

Gen Z Takes Over the Video Buzz

The newest generation isn't easily impressed. What can broadband providers do to win over these skeptics?

By Michael A. Kashmer / *Digital Broadband Programming Consultant*

Gen Z has replaced the millennial generation as the next big thing for marketers, cultural observers and trend forecasters, as Alex Williams of The New York Times observed in late 2015. The oldest members of this group are barely out of high school, but today's tweens and teens are gearing up to be tomorrow's major influences.

A few highlights of this highly consumer-centric group:

- Gen Z is the first nonwhite-majority U.S. generation.
- Forty percent of U.S. consumers will be part of this generation by 2020. (Source: U.S. Census)
- Gen Z-ers, like the millennials, are accustomed to being coddled. They are told they "deserve" lavish goods and services.
- Gen Z-ers have no particular attachment to traditional media and its advertising messages. The Harris Poll took an in-depth look at brand equity and found that the younger the respondents, the less likely they were to identify ABC, CBS or similar brands.

Joan Sinopoli, vice president of brand solutions at Nielsen, which owns the Harris Poll, predicts that Gen Z will be the real disrupter. Advertisers finally got their hands around the millennials, and here comes a bigger, richer generation to tackle!

This fresh batch of consumers, now in their tweens and teens, have already become steady moneymakers for brands worldwide. Competition for the Z's from foreign companies, such as Lego and Nintendo, is fierce. Some advertisers will count on consumer traits that have already been identified and can be applied to this new generation.

That would be easy – but wrong.

Gen Z-ers challenge brands that don't offer connected experiences, technical excellence and full transparency. They understand that everything is knowable. They are not interested in ambiguous branding or inauthentic statements. This dynamic generation is devising another way to look at culture and values. Sunlight is cleansing.

Products that succeed with this generation can be taken apart, and pieces can be moved around and reassembled, like Lego or Minecraft projects.

For a firsthand look at this experience, stop by a local Lego camp, and observe how the kids are playing. Older kids easily show younger ones how things work and help them if they get stuck. The same blocks are used over and over to build imaginative designs. First the campers copy the design

as it appears on the box and in the directions. Soon they start building new, more personal projects. The creativity is astounding, and the interaction among ages helps kids teach and/or learn. Everyone participates. Everyone learns.

REACHING OUT TO EAGER Z-ERS

Employers have already started reaching out to post-millennials. In a recent article, Chicago Tribune reporter Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz told how an internship for Evon Lopez, a 16-year-old high school junior, with a Chicago-area health care provider reinforced Evon's interest in engineering.

Broadband providers could follow this lead. Smart employers are appealing to high school students with versions of internships normally reserved for college students. By extending these opportunities to high schoolers, companies offer a head start to advanced learning.

Imagine the excellent press coverage for a broadband company that offers high school internships at its local properties. After decades of poor customer service, bad press and rising cable rates, the industry could benefit from this positive, forward-looking tactic.

Marketing to Generation Z requires advertisers to tune in to this generation and in some ways leave millennials behind. Digital broadband companies are in a sweet spot to market to this youthful generation. The foot is already in the door with broadband entertainment screens, increasingly faster internet speeds and cool content that flirts with virtual reality and 3-D.

Millennials use three screens on average. Gen Z-ers use five, and they expect brands to follow them seamlessly across digital and mobile platforms. The message needs to be quick, to the point and in Z-ers' language. Z-ers have attention spans that average about eight seconds. They are used to processing and filtering enormous amounts of information. To nurture their attention, advertisers communicate with "snackable content," a wonderful term.

Generation Z will be in charge until the next wunderkinds roll into town, just as the generations before them did. ❖

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