

MARKETING

## Are luxury brands taking their eye off Gen X?

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Latch on to Gen X. Image source: Google images

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Did you know that Generation X has the biggest spending power among all the generations? You do now.

After all, the founders of Google, Amazon, Tesla and SpaceX, PayPal, Beats by Dre and Wikipedia all are Gen X.

In fact, 55 percent of startup founders overall belong to this generation. So does Giovanna Bataglia, who became the most famous bride in history after throwing her "Celebration of Extravagance" wedding party last year, but that is neither here nor there.

X marks the spot

Gen X comprises consumers born between 1965 and 1976, although some demographers cap it at 1980.

Once known as slackers or latchkey kids, Gen X is preceded by baby boomers, a cohort born between 1946 and 1964.

Gen Y, better known as millennials, covers consumers born between 1977 and 1994, with Gen Z accounting for those born between 1995 to 2007.

One would think that Gen X is a luxury marketer's dream: affluent (even those who do not categorize as affluent are doing better than their baby boomer counterparts), willing to spend on travel for pleasure and on luxury products, loyal to their brands, health conscious, highly educated, consumers of both traditional media and the Internet and, most importantly, wielding considerable influence on both millennial and boomer generations.

But no. Luxury marketers are all about the millennials: those pesky luxury consumers-to-be, fickle in their tastes and their brand loyalty. They love lifestyles projected by luxury brands (think Balmain's Olivier Rousteing's following or Vetements hype), but if we do not count the rich kids of Instagram have yet to become viable customers of luxury products.

Home run

Millennials are the future of luxury, and boomers are its past. Gen X is its present, and this demographic group is the

easy, if not obvious, answer to the luxury brands' challenge of closing the gap between their maturing luxury demographic to the young one.

This generational gap is often bridged in Gen X's own homes.

Boomers are parents they care for, and millennials are their kids. This puts them in the position of power and influence.

Millennials are regularly introduced to luxury brands through their parents. I remember one millennial telling me that her mom took her to the Tom Ford Beauty counter at Barneys New York so that she can learn about quality.

Quality, convenience, service and trust are attributes often uniquely equaled with luxury. They are also the top priorities of Gen X when it comes to brands: they are intensely loyal to companies who save their time and serve them well.

Obsessive gift-givers, Gen X is going to gift and keep gifting those brands to their kids, effectively creating brand awareness among the next consumer generation.

Divide and rule

Inside luxury companies, there are currently more Gen X than millennials.

Instead of obsessing over the millennial puzzle with fervor that only those who do not belong to that generation have, luxury brand managers should focus on their unique closeness to their actual and currently much-more-lucrative target with whom they share age, lifestyle and interests, and devise marketing strategies to serve it.

Gen X-friendly marketing strategies are more likely than not to resonate with all three generations.

Think about it: Gen X is on both sides of digital divide. They consume print media and television and shop online and avidly use social media. They are deeply, truly omnichannel a Holy Grail (or the most overused catchphrase) of luxury retail.

The simplest solutions are often the best.

Luxury brands should keep investing in omnichannel marketing, and adjust their brand imagery to those between 34-54 instead of only courting boomers (think Lauren Hutton for Bottega Veneta) or millennials (think everyone else).

These brands should invest in highly personalized email communication, as that is the best way to reach and keep Gen X interested. They need to amplify their CRM and make sure that they provide superior customer service, both online and offline.

Also, they should manage a considered and relevant Facebook and Instagram presence.

Finally, they need to devise strong membership and loyalty programs to create a close and personal connection with this target.

NONE OF THESE things are going to turn millennials off.

The only real danger is in not doing them, as that would lead luxury brands to miss out on an entire lucrative generation.



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