

Marketing to Generation X & Y

by Michael Fleischner

If you're trying to market to adults who were born between 1965 and 1994, then you need to understand the best method for reaching generation X and Y.

Who is a part of Generation X? Gen Xers were born between 1965 and 1976 and make up about 17% of the U.S. population. As a whole, this group is both independent and skeptical, existing in the shadow of Baby Boomers. As they move into their 30s and 40s, Gen Xers are establishing themselves as consumers who are starting families and buying homes.

Who is a part of Generation Y? Individuals born between 1977 and 1994 are considered Gen Yers and make up about 25% of the U.S. population. This group is generally idealistic, optimistic, and patriotic. Gen Yers consume media in extremely fragmented ways, representing the next big wave in our demographic makeup.

Gen Xers and Gen Yers have a number of things in common. Both groups grew up with recessions, single-parent households, cable TV, the Internet and other personal technology. Consequently, these groups consume media differently from earlier generations. Communicating with them through traditional marketing channels can be difficult. So, how can you reach these groups, communicate your message, and get them to take action?

The answer is more traditional than you think. **In combination with online marketing, direct mail is one of the most powerful ways to market to both Gen X and Y.** According to a recent study conducted by InnoMedia, NuStats, and Vertis, 87% of Gen Y and 86% of Gen X bring in the mail the day it's delivered; and 73% of Gen Y and 68% of Gen X retail direct-mail readers have used coupons received in the mail; Gen X and Y consumers rate 75% of the mail they receive as valuable.

To reach Gen X and Y with direct mail, you should keep in mind some basic marketing practices. Keep in mind that your direct mail efforts can be supplemented with online marketing in the form of targeted site advertising and keyword buys, or perhaps you can give these consumers a reason to visit you online via email (contests, sweepstakes, discounts, etc.).

Direct mail is most effective when you understand your audience, time your campaign appropriately, provide a compelling offer, and develop a relevant message:

- **Audience.** Knowing your audience is essential for the success of any direct marketing campaign. Having information about Gen Xers or Yers in general terms is a place start, but you need to dig deeper and develop a fuller understanding of the segment. You should know their motivations, their greatest pains, their latent needs-and what products or solutions they use. Once you've gotten to know your audience, other marketing criteria can fall into place.
- **Timing.** Communicating your message at the right time can make all the difference in your marketing results. Selling tax software immediately after April 15th won't produce the results you're looking for. You need to have an understanding of your audience's timeline and when they

are in the market to buy your product or service. Be sure to give them enough time to respond to your offer, but don't leave it open ended.

- **Offer.** Many consumers need a reason to buy, especially Gen Xers, who are normally skeptical. Your offer should provide some benefit to the buyer as well as provide some level of comfort in moving forward with a purchase. This can be in the form of a satisfaction guarantee or something similar. One great technique is to place your offer on the outside of the envelope that contains your marketing materials. This can help to differentiate your mail and get your envelope opened by prospects.
- **Message.** Your message needs to resonate with prospective buyers. Do you understand their needs? Have you communicated benefits as well as features? Are you solving a problem for them? Have you provided a simple, yet compelling message? Many direct marketers talk about the "long" letter versus the "short" letter. Studies validate the use of both. As long as your message resonates with buyers, it doesn't matter how long it is. But be sure to test your messages on an ongoing basis.

If you're marketing to either Generation X or Y, or both, use direct mail in your marketing mix. Individuals in these groups respond to direct mail. Keep in mind, however, that a direct marketing piece should be supplemented with other forms of marketing-Internet marketing, search engine optimization, advertising, etc.

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