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Marketing to Gen-Z Business Owners

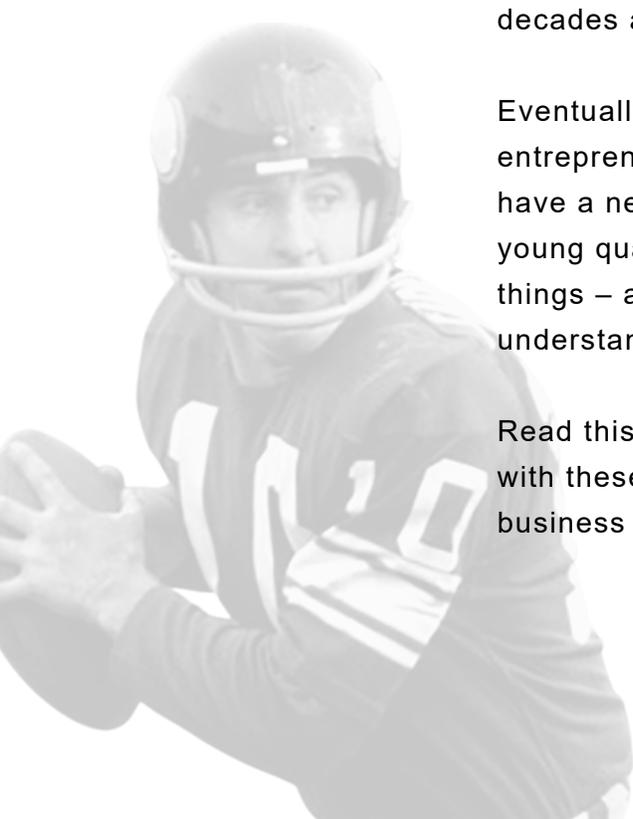
Takeaways

- The Different Priorities of Gen-Z
- How Gen-Zs Communicate

When I was drafted into the NFL, just 21 years old, I wanted to learn, and that meant making connections with other quarterbacks. When we were playing the Bears, I requested a meeting with the legendary Hall of Fame quarterback Sid Luckman, who had won several championships in the 1940s. He took the time to get to know me, to understand me, and we ended up developing a relationship; every time I played in Chicago, he would come up and spend a day with me, and during the offseasons I would go visit him for several days. I had so many questions, and he helped me learn how to be an NFL quarterback, even though we were decades apart and played completely different styles.

Eventually I became the veteran mentor, and today I'm the experienced entrepreneur, watching and working with new business leaders. Now we have a new generation rising, Gen Z, and just like me when I was a young quarterback taking on the world, they have their own way of doing things – along with so much ability and potential and such a deep understanding of technology.

Read this article for insights into how you can make real connections with these young leaders, and how they might change the world of business in years to come!



Marketing to Gen-Z Business Owners

Every generation of business owners presents a fresh set of challenges to vendors. If you're wondering how to appeal to Generation Z owners (born after the year 1996), there are two key principles to remember.

First, much of what you read in the mainstream press regarding Gen-Z purchasing habits spills over into their entrepreneurial subculture. As native-speakers of modern technology who grew up with smartphones and tablets, Gen-Z owners don't grapple with the information gap of previous generations. If they're interested in your company, they are likely to approach you after they complete their own (extensive) research—somewhat like a background check.

They're also likely to have different priorities in vendors. Price, effectiveness, and relevance still matter, but not like they used to. This generation is far more interested in a vendor's values. If they take interest in your company, expect them to seek confirmation your company is aligned with their convictions in a verifiable way. Brands like Nike and Kylie Cosmetics rediscovered this on the consumer side, making direct appeals to Gen-Z's values. So when you're talking to Gen-Z decision makers, consider that same dynamic.

In some ways, Gen-Z is like any other generation: speak their language, in their context, and you'll succeed in appealing to them. What's different is the ease with which they verify the authenticity of the message you send. No longer can a vendor pay lip service to a social or political cause, as they might have in the past. If you're going to broadcast a message to align yourself with Gen-Z buyers, be prepared to back it up with actions and a track record. (Or, at the very least, be prepared to admit that you haven't given it the attention it deserves, and make a pledge to correct it.)

The Different Priorities of Gen-Z

While some of what the media says about Gen-Z is true, don't believe everything you hear. The truth is more complex, and if you find a way to connect with them effectively, you'll adapt to the differences and befuddle competitors.

One young entrepreneur we interviewed prefers companies he can research independently, without spin or bias. “The first thing I look for is whether any friends have success with something,” he said. “If it works for people close to me, I’m more open to what authority figures say. If both of those line up, then I’ll do research and read reviews.”

Thus, the vendor who focuses on customer experience, aligns with influencers, and receives positive reviews should attract Gen-Z clients.



Gen-Z places a premium on remaining true to their identity. This can often be seen in just a glance! For example, older generations still expect to “dress up” for sales meetings, putting on coats and ties. With younger generations, and especially Gen-Zers, people will often walk into a presentation with a more casual wardrobe and visible tattoos and piercings. They don’t change who they are to suit the occasion.

But don’t mistake this attitude for a demand to lower standards or a lack of respect. Instead, it represents a deep respect for authenticity.

Gen-Z owners carry openness and curiosity characteristic of people in their late teens and early twenties, particularly if the solution you present speaks to their interests, passions, and morals. If you appreciate the same movements they do, speak to their peer groups, and show up as your true self, word about you is likely to spread among younger circles.

How the Zs Communicate

To dispense with the obvious, you won’t reach many Gen-Z owners on traditional media like television, radio or print magazines.

But social media has also grown more complex. Simply running ads no longer does the trick. Gen-Z has grown up with such a plethora of round-the-clock content that they developed an expectation of being entertained. For the past decade, the popularity and effectiveness of video-driven marketing rose consistently, year-over-year. It’s hardly a coincidence that those same years represent the coming-of-age of Generation Z.

Moreover, Gen-Z expects to see people who look like, think like, and act like them featured in advertising. If, as on the consumer side, they’re tightly wound to inclusivity, diversity, and respect and engagement from brands for the social issues they care about, you should anticipate similar demands from Gen-Z entrepreneurs.

A third major difference benefits vendors who exhibit purpose in what they do. Accelerating the standards set by their Millennial forebears, Gen-Z owners easily detect vendors who just want to make a sale. They're way ahead of their time when it comes to spotting transactional marketers.

"Automated approaches turn me off," said another young owner. "If you show that you've done research and understand the problem, I'll listen. But if you don't bother asking any questions, it's a non-starter. And even if you do ask questions, I'm going to pay attention to the kind of questions you ask."

By contrast, the more time vendors take to think through each syllable of their vision, mission, and values, and the more they express it effectively in their marketing and avoid appearing sales-y, the more Generation Z owners appreciate the effort.

Author Donald Miller says marketing is similar to music. It's why most marketing looks and feels as awkward as a beginner trying to play their first song on a new instrument. While good marketing has always stood out in each generation, no generation in history has grown up like Gen-Z, with the sheer volume of messages appearing every few seconds, in the palms of their hands, every waking moment of their lives. Vendors simply need to do better—much better—at communicating.

If this is true, we must dedicate ourselves to becoming better "composers" (communicators).

If your symphony (strategy) could use an upgrade to reach younger generations, schedule a conversation with a member of our business development team!



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Hannah Wohlfahrt manages marketing projects for Tarkenton's partners, in addition to overseeing our own marketing efforts. She works with partners to identify marketing needs and propose solutions, and organizes internal teams to plan out and execute these projects. Hannah joined the Tarkenton team in 2023, bringing years of marketing, communications, and media experience. With strong communication skills, she specializes in making marketing visions come to life.