

How Abercrombie & Fitch and e.l.f. Beauty stay relevant when marketing to Gen Z

Article

Marketing to Gen Z requires a different approach than marketing to millennials. Abercrombie & Fitch found this out the hard way as its millennial playbook became outdated for younger

shoppers, earning it the title of “**most hated retail brand**” in the US in 2016 by the American Customer Satisfaction Index.

Abercrombie & Fitch learned its lesson. The brand reinvented itself by refocusing its efforts to appeal to Gen Zers reaching adulthood. Here are some lessons from Abercrombie & Fitch, e.l.f. Beauty, and others on how marketing to Gen Z differs from reaching millennials.

1. Gen Z has a shorter attention span than millennials, so content should be different

- Millennials are looking for narrative and aspiration, said Megan Brophy, vice president of marketing at Abercrombie & Fitch, speaking at The Lead Innovation Summit in New York City last week.
- “Gen Z is definitely very direct,” Brophy said. “They’re very transparent. They want realness. They want authenticity.” As a result, advertising for Gen Z can be “messy” and “chaotic.”
- Brophy suggested hiring and shadowing Gen Zers to make sure you understand their media consumption habits.

2. Meet Gen Z consumers on TikTok—and let them take it from there

- Gen Zers are on both TikTok and Instagram: 76.2% of US 18- to-24-year olds use TikTok and 78.4% use Instagram, according to our forecasts.
- In contrast, 54.0% of US 25- to-34-year-olds are on TikTok, while 78.6% are on Instagram.
- TikTok is a particularly powerful tool for Gen Z because it allows “putting the brand in the hands of the people,” said Brophy. TikTok’s quick and chaotic content allows brand identity to be formed more organically than on Instagram, where posts tend to be more polished.
- “I don’t think the TikTok party is going anywhere anytime soon,” said Brophy.

3. Gen Z sets its own trends, so be sure to listen

- Where millennials followed slower trend cycles, Gen Z makes its own. “When they say, ‘We want this from you,’ we go after that. When they change communication habits, change consumption habits ... we’re constantly listening,” said Brophy.
- Laurie Lam, chief brand officer of e.l.f. Beauty, said the company can’t be completely certain of which trends to jump on. Through social listening and trial and error, the brand can make sure it empowers creators, no matter what’s trendy.

4. Gen Z expects authenticity from influencers

- Millennials using Instagram could identify an influencer and follow them. But TikTok has flipped the script on who can go viral, meaning pretty much anyone can become an influencer.
- Brophy's approach to Gen Z influencer marketing involves looking for influencers who already want to wear Abercrombie & Fitch apparel, giving them some talking points, and then being "fully hands off."
- Gen Z will call brands out if influencers aren't authentic brand users, said Kim Gallagher, director of marketing and customer success at clothing rental brand Nuuly.

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