



Getting Your Message Through

7 keys to crafting a marketing message that bridges the generation gap

Recent data from US author and social commentator Douglas Rushkoff indicates that Gen Y represent something of a goldmine for marketers and advertisers. With a combined buying power of over \$100 billion, this group are by far the most cashed up generation of youngsters ever. In addition, this generation of young people born between the early 1980s and late 1990s are delaying commitments such as starting a family and getting a mortgage. As such, they are a commercial force to be reckoned with. Those who can understand them and communicate with them most effectively stand to win and win BIG!

Be warned, however, that this well-informed and highly educated group are not easy to woo. They are savvy to the tools and tricks of advertisers and require more than a stroking of their brand-conscious egos. Getting a message to Gen Y through the thick haze of media and noise that surrounds them requires skill and understanding. Furthermore, it requires a commitment to offering more than simply good value or competitive pricing.

In order to craft a message that connect with Gen Y, it must be:

1. Entertaining

Having grown up with more rich media and quality entertainment than any generation previous, Gen Y expect advertising messages to be an art form in themselves. Simply outlining features and benefits is not enough - you need to shock, impress and entertain this group if your message is to make a mark.

2. Authentic

Generation Y have a finely tuned 'BS Meter'. Overly audacious claims and sweeping statements that lack substance will only lead to scepticism. Steer clear of using the 99.9% figure in any marketing with this group... it is perceived as just too convenient to be true. The secret is to be real and transparent with Gen Y.

Kit Yarrow, who co-authored *Gen BuY* suggests that "[Gen Y] like it when companies treat them like the smart, informed consumers that they are, and they are wary at the first sign that they are being manipulated." Sometimes pointing out the obvious and engaging in



self-deprecating humour is the most effective way to disarm this group of consumers. Remember – Gen Y know that you are marketing to them so don't try and hide it.

3. Subtle

The most effective marketing messages for Gen Y are the ones that don't appear to be marketing anything at all. The litmus test of whether your advertisement will work for this younger group is to first show the ad to their parents. If the older generation are left asking what the point or the product is, you may be on a winner.

4. Viral and Organic

The Internet has changed everything when it comes to getting a message, product or idea past the ever-critical tipping point with Gen Y. In his book *Unleashing the Idea Virus*, marketing guru Seth Godin challenges advertisers not to market *AT* people but rather to focus effort and attention on turning ideas into 'epidemics' by helping customers do the marketing for you via viral word of mouth (or click of mouse).

The key way to get a message to Gen Y is actually to market *through* them and not *to* them. Create a video, an idea or a scandal that gets your market talking, sharing or debating and you will get the attention of younger people.

It also helps if a brand can become embedded in the market in a way similar to what Sprite very deliberately and cleverly did in the hip hop market in the USA. By making a group of consumers feel like they own and are defined by a product, you are well on the way to creating the sort of brand loyalty that every marketer dreams of.

5. Principled

If you look closely at Generation Y and what they are choosing to fill their lives with, you will see that they aren't as flippant and naive as their reputation suggests. Brand consultancy *Belong* surveyed a selection of Gen Y consumers in order to discover a list of 20 most popular brands, products and people. The results clearly indicate that a key purchasing motivator for Gen Y is the social consciousness of the brand.

Indicative of this positive trend are figures released recently which showed that 69% of Gen Ys considered a company's social and environmental commitment when deciding where to shop. For this demographic group, it has become cool to care.

6. Relational

Gen Y spend the bulk of their time doing one thing online... building community. For this group, a sense of connectedness, togetherness and 'tribe' is absolutely key. If marketers can effectively use symbols, images and language of community and relationship in their marketing messages, Gen Y will typically pay more attention. Coke, McDonalds and Mitsubishi have done this exceptionally well in recent years.

7. Narrative-driven

Younger generations are typically described as being 'post modern' in their mindset. Defined as worldview characterised by a belief that all truth is relative, post modernism is typified by the notion that *experience* is king. As such, the mantra of a postmodern generation is 'don't tell me it's right, show me it works'.

The best way to get a message through to a postmodern consumer is to use stories.

Facts, evidence, pie charts and experts can make them wary and adversarial, but the sharing of a real person's experience will work almost every time. Using genuine, unedited and somewhat raw testimonials from people who seem 'just like them' will be a powerful form of influence with this group.

Marketing has come a long way from the days of Henry Ford and his newspaper advertisements for the Model T. Gone are the days where features or benefits alone persuaded the consumer. Marketers today need to be far more sophisticated and strategic if they are to get a message through to a generation who have so many options and are surrounded by so much noise.

ABOUT MICHAEL

Michael McQueen is an award-winning speaker, social researcher and 3-time bestselling author.

Michael's first book *The 'New' Rules of Engagement* was the culmination of a 3-year study of the key drivers of youth culture around the world. With an emphasis on the values and attitudes of Generation Y, this 2007 release was designed to help business leaders, educators and parents to better engage younger generations.

Michael's most recent book *Winning the Battle for Relevance* is a landmark title that explores why even the greatest businesses and institutions become obsolete and how others can avoid their fate.

In addition to featuring regularly as a commentator on TV and radio, Michael is a familiar face on the international conference circuit having shared the stage with the like of Bill Gates, Whoopi Goldberg and Larry King.

Michael has spoken to over 150,000 people across 5 continents since 2004 and is known for his engaging, entertaining and practical conference presentations.

