

# UNDERSTANDING ZOOMERS

*What Drives Them? What is  
Their Impact on the Future?*





# Who are the Zoomers?

**Generation Z**—those born between the years 1997 and 2012—is growing up. Sandwiched between Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Alpha, this group, now the largest generation on Earth, is emerging as an influential demographic and driving impactful change that will shape our future in ways we haven't seen before.

While we are not suggesting anyone market to grade schoolers, marketers should recognize the influence that the older segment of this group has today, and, as the younger segment ages, the future should be an important part of your strategic plans.

**According to Pew Research**, American Gen Zers are the most ethnically diverse generation in history and are deeply interested in the world outside their own borders. As communicators, we must look beyond a mostly white culture to embrace this diverse group.

Zoomers are highly collaborative and prefer in-person experiences. By creating these types of experiences, we can attract and retain new talent, develop a new and loyal customer base and engage new advocates for our brand.



**Gen Z is the future of our workforce. They are our employees, our consumers, and, in the not-too-distant future, our leaders.**

It's time we look at how we engage with them—in the workplace, on social media and in other spaces. Your organization's future success relies heavily on how well your brand resonates with this diverse and influential generation, whether they're your customers, clients, partners or employees.

**Don't Get it Mixed Up: Zoomers are Not Millennials 2.0**

While Millennials are aspirational, idealistic and expect brands to tell a story, Gen Z is authentic, pragmatic and prefers living the story versus telling it. They are the first generation to have access to the internet and digital technology for almost, if not all their lives—and they are spending more time on electronic devices and less time reading books than their counterparts. They do not like to be talked down to, hate clickbait and want to be informed in a more informal and light-hearted way than their predecessors.



## MILLENNIALS

*Aspirational Self-Image*  
*Idealistic Outlook on Life*  
*Adapted to Technology*  
*Expects Storytelling from Brands*  
*Evolved Text Communication Style*



## GEN Z

*Authentic Self-Image*  
*Pragmatic Outlook on Life*  
*Born into Technology*  
*Wants to Live the Story*  
*Visual-First Communication Style*

Source: [Gen Z Explained: The Art of Living in a Digital Age](#)



# Marketing to Gen Z

## **ESG is a Gen-Z Preferred Value**

There are a variety of ways to measure the success of a company—its financial health, its longevity through good times and bad, the strength of its leadership, the loyalty of its customers—but in recent years, the definition of success has shifted from a purely financial meaning to one that also includes how a business impacts the world around it. Now, companies are being evaluated by investors, customers and the general public on environmental, social and governance metrics (also known as ESG) and are beginning to see the rewards—and consequences—of their business’s actions. Additionally, prospective employees, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, want to work for a company that values ESG.



It’s important to note that ESG ratings are not regulated by any government agency, so criteria may be inconsistent across rating agencies. They also encompass hundreds of factors, including:

### **ENVIRONMENTAL (how your organization positively and negatively impacts the physical natural world):**

- Carbon emissions
- Energy consumption
- Use of renewable energy
- Water and wastewater management
- Pollution
- Waste and hazardous materials management

### **SOCIAL (how your organization impacts its employees, stakeholders and society in general):**

- Labor practices
- Health and safety
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Community relations and engagement
- Treatment of employees
- Relationships with suppliers

### **GOVERNANCE (how your organization is run):**

- Board diversity
- Executive compensation
- Overall ethical behavior
- Data security
- Supply chain management
- Policies
- Political contributions
- Internal corruption



In the AEC industry, there is a growing demand for firms that have made commitments to improving their ESG metrics. Some construction-specific examples of ESG initiatives include:

- Reducing or mitigating the use of purchased electricity and/or fuels for jobsite equipment.
- Reducing or mitigating emissions from product transportation, employee commutes to the job site and other project-related business travel.
- Reducing construction waste.
- Responsibly sourcing materials.
- Measuring water consumption and reducing or reusing what is used on a jobsite.
- Working with a Minority- or Woman-Owned Business Enterprise (M/WBE).
- Working with local partners to bring new jobs and increased business revenue to the community.
- Enforcing safety precautions on the jobsite to improve employee health and well-being.
- Being involved in the community.
- Doing due diligence when hiring contractors and suppliers to ensure their ESG values align with yours.
- Providing equitable compensation.
- Hiring diverse candidates and promoting DEI initiatives within the organization.

Beginning the ESG process can be overwhelming, but it's a must-do if you want to remain competitive in the industry. Construction has such a significant impact on the environment and communities, a firm's ESG efforts won't go unnoticed—or unrewarded: When it comes to deciding where to invest in new projects, owners and investors take ESG metrics into account. They also consider ESG when deciding which companies to do business with. **Those who are committed to ESG will find that “doing the right thing” ultimately leads to profit and success.**



## ***Listening is Key for Associations to Attract Younger Generations***

For any organization, member involvement and engagement is crucial to success. Attracting younger employees from your member firms should be a key priority. According to HiringThing, 56 percent of associations are having trouble engaging young professionals. These statistics make it even more necessary for associations to appeal to younger audiences. With most member experiences structured around boomers, reconstruction is required to keep up with the changes in the generational dynamics of the workforce.

The following tips allow associations to appeal more broadly to Gen Z to examine their membership offerings and engagement.

### **PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH, CONNECTEDNESS AND COMMUNITY**

Younger professionals always seek opportunities to advance their careers and connect with others in their field. Creating specific networking activities, leadership academies and mentorship programs are great ways to provide members with opportunities to connect while advancing their career paths. Gen Z also wants to see options for community service to understand the value of brands and organizations that are supportive. Service gives professionals another opportunity to network and foster loyalty to the association while giving back to the community.

### **ENCOURAGE MEMBERSHIP WITH FLEXIBILITY AND OPTIONS; SEGMENT FOR RELATIVE COMMUNICATIONS**

Make an effort to send valuable and pertinent information highlighting the members' career-stage accomplishments.

***Any form of communication—whether via email, mail or even phone—should be segmented for age groups in your association.***



Typically, publications meant for a wider demographic are unlikely to attract Gen Z members. The standard membership tiers also may be less enticing to this particular generation. Associations should consider monthly or a la carte membership options that require less commitment while meeting needs for education, community and service.

### **LET THEM BE HEARD AND FIND THEM**

Ask. Younger members may need more information or direction, so ask about challenges in their work and discover where they need more information and guidance. Listening can also teach associations how to guide and be a resource to members. Listening efforts allow associations to understand the needs of younger members, leading to new or refined programs, products and services for the organization.

Extra effort and creativity when connecting with younger members and providing meaningful experiences is essential for associations to succeed. Fostering a sense of community by creating opportunities will go a long way in engaging Gen Z members. Associations that take this approach with trustworthy interactions and genuine interest will see the benefits and be rewarded with loyal membership with strong leaders in the organization for years to come.





## ***What does Gen Z Want from Brands?***

Born between the years 1997 and 2012, Gen Z is the first generation to grow up with the internet easily at their fingertips and social media as a strong influence in day-to-day activities. Unlike Gen Xers, who adapted to digital technology, and Millennials, who were young enough during their adaptation to be considered “digital natives,” Gen Z was born into the digital world. They grew up with smartphones, and the vast majority of this group does not know a world without mobile video. They use text and apps to communicate, and they gravitate toward video-based platforms and immersive digital environments.

Members of Gen Z have a different approach to how they interact, communicate and collaborate. **It is key that marketers reconsider their marketing approach because of this demographic’s tendencies, behavior and brand experience.**

Gen Z’s influence has changed how B2B brands and marketers need to engage and communicate with their audiences. As the most diverse generation, making up 40 percent of all global consumers, Gen Z typically wants more control of their brand experience.

***Gen Z is authentic and pragmatic. They value visual-first storytelling, and they prefer a “no filter” approach over perfectly posed images.***

Further, they want to be heard and collaborate in shaping a brand and the impact it has on the world. This is different from previous generations both culturally and economically. Because of this, organizations must be more thoughtful and creative when promoting their brand—allowing consumers to co-create, share opinions and grow in influence—in order to benefit their consumers and not just themselves.

How do brands implement co-creation, and how are they influenced by consumers? Successful consumer-brand co-creation campaigns start with getting the consumer involved. Sourcing product ideas (social media surveys), using feedback from existing and previous customers and launching campaigns with popular influencers or celebrities is a sure way to promote co-creation for a brand.



## ***How can Brands Reach Gen Z?***

As with any audience, to reach Gen Z you have to meet them where they are. Here are a few suggestions:

### **VIDEO-BASED SOCIAL PLATFORMS: YOUTUBE, TIKTOK, INSTAGRAM, TWITCH**

According to social media management platform Hootsuite, [about 95 percent of Gen Z uses YouTube, 67 percent use TikTok and 62 percent use Instagram](#). Zoomers' preferences for short-form video and authenticity are driving these platforms' popularity, and news outlets have confirmed [this group uses TikTok and Instagram as search engines](#).

In late 2022, Lenox Powel, content director at Semrush, led an information-packed presentation at the Content Marketing World conference on creating content for Gen Z. Below are results she shared from a Semrush study of viral videos on TikTok:

- One in three viral videos focused on a person speaking within the first three seconds.
- Sixty percent of viral videos featured a person on the screen.
- More than half of viral videos used music as their primary background sound in the first three seconds.
- Emotions triggered by the viral videos: happiness, humor and/or surprise.

### **VIRTUAL WORLDS, LIKE THE METAVERSE**

These online spaces create virtual environments for various activities. They often incorporate virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and other technologies to create a digital world that users navigate through using avatars. Organizations can enter established worlds to host virtual events—like concerts in the Fortnite gaming platform—or secure spaces to increase brand awareness. For example, Nike and Gucci each have space in the Roblox game and game-creation platform. Nikeland features parks, courts, an obstacle course and a running track, and Gucci Town has a café and a Gucci Store. Visitors in these spaces can buy branded gear for their avatars.

Organizations like the NBA and Coca-Cola have created their own mini virtual environments to sell digital and physical items and offer exclusive “loot” and discounts. (For more examples, perform an internet search for brand NFTs. This Gen X author used Google to search.) [Lowe's Open Builder](#) provides a free 3D product library to builders working in the metaverse, whether they are creating an AR experience, developing a game or working within a creative design application.

The construction industry can effectively tackle the industry's labor shortage and build interest in construction careers by leveraging immersive virtual worlds to gamify construction equipment and activities. (Watch this video about the video game [Construction Simulator!](#))





## VIRTUAL AND AUGMENTED REALITY

Leverage technology to engage younger audiences! As an example, since 2018, the American Concrete Pumping Association has been bringing [VR concrete pump simulators](#) to schools, job fairs and other venues as part of their workforce development and safety training programs.



## WEB 3.0

While Web3 communities are in their infancy, here are a few sites to watch: [Decentraland](#), [Diaspora](#), [Steemit](#) and [Sapient](#). Think of Web1 as the read-only websites of the 1990s and Web2 as today's interactive sites where visitors can like, comment, upload images/videos and make purchases. The Web3 focus is on increased privacy via decentralized apps (dapps), browsers, social networks and financial components that are not controlled by a single corporate entity—made possible with blockchain technology.

The emergence of Web3 is fueled by backlash against the cookies and centralized control of data and identity by FAANG—Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, Google. **Bottom line: Gen Z wants more control over their identity and data.**

## Fast Facts

Below are some key messages from Lenox Powel's Content Marketing World presentation.

### HOW GEN Z SEARCHES THE INTERNET\*

- Younger users employ long-tail keywords for searches.
- Commonly used search terms: Best, Cheap, How To.
- Reasons for not using Google: SEO blogs and buried answers.

*\* Sources: TechCrunch and FRACTL*

### CONTENT THAT RESONATES (AND DOESN'T)

- Preferred tone of voice: informal, friendly and engaging.
- Preferred images/graphics: creative and lighthearted.
- 52 percent want to be informed.
- 35 percent say media talks down to them.
- 37 percent hate click-bait.

### BE CREATIVE AND HAVE FUN!

- Start small, test out options.
- Create short-form videos, and use real people with real lives:
  - Interviews—employees about their work and clients about their experiences with your brand.
  - Testimonials.
  - How-tos and FAQs.
  - Case studies and best practices.
- Gen Z does not want to be sold to—they want to know who you are as a company and be part of your community. They want to get behind the scenes about your product and brand (what worked and what didn't work), and they want to have input.
- Shift your tone of voice from official and formal to casual and informal.
  - Be authentic. Be human. Be candid.

***If you get it right, Gen Z will become your brand advocates through their social platforms.***





# Gen Z and TikTok

Since it launched in 2016, TikTok has taken the world by storm. The short-form video-sharing app has more than 1 billion active users and is widely popular among Gen Z, making it an ideal platform for marketing to younger consumers and recruiting potential new hires. Its influence is also spreading to other age groups.

## ***What are the Pros of TikTok?***

### **WIDE REACH**

TikTok has a massive global following, making it a valuable platform for organizations seeking to reach a large and diverse audience.

### **VIRAL POTENTIAL**

The social media platform is known for its viral content, with videos often spreading quickly and reaching millions of users. This makes it an attractive medium for marketers looking to create viral campaigns.

### **THE BEST WAY TO REACH GEN Z**

Born between roughly 1997 and 2012, the youngest generation of workers and soon-to-be workers is currently the largest generation on Earth. They are highly active on social media, TikTok in particular.

Gen Z's preferences for short-form videos and authenticity are driving the platform's popularity, and news outlets have confirmed [this group uses TikTok as a search engine](#). In fact, web security company Cloudflare reported that [TikTok surpassed Google as the most visited domain in 2021](#).

### **TARGETED ADVERTISING**

The platform offers advertising options that enable organizations to reach specific audiences based on demographics, interests and behaviors. Advanced advertising options also include [CRM integrations](#).



## What are the Cons of TikTok?

### DATA PRIVACY ISSUES

TikTok is owned by a Chinese company. [The U.S. government has expressed concerns over national security risks](#), citing the potential for users' personal data to be accessed by the Chinese government.

### USAGE BANS

Due to data privacy concerns, more than half of U.S. state governments have [partially or fully banned TikTok from government networks and devices](#). In addition, [some U.S. colleges also have banned or restricted the use of TikTok on campus wireless networks](#), citing concerns over potential security risks and the app's perceived negative impacts on students' well-being and academic performance. Those negative impacts include the app's addictive nature and potential to distract students from their studies. This is an ongoing development that is worth following.

### CONTENT MODERATION

TikTok has faced criticism over its content moderation policies, with some users reporting that the app's algorithms promote and amplify inappropriate or harmful content.

### COMPETITION

TikTok is a highly competitive platform, with businesses and marketers facing a large and diverse pool of competitors. This makes it challenging for organizations to stand out and gain a significant following.

## Key Stats to Keep in Mind

According to social media management platform Sprout Social, nearly 40 percent of Gen Z say [they're directly influenced by products they see on TikTok](#).

Other noteworthy statistics include:

- 61 percent of TikTok users are female.
- Users spend nearly 90 minutes per day on the platform.
- The best times to post on TikTok are Wednesdays and Thursdays between 1 and 3 p.m.
- The worst day to post is Sunday.

## Keys to Success

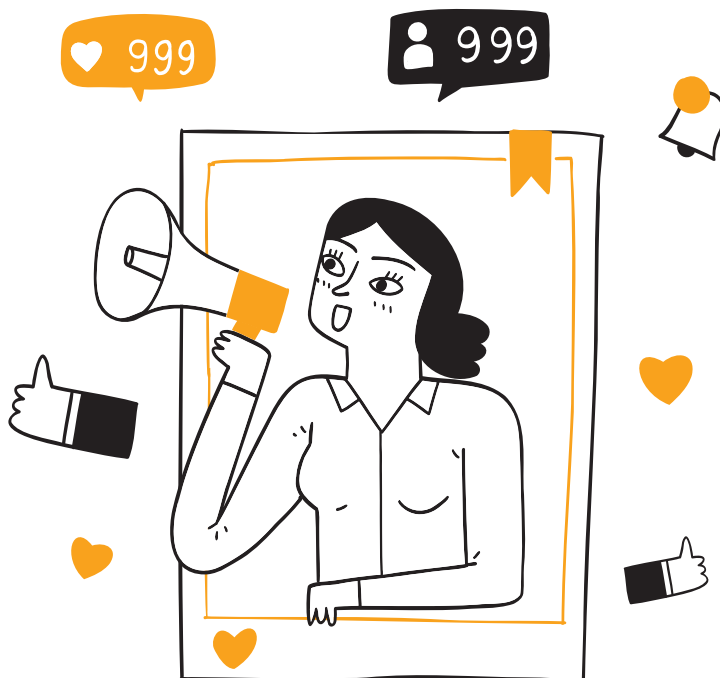
When creating videos for TikTok, a best practice is to feature real people. According to [a study of viral videos](#) by marketing software company Semrush:

- One in three videos focused on a person within the first three seconds.
- 60 percent featured a person visible on the screen.
- More than half used music as their primary background sound in the first three seconds.
- Viral videos triggered either happiness, humor or surprise among viewers.

Don't forget to have fun while creating your videos! [Check out how one concrete contractor does it.](#)

## What Next?

Deciding whether TikTok is the right platform for your organization boils down to your target audience(s) and marketing goals. If your audience is active on TikTok, it can be an effective platform for building brand awareness and engagement. However, if you decide the cons outweigh the pros, your resources could be better used on other channels—like Instagram Reels.



# Reach Gen Z with Effective Social Media Campaigns

Social media is important for business because it humanizes your organization. Providing more than a static website, social media platforms can elevate your organization's online presence and create an ongoing dialogue about your services and industry. Recognizing the speed at which companies can use social platforms to reach target audiences, a growing number of champions in niche industries are using social media to connect with customers, industry partners, prospects and the communities in which they work. Structuring a social media strategy will help you connect with your audience and grow your business.

According to a Harris Poll on behalf of Sprout Social, 55 percent of consumers learn about new brands on social media. In fact, **77 percent of consumers are more willing to buy from a brand over a competitor after a positive experience with that brand on social media.**

You can't underestimate the role of social media in marketing. You are missing out on exposure and "word-of-mouth" opportunities if you do not actively exist where people are spending their time: on social media outlets.

## What Makes a Social Media Campaign Successful?

[A great social media campaign](#) is one that is creative and shows your organization's "personality." When promoting a campaign on social media, you want it to feel authentic to your brand.

### BE THE CONTENT YOU WANT TO SEE

If nobody else in your industry is creating the type of content you want to see, create it yourself—and post often!

Video is the most engaging form of online content and certainly a medium you should be taking advantage of in your campaign. Here are some tips for video content creation:

- Just start! Capture video and post! Use your mobile device to take videos whenever you have an opportune moment. It doesn't have to be complicated.
- Maintain good resolution.
- Short-form video content is gaining in popularity. Include shorter webinars and fireside chat formats into your video mix.



## HUMANIZE YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Find people in your organization who are not camera-shy and are willing to share their stories on your platforms. How did they get involved in the industry? What does a day in their life look like while on the job? What do they find fun, or exciting or fulfilling about their job?
- Post about employees celebrating milestones, such as work anniversaries.
- Share behind-the-scenes photos or videos (be sure all safety regulations are followed). While employees are accustomed to the equipment or processes they use daily, your customers and other laypersons may find them fascinating.
- Find trends and relate them to your industry.

## REACH PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

Consider this: Seven out of every 10 Americans say they use (or have used) social media, according to a recent Pew Research report. You know your customers are online, but where are they? What platforms are they using? **YouTube and Facebook are the most widely used platforms among U.S. adults, while those under 30 seem to favor Instagram, SnapChat and TikTok.** Of course, LinkedIn should never be discounted for professional networking.

We're often asked by clients if TikTok is a good fit for their messaging. And, in certain industries, even established platforms like Instagram are considered "emerging," since many companies haven't incorporated them into their social media mix. Incorporating a new social media platform depends on the organization, its audience demographics and where its audience is "hanging out" on social media.

If the desired audience is present, organizations shouldn't be afraid of trying emerging platforms. For example, since younger generations are spending time on TikTok, this new short-form video platform can play a role in your recruiting efforts. While TikTok may not be a platform for your organization's marketing key messages, it could be ideal for reaching the next generation of workers.

## IS AN EMERGING PLATFORM RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Here are some things to consider:

- Get data about the platform, then determine if the data aligns with your organization's objectives and target audience.
- If you're trying to reach Gen Z, then TikTok and Instagram should be in your social media mix.
- [Instagram carousels](#) can be a powerful tool for getting your organization noticed.

## USE TAGS AND HASHTAGS

When posting about projects, partnerships or events you have participated in, be sure to tag the other players involved, including project owners or event organizers. Tagging others allows your posts to be seen by their unique followers, thus increasing your exposure. Hashtags are also useful to help categorize your messages and enable users to find your organization when searching for specific types of content.

Here are some ideas for increasing engagement:

- [Tag other organizations and people](#) whenever possible and as often as possible.
- Use hashtags and incorporate the most popular ones for the subject. Check out online resources like [hashtagify.me](#) to locate trending hashtags.
- Create an engagement campaign. One simple way is by hosting an online photo contest for social media followers to share a unique image with a special hashtag for the contest's theme.

## DEFINE YOUR GOALS

You can measure a social media campaign's success by its ability to raise awareness. When creating a new social media campaign, consider the goal and the audience. A common mistake in [social media marketing](#) is creating content and posting without giving any thought to these crucial elements. Design your campaign's content with a goal and an audience in mind—this begins with the platform you choose and continues through your campaign as you interact with your followers.



# Quiz: Guess the Generation!

Test your knowledge on engaging with different generations! Not every person in a group is the same, but it does help to know the broadly defined habits and preferences of certain age demographics when determining where and how to reach a large grouping of people. How well are you doing in your efforts to engage members of different generations?

## **Match the Generation with the Best Ways to Engage Them**

**1. Television, radio, and print media. Phone calls and in-person meetings for personal interactions. Email as a primary digital communication method and personalized email campaigns.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**2. Interactive and gamified digital experiences and augmented reality (AR) experiences.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**3. Text messaging, email, and social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter, YouTube). Engaging videos and visual content. Podcasts. Authentic, personalized content that resonates with values and aspirations, i.e., sustainability and social responsibility.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**4. Text messaging and instant messaging apps for quick exchanges. SMS marketing and personalized text campaigns. Prompt responses: live chat support, interactive messaging.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**5. Email, text messaging, and social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn). Interactive website and mobile app experiences. Live Q&A sessions, online chats, chatbot assistance.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)



**6. Brochures and physical catalogs. Print advertisements and direct mail. Newsletters (print and email).**

**Face-to-face events and seminars. Long-form articles and blog posts.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**7. A mix of traditional and digital marketing—magazines, newspapers, and billboards; personalized email campaigns, online ads, and social media influencer partnerships. Webinars and online/video tutorials.**

**Virtual events and interactive workshops.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**8. Mobile-responsive websites and apps. Social media contests and surveys. User-generated content and influencer collaborations. Authentic brand interactions.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**9. Video-based social media platforms (i.e., YouTube, Instagram Reels, TikTok). User-generated content, influencer partnerships, and brand ambassadors. Real-time engagement and social media conversations.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**10. Engaging videos and short-form content. Authentic and relatable storytelling. Conversational and informal tone in messaging.**

- A. Baby boomer (born 1946-1964)
- B. Gen X (born 1965-1980)
- C. Millennial (born 1981-1996)
- D. Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

**Bonus: Is YouTube considered a social media channel?**

- A. Yes
- B. No

Please note that these preferences are generalizations, and individual preferences may vary. Conducting market research and gathering specific insights about your target audiences can help you tailor your marketing and recruitment strategies more effectively. [Contact AOE](#) to get started!

Answer Key: (1) A, (2) D, (3) C, (4) D, (5) B, (6) A, (7) B, (8) C, (9) D, (10) D; Bonus: A



Gen Z is shaping the future of America. They are our employees, our consumers, and in the not-too-distant future, our leaders. It's time we look at how we engage with them—in the workplace, on social media and in other spaces.

**Reach out to AOE** to learn more about how to connect with Gen Z.

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Advancing Organizational Excellence

