

The Psychographics of the Emerging Consumer

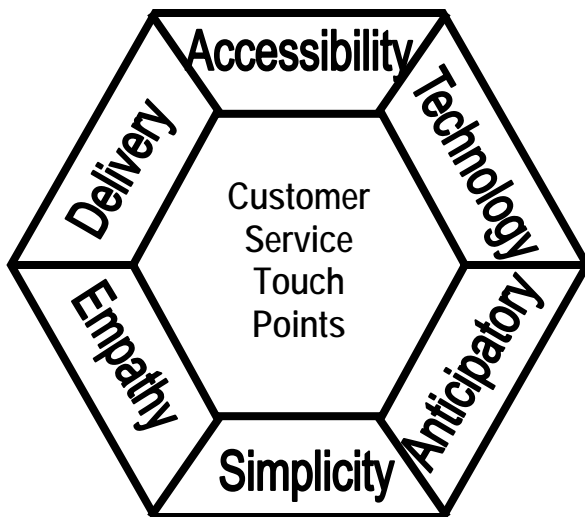


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How will you market and sell to the most diverse, wired, impatient, skeptical, demanding, fun-loving customers in history?

Generation X Consumer Themes

- They feel life is too short not to have fun.
- They like choice. If they are not offered the right options, they will attempt to create them.
- Xers seek extensive peer input .
- Money comes in the forms of credit cards and clicks.
- They're willing to wait to purchase quality.
- Xers are passionate about controlling their time.
- Xers want to interact with media rather than watch.
- They prefer non-textual information.
- To Xers, simplicity means practicality.
- They look for straightforward information.
- They like sales and service that anticipates their needs.
- They are innately suspicious of advertising.
- They research thoroughly before shopping.
- They consider it acceptable to lead a salesperson on with no intention of buying.
- They are comfortable challenging salespeople.
- They pride themselves on working smarter and purchasing smarter.



Millennial Consumer Themes

- They have grown up with computers and subtle technologies that present them with options.
- They expect computers to assist decision making.
- Money comes in the forms of credit cards and clicks.
- They are inherently skeptical of all media.
- Immediate outcome/gratification is critical.
- Debt is an acceptable form of being.
- Many have come of age with a regular infusion of discretionary income.
- They are conditioned to receive free "stuff."
- They are highly influenced by friends and congregate in groups.
- They want media they can call their own.
- They are highly brand conscious, especially with apparel and wear "badged" items.
- Attracted to immediate opportunities for affluence.
- They have become experienced consumers at an early age.

Customer Service Touch Points

Is it accessible? Can I access it 24/7/365? Will someone always answer the phone? How long will I wait on hold?

Does it meet current technological expectations? Is it menu driven? Are there helpful links to products and services? Can I get answers without speaking to a person?

Does it anticipate customer needs? Have they anticipated what can go wrong and prepared solutions in advance?

Is it simple to use? How many steps does it take? Are they fitting me into their system or the other way round?

Is it empathetic? Are the reps friendly? Do I feel handled? Are the instructions on the web empathetic? Do I feel like they understand my needs and problems?

Does it deliver the customer's desired outcome? Do I really get what I want? How hard do I have to work for good service? Is there follow-up once a solution has been offered?

Questions to ask. Thoughts to discuss.

- How can you get a better handle on the age demographics within your target markets?
- How will these diverse purchasing habits force you to modify present sales practices?
- How will Xers' lack of loyalty impact your long-term business relations?
- How can you modify promotions and sales to respond to Xers' focus on simplicity?
- What flexibility needs to be built into your systems to address Xers' and Millennials' ubiquitous use of technology?
- What business partners might be desirable for reaching out to these diverse groups?
- How will your promotion and advertising efforts have to change to attract diverse groups' attention?
- How can you take advantage of Xer and Millennial electronic social habits to increase traffic?
- How can you make your offerings more interactive to feed Millennials' desire to point and click?

Track Your Efforts

- Do you ask every customer and prospect about where they heard of your firm?
- Do you ask customers for suggestions on how you can better reach people like them?
- Do you take time to track sales in comparison to promotional spending?
- Do you periodically analyze all this information looking for changing trends and new opportunities?
- Do you act on what you find?

Millennials and the Big Click

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If there is one universal way to engage today's emerging generation of consumers, it is through technology. While this may appear obvious, the subtleties of doing so are more elusive. Regardless of the platform, there are five characteristics that all electronic marketing efforts share if they are to be successful with young buyers:

Informal personalization - Emerging consumers have come of age immersed in a world that treats them impersonally. After all, who knows their neighbors anymore? But on the Internet, the sites they visit address them by name, if they have been willing to share that name on a previous visit. If they are willing to embrace this kind of relationship with other sites, it is incumbent upon you and your organization to do the same. Remember the old saying? The most important word to anyone is their own first name. You don't need anything other than a first name and a valid e-mail to begin. The rest will come as the relationship evolves.

Relevant content - The old saying "sell the sizzle, not the steak" is counterintuitive for engaging emerging consumers. Successful marketers have discovered that value offered up front is the most effective way to establish a relationship with those in this young generation. Whether it's an excerpt of a book, a free upgrade on a product, the latest issue of an electronic magazine, or something else of perceived value, young visitors expect to walk away with value every time they visit a site.

Retailer Amazon.com and others have mastered the art of suggestive selling by matching visitors' navigation throughout the site with the electronic data they gather using cookies and other applications. While no one is advocating the surreptitious use of this technology, research indicates that emerging consumers are accepting of this practice provided it moves the relationship forward in a productive way. How can you accomplish this in your marketing and service efforts?

Intuitive navigation - Call it the Amazon.com effect. Granted Amazon has hundreds of programmers working 24-7 to make sure you not only find what you need but also what you don't know you need. Suggestive selling used to consist of "Would you like fries with that?"

Amazon.com and other organizations like it have taken this to an entirely new level. You, on the other hand, may be your organization's webmaster, top salesperson and chief custodian. Unfortunately, emerging consumers do not draw that distinction. That said, development of intuitive navigation takes little more than being able to place yourself in the users' minds and create a system that most visitors would be able to understand with little effort. Then observe people navigating the site and modify the navigation that they find difficult. Remember, this is not about engineering. It's about common sense and logic.

Entertainment/stimulation - With the introduction of YouTube and a number of similar sites, young consumers are expecting a bit of humor, fascination or wonder with every message. One community college, for instance, has developed a cartoon character that walks students through the registration process. Another organization has a site filled with individuals that narrate the visitor's path through the offerings available. Mouse over an icon and up pops a person to provide a whimsical explanation of the product.

The keys are engagement and instant gratification. Remember, emerging consumers are texting their friends, surfing the TV, participating in a conversation, listening to their favorite music, and oh, by the way, searching your site for what they need. You got that?

Speed - If it takes more than three seconds to load whatever you're providing to a visitor, you are probably toast. The multi-channeling mind has little, if any, patience for the concept of "buffering". Granted, both you and they can be uploading and downloading on a fiber-optic T-1 line, but it's still your fault if they see nothing but an hourglass toppling end-over-end. Solutions? Smaller pictures. Fewer effects. More engaging content and less complicated pizzazz that loads before the meat of the message. Streaming video? Sure, but cut your clip length by two-thirds and reduce the size of the image. Remember, if you're buffering, you're beaten.

If your efforts are to be successful in tomorrow's "big click" among emerging consumers, you need to begin today to engage them through the technology that dominates their everyday life.

