeland@StCloudAreaChamber.com



TRAILBLAZER:
Kelly Zaske
Owner • Gaslight Creative

BEHIND THE PROFESSIONAL

Age: 41 • **Education:** Master of Arts, Public Relations, Southern Illinois University; Bachelor of Science, Technical Communication, Michigan Technological University • **Hobbies:** Interior Design, Gardening
Best Advice: You can be whatever you want to be.

Kelly Zaske of Gaslight Creative has a business head on her shoulders and a face that alternates between a quick smile and a thoughtful glance. Her eyes shine with optimism, hinting at the rush and tumble of creative thoughts that collide with the business of business in her busy brain – appointments, strategies, finances, client needs. She’s the proud owner of an up-and-coming marketing, public relations, and website development company in St. Cloud. She’s having a blast.

“It’s exciting to be independent, at the helm of a new enterprise,” says Kelly. “There’s also the challenge, though, which can be a bit scary if I think about it too much.”

Kelly is a wife, mother of two young children (one of each), and budding entrepreneur of ten months. However, she’s not new to the marketing profession, having worked in the field for 20 years. New clients have found her and the agency is busy.

“I was encouraged to go out on my own,” says Kelly. “I know the field, and I have a strong business network of friends to draw upon for support.”

She’s also supported by her family (no surprise) and by her project team, comprised of art director Jodie Woeste and interactive director Joseph Barrett. Climb the marble staircase (or take the aged elevator) to the third floor of 501 West St. Germain. This is where the trio gets creative, working elbow-to-elbow in two cozy rooms, decorated with contemporary art and vintage details.

“Here’s where it happens,” says Kelly, a little awed that the office belongs to her.

“It” includes a full portfolio of capabilities – market strategizing, public relations planning, media buying, video production, website design and construction, collateral material generation, direct and email campaign creation, plus, interactive media development.

Their client list has developed to include commercial and residential contractors; land developers; retail stores; tourism; financial and educational institutions; food, gift, and fundraising companies; and more. “We give our best to our clients,” says Kelly.

No doubt, there’s more to come from Kelly Zaske, leader of Gaslight Creative, a team focused on using its imaginative intensity to help businesses thrive.

Projects pending ...
— mary macdonell belisle