

Building a Digital Strategy for Generational Marketing

Understand how each generation
is interacting with advertising channels.

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Segmenting Target Audiences

Segmenting your target audience can help you reach specific niches and tailor your message to specific types of people. This ultimately enables you to nurture customers, drive conversions with precision, and provide a personalized experience for your audience.

To up your targeting game, consider generational marketing. Based on the natural affinities and similarities between generations, you can draw certain conclusions for how they may behave—which can inform where you might find them online and the phrasing of the messaging in your ad campaigns.



SEGMENTING TARGET AUDIENCES

Although some of the shopping habits among people of one generation might differ slightly depending on the product or service they are looking into, many characteristics ring true across a generation. That said, all customers are different. This is why it's so important to segment your target audiences.



Once you uncover the general preferences of generations, whether related to specific devices or certain lifestyle values, you can adjust your digital strategy.

This guide explains why generational marketing is crucial for campaign strategy and personalization. We'll explore each generation's demographics, defining characteristics, consumer behaviours, and media usage in detail.

Ultimately, you'll learn how to best reach each of today's most prominent generations: Gen Z, millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers.



Generational Marketing in Digital Advertising

Generational marketing helps you to personalize your ad campaigns to specific audiences. This is important because consumers have grown to expect hyper-relevant advertising.

Every generation is different in the way they behave, what motivates them, and how they consume media. These differences are driven by various factors, like the events happening in the world as they grew up or their access to specific technologies. Each generation shares similarities in life experiences, which can then shape how they view the world, their most important values, and their ideals.

70% of consumers consider personalization to be a basic expectation.

Brands that fail to deliver personalized experiences risk losing up to 38% of their customer base.

Source: [Gartner](#)

Understanding each generation's interaction with technology can inform your digital marketing strategy. In such a tech-driven world, this approach helps marketers identify where digital ads will be most effective, according to each generation.

By targeting audiences based on their generational cohort, you create similar segments. This empowers you to craft a personalized and relevant message that draws a direct connection between individuals and how they relate to your brand.

With personalization, you can produce eye-catching creatives catered to a specific generation. For example, Gen Z consumers might respond to the use of emojis and age-specific verbiage. On the other hand, baby boomers may prefer creatives that feature products they are familiar with in the real world.

GENERATIONAL BREAKDOWN

Gen Z

Born Between
1997–2012



With over 69 million people, Gen Z makes up one in five Americans.

Gen Z has a spending power of \$360 billion USD and is projected to reach approximately \$12 trillion globally by 2030.

Defining Characteristics

Gen Z is the first generation to grow up immersed in technology. They are remarkably tech-savvy, connected, and informed: true “digital natives.”

Having grown up on social media, these young people are the self-image generation. Gen Z has distinct values, attitudes and lifestyle habits. Because of their adept internet usage, they are highly aware of what is happening in their own communities and globally, making them very socially conscious. Many Gen Zers grew up watching their parents take substantial financial hits during the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Witnessing their parents’ struggles has made Gen Z seek stability and security. They are financially minded and pragmatic spenders.



Consumer Behaviours

Brand values matter to Gen Z. They will make purchasing decisions if they see an alignment between brand values and their personal values. Gen Z expects the brands they support to take a stand on social justice issues, and 94% feel that brands should aim to do good in the world. Gen Z are very influenced by their communities and people they admire, like celebrities and influencers. Their purchase decisions are often driven by user-generated content and recommendations from people they know or influencers they admire.

As a result, this generation has minimal brand loyalty—more than 50% would switch to another brand if it offered a better price or higher quality, and 62% would explore other options even if they have a favourite brand.

Gen Z are digitally savvy and love to be online. More than 74% of this generation say they spend their free time using various web-connected devices, and 66% of Gen Z reports using more than one internet-connected device at a time. While one-third of Gen Z in the US said seeing an ad on TV caused them to buy a product, nearly two-thirds would buy after seeing an ad on social media.

Device Usage



Gen Z is on mobile

Gen Z spends an average of 6 hours and 5 minutes on their smartphones each day, with many reporting they spend more time on their devices than they would like. About 84% of Gen Z consider their smartphone to be the most important device they use.



Gen Z are multi-taskers

95% of Gen Z use another device while watching TV, most commonly for social media or to chat with friends.



Gen Z loves digital video

About 96% of Gen Z watch digital video, and Gen Z adults spend an average of 57 minutes a day on TikTok.



Gen Z are online shoppers

72% of Gen Z have purchased a product online using whichever device was most convenient. Approximately 74% of Gen Z prefers to shop on mobile devices.



Gen Z is listening to digital audio

On average, Gen Z spends about 3 hours and 43 minutes daily listening to music, which is approximately 40 minutes more than the general US population.

How Can You Best Reach Gen Z?



Through mobile, social media, CTV, and audio.



Communicate your brand values in a personal and relatable way. Ensure the messaging in your ads also speaks to how you align with their values.



Reach Gen Z across screens. Run ads across devices, including mobile, desktop, tablet, and CTV.



Improve the quality of your online experience. Use dynamic content, aesthetically pleasing images, carousel ads, and videos.



Reach Gen Z in screenless moments. Run programmatic audio campaigns to capture audiences listening to digital radio and podcasts.



Gen Z are the least willing of the four main generations to tolerate any form of online advertising. So, avoid invasive ads and go for context-fitting, organic ads instead. Leveraging contextual advertising methods can ensure you are reaching them in the right contexts.

GENERATIONAL BREAKDOWN

Millennials

Born Between
1981–1996



Millennials, are fully immersed in adulthood, balancing responsibilities like parenting, careers, and hobbies.

Millennial shoppers spend \$1.928 trillion in the US each year.

Their active and consistent online presence reflects these priorities. They stand out for their technology use because they grew up with digital media. Although they aren't considered digital natives in the way that Gen Z are, they are very tech-savvy.

Defining Characteristics

Millennials are gaining buying power as they become more established in their jobs. They are building their careers, paying off student loans, getting married, buying houses, and having families. With their busy lives, millennials appreciate convenience and will look for this characteristic when purchasing. Millennials are projected to have a significant economic impact, with their spending power expected to reach \$8.3 trillion in 2025, significantly more than that of Gen X and baby boomers.

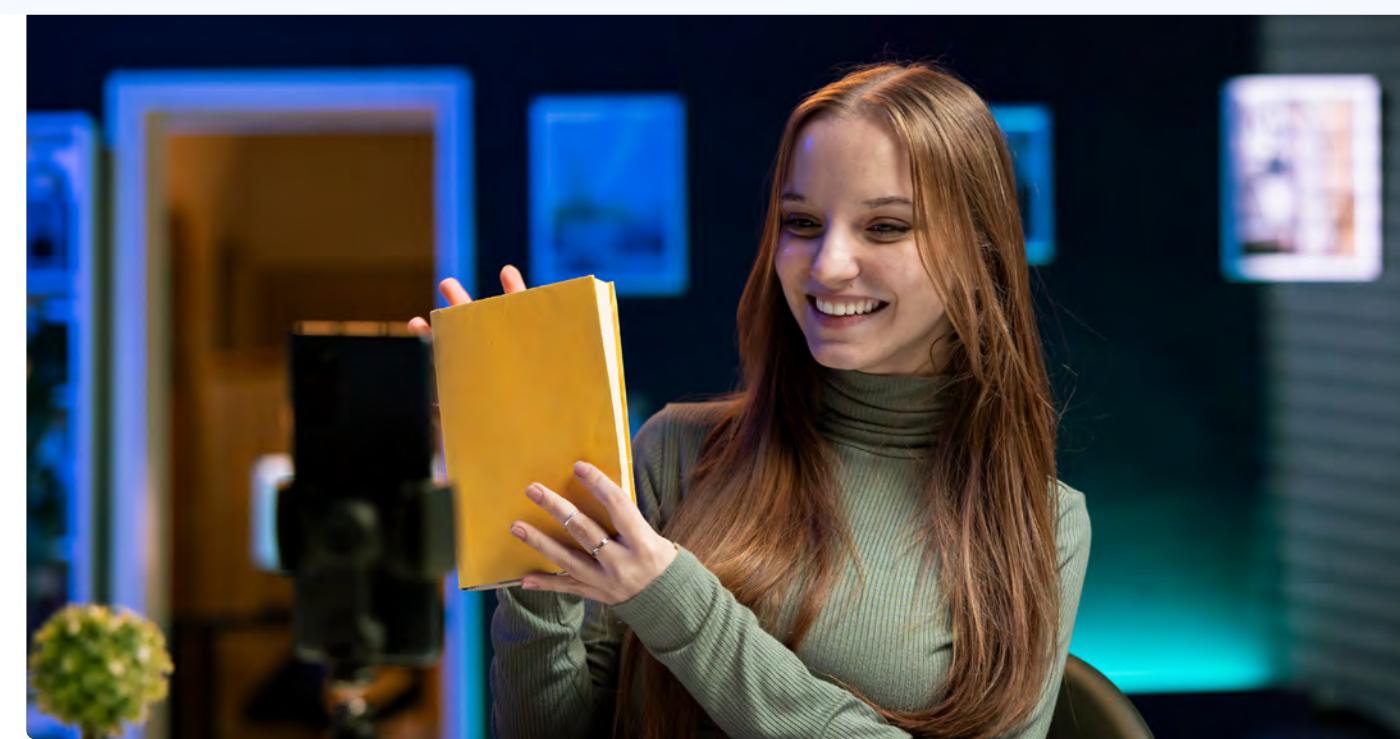
Consumer Behaviours

Millennials are multi-channel shoppers.

Their buying habits are heavily influenced by digital platforms, with a strong preference for online shopping, which has become a defining characteristic of their consumer behaviour. This generation is also known for its price sensitivity and willingness to pay more for products that align with their values or offer superior quality.

While shopping online, millennials expect personalized experiences. They want to be served relevant ads and respond well to other personalization features like targeted product recommendations. Millennials are receptive to social proof.

A Trustpilot survey found that 66% of millennials were more likely to purchase based on social proof. They will look at online reviews, take recommendations from peers and influencers, and self-educate before making a purchase decision.



Device Usage



Millennials are on mobile

94.4% of millennials in the US own and actively use smartphones. They spend an average of 4 hours and 36 minutes on their smartphones daily, with many engaging with multiple apps throughout the day.



Millennials are on CTV

Millennials are increasingly engaging with CTV, spending an average of over 7 hours per day in front of CTV devices, particularly among those with young children.



Millennials are listening

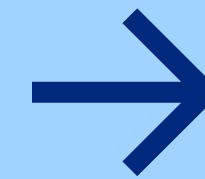
Millennials spend an average of 10 hours and 14 minutes per week listening to music, using multiple streaming apps, with 57% utilizing two or more services for music. About 37% of millennials regularly listen to podcasts, the highest percentage among all age groups.



Millennials like shoppable content

About 72% of millennials state that social media impacts their purchasing decisions, with 40% actively shopping on these platforms.

How Can You Best Reach Millennials?



Through mobile, social media, CTV, and audio.



Run ads across devices to target millennials on any screen, ensuring you reach them when and where they are most likely to engage.



Integrate programmatic audio to capture millennial attention when they are listening in screen-free moments.



Consider running ads on CTV because millennials find CTV ads relevant and informative, and will seek out more information after exposure.



Millennials have grown to expect hyper-relevant advertising, so use dynamic retargeting to deliver ads with personalized content to millennials who browsed your website to re-engage them.



As millennials work to inform themselves about a product or service before purchasing, leverage native ads to provide educational content and put them in the driver's seat for making a research-based purchase decision.

GENERATIONAL BREAKDOWN

Gen X

Born Between
1965–1980



Gen X accounts for approximately 27% of all US households and contributes over 33% to total consumer expenditures.

Despite being a smaller generation, they play a crucial role in driving economic activity. The average household income for Gen X is \$113,455 USD.

Defining Characteristics

Gen X is a challenging generation to define because they are tightly sandwiched between baby boomers and millennials. As a result, some of the Gen Xers born earlier have baby boomer characteristics, and Gen Xers born later have some millennial characteristics. Many Gen Xers have started families and have children who are school-aged or in college. As a result, this generation holds strong family values. Many of their decisions are influenced by their desire for financial security and their family's safety. Gen X are a unique generation because they didn't fully grow up with technology like Gen Z and millennials did, but they are still open to it. Gen Xers are quick technology adopters and are very active on social platforms, but they do still engage with traditional media. Many continue to listen to the radio, read newspapers, and watch traditional television.

Consumer Behaviours

Trust is an important factor for this family-oriented generation. They will research brands and businesses before making a purchase. They often discover new products through online searches (58%) but still value in-store discovery. Their shopping behaviour reflects a blend of traditional and modern influences, making them multi-channel consumers. There is a growing interest in health-related products, with many Gen Xers focusing on nutrition and wellness, which influences their purchasing decisions.

They primarily shop in-store for groceries (90%) and pharmaceuticals (62%). Gen Xers spend over \$80,000 annually, making them the highest spenders across all age groups in the US. They make over 480 shopping trips per year, averaging about \$35 per trip.



Device Usage



Gen X shops on mobile

On average, Gen X spends about 4 hours and 9 minutes on their smartphones daily, accounting for roughly 16.5% of their waking life. Over 66% of Gen Xers use their mobile phones primarily for online shopping.



Gen X is cord-cutting

Nearly 84% of Gen Xers actively use digital video, with YouTube (73.2%) and Netflix (56.9%) as their top streaming platforms, and 25.5% watching Disney+. According to a June 2024 LendingTree survey, Gen Xers are the least likely generation to cancel subscriptions (66% vs. 72% overall).



Gen X switches devices

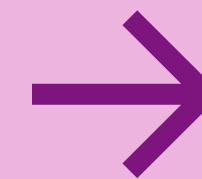
Gen Xers might open emails on their mobile devices, but they will switch to their laptop to click through and make a purchase.



Gen X looks at new and old media

Gen X is tech-savvy, often engaging with multiple media forms simultaneously. They are known for their adaptability in media consumption, blending traditional television with modern streaming options.

How Can You Best Reach Gen X?



Through mobile and CTV.



Don't assume Gen X aren't responsive to digital. They are tech-forward and receptive to digital advertising across channels and devices.



Gen X tend to research on the internet before purchasing. Use native ads to provide more information about a product or service, rather than just pushing a sale.



Use dynamic retargeting to serve ads with personalized content to Gen X consumers who visited your website to explore your product or service.



Leverage customer reviews and value-adds in your messaging. Curating the messaging in your ads to highlight what customers have said about your product will boost purchase confidence in Gen X.



Use 3rd-party data to understand Gen X households. Attributes such as family composition and the presence of children can help define your audience and refine your marketing approach.

GENERATIONAL BREAKDOWN

Baby Boomers

Born Between
1946–1964



While this generation didn't grow up with digital technology, they are catching up fast.

Baby boomers are beginning to retire, but they are still big spenders. There are now around 70 million baby boomers in the US, with a mean household expenditure of \$70,207 USD annually.

Defining Characteristics

Baby boomers grew up in the era of the “American Dream.” As a result, they are more financially stable and affluent than any other generation. As this generation is approaching and entering retirement, they have disposable income and want to spend, but they want to spend it well and wisely. Baby boomers were well into adulthood when home computers and internet usage became a household norm. As a result, they aren’t considered as tech-savvy as Gen Z and millennials, but they shouldn’t be discounted. About 69% of baby boomers own smartphones and spend about 3 hours and 31 minutes on them each day. 66% of boomers made a digital purchase in the past 12 months.

Consumer Behaviours

Baby boomers tend to gravitate toward premium brands and stores. This generation is willing to spend more money on high-quality products. Baby boomers spend the most across all categories and the most per transaction compared to other generations. Baby boomers have high expectations regarding customer service—both online and offline. Quality and pleasant interactions with brands and their employees will leave a good impression on this generation and lead to brand loyalty.

As baby boomers retire, they invest more in travel and their homes. Baby boomers are likelier than other generations to spend money on expensive items like wine, home goods, appliances, pharmacy, and healthcare.



Device Usage



Baby boomers browse on mobile

76% of boomers with smartphones browse on their phone and then switch to their laptop to complete an online purchase.



Baby boomers are on social

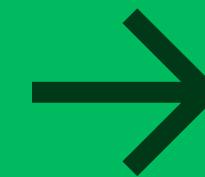
Their favourite social media platform is Facebook (48.7% use it) to connect and stay in touch with families and friends. It's expected that up to 16.7% will be on TikTok by 2028.



Baby boomers enjoy video content

Baby boomers are watching streamed video on their laptops and on CTV devices. About 52.3% of boomers use YouTube.

How Can You Best Reach Baby Boomers?



Through mobile, digital video, and CTV.



Custom segments will enable you to capture baby boomers. Target users in their age range who have recently searched for information on your market category.



Baby boomers are savvy shoppers who like to research before purchase, so give them the information they are looking for by providing clear and direct messaging.



Use dynamic retargeting to serve ads with personalized content to baby boomers who visit your website to explore your products or services.



Display ads on desktop will grab the attention of baby boomers. Use them to reinforce brand awareness and deliver messaging that speaks to the quality of your product or service. This will be particularly impactful as a retargeting tactic, leveraging site visits from a mobile device.



Leverage an empathetic tone in your messaging. This generation values quality customer service, so demonstrate how your brand will support them if they need it.

How to Build a Customer Profile

Customer profiles provide factual information about your target audience's demographics and buying behaviours.

STEP 1

Begin by identifying the problem your product or business aims to solve and the type of audience seeking an answer to that problem. For example, baby formula solves the problem of feeding a baby, which is relevant to parents. So, it's safe to say that parents are your broad audience. From there, narrow the audience to a profile that aligns with your product.

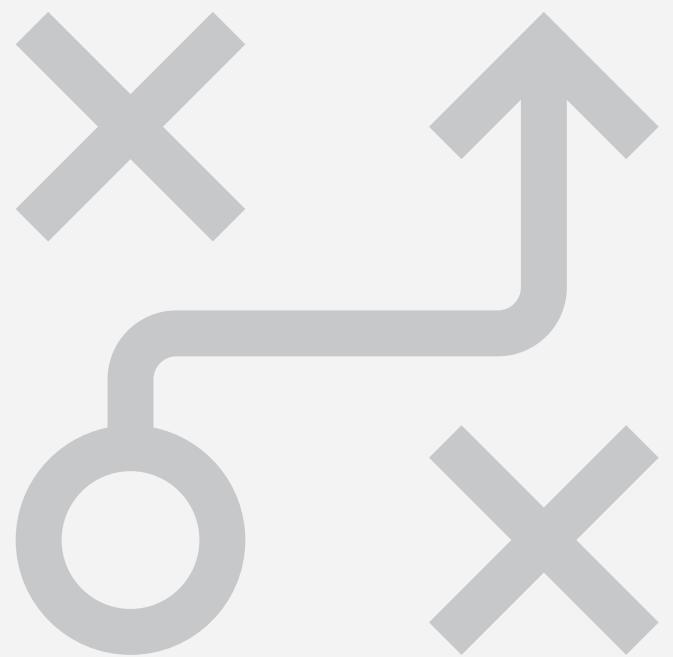
STEP 2

Use your customer's journey from awareness and consideration to evaluation and conversion to narrow your customer profiles. To do this, think about how a customer knows your business and eventually makes a purchase. Customer journeys will vary depending on your customer's generation. A baby boomer's first touchpoint might be an ad on CTV, whereas a Gen Zer's first touchpoint might be hearing your ad on a podcast.

STEP 3

Consider their demographics in detail once you have a broad idea of who your audience is and the customer journey. Build a profile description that includes age, marital status, education level, income, and whether they have children.

How to Build a Strategy Around the Profile



1

Use your customer profiles to understand how your customers are interacting with tech. We're in a tech-driven world, so finding that alignment is key when building a marketing strategy. When you understand what tech your customers are using, you can identify what digital ads will perform best in reaching those profiles.

2

You can then build out your strategy around the channels that make the most sense for reaching a particular profile. For example, if in building your profile you see that Gen Z is your ideal target market, you'll want to focus on mobile, social, and CTV.



Get the Most Out of Generational Marketing

Generational norms evolve over time. They are shaped by world events, culture, technology, and more. As generations get older and new technology becomes available, the channels that they are most likely to respond to digital ads on will change. With this in mind, it's important to remember to regularly review and make iterations to the profiles you have created for your generational marketing strategy.



StackAdapt is a multi-channel programmatic advertising platform used by the most exceptional digital marketers. This state-of-the-art platform is where some of the most progressive work in machine learning meets cutting-edge user experience. Ad buyers plan, execute, and manage data-driven digital advertising campaigns across all devices, inventory, and publisher partners.

For more information, visit stackadapt.com.