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Guerrilla Sales & Ma

X Marks the Spot

LORI TURNER

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Lori Turner

As a member of Generation X, I can appreciate why our generation is characterized as having a survivor mentality. In this second column in a three-part series on generational marketing, we look at the collective experiences that shape the way Gen Xers think, believe, buy, and ultimately, how to market most effectively to them.

Born from 1965 to 1976, now ages 34 to 45, Xers are entering their peak earning years and, more importantly, haven't yet formed strong brand alliances. That's why brands are prioritizing their Gen X marketing strategy.

Skeptical and pragmatic, Xers have witnessed crumbling political, corporate and family structures. They saw the Berlin Wall fall. Also dismantled were millions of families, as this generation's Baby Boomer parents were hit hard by recessions and corporate downsizing. The result is Xers who lost faith in corporations and the institution of marriage – thus the “survivor” characterization.

With rising divorce rates and financial uncertainty, more Xers were latchkey kids raised by working (and often single) parents.

Essentially raising themselves, they developed a steely self-reliance. At the same time, feeling orphaned as latchkey kids, Xers want you, as marketers, to prove you're willing to invest in a relationship.

MTV and radio were surrogate parents for Xers. So, savvy marketers often evoke nostalgia with this generation's music.

Xers are tech savvy. From the bag phone to the iPhone; from vinyl to digital music; from the Tandy 1000 to the MacBook, Xers are able to adapt to rapid changes. And they thrive on technological stimuli – laptop, cell phone, iPad, social media. Without it, they're bored.

So with all of these dramatic life changes, it's no wonder they embrace risk and question authority.

With a strong work ethic, they gravitate toward leadership roles. Many Xers are entrepreneurs, choosing to make their own way rather than trusting corporate entities. In fact, Xers have started more than two-thirds of U.S. businesses.

Because Xers are less comfortable with debt and feel less secure in their finances, they value a good value. And, when they find it, they will tell their friends in droves.

How do you reach Xers? Word of mouth is strongest. After that, go for e-mail, Internet including social media, and multi-media. Direct mail for this segment is more effective than with Gen Yers and less effective than with Boomers.

When messaging Xers be straightforward, even using sound bites. This is a problem-solving generation, so show consumers how your product or service solves a real problem. And while you don't want to go into too much detail, do make more information available. Information is power to Gen X.

Gen Xers see themselves as driven, hard-working leaders who need to stay connected to technology. Marriott Hotels gets it. Targeting Xers with experiencemarriott.com, the site builds a relationship using audio and video. Interactive virtual hotel tours appeal to tech-savvy users. The marketing messages have a clear Gen X slant, such as “Where the driven stay connected

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24/7.”

If 34- to 45-years-olds are a strong demographic for your business, why market to them as if they're Boomers or Gen Yers? X marks the spot.

Lori Turner is managing partner, RedRover Sales & Marketing, www.redrovercompany.com



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