

COLUMNS

Gen Z to dictate future of back-to-school trends

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This summer's back-to-school season was the most profitable ever, grossing **almost \$84 billion**. The Generation Z demographic consumers ages 21 and younger likely played a major role in this success and retailers are taking note.

There are currently more members of Gen Z than any other age group, with some **2.6 billion people** across the globe and roughly 60 million in the United States categorized as Gen Z.

So with this summer's back-to-school shopping season behind us, what better time for retailers to reflect on which shopping trends are most important to Gen Z? Here are three of the biggest.

Social media for product discovery

No other demographic puts as much stock in social media before making a purchase as Gen Z.

During the back-to-school season, Gen Z-ers spend much of their time browsing products and reading reviews online.

According to Retail Dive, **80 percent** of the purchases Gen Z-ers make are influenced by social media in some way.

Instagram is the most popular social media outlet for brand discovery, with **45 percent** of Gen Z shoppers using the social network to find new products.

But Instagram is just one of the many platforms that this demographic uses to find new brands.

As summer wound down and it came time to start thinking about the upcoming school year, Gen Z shoppers took to Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and more to discover the hottest back-to-school items.

For retailers, this focus on social media presents a serious marketing opportunity.

Understanding the prominent role social media plays in the life of Gen Z consumers will allow retailers to adjust their marketing strategies accordingly.

Bricks-and-mortar over digital

Over the past couple of years, online shopping has posed a real threat to bricks-and-mortar stores. However, when back-to-school shopping, Gen Z the most digital-centric age group we have ever seen actually prefers bricks-and-mortar.

According to the HRC Retail Advisory, **54 percent** of Gen Z consumers shopped for back-to-school items in-person this summer.

Specifically, 71 percent prefer buying school supplies in-person, and 62 percent would rather pick up beauty and personal grooming items in-store.

So what is attracting these tech-savvy, always logged-on kids to physical stores?

Gen Z-ers love a good deal, and they are more likely to shop somewhere that offers a discount or loyalty program.

In fact, **64 percent** of Gen Z shoppers are persuaded to shop with a brand if they offer a loyalty program, which are commonly available at bricks-and-mortar stores.

Another reason Gen Z prefers in-store back-to-school shopping is that they like interacting with products before deciding to purchase them.

When picking items they are going to use every day for an entire year, seeing an image online simply does not cut it. Retailers have an opportunity to drive foot traffic by capitalizing on Gen Z's preference for in-store shopping.

More personalization

For Gen Z consumers, one of the most impactful ways for retailers to reach Gen Z shoppers is with more personable, authentic marketing. This mindset should be front-and-center during the back-to-school season.

If a Gen Z shopper feels that a brand is being genuine, he or she is more likely to be attracted to them.

According to a study by the IBM Institute of Business Value and the National Retail Federation, **53 percent** of Gen Z-ers select brands that they feel understand them as a person. Brands can achieve this by using data and other metrics to find out where they shop and in what they are interested.

Gen Z consumers are also more likely to choose brands that are aligned with their beliefs and values.

For example, there is an increase in the number of Gen Z-ers who consider themselves environmentally conscious.

Currently, **55 percent** of Gen Z consumers go with brands who are eco-friendly and socially responsible.

Household names such as **Target, JC Penny and H&M** have made it a point to provide more environmentally-friendly offerings.

In addition, **many backpacks** a staple item of back-to-school shopping are designed with the environment in mind.

IT IS CLEAR that Gen Z will have a substantial impact on the future of back-to-school shopping.

Increasingly, Gen Z-ers are turning to social media, shopping in-store and desiring brands who get them.

For retailers to be successful during back-to-school season, they will have to pay attention to these trends and keep them in mind as they build their marketing strategies.

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