The generational gap

Understanding differences in generational working styles to maximize team engagement

Table of
CONTENTS

Build smarter, more collaborative, and higher-performing marketing teams.

Today's workforce is just a few years away from spanning *5 generations,*

each shaped by different cultural moments, technologies, and communication habits.

Every generation approaches communication, deadlines, creative work, and feedback differently. These differences directly influence how campaigns are built, how messaging is shaped, how teams collaborate, and how ROI is measured.

When marketing leaders understand how people think and work, they can hire more strategically, create balanced teams, and build an environment where high-quality marketing output happens consistently.

This guide breaks down generational traits, working styles, communication preferences, and strengths to help leaders build smarter, more collaborative, and higher-performing marketing teams.

Note that these behavioral traits within each generation are generalized and may not apply to every member of your team.

Remember: The best way to build a team that performs is to know each team member as an individual, and help them develop and lean into their unique strengths.

THE BABY BOOMERS

Loyal, professional, experienced.

Baby Boomers are often the most experienced members of a marketing team. They bring deep industry knowledge and strong brand stewardship shaped by decades of experience. They value structure, clarity, and professionalism in workplace communication. Boomers are also highly loyal, making them steady anchors in fast-moving environments.

Key insights:

Boomers are the most likely generation to stay long-term at a company (Pew Research, 2024).

65% value stability and strong leadership (Workday, 2024).

70% prefer email or in-person communication rather than messaging platforms (SHRM, 2025).

Boomers are the least likely to prefer informal communication styles or slang (Pew Research, 2024).

58% of Boomers say they feel most confident performing tasks when given structured, step-by-step instructions (AARP Workplace Survey, 2024).

What this means for marketing leaders

Boomers excel in marketing roles that require discipline, accuracy, and consistency. This could include brand governance, compliance reviews, long-standing vendor management, and roles where attention to detail matters.

Their preference for structure means they perform better when briefs, deadlines, and expectations are clearly documented. They are less comfortable with ambiguity, so instructions that lack clarity can lead to slower turnaround times or unnecessary revisions. This also means that language needs to be concise and clear; using slang or unnecessary jargon may unintentionally disengage them from the task or team.

Though the colloquial phrase "ok, boomer" became popular in recent years to denote being out of touch, not all Boomers are dismissive of new tools and technology. In fact, Boomers may be cautious adopters of new tools, but when given training, they often become strong process protectors who help maintain operational stability.

Their experience also makes them ideal mentors for younger team members who may lack historical context or strategic depth.

Maximizing Boomer performance

1 Assign Boomers to roles that benefit from long-term thinking and brand consistency.

2 Provide detailed briefs, timelines, and feedback so expectations are clear from the start.

3 Pair Boomers with younger employees in mentorship roles. This not only allows Boomers to share their knowledge with younger generations, but also encourages a two-way street for Boomer learning, as well. After all, most marketing teams aren't just targeting Boomers; they need to understand what makes every audience tick, regardless of age.

4 Introduce new tools gradually and offer training to ensure adoption feels manageable.

5 Give Boomers ownership of documentation-heavy tasks since they excel in producing clear, organized, and thorough reference materials for the team.
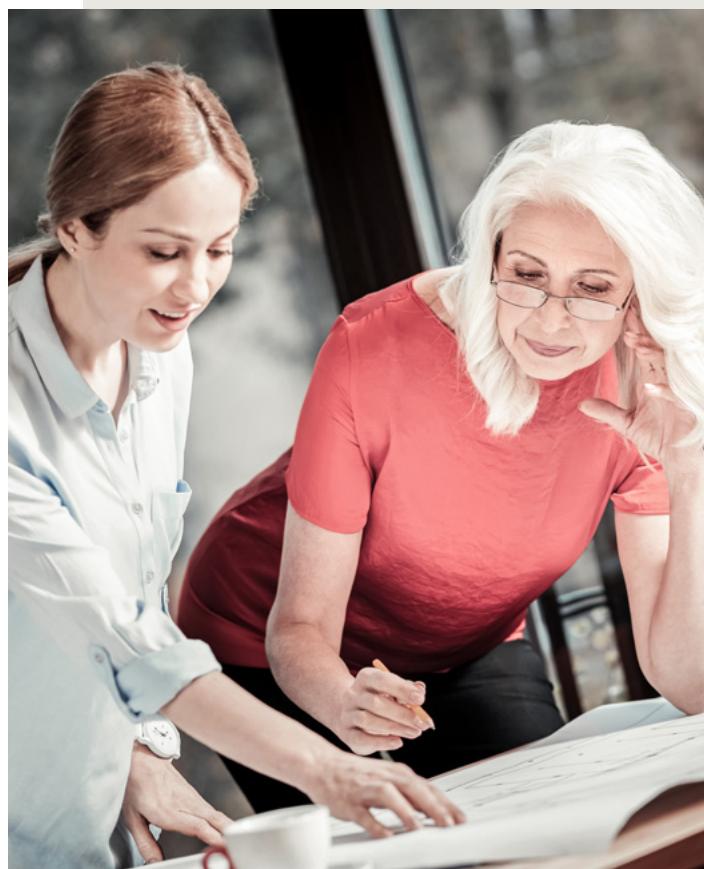
GENX

Independent, pragmatic, strategic.
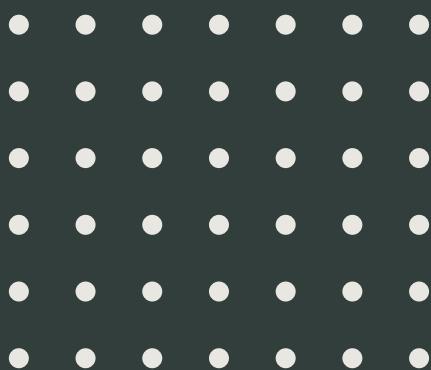
GenX is often the operational backbone of marketing teams. They balance strategic thinking with hands-on execution and are known for their independence, pragmatism, and ability to work across both traditional and digital marketing environments. Many GenXers lead cross-functional teams or act as bridges between senior leadership and younger staff.

Key insights:

72% value autonomy and flexible work setups (Pew Research, 2025).

60% prefer concise digital communication (LinkedIn Workplace Study, 2024).

GenX is the most likely generation to blend analog and digital work styles (Microsoft Work Trend Index, 2025).

GenXers are often described as the "get it done" generation in organizational productivity research.

68% of GenXers say they prefer problem-solving independently before escalating issues to leadership (Gallup Workplace Report, 2024).

What this means for marketing leaders

GenX performs best when trusted with ownership. They prefer clear objectives and the freedom to determine how to execute. This is important to note because over-explaining or micromanaging can have a significant impact on their productivity and engagement; namely, it can reduce their output.

Similarly, if communication is too long or unclear, campaign delays or misalignment are likely to happen. GenXers prefer direct, concise information. After all, they are known as the "get it done" generation; unnecessary delays that impact their own productivity can lead to significant dissatisfaction with their work.

GenXers grew up before the internet and built careers during the digital shift, so they have a unique understanding of both traditional and modern marketing strategies.

This means they have strong instincts around integrated campaigns, cross-channel planning, and balancing brand with performance.

Maximizing GenX performance

1 Provide autonomy with clear KPIs and outcomes.

2 Avoid micromanaging and trust their decision-making capabilities.

3 Communicate with short emails, tight agendas, and clear summaries.

4 Assign them to roles that require strategic planning, cross-functional leadership, and operational alignment.

5 Include GenX in process-building initiatives since they excel at creating repeatable workflows that increase team efficiency.

THE MILLENNIALS

Collaborative, purpose-driven, early adopters.
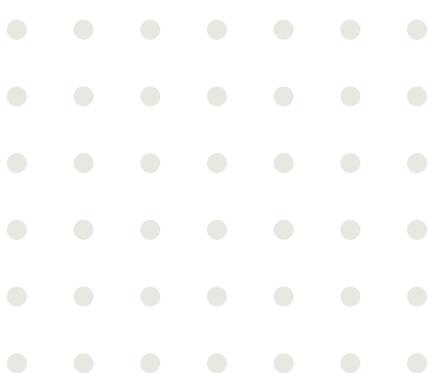
Millennials are the driving force behind modern digital marketing. They are collaborative, purpose-driven, and quick to adopt new technologies. They thrive in fast-paced environments where creativity, innovation, and experimentation are encouraged.

Key insights:

78% choose employers aligned with their values (Deloitte, 2025).

They are the largest share of the global workforce (PwC, 2025).

83% prefer regular feedback from managers (Gallup, 2024).

Millennials were early adopters of social media, automation tools, and digital content creation platforms (SproutSocial, 2025).

71% of Millennials say they are more engaged when working on cross-functional or collaborative projects (Asana Work Index, 2024).

What this means for marketing leaders

Millennials want to understand how their work impacts the business and contributes to brand purpose. If this connection is missing, engagement drops quickly.

They excel in digital-first roles, including social strategy, content creation, automation, paid media, and growth marketing. They are strong adopters of AI and can accelerate martech evolution inside the organization. Don't overlook this as a task that you'll get around to; preparing your tech stack to be AI-ready, and leveraging Millennials to lead the charge, can set you apart from competitors.

After all, Millennials understand digital marketing and appreciate the tools available to provide data-driven insights to maximize performance. This not only offers you benefits as an organization,

but it also presents growth and development opportunities to your Millennial team members.

Worth noting is that a lack of development opportunities or inconsistent feedback can lead to disengagement and turnover, especially because value alignment is a priority. This highlights a need for frequent communication on not just their performance, but also clarity on business goals and objectives, as well as business impact beyond the balance sheet.

The organizations that commit to making an impact beyond the traditional four walls tend to attract and retain Millennials who want to make a difference in today's world.

Maximizing Millennial performance

1 Connect project goals to broader brand and business outcomes.

2 Provide regular coaching, development, and clear growth pathways.

3 Encourage idea-sharing and collaborative brainstorming.

4 Use modern tools, like shared dashboards and project management systems, for transparency.

5 Provide consistent communication. Whether it's feedback about their individual performance or updates about the company and its impact on the community (and beyond), this is information Millennials use to make decisions about their own future.

BORN 1997–2012

GENERATION Z

Authentic, inclusive, digital natives.
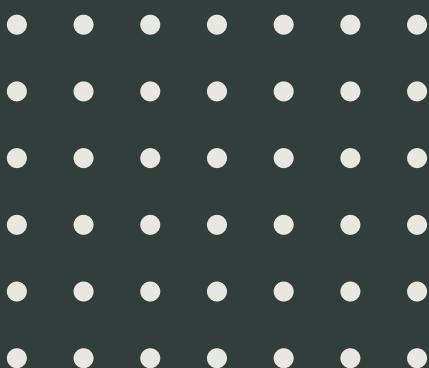
Gen Z is the first fully digital-native generation. They value authenticity, speed, transparency, and inclusivity. They grew up with smartphones, social algorithms, and short-form video, which deeply influences how they communicate and create.

Key insights:

75% use slang, memes, and informal communication online (Today.com, 2025).

53% use TikTok for product discovery, surpassing Google (Forrester, 2025).

90% say diversity and inclusion matter in the workplace (McKinsey, 2024).

74% of Gen Z employees prefer quick, ongoing feedback instead of traditional annual reviews (LinkedIn Workforce Learning Report, 2024).

67% of Gen Zers say they feel more motivated when leaders communicate informally and authentically rather than in a corporate tone (Adobe Future Workforce Study, 2025).

What this means for marketing leaders

Gen Z brings creative energy to content, social media, user-generated content (UGC), and community-driven campaigns. Though they often use memes and slang as their preferred form of communication, marketing leaders shouldn't be quick to dismiss this generation; Gen Z will help teams stay relevant to cultural shifts and emerging platforms.

Gen Z prefers quick, visual communication and can become disengaged if discussions feel too formal or slow. This means leaders should avoid overly corporate language when communicating with Gen Z.

To that point, communication styles may be the place where most challenges arise among the different generations.

For example, Boomers may prefer polished language, while Gen Z leans heavily on emojis and casual tone.

This can create misunderstandings unless expectations are set among the team and are proactively addressed.

Maximizing Gen Z performance

1 Use short, visual communication, such as quick messages or video updates.

2 Create an environment where Gen Z feels comfortable sharing ideas.

3 Involve them in trend identification, UGC strategy, and creative brainstorming.

4 Mediate communication style differences by establishing team norms early.

5 Provide fast-cycle project opportunities since Gen Z performs best with quick experimentation and rapid creative iteration.

GENERATION ALPHA

Highly visual, individualistic, AI native.
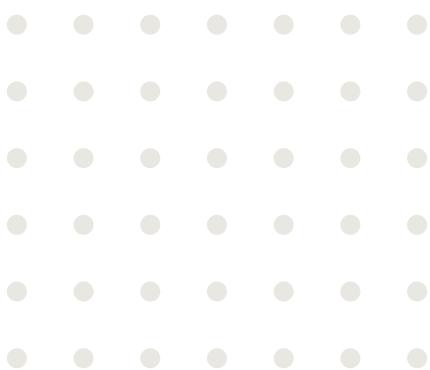
Gen Alpha is still young, yet their influence on marketing is already significant. They are AI-native, highly visual, and accustomed to real-time personalization. The oldest Alphas will enter internships and early jobs in the next 5 to 7 years.

Key insights:

65% of Gen Alphas interact with smart devices daily (Common Sense Media, 2025).

Their slang evolves rapidly through platforms like TikTok and YouTube (Today.com, 2025).

57% of Gen Z expect real-time personalization, meaning Gen Alpha will expect even more (Adobe, 2025).

65% of Gen Alpha regularly use voice assistants like Siri or Alexa, signaling the shift toward voice-led and conversational search behaviors (Common Sense Media, 2025).

71% of Gen Alpha consume most of their content through video-first formats, especially short-form educational or entertainment clips (SuperAwesome Youth Media Report, 2025).

What this means for marketing leaders

Gen Alpha will redefine how people search for information and engage with brands. Their comfort with AI means they will expect automated onboarding, gamified learning, and intuitive collaboration tools as both consumers and future employees.

They will choose brands and employers that use AI responsibly, communicate visually, and personalize experiences at scale.

Marketing teams should start watching Gen Alpha now to anticipate future creative and hiring trends.

Maximizing Gen Alpha performance

1 Track Gen Alpha digital habits, platform usage, and emerging content formats.

2 Experiment with AI content tools, gamified workflows, and short-form storytelling.

3 Build internship and early-career programs tailored to digital-first learners.

4 Prepare internal workflows for more automation, visual communication, and AI integration.

5 Develop early mentorship pipelines so incoming Alphas can learn from older generations while contributing fresh digital insights.

The impact of an effective cross-generational team

Each generation brings unique strengths, communication styles, and work preferences that can elevate marketing teams when used intentionally.

SENIOR MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD:

1 Encourage collaboration by understanding each generation's communication styles and preferences.

2 Leverage each age group's strengths to improve creativity, execution, and ROI.

3 Build psychologically safe environments where every generation feels supported and valued.

4 Hire with intention, recognizing that generational diversity drives innovation and stronger campaigns.

5 Create team norms that proactively address communication differences to prevent misunderstandings and improve cross-generational collaboration.

Marketing success in 2026 and beyond will largely depend on how well leaders understand the people behind the work.

When teams feel **aligned, supported, and empowered**, they produce better campaigns, stronger stories, and higher-performing marketing outcomes, whether they like memes or not.

References

Pew Research Center
Deloitte Global Millennial and Gen Z Survey 2025
McKinsey: Gen Z and the Future of Work
SHRM: Multigenerational Workforce Trends

LinkedIn Workplace Study 2024
Common Sense Media – Kids & Tech Report 2025
Today.com Gen Alpha Language Insights
Workday Generational Workforce Report

Adobe Consumer Personalization Report 2025
SproutSocial: How millennials use social media:
What marketers need to know, July 2025

Marketing
in Progress

Brought to you by Creo Collective