

Marketing lessons from Gen Z: Creators, connections, finding ‘besties’

Article

Gen Z is looking for “besties,” said speakers at ZCON, a conference featuring [Gen Z](#) speakers, [creators](#), [marketers](#), and business leaders. Speakers and attendees emphasized connections,

personal branding on [social media](#), platforms for networking, and more. Here are four takeaways from the event.



Image courtesy of UTA.

1. Gen Z prioritizes personal connection

“This is a room full of besties,” said Ziad Ahmed, head of Next Gen at [UTA](#), describing Gen Zers’ desire to connect with each other. For brands to become “besties” with consumers, they need to build community and find ways to connect with Gen Z. “Brands are acting more like people,” Ahmed said.

Brands are directly connecting with Gen Zers through [TikTok](#) comments, building niche communities like running clubs, or through [targeted marketing](#). In the past, Next Gen execs

have emphasized the importance of being “[the brand that enters the group chat](#)” where Gen Z recommends products to each other via word-of-mouth.

Brands looking to build a personal connection with Gen Z should be where the generation is. These include arts and culture events, sports games, and events surrounding animals and wildlife, according to MERGE data.

Type of Events US Gen Z Consumers Have Attended in the Past Year, by Gender, July 2024

% of respondents

	Female	Male
Arts and culture event	59%	49%
Sports event	53%	66%
Animals and wildlife	48%	34%
Fashion and beauty	39%	22%
Home and garden	35%	26%
Fish and game	32%	29%
Personal growth	31%	33%
Tech and innovation	22%	30%

Note: n=1,000 ages 18-27

Source: MERGE, “The Event Effect: Gen Z Retail Survey,” Sep 10, 2024

287690

EM | EMARKETER

2. Gen Z brand founders are also creators

As brands act more like people, people are also acting more like brands, Ahmed said. At ZCON there was a strong emphasis on the importance of building a personal brand on social media, and a number of brand founders who spoke were also [creators](#).

“I turned myself into a creator because it was good for the business,” said Nadya Okamoto, co-founder of period care company [August](#). Okamoto, who boasts 4.1 million followers on TikTok, said brand founders can create organic content as a way to avoid “paying for eyeballs,” referring to paid ads.

Okamoto emphasized the importance of authenticity in creating content, but also said volume is key to virality. The founder said she made 100 TikToks per day when starting her brand and would take down what didn’t do well in order to boost her brand’s presence.

3. LinkedIn is the next frontier for Gen Z—but other social media is also being used for networking

LinkedIn is increasingly useful for creator content, according to Okamoto. [LinkedIn launched its own TikTok-like vertical video feed](#) in March, and Okamoto and other creators have seen success as early adopters.

Gen Z currently makes up 26.2% of US LinkedIn users, and the cohort will surpass Gen X in LinkedIn use next year, according to our May 2024 forecast. Brands investing in creator content should consider LinkedIn, on which they can reach 34.8% of Gen Z social media users.

But LinkedIn isn't the only place where Gen Z is networking. Many Gen Zers at the conference were networking by [Instagram](#), where many said they were more likely to check direct messages.

4. Gen Z is interested in religion and spirituality—to a point

Religion and spirituality is one of the fastest-growing [categories on Spotify](#), increasing by 85% YoY, according to Spotify's "2024 Culture Next: Top Gen Z Trends" report. But Gen Z is more likely to identify as religiously unaffiliated than all older generations except [millennials](#), according to PRRI.

Gen Z may show interest in spirituality not affiliated with organized religion. Several people at ZCON spoke of spiritual concepts such as "manifesting." Brands don't need to go all-in on religion to appeal to Gen Z. But they may consider incorporating Gen Z's spiritual side or focus on wellness into their strategies.

This was originally featured in the [EMARKETER Daily newsletter](#). For more marketing insights, statistics, and trends, subscribe [here](#).