

Q3
2020

*the cooper*group

STRATEGY
HQ

GEN

**CAUGHT
OFF GUARD:
MARKETERS HAVEN'T
BEEN PREPARING
FOR GENERATION Z**

**WHAT IS
THE REAL VALUE OF
AUTHENTICITY?**

**UNLEASH
YOUR THINKERS:
NO MORE BOXES**





What Is the Real Value of Authenticity?

For many companies, the value of authenticity becomes evident only after they are abandoned by key customers, hurting financially, or shut out by competitors who are seen as more virtuous.

I can't think of a market in which growth-minded companies can afford to skip being genuine. Consumer trust is at an all-time low. Huge blocs of buyers are demanding values-driven commerce. And societal and economic influences are echoing skepticism on just about everything, from individual brands to entire companies, trustworthiness, reliability, and ethics.

In today's environment, customers, employees, and sought-after job candidates aren't casually looking for honesty in business. They expect it. And they're not alone. Local communities, suppliers, business partners, investors, in fact every entity a company counts on or courts wants to see that the company is consistently true to its mission and values from the inside out.

Authenticity Isn't What We Have. It's What We Do.

The journey to authenticity, and its wholly measurable value, is lined with intentional daily acts that permeate every pillar of brand identity:

■ **Mission**

Daily decisions are made that affirm, work to achieve, and sustain strategic goals.

■ **Values**

Organizational beliefs and commitments are made known and staunchly upheld.

■ **Stakeholders**

The needs of all constituents are studied, embraced, and championed.

■ **Market Distinctions**

Competitive strengths are closely monitored and diligently refined. And last but definitely not least...

■ **Communications**

Trust is built through honest, transparent, and continuous engagement.

Trust is the real value companies derive from being authentic – trust in who we

are, what we do best, and how we operate and interact with people and other entities. It is what drives customers to buy and investors to invest. It is what gives employees confidence in an employer and their own futures. The trust companies earn through everyday actions is what allows us to grow and become more credible and profitable, and what sustains us in economic downturns.

It grows from the inside out – through relationships.

The viability of any brand depends on its perceived truthfulness across its unique community of stakeholders. In our targeted outreach and relationships, if everything we do and say aligns with our mission and values, we can be confident that employees, customers, and other constituents will see, hear, and favorably react to our truths that are most relevant and meaningful to them.

For example, it's no secret that creating genuine value for employees results in happier employees, and more successful businesses and brands. Again, it's all about forthright engagement, responding to their needs in the most strategic ways, and fostering relationships that build trust

and confidence. Knowing they are valued brings out the best in employees. They in turn emanate our brand authenticity in their relationships with our customers, and in the communities and industries we serve.

Authenticity is impossible to contain! Every relationship has potential to become an avid brand ambassador,

driving positive perceptions, top talent to our doorsteps, and higher customer satisfaction, retention, and profitability.

“You can't fake it – you have to be it.”

That is how business writer Matthew Jones coins the approach to authenticity. While his article focuses on [authentic leaders](#), his edict holds



...it's no secret that creating genuine value for employees results in happier employees, and more successful businesses and brands.

true for the company itself as a product or service provider, as an employer and corporate citizen. Leaders and companies alike must exhibit focused, honest, and transparent actions.

Much more than lip service, intentional authenticity means walking the talk, being a passionate embodiment of truth, consistency, and trustworthiness.

Does Everybody Want the Same Things in a Relationship?

Fundamentally, yes. Our constituents

expect to see values built on a belief system that extends the same honesty and respect to everyone. Any disparity lies naked for the world to see in today's environment, where people are well-connected and exposed to user-generated content (UGC), both good and bad, about companies and brands. They also have access to employee-generated company ratings through sites like Glassdoor.

Shanna Hyder, founder and CEO of Zen Media explains with great clarity how "...connected consumers see a

If we see our constituents as human beings, not merely cogs in our revenue wheel, and if we know what truly motivates them, we have the empirical facts needed to successfully engage them and build rewarding relationships.

brand as the sum total of all of these relationships, and a mismatch between a brand's walk and talk with any one of these relationships can put a brand at serious risk.”

On a more granular level, every group's needs and expectations are quite different, to the extent that distinctive methods and functional terms exist for improving relationships, such as employee experience (EX) and customer experience (CX).

This is why in our outreach and relationships, if all that we do and say aligns with our mission and values, we are able to impart our most relevant and meaningful truths to every group.

How Does Authenticity Connect with People and Communities?

If we see our constituents as human beings, not merely cogs in our revenue wheel, and if we know what truly motivates them, we have the empirical facts needed to successfully

engage them and build rewarding relationships. You will find most if not all of your stakeholders within these groups, including their spending influence and what they value in life and business:

- Controlling 70% of [disposable income](#) in the United States, Baby Boomers, ~55 to 75 years old, until 2020 were the largest demographic with more than [\\$548 billion](#) in annual spending power. They are growing in the workforce, not shrinking, and boosting performance with solid work ethics, mental focus, and team- and goal-oriented strengths. They are active and influential participants in their communities, and overall a formidable contingent known to respect and advocate for authentic brands.

- More than [50%](#) of leadership roles are held by Gen Xers, ~36 to 54 years in age. They have advanced skills and experience and readily embrace challenge. As [highlighted](#) in U.S. News and World Report, they are both digitally connected and recognized for their ability to collaborate with others to get things done. They follow Boomers with [\\$357 billion](#) in annual buying power. As employees, customers, or other influencers, they are vital to enriching authentic brands.

- Millennials are altruistic in their lives and expectations of society and business. In fact, they are largely responsible for forcing companies to put their values where their mouth and money are. That is, to reflect like values of social consciousness, diversity, inclusiveness, and sustainability. Just behind Gen X with [\\$323 billion](#) in annual spending power, Millennials are firmly committed to working for and buying from transparent, authentic companies.

- Although they are young, it is a mistake for companies to dismiss the influence of Gen Z. As acknowledged

by Anna Blue, co-executive director of Girl Up, Gen Z has upped the Millennial ante by “expecting companies to align their values with [action](#). They don't want to just hear talk.” Older Gen Z'ers are in college and the workforce. Collectively, they are the second-largest U.S. generation, representing [\\$143 billion](#) in annual spending. They start voting this year, and soon enough, they will be leading our companies and communities.

Turning Our Sights and Actions to the Human Experience

To be authentic business and market leaders, we must understand, act, and engage on:

- Who we are, what we stand for, and what we do best
- Our stakeholders, what drives them, and what they admire most in us
- Our communities, what they need, and how we can support them

Only in this way can we build genuine relationships, create positive experiences and outcomes, and demonstrate our virtues in ways that build trust – the true value of authenticity.

BABY BOO
GEN XERS
MILLENNI
GEN ZERS

CAUGHT OFF GUARD:

by Dwan V.
White

MARKETERS HAVEN'T BEEN PREPARING FOR GENERATION Z

Most companies could never have imagined that recent events shaping today's social and cultural climate would so dramatically shake up brands and how they engage with consumers. But any marketer with eyes on Generation Z knew such a shake-up was not just possible, but highly probable.

Just as marketers settled into understanding how to speak to Millennials, another generation entered the sphere of our interest, and they're kicking butt and taking names, literally and figuratively. Anyone who thinks Generation Z (born 1997 through about 2012) is merely an extension of Millennials should think again. Gen Z is disrupting the culture that popularized disruption with a very distinctive way of thinking and being. If you combine the insightfulness, political awareness, enthusiasm for learning and frugality of Baby Boomers with the technical savvy, social consciousness, spirit of entrepreneurship and frankness of Millennials, you get an amazing hybrid we now call Gen Z.

The civil unrest the United States is currently experiencing has been triggered by widespread lack of tolerance for blatant racism toward Black Americans. This period marks one of the first times in recent history when voices of people representing every race in the country are speaking out, calling for justice and equality, and showing up as a united front to support the dismantling of systematic racism.

Among the loudest voices, Gen Z is front and center, leading and supporting the charge. But it doesn't stop there. Some of the most prominent voices demanding change for everything from environmental awareness to access to quality healthcare for all are under the age of 20. They include 15-year-old political strategist Jett James Pruitt, whose political involvement began at age 9, and whose book, "Through the Eyes of a Young American: A Teenager's Perspective on Government, Politics and Solving our Country's

Biggest Problems," is hailed as one of the Best Books of 2020 by [BooksOnPolitics.com](https://www.books-on-politics.com/).

Gen Z is a powerful force with a mindset to challenge and change systems and outlooks. So, when we compare Millennial and Gen Z attributes, we see stark differences in their approach to issues from the economy and education to self-esteem, social advocacy and community. The implications of these differences are quite significant, especially for the way marketers communicate with this maturing generation, which in 2020 became the largest generation on earth.

means of protesting when justice isn't being served, whether online or with boots on the ground, that crowdfunding is the way to instantly raise money for just causes, that viral social media is the main way to raise awareness, and they expect that eradicating a wrong must occur without delay.

The age of the Millennial sparked lots of conversations about injustices. With Gen Z, there's no more room for conversations. They want and expect action. This global-minded generation that may potentially consist of the largest number of bi-racial individuals is not about tolerance, but full inclusion. Don't try to pull the wool over their eyes with loosely defined support or fluffy messages. They will call foul and put it on blast.



Authenticity: Activism with Words vs. Activism with Action

Millennials have long required the brands they interact with to stand for and show support for a meaningful cause. Gen Z, on the other hand, is more concerned with the actual cause, being an active part of the solution and holding a brand accountable for how it actively supports the cause.

Gen Z's first thoughts involve public

Brands should not just stand for something but provide a platform for Gen Z to get involved right along with them. While authenticity is important to both groups, Millennials' level of activism can be limited by their me-focused mindset vs. Gen Z's community/global outlook.

General Outlook: Optimism vs. Pragmatism

In the minds of Millennials, everything is possible and should be accomplished.

Gen Z's distrust of big systems, such as government, organizations and corporations, plays a huge role with what they choose to align themselves.

There are no barriers to entry. So, if it can be conceived, it can be achieved... and they are entitled to it all. This is not so much the case with Gen Z, who have witnessed some of the shortcomings of their Millennial siblings, many of whom still require parental support, and approach life with a more practical paradigm.

Gen Z's distrust of big systems, such as government, organizations and corporations, plays a huge role with what they choose to align themselves. They will likely be the most logically thinking generation of modern times. They carefully think through choices and rarely make a move if it doesn't make sense. This application of logic in making major life decisions also applies to lower-level decisions, such as purchasing behavior. They're not lured by a product or service that enhances their self-esteem or image. In general, they educate themselves and determine whether the value proposition makes sense.

Economy: Spend on the Experience vs. Frugality

Unlike Millennials, who have spared no expense to enjoy experiences that

heighten lifestyle and boost image among peers in the here and now, Gen Z has been raised in a recession-oriented economy and chooses to be more frugal and logical in their spending. They are less now-focused and more future-focused, making them savers instead of big spenders.

While Gen Z'ers also enjoy and seek to have experiences, if the benefit of saving outweighs the perceived pleasure or panache of an experience, they'll likely choose the former. Therefore, experiences – travel, major consumer purchases, education choices, brand choices, etc. – have to be meaningful, affordable, convenient and readily accessible.

Use of the Internet: Social Stardom vs. Learning

Millennials are responsible for the creation and rise of the internet rock star with social media as the platform of choice for being discovered. When Gen Z takes to the internet, being discovered isn't necessarily a goal. It's generally for the pursuit of knowledge. A great number of their searches start with, "How do I" or "How to." They

use the internet as a research tool to access information about anything and everything under the sun and have an expectation to instantaneously find it.

This isn't surprising, as Gen Z is the first generation with internet technology heavily integrated into their classrooms. Using personal cell phones and tablets at school each day as part of their academic experience, Gen Z thinks about learning and access to knowledge as being literally at their fingertips.

Just like with Millennials, marketers should expect Gen Z to thoroughly research and engage with products well in advance of a purchase. However, because of Gen Z's greater preference to make purchases online vs. a brick and mortar store, there must be enough meaningful information online to help them learn as much as possible about a product to inform and drive their purchase decisions.

Entrepreneurism: Sharing Things vs. Making Things

Entrepreneurism is being infused into Gen Z's DNA. Groomed in critical thinking techniques, collaborative and creative problem solving, and STEM programs at the elementary school level, Gen Z gets excited about making things, whereas Millennials have demonstrated more interest in sharing things. This in no way suggests Millennials are slackers. After all, their ingenuity coined the buzz phrase "disruption." Gen Z just takes it to a more heightened level.

Gen Z'ers are learning enthusiasts. They seek advice from those who are more experienced so they get it right the first time, while Millennials subject themselves to lots of trial and error by

doing it on their own, fulfilled by being able to be self-made, achieving their objectives on their own terms without the assistance of older individuals who may not agree with their way of thinking.

Gen Z has also grown up with a better understanding of how to advance and fund their ideas. Having access to an abundance of content sources like YouTube (full of DIY content), internet-based education providers like Udemy, and popular television shows like Shark Tank, Gen Z is learning how to create, present and then raise capital for their ideas. This way of learning significantly impacts traditional education systems. Many Gen Z'ers are opting out of earning a college degree and turning to non-traditional learning through webinars, videos and apprenticeships with solopreneurs and entrepreneurs to acquire hands-on knowledge and experience.

Having watched their Millennial siblings rack up debt on college degrees that haven't led to satisfying jobs, many Gen Z'ers find it illogical to amass debt in pursuit of a formal college education. Although they are smart and mature, this could potentially imply that Gen Z will lack scholarship in their way of thinking and learning.

Interpersonal Connections: Relationships, Recognition and Personality

Regarding relationships, we've seen that Millennials can be more co-dependent, in need of approval, support and also reward, both emotional and financial.

Conversely, research is showing that Gen Z craves independence and is zealous about working hard and making a contribution. Their work ethic is similar to that of Baby Boomers, in that hard work is fulfilling and a means to achieve success, whereas Millennials view work, hard or otherwise, as a means to gain recognition and quick advancement.

Gen Z is more open to advice and counsel of older adults, while Millennials tend to regard the advice and outlook of their predecessors as



outdated. Gen Z's comfort level with older adults may be the result of many growing up in multigenerational homes and grandparents living longer. Younger Gen Z'ers don't want to be spoken to or reasoned with as children. In dialogue, they want direct communication and facts, and they're prepared to argue their point to win the other person to their way of thinking.

Although Gen Z is proving to be mature and logical, they also experience depression at higher levels. Their emotional vulnerabilities can be

triggered by a lack of perfectionism, resulting in chronic feelings of embarrassment and anxiety when they feel they don't measure up or that tasks and situations are too difficult. Reward and recognition seem to produce internal and personal pride, whereas with Millennials, reward and recognition produce outward pride and external approval.



These are just a few Millennial vs. Generation Z trait comparisons. There's a lot more for marketers to explore.

Many brands are still heavily focused on connecting with Millennials, and rightfully so. Their purchasing power is the most significant of recent generations. But with Gen Z on the rise and already challenging brand messaging and wielding \$143 billion in spending power, companies must be greater social listeners and tap into

commonalities across generations to craft relevant messages and experiences that align with newer attitudes, value propositions, outlooks and emotional intelligence.

Dwan V. White is a brand architect, marketing strategist, intrapreneur, and self-proclaimed generational research geek. She is currently vice president of Global Marketing & Product Development at House of Cheatham, Inc. in Stone Mountain, Georgia, where she leads marketing strategy and creation of brands and products in the Personal Care industry, mainly in the multicultural hair products category.

by David Cooper

UNLEASH YOUR THINKERS: NO MORE BOXES

Innovation should not be an event or project. It should be the organizational culture with priority, utilized to gain and retain a competitive advantage. If true innovation occurs outside the box, then you do not need the box. Time to burn it.

Don't Use This Cliché

“Think outside of the box!” This overused cliché “covertly” urges people to partake in different or unconventional thinking. It asks a person or organization to abandon legacy approaches to address a particular, often temporary, situation in a non-traditional way. It asks humans to disregard cultural norms and historical training in favor of progress and then return to the same approaches they were just asked to abandon. This is very interesting (but counter-intuitive).

Let's take a moment to understand the complex human. Beyond cognitive considerations, people (and organizations) are creatures of habit. Yes, they are highly adaptive

to unforeseen circumstances, effectively maneuvering through challenges, which threaten their existence. However, our ultimate goal is to return to a place of comfort, consistency and safety. We are adaptive but most of the time, we don't enjoy change.

Past Walls Destroy Future Views

How can an organization encourage “Thinking outside the box”? Here's the secret – it can't. Most organizations are successful because of well-defined and structured processes that contribute to its efficiency. Unfortunately, this “benefit” is both a gift and a curse, as movement beyond the “organized boundaries” becomes almost impossible for



INNOVATE



the well-trained employee. Most organizations discourage “real free thinking.” Instead, they advocate thinly veiled attempts to get temporary innovation from people who have been encouraged to remain comfortably sterile. For example, a global Fortune 100 company, well known for producing the world’s most talented martial artists (Six Sigma), struggled to implement a new business process.

For several years, its black belts worked diligently to make a 2015 concern fit into a 1990 box. They were unable to move beyond a standard (historical) approach to address contemporary concerns. After several unsuccessful attempts to complete the project, the company cancelled the project. There is nothing more disheartening

than investing valuable resources, which yield a negative ROI.

Burning the Box: Complete the Innovation Transformation

Real innovation is not a project; it’s a culture. People are encouraged to consistently think and act differently – for the sake of the organization. Employees are not moving from a place of complacency to a place of creativity. They continuously dwell in the innovation space. They are not asked to “think outside the box” because there is no box to constrain them.

Leaders need to carefully evaluate their culture and systems. If the lack of innovation is hindering organizational progress (you are in a box), consider compelling

(cultural change) all stakeholders to permanently move from a responsive posture to a permanently disruptive position (burn the box). Leaders must remove all restrictive boundaries, inspiring intellectual expansion and behavioral development among all contributors.

Innovation Is...

Innovation is more than a buzzword; it is an actionable, profitable culture that constantly works to improve itself. It is not constrained by historical perspectives because it is motivated by potential opportunities. It does not temporarily eliminate obstructions because there are no obstacles to remove. Burn the box today!

WE BELIEVE
BETTER
BUSINESS
HEALTH
WILL BUILD
A STRONGER
SOCIETY



The Cooper Group, Inc.
5 Concourse Parkway
Suite 3000
Atlanta, GA 30328
678-474-9678

To subscribe, e-mail us at
StrategyHQ@thecoopergroup.net

the **cooper** group

www.thecoopergroup.net

 @TCGInsights