

Understanding Generational Communication Differences

<https://www.vervent.com/generational-communication-differences/>

The generation a customer belongs to significantly impacts their decision-making processes and communication preferences. As customer service insiders, we know that customers do not hesitate to pick up the phone and call when they have a question, problem or concern – but what are the most effective ways for businesses to communicate when they want to *share* information.

Each generation is heavily influenced by personal, cultural, social and psychological factors that affect their behavior and impact when, where, why and how they need to adapt and receive information. At the same time, technology and social media are transforming business and personal communication at lightning speeds. To be successful, companies now need to invest in new communication platforms and develop extensive content to access current customers, as well as effectively target potential new customers, with information for their products and services.

For the purposes of this article, we will focus on generations that are most active in today's business world and include the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials as indicated by the chart below.

Generation	Years	Age Range in 2018
Baby Boomers	1944-1964	54-74
Generation X	1965-1979	39-53
Millennials	1980-1994	24-38

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers were born in a time of austerity when countries were recovering from World War II and reestablishing or developing their economies. Because of this, Boomers are patriotic, encourage cultural freedom, freedom of expression, tolerance, and diversity. They are also highly focused on traditional TV and print 'news' which is the main way they stayed connected and how they learn about major happenings.

On a social basis, Boomers grew up with television, cinema, and radio and are excited to use this technology to stay updated with world affairs, self-educate, and stay connected with the world around them.

To enhance business, Boomers are accustomed to using fax machines, telephone books, and printed material, which is why this generation today feels most comfortable

with receiving printed information. It was not until the late 80's that this generation began to incorporate the limited use of cell phones and personal computers to their daily routine. Still today, they continuously work to adapt to the younger generation's trends and technology.

Preferred Tech-Media:

- Telephone

Most Used Written Media:

- Newspaper

Communication Preference:

- Face to face ideally, but online interaction continues to increase

Preferred Social Media:

- Facebook 65%
- Linked In 24%
- Instagram 21%
- Twitter 19%

How to approach them correctly:

- Most baby boomers have a Facebook account. Target ads and sponsored ads with relevant information will surely catch their attention.
- Baby boomers enjoy rich content that offers information as many of them have more free time as compared to other generations. Producing and publishing high-quality content delivered via blog articles, reviews, eBooks, commentaries, etc. work well with this group.
- Boomers are vocal, encourage them to participate in providing reviews.
- They are avid users of email so running email content campaigns is a fruitful strategy for companies to apply. Boomers consider email a great method to communicate and are known to engage with email content streams.
- Baby boomers trust and feel comfortable with printed information, since they used it before digital marketing communication even existed. This generation is more likely to respond to direct mail campaigns than any other.
- Since Baby Boomers are a conservative generation they prefer options that allow them to save money whenever they can. Therefore, discount and coupon strategies work well with this segment delivered through email, social media or direct mail.
- Videos that are slow in pace and contain detailed information are appealing to boomers. Quick video clips or 'highlights' that don't lay out information are not and will require an additional touchpoint.

- Interactive content such as quizzes and games attract this market. If they find this type of content useful or entertaining, they will share it with their peers.
- Baby Boomers like to be informed. Promote newsletter signups so they can continually engage with content and develop a relationship with the brand.

Content Consumption Habits:

- Printed, digital and online content

Active Hours (time):

- Between 5 a.m. and noon

Email Activity:

- 95% use email

News Consumption:

- 89% of are interested in news
- 54% like to go in-depth

The topics this generation is more attracted to include:

- Environment
- Local news
- National politics
- Economy
- Crime
- Health
- Education

Top media/device used to get informed:

- TV 92%
- Radio 65%
- Computer 56%
- Print Newspaper 53%
- Print magazines 13%
- Smartphone 12%
- Tablet 6%

Top social media channels regularly used to get informed:

- 11% Facebook
- 1% Twitter

- 6% Google+

Top media used to share news or content:

- 74% Word of mouth
- 32% Email
- 20% Print media
- 9% share links on social media or website

Generation X

Generation X are highly influenced by their parents. This group focus is its efforts on working smarter and finding a balance between work and personal life. Influences for this generation included a change in family and social movements, dual-income households and gender, racial and ethnic diversity. Unfortunately, this generation also experienced high divorce rates, double-digit inflation, and environmental impacts, leading to skepticism and driving high personal needs.

Technology, such as email, cell phones, Walkman's/iPods, VHS tapes and computers came into being in the formative years of this generation era benefiting everyone. Xers were characterized for being an autodidactic, interactive, learning generation who like to explore and work to acquire knowledge.

They grew up with email communication, and regardless of new social communication methods companies have experimented with, Xers see email as a viable medium to communicate professionally. Social media for a personal use & managing lifestyle (bill pay, banking, travel, shopping, education and staying connected with friends & family) is very common, but not all Xers are comfortable with using social media professionally. Time is one of the most valuable commodities for this generation so any communication or tools that helps them be efficient are valued and highly utilized.

Preferred Tech-Media:

- Email and text message

Most Used Written Media:

- Newspaper

Communication Preference:

- Receive and send text messages or emails

Preferred Social Media:

- Facebook 78%

- Linked In 33%
- Twitter 27%
- Instagram 40%

How to approach them correctly:

- The number of Gen-Xers active on Facebook is much higher than Boomers. It is safe to say that Facebook Ads will engage a positive response.
- The percentage of Gen-Xers who download or watch videos online at least once per month is 78.8%, so creating substantial, visual, engaging and vibrant video content is a good way to reach them.
- Content of value will reap rewards. Focus on their main points and aspirations and deliver it in a compelling manner. Remember to pamper their need for nostalgia and comfort.
- Gen X is recognized as an educated generation with higher education rates than previous generations. Over 10 % of this generation are actively pursuing continuous education. Use content that teaches this generation how to do things on their own, but avoid polls and quizzes, since they find them time-consuming and less appealing.
- Mobile and desktop email attract this generation. Take advantage of this media and send relevant information to them.
- Providing straightforward “click-through” links on emails or social media is something they appreciate.
- eCommerce is essential for Xers and they are likely to engage more deeply when there are perks that save them time (free shipping, expedited delivery, known preferences, etc.).

Content Consumption Habits:

- Online content related to entertainment and lifestyle

Active Hours (time):

- In the evening between 8 p.m. to midnight

Email Activity:

- 92% use email

News Consumption:

- 77% of Xers are interested in news
- 43% of them like to go in-depth

The topics this generation is more attracted to include:

- Environment
- Local news
- Politics
- Business
- Health
- Lifestyle
- Education

Top media/device used to get informed:

- TV 83%
- Computer 67%
- Radio 62%
- Print Newspaper 32%
- Smartphone 29%
- Print magazines 11%
- Tablet 10%

Top social media channels regularly used to get informed:

- 23% Facebook
- 4% Twitter
- 4% Google+
- 2% Linked In

Top media used to share news or content:

- 66% Word of mouth
- 39% Email
- 19% Share Link on social media or website

Millennials

Millennials experienced events, such as 9/11, the upgrading cycle of technology, globalization and the great recession, that contributed to their behavior and preferences throughout the years.

They were raised in a web-based environment where everything they wanted to know was available via internet. Millennials are highly collaborative, tech savvy and socially conscious. The arrival of modern technology changed how they communicate all over the world. Most Millennials were in their formative years when social media platforms were created. The fact that they were raised during this time makes Millennials the first generation to adapt quickly to every social platform.

Speed and constant communication are crucial for this generation. Given their comfort with technology and text, instant messaging and mobile apps should be taken into

consideration when trying to reach them. Millennials have a much shorter attention-span than other generations due to being raised in the tech age, so bite-sized content, brief emails or social media work perfect for them. All content for this audience should be mobile-friendly and adaptive to their devices.

Preferred Tech-Media:

- Text message and social media

Most Used Written Media:

- None (to get information)

Communication Preference:

- Online and mobile – messages

Preferred Social Media:

- Facebook 81%
- Linked In 29%
- Twitter 40%
- Instagram 64%

How to approach them correctly:

- This generation is all about mobile and portability, so make sure your marketing strategies are aligned with this technology. If the content isn't adaptable to a smartphone this audience will likely miss it.
- Millennials are extremely active users of social media. Facebook is their top option (Instagram is gaining rapidly), but they use all contemporary social media sites and apps.
- User-generated content such as blogs, chats, tweets, digital images, video, etc. are good ways of grabbing millennials attention.
- Millennials are highly responsive to peer recommendations! They follow well-known influencers who recommend certain services or products and are 5 times more likely to take action if someone else they know or admire has done so. They find "recommended" content more trustworthy and memorable even if they don't know the person recommending.
- Authenticity and real-time videos appeal to millennials. Scripted, slick videos are not relevant for this audience, they prefer self-taken and live action videos that seem unscripted.
- Use ratings and reviews to approach them, they rely on them to decide about the reputability of a company or a product.
- Tap into subjects that interest this generation, they are more idealistic than other generations, are highly passionate on a surface level.

Content Consumption Habits:

- Brief online content

Active Hours (time):

- In the evening

Email Activity:

- 89% use email

News Consumption:

- 75% are interested in news
- 25% like to go in-depth

The topics this generation is more attracted to include:

- Environment
- Local news
- National Politics
- Business
- Crime
- Foreign issues
- Science
- Technology

Top media/device used to get informed:

- TV 75%
- Computer 69%
- Smartphone 49%
- Radio 47%
- Print Newspaper 22%
- Print magazines 9%
- Tablet 11%

Top social media channels regularly used to get informed:

- 35% Facebook
- 10% Twitter
- 7% Google+
- 1% Linked in

Top media used to share news or content:

- 66% Word of mouth
- 35% Share Link on social media or website
- 34% Email

Considering the differences between generations, it is critically important for companies to identify the generation their target market belongs to, the type of content they prefer and the media they use to approach them correctly. If they are focusing on multiple generations the best bet is to segment communication efforts and sub-target each generation through their preferred method and content-style. It is equally important to recognize the uniqueness of each generation's personality and that not all people or segments will respond the same way.

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