

# How Edelman's Gen Z Lab works with clients to answer questions about this generation's needs and impacts

Article

In the marketing lingo bingo game, “Gen Z” ranks at the top. (Yes, there’s also “TikTok,” but that’s largely due to its proximity to Gen Z.)

So what happens when the hot topic is also the thing that makes you the most uneasy? PR and marketing consultancy firm Edelman was faced with that dilemma. When six CMOs were asked what was making them uncomfortable, “every single one [said] Gen Z. And ‘What the hell is TikTok anyway,’” said Jackie Cooper, Edelman’s global chief brand officer.

“What was really clear was that they were actually feeling daunted and overwhelmed by the fact that maybe for once, the audience knew more about what [the CMOs] needed to do than [the CMOs] did.”

**Finding a solution:** Enter the Gen Z Lab, which combines Gen Z employees, outside advisors, and data into a generational insight resource. The Lab was founded in June.

- The Lab started with two rounds of external quantitative studies of Gen Zers in 20 markets to craft a data library.
- More than 100 Gen Z Edelman staff have joined the Lab to offer insights and work with clients as needed.
- Outside advisors provide guidance, like current ZEO (no, that’s not a typo), British American fashion designer Harris Reed.

So how does Edelman tap into the Lab?

### **1. Proactively, with education about macro trends:**

- “What our data has shown is that Gen Z is behind a lot of the changes we’re seeing in the world, and so [the Lab is] also a proxy and almost a Trojan horse for clients coming to us to understand changing consumer expectations or changing employee behavior,” said Amanda Edelman, the Gen Z Lab’s COO.
- The Lab keeps account managers up to date on its findings and ensures they are aware of any cultural moments (think, the launch of a new social app or a new climate policy) that are relevant to Gen Z.

### **2. By working with clients on specific projects:**

- For example, a client asked the Lab about the perception of palm oil in Southeast Asia and a health client invited Lab members to a “lunch and learn” panel to find out about the intersection of Gen Z with health and wellness.
- “We’re really not asking our clients for briefs, because they don’t know enough about Gen Z to brief us well,” Cooper said. “We’re asking, ‘Can you just give us your problem, and then we’ll define the brief and the answer and bring both back to you?’”

### Here are a few insights from Edelman’s Gen Z Lab:

- **They want you to use your power for good:** “We know that NGOs and governments are going to fall short on doing that and making the change that we need to see. Can you please step up and use your superpower as a company to make those changes,” Cooper said of a Gen Z request for brands to use their marketing power and reach to make changes for the betterment of all.
- **They aren’t out to cancel you:** Actually, Gen Zers just want brands to take accountability, Edelman said. They are a generation of sensibility and don’t have outlandish demands.
- **They don’t all want to be influencers:** Only 12% aspire to be an influencer.
- **They want to feel safe and secure:** Traditional marketing is about consumption and aspiration, but that’s not what Gen Z wants to see, Cooper said. “It’s much more about basic needs because everything is so challenged right now,” or as Cooper put it: “If we are okay then I can start to think about me being okay.”
- **They impact more than just themselves:** “Gen Z is influencing the general population across areas you wouldn’t expect, and that’s areas like workplace culture, financial behavior—areas that you would expect to be dominated by older generations are actually incredibly influenced by Gen Z,” Edelman said. The power of Gen Z is “how they’re changing things for the rest of society.” For example, 60% of people said Gen Z was influencing the way they get news.

So far, the Gen Z Lab has secured \$5 million in projects, benefiting both Edelman and its clients. In this tough labor market, it also provides another benefit: “A reason why a lot of Gen Zers join the Lab is because it gives us the ability to use our voice and have that direct connection with C-suite level execs that you normally wouldn’t have included in [your day-to-day] work,” said Lab member Darriel Sanders.

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