

# Connect With Gen Y Or Risk Irrelevancy

By Lori Turner-Wilson

**Editor's Note: This is the second in a two-part series.**

Now is the time to engage Generation Y. The second-largest generation in our nation's history, they have more money of their own at this point in their lives than any prior generation.

Combine that financial power with their eagerness to form brand alliances early in their lives, and you have a perfect storm. If your brand fails to connect with Gen Y now, you may be risking future brand irrelevancy as this generation takes over the marketplace.

Adapting your marketing strategy to this generation begins with selecting the proper marketing channel and adjusting your message.

**Key Channels:** Technology is the lifeblood of Gen Y, so naturally well-performing technology is expected. Your website has to perform quickly, look good, and be easy to navigate with no dead ends. This is the cost of entry to communicating with this generation.

Plugged in at all times in all places, social media should be an integral part of your marketing plan. Viral marketing – electronic word of mouth – and text marketing can be particularly effective strategies.

A cause-focused generation, aligning your brand with a worthy cause that's of interest to this generation can strengthen their loyalty. Where often this group opts to communicate with the world through a veil of technology, a cause-related event could offer your brand a rare opportunity for face-to-face relationship building.

Gen Y is relying less on TV as they age, and with digital music taking over listenership among this segment, it is increasingly difficult to reach this group through traditional TV and radio ads. Email marketing can be effective if appropriately targeted toward Gen Y, if it offers a nice balance of content and imagery and is personalized.

**Key Messages:** Avoid talking down to Gen Y or pushing your product or service on them. Show you know how smart they are by sharing information and allowing them to make an informed decision, versus selling them. Be authentic. Slick pitches will turn off this generation.

Gen Y tunes into messages related to planning for their future or their family. Make sure they understand your brand knows there's more to life than work.

Be entertaining. They love humor and irony. Show that your brand doesn't take itself too seriously. To them, all technology should be entertainment. Use it as such when marketing.

Help Gen Y see that your product is the latest and coolest, and you may convince them to buy, as this generation distinguishes little between "want" and need."

This generation responds well when they feel they've stumbled across your message themselves. So talk to Gen Y in their environment. The sneaker manufacturer Vans builds skate parks for Gen Y. There's no hard sell there. It's a cause-related effort, environmentally friendly, and authentic – a Gen Y trifecta.

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