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Time to get familiar with Gen Z

Here are eight things you should know about this up-and-coming group of shoppers

Rosalind Stefanac | January 03, 2019

WELCOME TO THE FIRST GENERATION OF CONSUMERS WHO

have grown up in a 24-hour news cycle and have never known a world without high-speed internet. Generation Z (roughly those between the ages of seven and 24), expect to be connected at all times, so it's no wonder this group has some unique shopping traits and retail expectations. Here's what the experts say every grocer should know in order to appeal to a Gen Z crowd.

They expect seamless service

As a generation that sees physical and digital retail as intertwined, Gen Zs use their smartphones even when they're shopping brick and mortar, says Katherine Cullen, director of retail and consumer insights at the U.S.

National Retail Federation (NRF). "It's not online versus offline, but rather about how to move easily throughout both environments," she says. Gen Zs expect to use their phones while shopping to look up deals and product information—and they won't stand for shoddy technology either. In fact, according to the 2017 *Uniquely Gen Z report*, which NRF produced in partnership with IBM, 62% of Gen Zs will not use an app or website that is hard to navigate, and 60% won't use one that's too slow to load.

They're all about sharing

As "digital natives" they want to be able to immediately share their opinion on products and seek feedback from friends, says Cullen. "Unlike millennials who are more apt to write reviews when they're unhappy, Gen Zs will spread their positive experiences with a brand or store, and want to upload videos about their experiences," she says, adding that this group is also more apt to want to be part of marketing campaigns with brands. However, according to the *Uniquely Gen Z report*, only 21% would be willing to share personal life information with a brand and they still value transparency from retailers.

They know their way around a kitchen

Keep in mind that this generation has grown up in busy households, where they're often fending for themselves when it comes to meals. "They have everything accessible on their phones so they don't find cooking as intimidating, and they have better cooking skills than previous generations," says Jo-Ann McArthur, president of Nourish Food Marketing in Toronto. Meal solutions they can handle on their own will be a selling factor for this young group, as will dinner options that can be eaten at various times throughout an evening.

They like leftovers

Given their heightened awareness of food waste, Gen Zs also like leftovers more than other generations. "Super-size options have relevance with this group as they will use half and save the other for the next day," says McArthur. "Manufacturers and retailers should be looking at how to make these leftovers exciting again."



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Cheap snack foods are essential

“Convenience and price reign supreme right now,” says Shelley Balanko, senior vice-president of business development at The Hartman Group, which produced a 2018 report on Gen Z shopping habits. “Even though their parents are doing most of the shopping, 80% still visit a brick-and-mortar store at least a few times a month and they’re huge snackers,” says Balanko. Like typical teenagers they prefer sweet and salty snacks, she says, as well as soda and energy drinks. Sustainability and social responsibility is not as high on their radar yet, but that is expected to change over time.

They need a place to meet

Yes, the Gen Z world is primarily online, but they’re still looking for places to congregate with friends—and given their ages, the grocery store may fit that bill, says Balanko. “They need hang-out spaces and retailers who build relationships with them now will probably capture their dollars in the future,” she says.

They influence their parents

While they’re not doing a lot of the grocery shopping yet, don’t underestimate their influence on choices for the household. According to the *Uniquely Gen Z* report, 77% of them influence their family’s food and beverage purchases. Cullen points out that parents want to give their kids a voice and teach decision-making. “Amazon has come out with a way you can allow your teenager to add or recommend things on your account,” she says. “While this could be a little dangerous, it speaks to the broader idea of involving kids in the household purchases.”

Their shopping habits will change over time

As they progress into different life stages (i.e., moving into higher education and having children) retail preferences will change, say the experts. For example, online shopping is more prevalent in those aged 19 to 24 compared to the 13- to 15-year-old group, according to the *Uniquely Gen Z* report. “It’s all about figuring out how to target them now and then again in the future when they’re more independent,” says Balanko.

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