

# [***How Marketers Can Target Gen Z: Tapping Into Social Media And TikTok***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69N1-KP71-DXVP-54G6-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** The published version of Forbes' CMO newsletter delivers the latest news for chief marketing officers and other messaging-focused leaders to inboxes every Wednesday.

**Body**

**This is the published version of Forbes' CMO newsletter, which offers the latest news for chief marketing officers and other messaging-focused leaders. Click here to get it delivered to your inbox every Wednesday.**

When it comes to messaging today,**social video is king**. According to TikTok, the app had more than 150 million active users in the U.S. in March, and according to testimony from the app s CEO Shou Zi Chew reported by Business Insider, the average user is an adult well past college age. Nine in 10 customers say thatvideo helps them make buying decisions.

No age group consumes more social video media than Gen Z those born between 1997 and 2012.**It s the default for them**. According to Horizon Media s 2023 Gen Z Field Guide, shared exclusively with**Forbes**, 74% of the people in this age group use TikTok as a search platform. More than half 51% prefer it to Google.

Social media so think TikTok and [Instagram] Reels and [YouTube] Shorts is really becoming more like entertainment, said Matt Higgins, head of strategy at Blue Hour Studios, the influencer marketing unit of Horizon Media. It s replacing cable TV, it s replacing channel flipping.

Mastering social video messaging and TikTok is one of many keys to reach Gen Z consumers. But**it isn t just Gen Z**. Horizon s study found that parents of Gen Zers ages 13 to 17 are 20% more likely to say their kids influence the brands they buy. And social video works as a targeting tool for all generations, displaying a more experiential taste of brands, places, restaurants and activities to be shared across generations.

Keep on reading for more on Horizon s Gen Z Field Guide. In the meantime, I ll be pondering how to make TikTok versions of email newsletters. (Suggestions are welcome!)

**TECHNOLOGY + INNOVATION**

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A person walks past a Google logo at a 2018 trade fair in Paris.

AFP via Getty Images

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It s holiday shopping season, and Google isrolling out new featuresdesigned to**help people find deals**. A search for shop deals on both desktop and mobile browsers will pull up a curated page featuring discounts from a variety of retailers. Chrome will also feature a discount tag that shows available coupon codes. The new features also make it easy for a user to get notifications about sales and price drops from this page. These features are brand new, so it s unclear what kind of algorithm is used, but deals searches show both paid and organic results.

Social app**Snapchat is getting into e-commerce**as well. Amazon and Snapchat entered an agreement in whichSnapchat users can buy productsdirectly from the app. The news initially boosted Snapchat s stock price 9%. A similar feature for Amazon shopping debuted on Meta s apps Facebook and Instagram earlier this month. Snapchat has had alargely unpredictable last year, with unsteady ad revenue and layoffs. It s unknown if a shopping platform will make a difference. After all, other social apps have similar Amazon partnerships and TikTok also has its TikTok Shop e-commerce platform.

Shopify has**taken the idea of e-commerce**andshifted it into the actual world. Taylor Swift s Eras Tour merchandise shop has been on the platform since July, helping boost the app s revenues by 25%. At Drake s concerts, a QR code for his store on Shopify was projected on venue walls, and some shoppers received surprise gifts as they ordered. And YouTube celebrity Jimmy Donaldson, or MrBeast, worked on a scavenger hunt event at the Shopify event space in Manhattan.

**BRANDS + MESSAGING**

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SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

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While millions of people young and old spend some of their time living in the virtual metaverse, studies show that bringing**fashion and beauty brands there translates into positive consumer sentiment and real-world sales**. InRoblox s annual Digital Expression, Fashion & Beauty Trends report, three-quarters of Gen Z respondents said they prioritize styling their digital avatar in fashion from a recognized brand. But 84% also said they d be likely to actually wear fashions from that brand in the actual world.

Virtual experiences, ranging from the brand history and side-quest-filledon The Sandbox gaming platform, and theLGBTQIA+ friendly on that platform,which came through a brand partnership with NYX Cosmetics, also**bring brands to where young consumers are**. For Gucci, the partnerships have paid off. A Business of Fashion survey of Gen Z s favorite fashion brands last year ranked Gucci at No. 2.

Climate change is a pressing real world problem, but the dry scientific explanations and ***politics*** around policy shifts have stopped some of the messages from hitting people s ears. A new U.K. campaign, Climate Science Translated,uses stand-up comedians to translate some scientists climate warnings into humorous and easily understood messages.**Will turning climate warnings into irreverent and sometimes profane punchlines work?**British entrepreneur Nick Oldridge, who is working on the campaign with creative agency Utopia Bureau, thinks so, especially because scientists communicate more cautiously and conservatively.

Comedians can speak much more freely, Oldridge said. They don t get shot down like, say, virtue-signaling actors. They can deal with hecklers.

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

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A pedestrian walks in front of the sign in front of Meta headquarters in Menlo Park, California.

Getty Images

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As the 2024 election draws nearer, Metaintroduced new AI policies for political ads. Advertisers**won t be allowed to use the company s generative AI software to create political or social issue ads**for either platform. Advertisers will also have to disclose when they used AI software to create images, video or audio with people doing or saying things they might not have, as well as if the ad shows events that did not take place. Disclosures will not be necessary for generated or altered content that is inconsequential or immaterial to the issue in the ad. Googleannounced similar guidelinesfor political ads in September.

While these guidelines may help control the spread of some misinformation, the bigger question is**how will the companies ensure that all of the guidelines are being followed**.

**ON MESSAGE**

**Horizon Media Pinpoints How To Communicate With Gen Z**

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Matt Higgins and Maxine Gurevich

Horizon Media

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**Gen Z makes up about a fifth of the U.S. population and has $360 billion in disposable income, according to a** Bloomberg**. And, like every young generation society has known, they have their own way of looking at the world and interpreting messages. Horizon Media puts together an annual report on how marketers can best communicate and connect with Gen Zers. Not surprisingly, social media plays an outsized role 89% use social media to discover new content related to their unique passions.**

**Horizon Media gave** Forbes **the exclusive first look at their report, and I talked about it with Matt Higgins, head of strategy at Horizon Media s influencer marketing unit Blue Hour Studios, and Maxine Gurevich, Horizon Media s senior vice president for cultural intelligence. The following conversation has been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.**

**How is Gen Z different from other demographic groups when it comes to messaging and reaching them?**

**Maxine Gurevich:** They are really coming together based on what they love. In tandem with a fragmented media landscape, going niche and being cool is about standing out it s being as unique as you possibly can in order to fit in. Whereas in previous generations, it was kind of about fitting in to connect. In our research, we found that there s pressure now not to fit in, but there s pressure to stand out.

The idea of subcultures is of course not new, but what subcultures used to be about was generally about countering a movement, it was against a mass movement. Subcultures through the lens of Gen Z is not against anything, because actually they don t even believe mainstream culture exists. It is just about coming together based on what they love. There s no counter culture to it anymore. There s no counter movement.

**Matt Higgins:** It s part culture and it s part driven by what Gen Z is looking for, but the changes in these social platforms have kind of matched that to the point where it s almost a perpetuating wheel, where the platforms and technology are kind of driving towards subcultures. We ll sometimes call this the TikTok-ification of social that brought this interest-based feed that drove people down interests that they may or may not have even known that they had.

**There are so many subcultures identified in the report, which adds up to many niche audiences to reach. How are brands handling this kind of challenge?**

**Gurevich:** There s different ways to be tapping into subcultures, depending on the budgets you have at hand. One of the things that we talk about in the report is that first of all, social is a great place to do an understand, test and learn approach. You can put some spend behind a couple of tests across all subcultures with different messages, and then see and understand what s performing the best, and then double down and go bigger across above-the-line creative. So using social as a kind of insights lab to get a sense of which subculture is going to resonate for your audience and your brand message. The other place to start is to understand where these subcultures overlap in interest. Subcultures are not mutually exclusive. Just because you're talking to one subculture, it is absolutely not isolating you from talking to other subcultures. And that s the beauty, and that is why this is not a segmentation, because these subcultures are fluid. They have many cross-pollinating interests, and it s about understanding where those interests collide.

**Higgins:** What we also do when we re working with brands is recommend that they do stick by and participate within these subcultures. We ve used the analogy of an ancestry DNA test, that when you re working against custom subcultures for your brand, can actually use them to inform how you re showing up as a brand across channels, not just social, but everywhere. That helps inform the personality of the brands in some way, too. And then finally, I think just adding to the point that we're using it as a way to differentiate, to be distinct and to stand out through some of these interests and passions. With this way of planning and thinking about who we re trying to reach and how we re trying to reach them, it s not just targeting a subculture, it s actually using it to inspire really interesting ways in to engage with people, too.

**How does Gen Z s reliance on TikTok for search and information inform marketing for all ages?**

**Higgins:** There s so many TikTok experiences where you can see someone actually experiencing different destinations, and you can have kind of a more of a visual and interactive experience versus something to read. I think that s what s driving some of that [Gen Z s reliance on TikTok].

For us, it s definitely this social-first approach. And I think for for non-marketers, or even at the CMO level, it s about shifting away from having social as a channel that s maybe on page 90 of of a strategy or an annual plan, to thinking about it as being maybe the first point of contact, the first input, what s driving all other channels.

**What s the top advice you would give a CMO based on your findings?**

**Gurevich:** Demographics are dead. It might be scary to embrace other cultures, but don t think that you have to embrace all of them at the same time. It s just a matter of understanding where you have the right to play.

**Higgins:** The way of planning for the year, the way of connecting with people is quite different than it was a few years ago. We think that we ve unlocked we call it a cheat code to build that intuition. What I see is that there's a lot of upstart brands that might be led by Gen Zers that kind of get this or understand it. But we think with this approach, it can build that intuition across an organization for what to create, how to create it.

Things move too fast now to have a three-month process for reviewing a creative concept or a media plan. The brands that are moving faster are getting the benefit of that, because that s how internet culture moves.

**FACTS + COMMENTS**

**The Marvels**, which is the newest installment in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, had the franchise s**worst-ever box office opening weekend**andis being criticizedfor its budget and woke theme of female empowerment.

**$47 million:**Opening weekend ticket sales for**The Marvels**, less than the $55.4 million 2008 opening of Universal Pictures **The Incredible Hulk**

**Over $200 million:** Reported production budget for**The Marvels**

**Audiences are not embracing these stories :** What film consultant David A. Grosstold the about the current wave of female-powered entertainment

**VIDEO**

**From College Fitness Coach To Creating Insanity: Shaun T s Story Is One Of Motivation**

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YouTube

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**QUIZ**

A new eatery**inspired by a hangout from a popular TV show**is opening in Boston. What is the hangout?

A. The Regal Beagle

B. Luke s Diner

C. Central Perk

D. Café Tropical

**See if you got it right .**

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