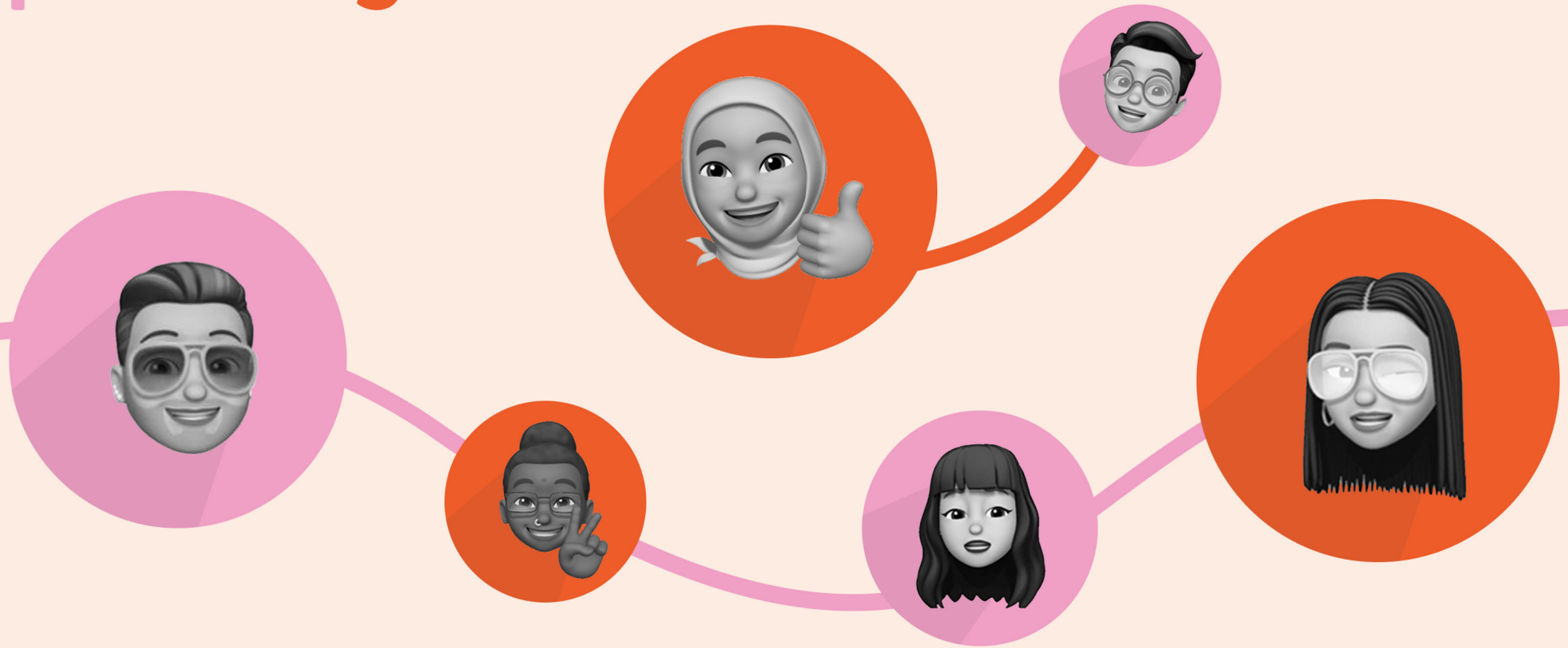


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Getting to know Gen Z

It's not as complicated as it appears

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Introduction

Marketers have honed in on Millennials as the emerging stars of company decision-making and consumer spending for years. Meanwhile, Generation Z has been mostly ignored by marketing research and has generally been regarded as a group of teenagers infatuated with their phones.

However, Gen Z has been quietly rising into a significant market force. Beyond its economic leverage, this generation is also the most diverse in world history, with deeply held and unconventional ideas on gender and identity. This generation is the genuine digital native, capable of multitasking on any device and absorbing information at a breakneck speed. They are well-informed shoppers who know exactly what they want. They're also a generation of consumers who are still defining themselves - and their purchasing preferences, making now the opportune time to attempt to understand, and therefore - market to them.

To fully comprehend Gen Z, we must first understand the world in which they were born.

Gen Z has never known a world without Google, so the idea of getting information from an encyclopedia rather than their device makes no sense to them.

They've spent their childhoods and adolescence surrounded by 24-hour news networks, social media, and television content that caters to their needs. They're used to things happening when it's convenient for them. This is why they're prone to expect things to happen for them immediately and with little effort; unfortunately, this is also the type of behavior that can promote entitlement.

Gen Z is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation yet

- Just 52% of Gen Z identify as white, compared with 61% of Millennials;
- One in four Gen Zers identify as Hispanic, compared with 18% of Millennials; and
- 6% of Gen Z identify as Asian, compared with 4% of Millennials.



More Gen Zers are pursuing higher education than previous generations

- 59% of 18- to 20-year-old Gen Zers were in college in 2017, compared with 53% of similarly-aged Millennials in 2002;
- More than half of Hispanic Gen Zers (55%) and African-American Gen Zers (54%) were enrolled in college, compared with 34% and 47% of their respective Millennial peers; and
- Two-thirds of Gen Z women were enrolled in college, compared with 57% of Millennial women.

Gen Z is more likely to have a parent with a bachelor's degree or more

- 43% of Gen Z have at least one parent with a bachelor's degree or more, compared with 32% of Millennials in 2002 and 23% of Gen X in 1986.



Who exactly are they?

Generation Z (otherwise known as Gen Z, iGen, or Centennials) refers to the generation born between 1997 and 2012.

Following their Millennial predecessors, this is a generation that has been raised on the internet and social media - they just don't skip a beat.

As its older members reach young adulthood, Gen Z has emerged as a population increasingly deserving of attention.

Drawing similarities to their Millennial counterparts

While the cutoff birth date for Gen Z varies - most sources will confirm that they're anyone born after the year 1997. At first glance, this generation could be mistaken for Millennials, whose members are now in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. These two generations share identical affinities for technology and social media, as well as similar political preferences and social equity.

Pragmatism is the word of the day

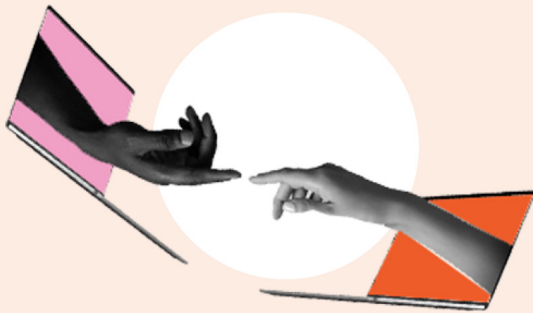
Another core characteristic of Gen Z is economic mindedness. Many Gen Zers grew up seeing their parents suffer massive financial losses during the Great Recession. This generation is driven by pragmatism and security, having witnessed their parents' hardships.

While Millennials grew up amid an economic boom, Gen Zers were influenced by the economic pressures that their families and communities encountered, from the financial pressure of the rental market to the increased costs of living. As a result, they place a high value on the stability that comes with prudent spending, stable employment, and wise investments.

Diversity is their normal

Racial diversity is one of Gen Z's most important characteristics. As the demographics of America continue to evolve, Gen Z will be the last generation to be predominately white. White Gen Zers make up a slight majority (52%); Hispanic Gen Zers make up 25%, Black Gen Zers make up 14%, and Asian Gen Zers make up 4%.

For many Gen Zers, their formative years included the election of the United States' first Black president and the legalization of gay marriage. Globally speaking, they are more likely to have grown up in a household with a variety of family structures, whether it was a single-parent home, a multi-racial home, or a home where gender roles were blurred. As a result, they are less affected by differences in ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion than in previous generations.



They're always online

This is the first generation in history to have grown up with a smartphone. In fact - we can go as far as saying that internet access is one of their most basic needs. (Might be time to update the age-old hierarchy of needs!) They fall asleep with it, wake up to it - and feel lost when it's not there. Their desire to always be online is the cornerstone of this generation. Their consumption habits are different too. Where their Millennial counterparts would use Google to source information - most Gen Zers pride themselves on their ability to obtain information through YouTube alone, reliable or otherwise.

They're our first digital natives

Another characteristic of Gen Z is their natural usage of technology. Gen Z was born into a world of peak technological innovation, where information was immediately accessible and social media became increasingly prevalent. Whereas Millennials were considered "digital pioneers," who bore witness to the explosion of technology and social media,

These technological advances have had both positive and negative consequences for Gen Z. On the plus side, Gen Zers have access to a wealth of information at their fingertips, allowing them to broaden their knowledge and take charge of their education. On the other hand, too much screen time can exacerbate feelings of isolation and lead to a lack of social skills development - only made worse by going on 3 years of a global pandemic.

Already strained mental health

Mental health issues are a tragic characteristic and consequence of Gen Z, which has been dubbed the "loneliest generation" because of their endless hours spent online, which can foster feelings of isolation and depression. Spending more time on smartphones or watching Netflix means spending less time cultivating meaningful relationships. Furthermore, many young people fall into the "comparison and despair" trap that social media presents.

The turbulent situation of the planet also has an impact on Gen Z kids' mental health. As political involvement within Gen Z has grown, many Gen Zers have embraced the discontent surrounding issues such as gun control, police brutality, and climate change, resulting in higher stress levels.



Gen Z in the workforce

Businesses have been focusing on wooing the Millennial market — as customers and employees — for years. Gen Z, on the other hand, is reaching adulthood and entering the workforce. However, with the oldest Gen Zs still only 24 years old, they still make up a small percentage of the workforce in the United States (only 11.6% in 2020, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics). But, when they get older, they'll undoubtedly become as powerful — if not more so — than the Millennial generation. (Buckle up Millennials!)

Gen Z is more aware of systematic racism, holds non-traditional gender identities, and is hyperaware of intersectionality issues.

They prefer traditional forms of communication

Despite having grown up with texting and instant messaging, research reveals that Gen Z prefers to communicate face-to-face in the workplace. This could be because they find it difficult to grasp the intricacies of written communication and would prefer the reassurance that comes with personal engagement.

They prefer to fly solo

While Gen Z does not have difficulty working in a group setting, many young people prefer to work on their projects as much as feasible. Gen Zers prove themselves to companies by working independently and showcasing their talents and abilities.

Stability is their motivation

Gen Z is more risk cautious than Millennials because they grew up during a severe economic downturn. As a result, they cherish the security that comes with a stable job with a well-defined salary package and benefits package.

They're born competitors

Gen Z is accustomed to competition and relishes the challenge of pitting oneself against another. Businesses can keep young employees engaged and help them perform their best work if they can foster a healthy feeling of rivalry in their workplace, especially during the training period.

The challenges that come with marketing to Gen Z

It's time for marketers to realize that Gen Z is still a developing generation.

What we thought we knew about them has changed significantly in the past three years. The Covid-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark on their lives: they'll never be the same at work, at school, or in their social activities. Pre-Covid marketing techniques for them are also irrevocably altered. As it stands Gen Z accounts for a considerable portion of total U.S. customers (40%) and has enormous purchasing power (\$143 billion) - which means that to market to this contingent - we need to up the ante.

Generally speaking, this generation is shaped by social intricacies that older generations may never fully understand. Pandemic aside, these are the challenges that marketers will indefinitely face when it comes to marketing to this generation.

If it's not relevant, they don't care

The media has occasionally depicted Gen Z as having an alarmingly short attention span. However, according to Fast Company, it's more of a relevancy issue than an attention one. Gen Z has what is termed an 8-second filter, which means that anything of relevance needs to be demonstrated within 8 seconds - or they will forget about you completely.

They trust influencers more than any other generation to date

Gen Z values influencers - not because of notoriety, but because of authenticity. They'll use these influencers to cut through the noise, seeking out their 'approval' before making any purchase decision.

They don't want to be sold

Gen Z has a poor tolerance for overt commercial pitches. According to one study, Gen Z is substantially more inclined than Millennials or Gen X to ignore online advertising. They are also less receptive to invasive, interruptive internet and mobile formats as a group. These trends suggest that Gen Z is averse to traditional sales and marketing strategies.

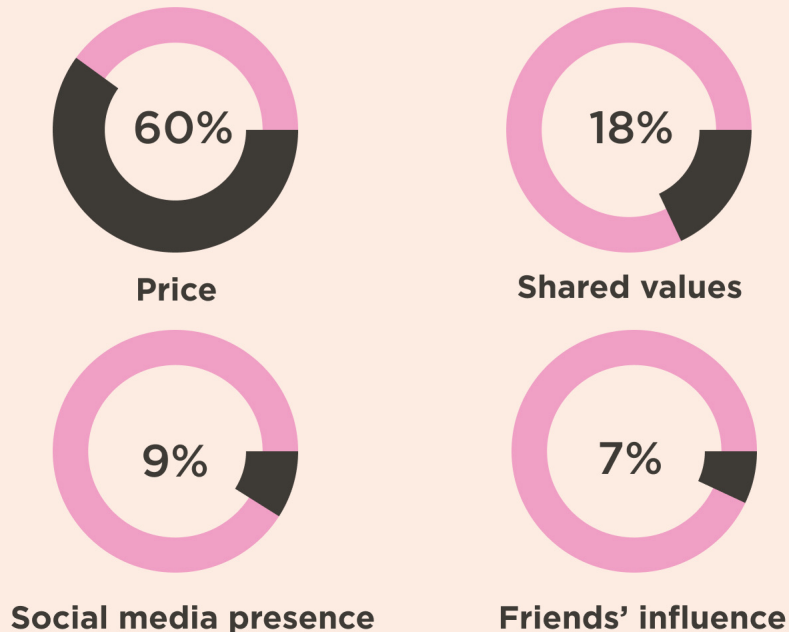
This is a generation that yearns for authenticity and the freedom to express their (many) selves. Marketers and advertisers who want to get past the eight-second filter will need to employ innovative, engaging, and genuine strategies.

Think of them as the antibiotic-resistant Generation. They've grown up watching and consuming ads. They're almost immune to traditional advertising tactics.

How do they relate to brands?

The common belief, shaped by the Great Recession, is that Gen Z does not want to pay full price for anything.

According to Business Insider - Gen Z chooses brands based on:



We've entered the age of impressive transparency

Never underestimate the discerning nature of Gen Z (also known as "True Gen"). They are incredibly resourceful when it comes to obtaining and validating facts. This has significant ramifications for businesses in terms of their social justice positions and what a brand's driving purpose is.



Gen Z - The profile

Getting to know Gen Z



Marketing to digital natives

Traditional marketing and sales approaches aren't going to cut it when it comes to reaching and engaging Generation Z, as we all know.

Here are some tips for marketing (higher) education to this Generation!

Keep it personal

Amazon purchasing and online streaming platforms provided customized, curated online experiences for young prospective students in 2019. There is no "one-size-fits-all" messaging to entice potential students of this generation. As a result, there has been a trend in (higher) education marketing toward personal messaging. Marketers are constructing extremely precise personas that mirror the individual students they wish to recruit, rather than addressing prospective students as a group. Think alumni success stories, emotional branding - and social proof, always.

Get to the point

It's also more difficult to pique Gen Z's interest - and hold it. According to studies, Gen Z has an attention span of only eight seconds, compared to 12 seconds for Millennials. That isn't to imply that Gen Z kids can't concentrate for extended periods. Rather, they can swiftly assess stuff to see if it is relevant to their life. Consider the following scenario:

Is this Instagram post something I'd be interested in seeing?
No?
Bye, Felicia!

We need to front-load our marketing strategy for these prospective students, giving important facts in a short, easy-to-digest way. All of the fluff should be pushed beneath the fold and saved for older generations.

Authenticity is more valuable than gold

Gen Z is preoccupied with their careers. Nearly a quarter of students had already started looking for work during their first year of study. According to a Yello survey, that number had risen to more than half by their junior/senior year. Marketing materials for (higher) education should emphasize how a college/university education provides possibilities to get real-world experience outside of the classroom. According to research, just over half of students (57%) believe their education has adequately prepared them for their future careers. You want to demonstrate how your school can help people take charge of their careers, volunteer work, and personal lives.



Up your influencer game

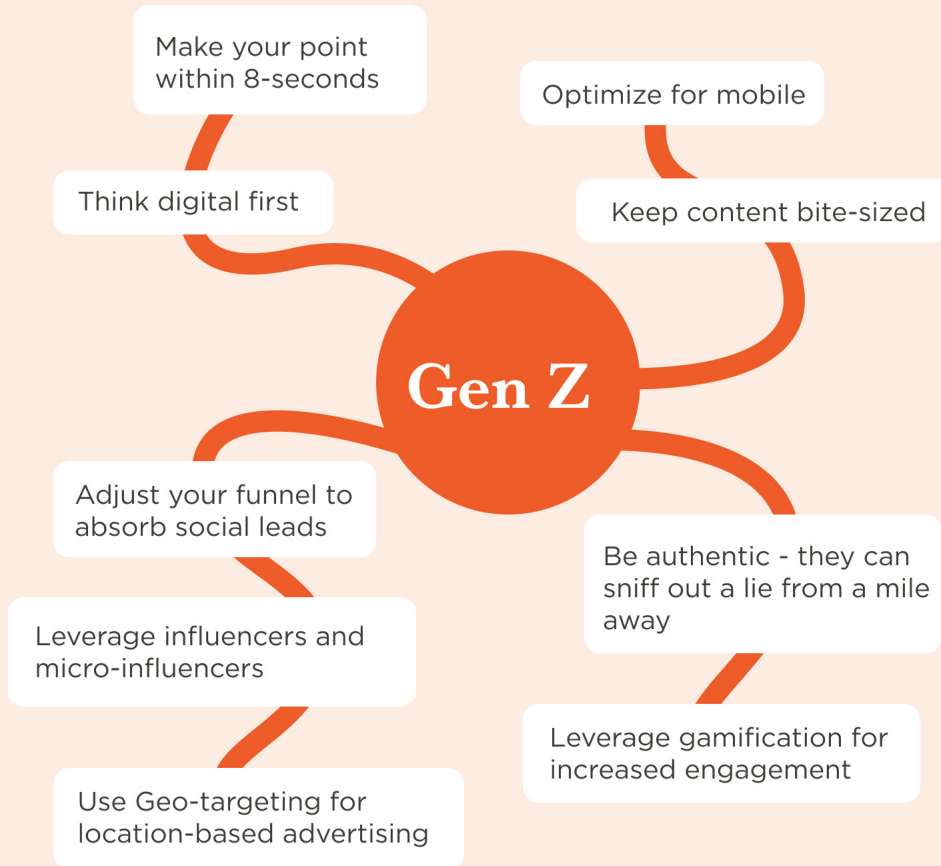
This could be the first generation in decades to be less influenced by Hollywood. Celebrity hijinks are seen as inauthentic and unrelatable by young folks. Meanwhile, 70% of teen YouTube viewers feel they have a stronger connection to YouTube producers than to established celebrities. Brand influencers, on the other hand, frequently draw the attention of Gen Z.

Influencers establish their brand early on by sharing genuine content, user-Generated Content (UGC), and forging personal bonds with their audience.

These brand influencers promote things they enjoy because they are passionate about them. There is a personal connection, not because they are being compensated for it.



Optimizing content for Gen Z



Generation-based education marketing tactics

Keeping up with the current social media trends (and getting other stakeholders on board with your goals) seems like a losing battle as a marketer in (higher) education. Oftentimes, we're tempted to stick with what we know, quickly reverting to older marketing tactics that will prove ineffective.

However, given the extremely competitive (higher) education recruitment scene, you know that reaching Gen Z through their favored digital channels is a must. In the same breath, you know that your current students expect your institution to be active on their preferred social media platforms. The problem is that the recommended channels have changed. Instead, these mediums are a hybrid of television, print, and radio.

Meet Gen Z where they're at - and bring your stakeholders with you.

1 - Get the UX right the first time

An excellent user experience is one that the user finds meaningful and relevant. To do this, designers and developers must examine all of the product's practical and experience features, from branding and design to usability and troubleshooting. When it comes to Gen Z, they know a good UX when they see it - and they'll quickly forget anything that doesn't fit their expectations. From a (higher) education marketing perspective - consider your application and enrollment process. Is it simple? Is it fun? Is it engaging? Make sure that the process is seamless and always focused on the prospective student.

2 - Remember the offline experience too

Even though this is a Generation that grew up in the throes of social media, they still value some offline interaction - they are human after all. These digital natives are adept at separating themselves from their digital and physical selves, and the distinction can and should be leveraged. With this in mind - it's certainly worthwhile to create events for potential students so that they can get a taste of what campus life is like. They value experience, so give it to them. Keep your communication #studentlife focused.

We all want to feel like we are a part of something - regardless of what year we were born. It is human nature to want to feel that we're a part of something bigger than ourselves.

3 - The balancing act continues

Gen Z is affected by "30-second soundbites," rather than "in-depth research," as previous generations were.

As a result, viewers are frequently exposed to only one side of a subject. Marketers should consider engaging consumers in a timely and digital manner while maintaining a balanced perspective. Consider how you may contribute to the fight against fragmentation. Incorporating a varied range of voices and experiences into promotional materials could be an excellent method to do this.

Closing thoughts

As the next generation of consumers, Gen Z is more attuned to brand values than ever before, thanks to their extensive use of mobile and social media. To successfully connect with this young and socially conscious population, businesses need to be mindful of their web presence and avoid any unfair market practices or inflammatory statements. As more Gen Zers enter the workforce and become key influencers in the market, their impact on sales and marketing will only continue to grow.

What works?

- Influencers are their celebrities
- Let Gen Z speak to Gen Z
- Trust and authenticity are crucial
- Communication requires precision

Gen Z is a refreshingly informed generation. They set a new standard for the businesses from which they purchase. You must win their trust because they must believe in your product and mission. Then and only then will Gen Z reward you with their patronage and loyalty.

They have high expectations, but we believe it will be a positive change.