The first generation of the 21st Century has arrived!

By Sarah Sladek and Alyx Grabinger
A new generation forms every 15 to 20 years in American culture, shaped largely by important world events and evolving cultural trends. These are the paradigms that define the attitudes, behaviors and values of each generation.

Now, marketers and generational professionals have turned their attention to Generation Z (1996-2009)—the oldest of whom will turn 18 this year—to gain a better understanding of what will define and drive this next generation of workers and consumers.

XYZ University spent the last six months researching Gen Z and our findings have been nothing short of fascinating. Personally, I’m intrigued by this generation’s influences because I have two Gen Z children. Professionally, I’ve studied generations for 12 years and I think it’s safe to say the arrival of Generation Z will be unlike any other.

It’s appropriate that Gen Z is named after the last letter in the alphabet because their arrival marks the end of clearly defined roles, traditions and experiences. After all, Zs are coming of age on the heels of what has been referred to as the most disruptive decade of the last century.

To start, the concept of family has changed. Whereas Gen Xers and Ys were born into a new career era that saw the rise of women educationally and professionally, Zs have been born into a new family era in which highly involved Dads help out at home. One in seven stay-at-home parents today is a Dad, compared to one in 100 in 1970. According to The Curve Report, 85% of Gen X and Y Dads say that they actively share the household chores and childcare duties with their spouse.

Zs are the first generation made up of the children of three generations of parents (Boomers, Xers and Ys). In addition, the concept of family is more diverse than ever, with the nuclear model representing only one-fifth of American households and alternative lifestyles becoming more widely accepted.

Since most Zs are the children of Gen Xers, it’s interesting to reflect on the Xer style of parenting as the generation defined by its independence and anti-status quo approach to life. Xers have lived through four recessions, struggled with debt and watched the most educated and accomplished generation of all time (Gen Y) also graduate into a recession and lifetime saddled with debt. As a result, Xers are likely to encourage their Zs to be realists, to not follow the traditional paths of education and careers, and to expose themselves to varied experiences, draw their own conclusions—find their own way.

Generation Z will largely be responsible for confronting the aftermath of the financial crisis, high youth unemployment, the effects of climate change and energy sustainability, along with a potential demographic time bomb. Yet this is an extremely resourceful generation that is technologically astute and can create virtual communities at lightning speed.

As the first generation to be born into a world where everything physical—from people to places—has a digital equivalent, Zs will likely “see” a digital layer in all they encounter. They aren’t likely to distinguish the physical world from the digital world, but will simply see them as one.

Gen Z will be faced with a whole new set of privileges and obstacles, including a better understanding of and access to all things digital, and a greatly increased lifespan (National Geographic reported in May 2013 that scientific breakthroughs in longevity could mean that children today may live to be 120 and one out of three children will live to be 100 years old!)

Raised by parents who have encouraged them to celebrate their individualism during an era of tremendous change, Gen Z is believed to possess great leadership skills and drive. With their unique life experiences, skills and values, Z’s arrival to the workplace is certain to create change.

This research paper explores Generation Z in greater detail and provides insight into how this generation will work and what businesses need to be doing to prepare for their arrival.

Time will tell how this generation goes down in history, but we believe Generation Z’s arrival will mark the beginning of the end of the America we’ve always known.

Welcome to the 21st century. This is Generation Z.

Sarah L. Sladek, CEO, XYZ University
Introducing Generation Z: A new generation

A new generation is here—Generation Z. Gen Z acts, thinks and works differently than any previous generation. While that may be frightening to think about, when members of Gen Z are properly engaged and their skills are utilized, they can prove to be exceptionally powerful.

History shows that businesses are slow to react and adapt to new generations; those who want to avoid repeating history and take full advantage of the new generation will begin investing in Gen Z this year as the oldest members turn 18.

Defining Gen Z

Gen Z is comprised of those born between 1996 and 2009. According to the National Center for Education Statistics and the U.S. Department of Education, there are an estimated 57 million members of Gen Z in the United States, compared to 78 million Boomers, 48 million Xers, and 80 million Ys.

Of course, Gen Z is known for being tech savvy, but, more than technology, the members of this generation have been shaped by the crises they were born into: the rise of school shootings, climate change, terrorism and the Great Recession. These dark events have undoubtedly made this generation more cautious and pragmatic, but they have also provided the generation with the inspiration to change the world – and their realistic approach to life is going to allow them to do it.

On the following pages, we explore who exactly Gen Z is, what influences them and how your organization can engage them.

Gen Z is not Gen Y

Make no mistake; we are talking about two entirely different generations here. While it may be easy to lump Gen Y and Gen Z together because both generations are technology-driven, it would be a mistake to think they are the same. Gen Y and Gen Z grew up with two vastly different parenting styles, which affect how they approach problems—both personal and work related.

Gen Y is full of dreamers, Gen Z is full of realists

Baby Boomers raised their Gen Y kids to believe in the American Dream. They encouraged Gen Y to chase their passions and dreams wherever they may lead. Gen X watched Gen Y fail and the economy break down, and have chosen to raise Gen Z more practically. They have taught Gen Z to find what they are good at and to pursue that.
Gen Y was given tools to succeed, Gen Z was taught skills to succeed

Boomers were one of the first generations to be “friends” with their kids. This new dynamic led to Boomers struggling to properly send their kids off to learn to manage the world on their own. Boomers gave Gen Y everything they needed to succeed. One example of this is allowing Gen Y to live at home into their mid- to late-20s. Gen X, however, has been teaching Gen Z skills to succeed on their own. A great example of this is the incredibly high rate of homeschooled Gen Z students (done so by their Gen X parents). Gen X is teaching their children how to survive and adapt—not just how to take tests.

Gen Y is group-oriented, Gen Z is individualistic

With the American Dream alive and well, Boomers had no reason to teach Gen Y about competition. Instead, they taught Gen Y to be team players because if everyone works hard, everyone can win. Gen X witnessed economic distress and realized that not everyone can be winners. They have taught Gen Z to be competitive because only the best can win.

Implications

The generations’ different approaches to life and work have many implications, but there are two that may surprise business: Gen Z is going to lead and Gen Z will bridge the gap between being passionate and making a living.

Gen Y’s team-oriented mindset can prove a challenge when it comes to leadership development. In fact, Gen Y’s aversion to leadership is so strong they seek out companies like Valve that boast boss-free workplaces. Gen Z’s individualistic, realistic and competitive nature makes them strong leaders and since Gen Y doesn’t want the job, all Gen Z has to do is take it.

The school system let Gen Y down. It prepped them to take tests and follow orders, not how to handle real life experiences. Gen Z’s homeschooling and ability to learn something by simply Googling it means they are going to achieve Gen Y’s dream—combining work and passion. Gen Z has been taught the skills to successfully defy the norm, not just talk about it.

Gen Y and Gen Z do share a lot in common because they both grew up in technology-focused worlds, but due to their different upbringings, Gen Z is going to quickly surpass Gen Y in the workforce.
Characteristics of Gen Z

It is easy to quickly judge Gen Z and to fall into the habit of complaining about “kids these days,” but to do this is to choose to overlook new, innovative talent. Generation Z is vastly different than other generations, but different doesn’t have to be a negative quality. Gen Z may have different views, strengths and values, but if businesses take the time to understand these characteristics they can reap the benefits Gen Z has to offer them.

Gen Z is financially conscious

After watching friends and family struggle to find work, lose their homes to foreclosure, and drown in debt, Gen Z is incredibly money conscious. Although the need for instant gratification is common among the generation, it doesn’t seem to apply to shopping; much like Gen Y, Gen Z is content to stall a purchase to take the time to do research. They read reviews, virtually or physically try the product, and scour the internet for the best deals. Here at XYZ University, we conducted a survey of more than 100 parents of Gen Z and confirmed this trend. Our research showed that 59% of parents of Gen Z members consider their children money conscious and a majority of parents revealed that, whether the money be from an allowance or a job, their children are careful with how they spend it. Parents shared that their children weigh the pros and cons before buying, use coupons, and are even inquisitive about the household expenses—not just their own finances.

Gen Z is also painfully aware of, and frightened by, the cost of college. According to TD Ameritrade’s 2nd Annual Generation Z Survey, when asked about their biggest financial concerns, 46% of Gen Z reported that they fear drowning in student debt after graduation. With college costs increasing four times faster than the increase in the consumer price index and Gen Y swimming in student debt, this is a valid concern, but Gen Z is not known to hide from their fears; this generation is full of realists. They recognize that economy is still recovering and that if they want something, they have to work for it. So instead of worrying, they are saving money. The Cassandra Report found that 57% of Gen Z said they would rather save money than spend it immediately. Similarly, a United Nations study found that if given $500, 70% of Gen Z said they would save at least part of it. For a generation that is dominated by those who are not even in high school yet, that is truly forward thinking.

Gen Z is global-minded

Gen Z uses social media to connect with people around the world; our Parent Survey found that despite their young age, 34% of Gen Z is connecting online with friends in other states and 13% are connecting with friends in other countries.

These connections between cultures have proven to be very powerful. On a small scale, friends can share videos, photos and messages across their networks to make large groups aware of situations, good or bad, that are happening across the world. On a bigger scale, this connectedness has led to youth coming together to take on global issues. In December 2012, the Global Youth Forum took place in Bali. Over 650 young people, joined by over 2,500 virtual youth delegates, presented recommendations for future global policy development to government, NGO, UN and private sector representatives from 180 countries. These recommendations formed the Bali Declaration—a groundbreaking document that went directly to the Secretary General to help shape the future development agenda. Gen Z is not taking their connectedness for granted; instead, they are using it to help change the world.

What this means for businesses: Quality products and services at competitive prices are the only way to reach Gen Z.
Gen Z is lacking work experience

According to Renée Ward, founder of Teens4Hire, a majority of people under 25 have not held a paying job. While the older generations spent their teen years getting job experience, Gen Z is not being given the opportunity. Ward shared just a few, of the many, reasons why Gen Z is not getting work experience.

One of the most visible reasons Gen Z lacks job experience is the automatization of the workplace. Many of the companies that have been known to hire young workers, such as fast food restaurants and amusement parks, are now employing machines to sell meals and tickets. Another reason, although not a bad reason, teens are not getting jobs is due to child labor laws. While Baby Boomers may have spent their teen years in factories, today, many retail stores require workers to be 18. Finally, jobs that used to be seen as work for teens are getting scooped up by adults. Recent immigrants are happy to take these jobs and with the recession, many adults, even those past retirement age, are staying in the workforce and picking up second jobs.

What this means for businesses: Do not underestimate the power of Gen Z. Just because this generation spends a lot of time looking at screens does not mean they are not networking. Businesses need to encourage Gen Z workers to tap into their networks to come up with creative solutions and ideas for their brands.

Gen Z is tech savvy

Members of Gen Z are society’s true “digital natives.” Our Parent Survey revealed that 50% of Gen Z has their own tablet and 33% have their own smartphone. A Wikia study found that all of Gen Z (100%) is connected online for 1+ hours per day, but 46% are connected 10+ hours per day. Technology means something different to Gen Z than it does to older generations.

To Gen Z, technology is more than just a tool—it is a part of who they are. Their ability to use technology to expand their minds and fuel societal change is empowering to them. It defines who they are and why society needs them. To Gen Z, their gadgets and profiles are simply extensions of themselves.

What this means for businesses: Don’t try to rid workers of their technology, instead businesses need to get creative and find ways to use Gen Z’s gadgets to their advantage.
Importance of Gen Z

Businesses made the mistake of ignoring the incoming generation before; now, entire industries are struggling because Gen Y (1982-1995) is reluctant to work with companies that are not interested in adapting to their needs. Businesses that don’t want to repeat this mistake are beginning to pay attention to Gen Z today. It is important to recognize that the members of Gen Z are not just kids; they are kids who hold the power to make or break companies in two ways: employment and influence.

Employment

The eldest members of this generation turn 18 in 2014, which means they are starting to consider careers. Now is the time for businesses to start making themselves appealing to this generation.

No business is going to escape the need to adapt. As society changes, businesses change; companies are going to have to create new positions they had never considered before in order to survive in an ever-changing society. To illustrate this point, consider that some of today’s most in-demand jobs – mobile app developer, sustainability expert, user experience designer, etc. – did not exist 10 years ago; and now, Cathy N. Davidson, professor of English at Duke University, predicts in her book “Now You See It” that 65% of children entering school today will work in jobs that do not currently exist. Members of Gen Z are assets that many industries don’t even know they need yet.

Influence

Gen Z may be smaller than any of the other generations, but their influence exceeds their size. Due to their exposure to so many brands on a daily basis—banner ads on mobile apps, suggested posts on social media, commercials, etc.—Gen Z has become a group of demanding consumers. While being demanding does not equate to having influence, being demanding and being constantly connected to the world does. If Gen Z has a good or bad experience with a company, they are not going to keep it to themselves; they are going to tell the world. They are going to share their thoughts via mobile, social media, and the internet.

Perhaps even more significant than Gen Z’s online influence, is their influence over their parents. According to a recent study by Nickelodeon, more than ever before, kids are influencing family purchasing decisions. The study found that in the U.S., 71% of parents solicit and consider their kids’ opinions when making purchases. Even when considering a purchase for themselves, 28% of U.S. parents confer with their children. Given the power and influence Gen Z has, it would be careless for businesses to ignore them.

Kids’ Influence in the U.S.
Statistics provided by Nickelodeon

- 2/3 of parents agree that they are closer to their children than their parents were to them.
- 83% of parents consider their child to be one of their best friends.
- 71% of parents solicit and consider their kids’ opinions when making purchases.
- 95% of parents seek their kids’ opinions when buying products for them.
- 28% of parents seek their kids’ opinions when buying products for themselves.
Get to know the generations

In addition to the characteristics we’ve outlined on the previous pages, the chart below gives you a snapshot of generational characteristics, how they are different and the problems each of them are facing now.

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<td>Born</td>
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<td>self-reliant,</td>
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<td>Why they are the way they</td>
<td>The wealthiest, healthiest, largest generation of their time. Raised to pursue the American Dream.</td>
<td>Children of workaholics and divorce, the arrival of cable television and computers. Raised to be self-sufficient.</td>
<td>Micro-managed by their parents, technology, always rewarded for participation. Raised to be high achievers.</td>
<td>Raised in a culture of fear, mobile technology, helicopter parents, social media.</td>
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<td>Communication styles</td>
<td>Prefer detailed dialogue in-person or via phone. Appreciate meetings. Believe no news is good news.</td>
<td>Prefer close, concise communication—not over-explaining, clichés or corporate jargon. Prefer e-mail.</td>
<td>Prefer frequent feedback and problem-solving via technology instead of phone calls or meetings.</td>
<td>Prefer visual communication via technology instead of in-person meetings. Expect to be able to communicate whenever and wherever they want.</td>
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<td>Problems they are facing now</td>
<td>Dwindling retirement funds, job dislocation, rising health care costs or inadequate health care coverage.</td>
<td>Debt, caring for young children and aging parents, balancing life and career, stuck in middle management.</td>
<td>Debt, unemployment, difficulty transitioning from college career, negative stereotypes, being taken seriously.</td>
<td>Finding an identity, lack of job opportunities, the falling apart of the American Dream, being taken seriously.</td>
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<td>Flaws</td>
<td>Have a &quot;been there, done that&quot; attitude, not always open to new ideas.</td>
<td>Have difficulty committing, tend to have a &quot;wait-and-see&quot; approach.</td>
<td>Have short attention spans and high demands and ask &quot;what's in it for me?&quot;</td>
<td>Need for structure, over confident in their knowledge, lack interpersonal skills, expect quick results.</td>
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Gen Z key influences

Gen Z has been shaped by a vastly different environment than previous generations; the economy, technology, society and parenting have all played major roles in influencing this generation. Let’s explore some of these key influences:

The Great Recession has made Gen Z socially aware

Due to the Great Recession, Gen Z has become more socially aware and concerned than any previous generation. After
having to watch friends and family suffer for years, research from psychologists at San Diego State University and the University of California, Los Angeles, found that Great Recession-era high school seniors are more interested in social problems and careers helping others than their counterparts who graduated before the downturn.

Stereotypes of Gen Z make them out to be a selfish, self-centered group, but that is not the case. A study sponsored by the United Nations Foundation found that about seven out of eight children ages eight to 19 give money to charitable organizations. Parrish Ravelli, team leader at Youth Empowered Solutions, shared that members of Gen Z “want to contribute to something larger” and are “committed to seeing things through.”

What this means for businesses: Gen Z wants to shape the world. Businesses should be providing ways for both customers and employees to get involved in community and charity programs.

The economy, internet, and parents have left Gen Z stressed

A recent study by the American Psychological Association found that the ability to manage stress and achieve healthy lifestyles has been decreasing with each generation. If the trend continues, Gen Z will be the most stressed out generation in history – but, that is not surprising; Gen Z has been surrounded by competition their whole lives. With the Recession, only the best and the brightest might land a job, so they need to achieve that 4.0 GPA and pad their resumes. Reality shows are teaching Gen Z that everything – from finding talent to finding love – is a fierce competition and online activities rank everything people do from gaming to the number friends someone has.

Parents of Gen Z kids have augmented this stress by putting their kids in competitive environments since before they were crawling, literally. There are crawling classes. Our parent survey revealed that over 70% of Gen Z has participated in a team activity in which they had to compete for first place and over 54% have competed for first place as an individual.

What this means for businesses: Recognize that Gen Z has had the road to success mapped out for them their entire lives; they need a company structure that makes expectations clear and guides workers from one position to the next.

New norms have left Gen Z struggling for an identity

Society’s shift over the past few decades to become more open and accepting of diversity is a good thing, but it has had one unexpected consequence – it has left Gen Z unable to define themselves. Past generations have defined themselves by gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc., but it is now politically incorrect to use those qualities as the defining characteristics of a person. Teen4Hire’s Ward pointed out that this isn’t only hurting Gen Z on a personal level, but on a business level. Many teens struggle to fill out a résumé because they don’t understand themselves enough to label
their strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes.

Gen Z’s struggle for identity also explains their interest in fame culture. Many of today’s celebrities are simply famous for being famous (i.e. the Kardashians). Gen Z is less interested in a celebrity’s talent and more interested in their personal lives. Celebrities seem to have what Gen Z wants – a fully defined identity – and Gen Z is watching them in order to learn how to define their own identities.

A changing society has made Gen Z health conscious

Childhood obesity has become such a serious issue that it is being attacked from every angle in order to prevent it from getting worse. People like Michelle Obama and Jamie Oliver have changed the school lunch programs and introduced programs addressing childhood obesity and encouraging healthy eating and exercise. In fact Michelle Obama launched the “Let’s Move” campaign which is “dedicated to solving the challenge of childhood obesity within a generation, so that children born today will grow up healthier and able to pursue their dreams.” She has toured schools nationally and appeared several times on Sesame Street and Disney channel. She’s made widespread change from what schools serve for meals to new fitness programs.

Video game companies have even created consoles and games that encourage kids to get off the couch and organizations like The Interagency Working Group on Foods Marketed to Children are proposing guidelines for how companies can market junk food to kids.

All of these prevention efforts have inspired Gen X to raise health conscious kids. Gen Xers are putting their kids in sports and encouraging them to play outside. Gen Z members are being taught to avoid processed food and with the rise of so many organic and healthy food companies, they are being given the access to better choices.

What this means for business: Gen Z will likely be drawn to employers that provide health-centered workplaces with fitness centers, open outdoor green spaces, sports-related activities and benefits, aggressive recycling and environmental programs, organic meals on-site, etc.
Innovation and fast information have made Gen Z creative

Nearly everyone we interviewed for this report agreed on one thing—Gen Z is exceptionally creative. For this generation, both literally and figuratively, the sky is not the limit. For generations, stories illustrated the “future” as a time when people used jet packs, people lived on Mars, and robots roamed. Well, jet packs are set to be sold in the next few years, in 2013, a group looking for volunteers to be the first colony on Mars received 200,000 applications, and robots are so commonplace that there is an International Federation of Robotics. To be cliché, the future is now and Gen Z interprets all this innovation as inspiration.

Another reason Gen Z is so creative is because they have a world of information at their fingertips. Unlike generations past, Gen Z does not have to waste time searching for information; they can find much of what they need to know in a matter of minutes and use the rest of their time to analyze the information and create solutions.

What this means for businesses: Give Gen Z time and freedom to come up with innovative ideas. Use customer creativity to create user-generated content.

Results from our Gen Z Myth-Busting Survey

In order to address some rumors surrounding the characteristics of Gen Z, we surveyed those who know the generation best—their parents.

Rumor: Gen Z stays inside and does not spend time outdoors.

Survey Says: False. 96% of parents shared that their kids spend at least some time outside each week and 74% said their children spend more than three hours outside per week.

Rumor: Gen Z does not access information via newspapers or TV.

Survey Says: True. When asked how many hours per week their child spends reading the newspaper or watching television news shows, 54% of parents said their children never use those resources and only 8% said their children use them more than three hours per week.

Rumor: Gen Z lacks social etiquette and manners.

Survey Says: False. When asked if their children understand and use proper social etiquette (speaking with respect, holding doors open for elderly, etc.) and manners (saying please and thank you, placing napkin in lap while eating dinner, etc.), 58% of parents reported their children often do and 39% said sometimes.
Technology has given Gen Z unique learning habits

Gen Z is not the uneducated, detached generation some authors and professors claim they are; instead, it is a generation full of realists. Gen Z is incredibly practical and their learning habits reflect that.

They don’t memorize

Generations past can remember sitting in school memorizing times tables, presidents, and dates; chances are, many of those people can still recite all of that information, but Gen Z is not even bothering to consider retaining it. While that may seem problematic, the fact is, they don’t have to. Gen Z has a world of information at their fingertips; they can simply Google anything they need to know. Instead of wasting time memorizing what they can look up, Gen Z focuses on learning how to find, interpret, and take advantage of information.

They multi-task

When it comes to multi-tasking, Gen Z defies statistics. Past research from the University of Utah has shown that multi-tasking is a myth and that only 2% of the population can successfully multi-task, but Gen Z is baffling scientists. Research by Forrester Research found that 84% of Gen Z multi-tasks with an Internet-connected device while watching TV; predictions suggest they should perform poorly and be distracted, but they survive distraction. Psychologist Larry Rosen of California State University-Dominguez Hills said that he is inclined to believe that some rewiring is taking place, and researchers are trying to determine whether technology somehow causes the brains of young people to be wired differently.

They learn visually

Constant stimulation in the form of video games, YouTube videos and television has created a generation of visual learners. Educators should be employing tools such as interactive textbooks and educational games to meet the visual learning needs of Gen Z.

They don’t verify information

Due to the generation’s tendency to move quickly when online and finding information, they often forget to verify the credibility of what they read and report. These “digital natives” know a lot about how technology works, but they are still kids who need to be shown how the world works. They need to be taught how to manage personal information online, the importance guarding intellectual property, how to determine credibility, and how to protect themselves from online hazards.
How to engage Gen Z

Gen Z is full of good workers, but they can seem difficult to recruit and manage if companies don’t understand how the generation functions. Businesses cannot expect to maintain the same management system and hire around Gen Z’s personality; they need to learn how Gen Z works and adapt to them.

Appealing to Gen Z employees

Build a digital presence

Gen Z sees no distinction between the physical and virtual worlds. If a company is not active online, they assume the organization is non-existent. Companies need to be active where Gen Z is—online. Despite rumors that teens are drifting away from traditional social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, the research suggests otherwise. According to the JWT Intelligence, 65% of those between the ages of 8 and 17 have a profile on Facebook and 26% have a Twitter profile. Businesses need to reach out to Gen Z on these traditional sites as well as the networks that have a concentration of young users—Instagram, Snapchat, Kik, and YouTube.

Give them a voice

Gen Z wants and expects to be heard. Bronwyn Lucas, executive director of Youth Empowered Solutions, shared that Gen Z is engaged and concerned, but they feel “disenfranchised” and like the world has an “us versus them” mentality when it comes to the younger and older generations. Gen Z does not want that. They want a place where they can come together with adults, have their opinions heard and considered, and help make a difference. Companies that listen to Gen Z and allow them to truly contribute to projects are going to gain a lot of loyalty and respect from Gen Z.

Make a community commitment

Gen Z has the motivation and skills to change the world, and companies have the resources to do it. Gen Z loves companies that care enough about making an impact to provide insight and investments to employees to help them make a difference.

Engage via mobile

Companies who want to appeal to Gen Z workers need to go beyond traditional marketing and focus on mobile marketing—traditional marketing does not reach Gen Z. Ben Detofsky, managing director of Youth Marketing Connection, emphasized this point when he shared some of the difficulties companies are having marketing to the younger generations, “They’re mostly looking down, not up... the second screen is here to stay. That’s terrifying for a lot of traditional channels.”

Offer flexible scheduling

Much like Gen Y, Gen Z does not live to work. A healthy work-life balance is not just an expectation for them, it is a requirement. One of the easiest ways for companies to meet this need is to allow employees to work from home.

Provide structure

While Gen Z wants the freedom to work when they want, they need to know what to work toward. Fierce competition, helicopter parents, and systematic schooling have made Gen Z crave structure. Lenore Skenazy, author of “Free-Range Kids:
There needs to be an end to the “doom and gloom” mentality surrounding Gen Z. Focusing on Gen Z's flaws makes it easy to overlook their strengths, of which they have many, and although the majority of the generation isn’t old enough to drive, they are already shaping the world. They are offering suggestions, spending money, and solving problems—all on a global scale.

It would be careless of businesses to ignore the influence and power this generation has currently and is going to have in the future. Gen Z is here and it is up to businesses to decide whether they are going to adapt or perish.

Accept authority indifference

Gen Z is indifferent to authority. They have grown up being taught that everyone’s opinion is worth considering and that everyone is equal. A majority of Gen Z considers their parents their best friends. Many schools encourage students to call their teachers by their first names. Gen Z even engages with government officials and the police on a daily basis via Twitter. Businesses need to understand that this indifference is not an act of defiance; it is a willingness to collaborate and work with anyone.

Provide feedback

Annual or even quarterly reviews are not going to be enough for Gen Z. After growing up with games and toys that provided them with instant results, this generation craves constant and immediate feedback. While this may seem like a negative quality, it is not. They want feedback not because they are self-centered, but because they want to assess the success of their work. They want to know what worked, what didn’t, and what they need in order to do better. Gen Z willingly seeks out change if it means better results.

Create work teams

Gen Z has spent their entire lives collaborating. They run all their ideas by family, friends, and like-minded strangers on the internet and when they need help, they reach out to their online communities. In the workplace, they are going to rely on these same tactics. Businesses that put Gen Z workers in tight-knit groups are going to tap into the generation’s true potential.

Invest in teaching behavior

It is well documented that Gen Z lacks interpersonal skills; they are not unwilling learners, they have just not needed the skills to get by in life. This generation is going to need ongoing guidance in customer service and interpersonal relationships in order to combat their natural tendency to rely on technology for everything. As noted before, the best way to teach Gen Z is not through lecture style lessons; instead, companies need to pair Gen Z workers with a mentor. Mentorships help bridge generational gaps in the workplace and both mentor and mentee can learn from each other.

Adapt or perish

There needs to be an end to the “doom and gloom” mentality surrounding Gen Z. Focusing on Gen Z’s flaws makes it easy to overlook their strengths, of which they have many, and although the majority of the generation isn’t old enough to drive, they are already shaping the world. They are offering suggestions, spending money, and solving problems—all on a global scale.

It would be careless of businesses to ignore the influence and power this generation has currently and is going to have in the future. Gen Z is here and it is up to businesses to decide whether they are going to adapt or perish.
We can help

XYZ University provides next generation intelligence, which helps organizations like yours create environments that thrive on generational differences. We’re a future-focused management consulting company that specializes in helping organizations worldwide engage talent and seize market share among Generations X, Y and Z.

Strategic

You can count on us to prepare your organization for what—and who—comes next. Our services focus on succession planning, engagement and leadership development.

Engaging

Audiences worldwide have described our presentations as hugely relevant, rockin’, and a wake-up call.

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Our interactive education such as on-demand webinars and Next Generation iPortal delivers topics on staying relevant and engaging the next generation.

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XYZ University is a management consulting firm specializing in helping organizations engage the next generation of members, employees, executives and advocates.

About the authors

Concerned about declining engagement in our nation’s membership associations, non-profits, and workplaces, Sarah Sladek, a former marketing and media professional, founded XYZ University in 2002—a management company focused on helping organizations engage Generations X, Y, and Z. Sarah is the author of three books and founder of the RockStars@Work Conference, the nation’s first business conference focused on bridging talent and leadership gaps in the workforce. Her expertise has been featured in international media and she has keynoted more than 100 events. Sarah remains committed to helping organizations engage every generation to thrive and prosper in the new economy.

Alyx Grabinger provided extensive research and interview source gathering for this report. A current communication and journalism student, Alyx is a writer and content project manager. Alyx has worked with many for-profit and non-profit businesses to create and revitalize their website content strategies; she also writes blog posts and web content for businesses all across the United States. To each project, Alyx brings an array of skills, including the ability to effectively communicate across age groups. She is also able to take dense, complex information and break it down into manageable, and understandable, pieces.
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