

Gen Z excels at social media marketing. How do brands keep up?

Article

If you're trying to appeal to Gen Z, "hire Gen Zers," said Jennifer Quigley-Jones, CEO and founder of influencer marketing agency Digital Voices. Whether making social media content for brand-owned accounts or working with influencers, marketers that want to sell to Gen Z need to work with Gen Zers.

Why is Gen Z so good at marketing and content creation? They're digital natives. Gen Zers understand how to interact on the internet because they grew up with it. That also means they have a keen eye for when a brand is inauthentically trying to win them over. "Brands can come across as very 'cringe' on social when they try and be Gen Z but don't know how to be," said Quigley-Jones.

That concept of "being Gen Z" can mean a lot of things, but it starts with authenticity. Where millennial content creators historically leaned into a polished look for Instagram and YouTube, Gen Zers tend to be more vulnerable and are willing to take risks, said Quigley-Jones.

Certain "cringe" aspects of social media marketing are unavoidable. The #ad featured in a sponsored post, for example, is required for all creators, and paid social content will also be labeled as sponsored. But through effective content and creator marketing, brands can capture Gen Z attention.

Make good content. This seems like a no-brainer, but every brand marketer knows creating quality social media content the way brands like **Duolingo**, **Ryanair**, and **Wendy's** have requires strategy.

- **Hire the right people.** Most Gen Zers are now adults, according to the US Census Bureau. And of **US Gen Z adults**, about half are non-white. A marketing team that wants to communicate with Gen Z effectively should reflect Gen Z's population.
- **Create the right culture.** The best brands have created a "culture of bravery" and "a culture where people are willing to fail," said Quigley-Jones. "You can't have a culture of experimentation without a culture of accepting failure." In other words, if brands want risky, attention-grabbing content, they need to accept that some content may flop along the way.

Work with creators. Brands that don't want to take risks on their owned channels (often for good reasons) should allow Gen Z creators to showcase their brand, keeping in mind certain best practices.

- **Let creators cook.** "Brands need to stop thinking of their brand guidelines quite so preciously," said Quigley-Jones. "They need to understand that the brand is a guest on the creator's channel." Requirements like scripts, multiple talking points, or lengthy brand logo features will make the content **feel too much like an ad, and it won't perform well.**

- **Have a perspective.** Sponsored influencer content should be entertaining, funny, or useful, noted Quigley-Jones.

Be brave. Unhinged content is synonymous with Gen Z content right now. Quigley-Jones defined unhinged content via three characteristics.

- Content that feels like it shouldn't have gotten past a brand approval process, like **the Wendy's X account** saying a burning McDonald's "looks absolutely fire."
- Content that crosses genres in ways that people don't expect, like a **Duolingo tutorial from a makeup content creator**.

Content that makes consumers feel like they're being entertained, not sold to, the way **American Girl did with a TikTok** playing off of the infamy of its book, "The Care and Keeping of You."

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