

Advertising for the Woke Generation

In the current times, Gen Z or the ‘woke’ generation is seen to have become extremely conscious regarding their surroundings and tend to develop opinions on the same. It seems that being called the ‘woke generation’ has become extremely important for them as they struggle to come to terms with the flaws of the society that they have inherited from their predecessors. ‘Woke’, an American term that refers to a heightened awareness of issues concerning social and racial justice, is now part of the Gen Z lingo and has come to mean sharp social consciousness.

Millennials long were known as the altruistic generation but Gen Z seems to have surpassed them. Millennials, after all, were raised during the boom times and relative peace of the 1990s, only to see their sunny world dashed by terrorist attacks, recessions, and social clashes that seem questionable at all levels.

A millennial is anyone born from 1981-1996. Generation Z, on the other hand, consists of anyone born from 1997 to date. One might think that with a one-year gap between millennials and Generation Z, there isn’t much of a difference, but that would be wrong. Working in advertising, marketers and ad agencies must understand the differences between these two generations and how they consume content to effectively market to each.

It can easily be assumed that millennials are constantly attached to their phones, and while a large portion of millennials are, marketers have to remember that the oldest millennials are 39 years old. This is not to say that this specific age group isn’t tech-savvy, but they are not at par with younger millennials or Gen Z.

According to USC Dornsife, only 23% of millennials are “extremely tech-savvy and heavily consume streaming content and online video content.” The study goes on to explain that out of all millennials, only a mere 15% are genuinely engaged online.

So, this brings the question of how to capture their attention when so few are engaging with content. The key is to target millennials by appealing to their wants.

Let’s look at some strategies which can be helpful in marketing to the Gen Z:

Experiences over products: Members of Gen Z aren’t interested in hard sell. Because they’ve grown up with the internet, they’re immune to obvious marketing campaigns. They don’t want to hear about why a certain product is so amazing; instead, they want to know how it will benefit them. More specifically, what *experience* will the product bring them is what they want to know. According to Mention, 25% of what you sell is your product. The additional 75% is the intangible feeling that comes with the said product.

Find Gen Z in their natural habitats: Without any argument, Gen Z’s favourite sites are YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. Marketers need to start at these platforms for research from where all the various information can be found easily. Accordingly, brands can chalk out strategies based on the trends and requirements of these consumers. These three sites all emphasize visuals and allow videos, suggesting that Gen Z prefers to watch instead of read. The success of the visual social media sites shows that Gen Z responds well to video blogs, photography, online comics, GIFs, and memes.

Brand purpose is needed: According to the MNI study, 68% of Gen Z say doing their part to make the world a better place is important, and 56% consider themselves socially conscious. Similarly, they

expect their brands to do the same. A National Retail Federation report shows that 55% of Gen Z choose “brands that are eco-friendly and socially responsible.” Hence, to appeal to Gen Z, brands need to stand up for social and/or environmental issues. In other words, brands need to do more than just earn profits. Diversity in a brand’s media can go a long way. Gen Z is itself the most diverse generation to date, with an innate awareness of how race, gender, and sexual orientation are depicted or *not* depicted. While these may be hot-button issues for older consumers, for Gen Z they’re commonplace. These young minds have grown up surrounded by a diverse range of people, so it seems strange and unappealing to them if a brand’s media is not.

Short video is a hit: In Gen Z marketing, video is king. A Think with Google study revealed that 71% of Gen Z spend more than 3 hours every day watching online videos, whether social media videos or streaming TV/movies. That statistic also refers to more than 3 hours of watching videos on mobile devices per day. But not just any video will do. Brands should stick with short-form video, considering the dwindling attention spans of every new generation which is now only 8 seconds. Quick, bite-sized videos are most effective, or else the risk of getting skipped is high. Also, the content in the video being relevant is equally important. The content should depend on the brand and which Gen Z groups it is targeting.

*Thin line between personalization and privacy: Respect for privacy is highly important to Gen Z. They want brands to respect their online privacy, but also want personalized ads. That’s an overwhelming thin line that brands need to determine. Data reveals that 88% of Gen Z say that “protecting my privacy is very important to me,” and 44% of Gen Z expect advertising to be relevant to them. The only logical solution is to ask Gen Z whether or not they want to opt for personalized ads. Sites geared towards younger audiences are offering more customization options when it comes to online data, leaving the responsibility in the user’s hands. The critical factor for marketers here is to make the right choice. Using their data for personalized ads with their permission seems to be a good idea but using their data *without* their permission might not be.

Hence, in a nutshell, marketers and brands need to keep an open mind. While millennials and Generation Z might seem similar, it is a whole new ball game that needs a separate plan. Social media seems to be the major place to garner the attention of both generations, but the approach to each generation needs to be different. Marketers need to think of unique and relevant content to put in front of them to catch their attention in a matter of seconds.
