

# How brands can connect with Generation Z

As part of their ongoing efforts to help South African SMEs navigate the post-pandemic "Great Staggering" back into the new post-normal, post-lockdown world, Dion Chang, founder of Flux Trends, interviewed Praise Majwafi a young marketing consultant and creative at the Alinea Marketing Master Class to find out South African businesses can connect with the next consumer.



Praise Majwafi is a self-described “agent of the creative economy”, with a B.Com in Business Innovation and Entrepreneurship from AFDA, Johannesburg. He has worked as a marketing agent for property development companies and as a marketing contractor for Global Citizen Festivals and UNICEF. As such, he is perfectly positioned to help brands understand what they are getting wrong and right when it comes to connecting with the youth market.

■ ***What do brands get wrong when it comes to marketing to a younger audience? Is it wrong in terms of the messaging? Is that the medium? The platform? Or the language? What are they getting right? And - more importantly - what is wrong with the communication they are putting out?***

Gen Z's emergence is driving tremendous change challenge and opportunity for leaders and brands.

“ The leaders who invest the most right now in trying to understand Gen Z and who we are as young individuals are going to reap the benefits. ”

Brands and employers will have to learn how to see the world through the diverse lens of my generation.

As to what brands get wrong, I would say the first thing is, do not ignore us. Gen Z is here. And if you are looking at the eldest Gen Z's, we are currently 24 years of age. We are the fastest growing global generation - we are your future employees and the most important group of consumers and trendsetters.

There are three key trends that shape the Gen Z. They are **parenting**, **technology**, and **economics**.

- Firstly, **technology**. Here, Gen Z's are an interesting topic or hot topic, because this is the first time in history where you have so much data on so many data points or so many individuals within one generational cohort. So, what we know about Gen Z is more accurate than what we know about older generations.
- Secondly, if we are to look at **parenting** for Gen Z's, Gen X's are the parents of Gen Z's, while The Baby Boomers are primarily the parents of millennials - and we see a huge shift in how these two generations grew up. Baby Boomers were the "helicopter" parents to millennials who tried to make life easy for their kids, which resulted in a co-dependent generation of millennials. Gen X's however took a "figure it out yourself" approach to parenting Gen Z's, resulting in a much more resilient, independent Gen Z generation.
- Thirdly, when it comes to **economics**, we are highly educated, and, surprisingly enough, more practical with money matters because we grew up during the 2008 recession, and we saw our parents struggling. We are now driving double-digit growth at thrift stores - trying to be more cost-effective with our money.

“ Price - value - is really a thing when it comes to Gen Z's. ”

I would also say we are increasingly self-aware, self-reliant, and innovative, and highly goal-oriented. This means Gen Z consumers can be hard to sell if a company's full experience is not up to expectations - we want to feel valued.

One of the biggest things that I see is that Gen Z's feel like they are misunderstood by older generations or are not represented in ad campaigns.

■ ***One of the biggest dilemmas in terms of digital marketing as well is getting the balance of frequency, not only message, but frequency right. So, what do you feel, as a digital native, is the optimal frequency? What is too much to the point it becomes annoying? What is too little? And then, especially in the South African context, because we also have a digital divide to contend with. If you are marketing to a younger audience here, what are the best platforms do you think to reach young people?***

When it comes to frequency, I think brands or organisations should look beyond the likes and views and followers when they are posting content, and seek to generate genuine engagements.

It is really a fight for attention when it comes to brands and advertising. Gen Z's customers are just looking for a brand that they vibe with - a brand that they feel like understands them.

*“ You want a “social digital fingerprint” that people can recognise. Having a digital social print helps you a lot when it comes to frequency because then you do not have to post as much to remain top of mind. Brands that are also deemed as exclusive are brands that do not post all the time. But when they do, they generate a lot of noise. ”*

So, I think when it comes to the balance of the optimal frequency for posting e-mail, or social communication, it really depends on the industry that you're in, and on the product that you're trying to sell.

If you are trying to sell a product that someone buys once per month, it does not make sense to be emailing them every day, and if you do, they actually get turned off.

When it comes to platforms, Gen Z's in South Africa still currently favour Facebook in terms of total usage and that is changing fast. We view Facebook as being for older generations, and are now looking at more peer to peer social media apps or messaging apps such as your Instagram or WhatsApp - and there's no denying that TikTok is taking over the screen.

We like nuggets of educational content - we like to learn something with almost every post we view.

**■ What is your advice to, for a company selling direct to the customer? Should they use influencer marketing? Or is that just kind of a lost cause? Or do you still think in any traditional advertising platforms still resonate with you and your peers?**

Influencers, at one point, were very influential in terms of sales conversions. But us Gen Z's learn quickly. We now know that it is just, you know, someone were paid to say something. So, when it comes to using influencers, I would investigate using micro-influences, or letting people try out your things themselves.

*“ Brands should actively try to engage with their customers directly rather than through influencers or platforms - by this I mean actually interact with us by commenting on posts and having human conversations with us, one on one, like we matter. That really does help. Because we are the generation that needs validation. ”*

*This interview was part of the Flux Trends Alinea Mini Masterclass Series dedicated to helping South African entrepreneurs and SMEs use trends as business insights to get back to work after the manifold challenges of 2020.*