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Getting to grips with Gen Z

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Just as you've got your head around millennials, it's time to get to know the new kids on the block – Generation Z, the cohort that will make up 40% of all consumers by 2020 according to *Retail Week*.

Born from the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, Gen Z are the first generation to have grown up with the internet their whole lives. In fact, around 24% are using the internet "almost constantly", according to the Pew Research Centre. This cohort are intuitively fluent in social media and technology, meaning their lives are played out in both an online and analogue world, which affects the way they act and the things they do. They are also a generation who are known to be more cautious than their predecessors, who are committed to doing good and want their voices to be heard. This means Gen Z has come of age expecting transparency from the brands they buy from and have a sense of equality and fairness that is even greater than that of millennials.

With these traits defined, it's clear that Gen Z is a tricky to reach audience. But it's by no means a losing battle and here are some key principles that marketers can employ to effectively communicate with a Gen Z audience.

GET NOTICED, FAST

This generation has grown up in a fast-paced world and are used to rapidly absorbing information in bite-sized chunks. They are constantly multi-screening, which means they are continually splitting their attention across multiple channels and absorbing multiple messages. Indeed, according to a recent survey by Alistdaily, 84% of Gen Z respondents claimed to regularly browse an internet-connected device while watching TV.

With the human brain affording newly viewed content an 8-second filter at best (Fast Company 2015), brands need to make sure they grab attention and land their point quickly and concisely. This is not to say that Gen Z don't enjoy longer form content – it just means with so much going on, you need to seed your key messages quickly, to get noticed in the first place.

BE REAL

Gen Z are super sceptical of advertising. They've grown up seeing it everywhere their entire lives. This means they can see right through something that they perceive to be fake or set up. After all, they're adept at manicuring and managing their own personal brand, notably through their own social media content, in the very same way. In a world where so much is staged and curated, showing a side that is natural and authentic is refreshing for Gen Z. They value stories from real people like them, rather than highly engineered and contrived brand stories. So, make sure your brand storytelling is genuine – content needs to be believable and use real people in scenarios that they can relate to.

SHOW YOU VALUE THEM

This generation has grown up in a world where they know full well that a social influencer is being paid hundreds of pounds to try out a new make-up brush – so they're savvy about their own value to brands. They have a perception of what they are entitled to for giving brands their time and attention. In order for marketing to keep its clout, we need to give Gen Z a fair value exchange for interacting with brands. Something that is of genuine use to them, or that empowers them. Or, at the very least entertains.

INVOLVE THEM

This generation have all the tools they need to express themselves and to be creative. They want to participate, so provide Gen Z with engaging brand experiences.

Let them make branded moments their own, for instance through personalising products or putting their own mark on brand experiences. The brands that actively seek Gen Z's opinions and include them in key decisions will benefit. Not only will it mean this cohort are more likely to purchase your products, they are also more likely to become a brand advocate and spread the word.

SHOW YOU STAND FOR SOMETHING

Gen Z want to make the world a better place; they want to do good and are more socially conscious than any previous generation. Omnipresent social media access means they can be exposed to all sides of an issue and expressing an opinion or showing they stand for something is as easy as a click of a button or a status post. This means Gen Z are switched on to what is going on in the world and deeply aware of causes, and they expect brands to be clued up too. In fact, according to a recent poll by millennialmarketing.com, 60% of Gen Z respondents expect their brands of choice to take a stand on the causes that they believe in. Yet this also comes with a Kendall-Jenner-for-Pepsi caution, as brands that do not fully commit to an issue will alienate Gen Z, and activity that smacks of being inauthentic will do more harm than good ■

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