

DMNews

How to reach Generation Y

Lauren Bell August 14, 2008

Generation Y, echo boomers — the moniker varies. Whatever you want to call them, today's tweens, teens and 20-somethings are an important — and challenging — group for marketers. Loosely defined as the generation born from 1980 to 1994, Generation Y represents a huge marketing opportunity due to its spending power, estimated at more than \$170 million annually, according to Harris Interactive. Its members are tastemakers who influence the spending of friends and family, and they are at an age when lifelong brand loyalties are built.

Of course, not all aspects of Gen Y are positive for marketers — these young, savvy consumers can be difficult to reach. “[Millennials] simply receive quite a lot of media every day through myriad platforms simultaneously, so reaching them is very difficult,” points out Samantha Skey, EVP of strategic marketing for Alloy Media & Marketing, which focuses on targeting millennials. “They are media-savvy and can edit out things that they feel are not relevant.”

Their wide age span, divergent interests and immersion in multiple, overlapping media make millennials nearly immune to generic, mass marketing strategies. So what's a marketer to do?

Some tips to reach this young, savvy crowd:

Support, but don't capitalize. Members of Gen Y are known for throwing personal support behind preferred ideas and causes, says Issa Sawabini, a partner at Fuse Marketing, a youth marketing agency. “It's great if you can come in and support something they're passionate about, but if you're not [doing] it in a credible, authentic way, they will pick up on it, and you're better off picking a different platform,” he says.

Craft campaigns to fit emerging behavioral patterns. “You need to observe the way they are consuming media and feed those behaviors,” says Rob Aksman, creative director, Brightline iTV, which has worked on interactive TV campaigns recently for Gen Y-friendly brands, such as Axe. “[This generation is] creating the new, personalized communications and entertainment framework, so you need to design a campaign that is dynamic and personalized.”

Segment within the group. “Look at their life goals and where they are going,” explains Carol Setter, SVP of strategy for agency WhittmanHart Interactive, who points out that college-bound students in this age group are different from non-college bound. “Non-college bound 18- and 19-year-olds have different levels of disposable income [from their college-bound counterparts], so we market to them differently,” she adds.

Foster a sense of community. Setter points out that a great many members of Gen Y “have this sense of being part of something bigger. It's part of the millennial fabric — they feel like they are citizens of the US, and citizens of the world out to do some good.”

Make your brand reflect Gen Y's personality. “They have so many different options, their choice will boil down to the brand they feel best represents them,” Skey says. “The focus has to be on value, utility, enhanced communication and enhanced life experiences, because that's what this group is about.”

Experts point out that perhaps the most important thing to remember about millennials is that despite their aptitude for social networking, they are highly individualistic. Gen Y members have many options available to customize nearly every aspect of their lives, from their clothes to their music collections — and to the way they consume marketing messages. They can make these choices instantly online or on their phones, and, though they often turn to their peers for suggestions, the places where they spend their disposable income is ultimately up to them. So, by speaking to them in the medium they want, respecting their tastes and offering them something that feels more like entertainment and less like marketing, marketers can capture Gen Y's attention.