



Members of The Z Suite

THE GEN Z DISCONNECT:

BRIDGING THE GAPS BETWEEN AUTHENTICITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY TO WIN OVER TODAY'S MOST DEMANDING CONSUMERS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNLOCKING THE GEN Z MINDSET	03
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: HOW THE GEN Z DISCONNECT SPELLS OPPORTUNITY	04
1. THE AUTHENTICITY DISCONNECT	10
2. THE INFLUENCER DISCONNECT	14
3. THE SUSTAINABILITY DISCONNECT	18
CASE STUDY: BUBBLE	22
INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS: HOW WINNIE PARK, CEO OF BELOVED GEN Z BRAND FOREVER 21, IS TRANSFORMING THE COMPANY	25



Hilal Ibrahim, Founder and CEO of Henna & Hijabs; Maya Penn, Founder and CEO of Maya's Ideas; and Deja Natei, fashion model



Ken Downing, Creative Director of Halston, and Stacey Bendet, CEO and Creative Director of alice + olivia



Tenzin Gonshar, member of The Z Suite; Ariana Ferwerda, Co-founder and CEO of Halfdays; Yaprak Ugurses and Armaan Ahmed, members of The Z Suite



Guests networking at the Retail Influencer CEO Forum Featuring The Z Suite



Unlocking the Gen Z Mindset



Stacy Berns, President of Berns Communications Group

Gen Z is set to become the largest consumer group in the next decade, so understanding this unique generation's mindset is critical for the retail industry. In the U.S. alone, Gen Zers already wield \$360 billion in disposable income and by 2030, they'll account for roughly a third of the workforce.

As their spending power continues to grow, their values, preferences and shopping habits will shape the retail landscape for years to come. To help the industry better grasp the psychology and behavior of Gen Z—and to bridge the disconnects that exist between how brands think they should interact with Gen Zers and how these consumers actually want to engage with brands—we recently hosted the inaugural Retail Influencer CEO Forum Featuring The Z Suite in New York City.

While numerous other conferences and research reports have given retail leaders and experts a platform to share their perceptions of what makes Gen Z tick, our event flipped the script. We also gave Gen Zers themselves the opportunity to share their insights and opinions firsthand to help educate an audience of C-suite executives, top-tier journalists, and industry analysts and business influencers about what really matters to them and how brands can best reach and engage them.

As the most diverse generation in American history, Gen Z is widely known to value individuality, self-expression and authenticity. Zers are far more open to sharing their thoughts, opinions and feelings publicly than previous generations were at their age. That's likely due, in part, to the fact that they're not only digital natives, but also social media natives who grew up interacting with peers and brands across multiple social platforms every day. Since they're so transparent themselves, Gen Zers tend to have little patience for brands and brand influencers whose messages they think are inauthentic.

Thanks to the technology at their fingertips, Gen Zers are also very well informed about social and environmental issues and they prefer to shop with purpose-driven brands whose values align with their own. They demand retail companies prioritize inclusivity across marketing, hiring and teams and they prefer to shop sustainably whenever they can, whether that means choosing resale instead of new or choosing greener brands that have committed to helping protect the planet.

Those are just a few of the insights surfaced at our forum, which brought together more than 100 CEOs, "ZEOs" (Gen Z CEOs), senior retail and brand leaders, executives from our Retail Influencer Network, media professionals and members of The Z Suite—an exclusive new network of Gen Z thought leaders. Joanna Coles served as mistress of ceremonies and featured guests ranged from the CEOs of brands beloved by Gen Z—such as Forever 21's Winnie Park and Bubble's Shai Eisenman—to successful Gen Z founders to influencers and advocates such as gold medal gymnast Aly Raisman.

This report distills some of the day's most important insights and revelations, giving retail and brand leaders, content creators, designers, analysts, investors, influencers and anyone who's curious about Gen Z's motivations and shopping behaviors a short guide to authentically connecting with this unique and highly diverse generation of consumers.

Stacy Berns
President, Berns Communications Group



Executive Summary: How the Gen Z Disconnect Spells Opportunity



Ziad Ahmed, CEO of JUV Consulting; Hilal Ibrahim, Founder and CEO of Henna & Hijabs; Tenzin Gonshar, Sophia Richter, Ella Ramirez, Clay Lute, Landon Rice, Fay Shuai and Rima Makhoul, members of The Z Suite; and Joanna Coles, former Editor-in-Chief of *Cosmopolitan* and mistress of ceremonies at the 2022 Retail Influencer CEO Forum Featuring The Z Suite

Gen Z, which includes roughly 70 million consumers between the ages of 10 and 25 in the U.S., is the most demanding—and most elusive—generation of our time. These young consumers are known to be frugal, activist, educated and wedded to technology. They're equally comfortable in the physical and digital worlds, but highly anxious about the future and distraught about climate change. While idealism is often a hallmark of youth, Gen Z takes it to new heights. These young people are cause-driven and expect the brands they buy from to support the causes they believe in.

While idealism is often a hallmark of youth, Gen Z takes it to new heights. These young people are cause-driven and expect the brands they buy from to support the causes they believe in.

The group can seem at times like a study in contradictions. They love online marketplaces and live on their phones, but often prefer to shop in

physical stores. They crave organic, human-to-human interactions, but will hang out with friends on gaming platforms. They crave authenticity, but buy clothes and accessories for their digital avatars. They're fierce advocates of sustainability, but gravitate toward the convenience and value of fast-fashion and mass-market brands.

Those who condemn Gen Z as inconsistent or, worse, as hypocrites, are missing the point. The disconnect between what Gen Zers value and how they behave as consumers is due to the difference between how the world is and how they would like it to be. This makes Zers a confusing target for marketers, but also presents unprecedented opportunities for brands and retailers that are able to engage them. The winners with Gen Z will be those that can bridge the gaps by making sure these demanding consumers can shop according to their values.

On the following pages is a discussion of three key disconnects that present opportunities for brands and retailers looking to capture the attention and spending power of Gen Z, namely:

1. The Authenticity Disconnect: Gen Zers care deeply about openness, transparency, inclusivity and acceptance and they prefer to shop brands that share their values and support the causes they believe in. They like to be inspired by brands, but not dictated to by them, and they're sensitive to any gaps they perceive between a brand's messaging and its actions. If a brand says inclusivity is a core value, but uses models who all look alike in its ads, Zers will notice and call it out.

The disconnect between what Gen Zers value and how they behave as consumers is due to the difference between how the world is and how they would like it to be.

To connect with Gen Z in an authentic way, companies first need to rethink their brand ethos and organizational culture. Then, they need to establish two-way communication that lets them share their brand values with their young customers and gather feedback and insights. Although it's not easy, successful brands are finding ways to authentically communicate their values to Gen Zers and engage the generation in an ongoing dialog that is well worth the effort.

2. The Influencer Disconnect: Social media is Gen Z's lifeline to the world and influencers are their go-to for information about and recommendations for new products. However, brands that think they can get noticed and build a Gen Z business by simply paying an influencer for hire need to rethink their strategy. Many Gen Z influencers will work only with brands they feel emotionally connected to and many Gen Z consumers will listen only to influencers who genuinely believe in the products they represent. This requires brands to invest time and work in the influencer courtship process and resulting partnerships to yield longer-lasting and more productive relationships.

3. The Sustainability Disconnect: Gen Zers are passionate about sustainability, but their frugality and desire for convenience and accessibility make it difficult for brands to deliver eco-friendly, ethically made products at Gen Z-friendly price points. These young consumers realize that new brands built on sustainability have made some small steps that are a great start, but that real progress won't be made until the big players catch on and begin to manufacture sustainably at scale.

Brands—particularly big ones—that can deliver sustainability, value and convenience will fill a huge unmet need with Gen Z.



Ellie Zeiler, actress, activist and digital creator, and Ziad Ahmed, CEO of JUV Consulting

Brands that want to connect authentically with Gen Z need to resist the urge to buy into stereotypes about the group. A large percentage of Gen Zers are still technically children and it's a given that their wants, needs, consumer behaviors and perhaps even their values will evolve over time. Brands need to track trends and demands closely and keep up with these consumers if they want to successfully meet their wants and needs.

As actress, activist and digital creator Ellie Zeiler said at the Retail Influencer CEO Forum when asked whether influencers with multi-hyphenate careers like hers should stay in one lane, "One thing that Gen Z has proven is that we don't want to be put in a box."

Gen Zers prize openness and inclusion and love to share their opinions and insights with brands. To understand what they want and value, all brands have to do is ask. Since knowing and resonating with this cohort is key to brands' survival, it's crucial for them to keep the conversation going on a regular basis. Brands that gain a better understanding of the values and trends driving Gen Z behavior will be better able to capitalize on the opportunities to connect with them long term by helping them shape and live in the world they want to live in.

GEN Z BY THE NUMBERS

70 million Gen Zers

There are roughly 70 million Gen Zers in the U.S. These consumers were born between 1997 and 2012, and are currently ages 10-25 (U.S. Census Bureau).

1/3 of workforce

A workforce to be reckoned with, Gen Z will represent nearly a third of all U.S. employees by 2030 (Bloomberg).

7.3 million full-time workers

About 7.3 million Gen Zers work full-time in the U.S. (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

\$360 billion in disposable income

Gen Zers wielded \$360 billion in disposable income in 2021 (Bloomberg).

77% of Gen Zers

Roughly 77% of Gen Zers say it's important to work at an organization whose values align with their own (Deloitte).

70% use TikTok

Approximately 70% of Gen Zers are on TikTok (YPulse).

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR GEN Z CUSTOMERS?

Gen Z is rapidly becoming some of the most active buyers in the retail market. Are you ready to capture this growing segment?

First Insight puts data from your current and potential customers through our predictive analytics engine to show how different audiences will react, so you can make better business decisions about your assortment, pricing, promotions and much more.

Learn more about Gen Z's shopping habits at [firstinsight.com/gen-z](https://www.firstinsight.com/gen-z)



Gen Zers are...

ACTIVISTIC

Gen Zers care deeply about causes, want to make a difference in the world, and aspire to live and behave in accordance with their values.



INFORMED

The generation is on track to be the most educated in history. Equipped with a supercomputer in their hands 24/7, they tend to research before buying.

FRUGAL

They can't remember a time before the Great Recession, so they tend to save and invest more than millennials. Zers are not brand loyal—they're often in search of the lowest price and most convenient option when shopping.

DIVERSE

Gen Z is the most multicultural generation in American history. Half self-define as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color). They demand inclusivity, diversity and acceptance, and will call out brands that aren't inclusive.

ANXIETY-RIDDEN

Zers grew up in an era of turmoil that included 9/11, the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. They often self-report as feeling anxious, moody, lost and self-involved. Extremely open about their mental health, which they feel is as important as physical wellness, they tend to like it when brands openly address and support mental health.

DIGITAL-FIRST



Technology is the cornerstone of Gen Zers' lives and underpins everything they do. They don't remember a time before social media, which is their lifeline to the world. They use technology to its fullest advantage, constantly tap into their digital connections and are equally at home in their virtual and physical communities.

INFLUENTIAL

Gen Zers are impacting the attitudes and behavior of their friends and family, including their Gen X parents, who have the highest median household income in the U.S. at over \$113,000 (compared with millennials and baby boomers at around \$80,000).

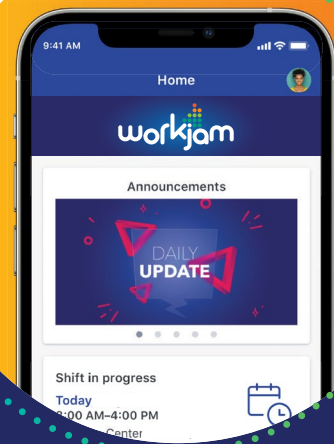
workjam

The World's Leading Digital Frontline Workplace

Engage Your Frontline Associates Gen Z Approved.

Meet them where they are. The solution that helps you:

- Simplify two-way communication
- Provide mentorship & training
- Offer associates shift swapping & schedule flexibility
- Share ideas & drive productivity



www.workjam.com

1. The Authenticity Disconnect



Joanna Coles, former Editor-in-Chief of *Cosmopolitan*

Gen Z puts authenticity—i.e., being real, open and transparent—at the top of its hierarchy of values. That means the kinds of marketing messages that have worked with older generations won't cut it with Gen Zers. They like to be inspired by brands, but not dictated to by them, and they're sensitive to any gaps they perceive between a brand's messaging and its actions. If a brand says inclusivity is a core value, but uses models who all look alike in its ads, Zers will notice and call it out. These younger consumers want a real connection to the brands they choose to shop and the vast majority of them say they buy from brands they trust and that support the causes they believe in, according to YPulse. But how can brands build those connections and that trust authentically?

Any brand trying to sell to or hire Gen Zers needs to understand their intense desire to be heard. Listening to them and soliciting their input and feedback or, better yet, engaging in an ongoing, honest, two-way conversation can help brands authentically connect with these young consumers.

They want to be listened to by brands and be part of the conversation and process, whether through social media, as content co-creators, or by giving input on product design and personalization, packaging, marketing, and the shopping process itself.

According to Ziad Ahmed, the Gen Z CEO of JUV Consulting, brands need to focus on listening and relationship building. "When I started my company as a junior in high school, I found myself often in rooms where people were talking a lot about Gen Z, but very rarely to us," he said. "What brands are doing wrong today is this idea that a white paper can serve as a sufficient replacement for meaningful community and for meaningful conversation. I believe that if you want to understand anyone, you have to talk to them in real time and on an iterative basis, not to check off as a box but to build a relationship."



Theresa Watts, SVP of Human Resources, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at True Religion

“What brands are doing wrong today is this idea that a white paper can serve as a sufficient replacement for meaningful community and for meaningful conversation. I believe that if you want to understand anyone, you have to talk to them in real time.”

**— Ziad Ahmed, CEO,
JUV Consulting**

Brands can foster truly authentic connections with Gen Zers by approaching these consumers in a whole new way. Daniella Pierson, the Gen Z Founder and CEO of The Newsette and Co-founder and Co-CEO of mental fitness platform Wondermind, noted, “Understanding Gen Z is very hard, especially for the biggest companies in the world, which have realized that the formula they’ve been using isn’t working anymore.”

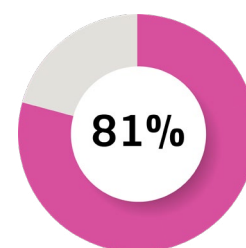


Yaprak Ugurses, Tenzin Gonshar and Armaan Ahmed, members of The Z Suite; Hilary Neve, VP of Communications at Bolt; Ariana Ferwerda, Co-founder and CEO of Halfdays; and Sheena Butler-Young, Senior Correspondent at *The Business of Fashion*

Pierson explained that brands wishing to reach Gen Z need to find a new paradigm. “I think it’s really about trusting people of color and young people...trusting them with your business so you don’t have to work with this huge agency that’s run by this 70-something-year-old white man in a suit,” she said. “Trust and put your dollars into businesses started by unconventional founders and entrepreneurs, because it’s likely they will know how to talk to Gen Z much better than the big names out there.”

Any brand trying to sell to or hire Gen Zers needs to understand their intense desire to be heard. Listening to them and soliciting their input and feedback or, better yet, engaging in an ongoing, honest, two-way conversation can help brands authentically connect with these young consumers.

According to JUV’s Ahmed, there’s no secret to being real. “Brands are using automated software to do mass plays with no level of authenticity or relationship-building. We talk a lot about buzzwords in marketing, like ‘authenticity,’ and there are seminars on how to be authentic but I don’t think it’s that hard,” he said.



81% of Gen Zers say they buy from brands they trust and that support the causes they believe in (YPulse).

"Things feel authentic when they are authentic. If you have a marketing team who looks nothing like the community you're trying to serve, or if you're using agencies who use software and that never actually interact with the end user and/or influencer, it's going to feel forced because it is forced."



Daniella Pierson, Founder and CEO of The Newsette and Co-Founder and Co-CEO of Wondermind

"For me, it's more important to know that the company at the top is actively working not just to change their own product, but to change the entire industry."

— Clay Lute, member of The Z Suite

Clay Lute, a member of The Z Suite, offered his perspective as a consumer, noting, "I can't at this point consciously shop somewhere that I know is unethical. And it goes beyond sustainability. I think we've all seen where we are canceling brands based on who they're donating to politically and what are those politicians doing in the sustainability space. We're going a lot deeper than just 'Are you recycling your T-shirt?' For me, it's more important to know that the company is actively working not just to change their own product, but to change the entire industry."

When asked how brands should engage with Gen Z consumers, members of The Z Suite suggested that brands should "listen, try to understand and be real."



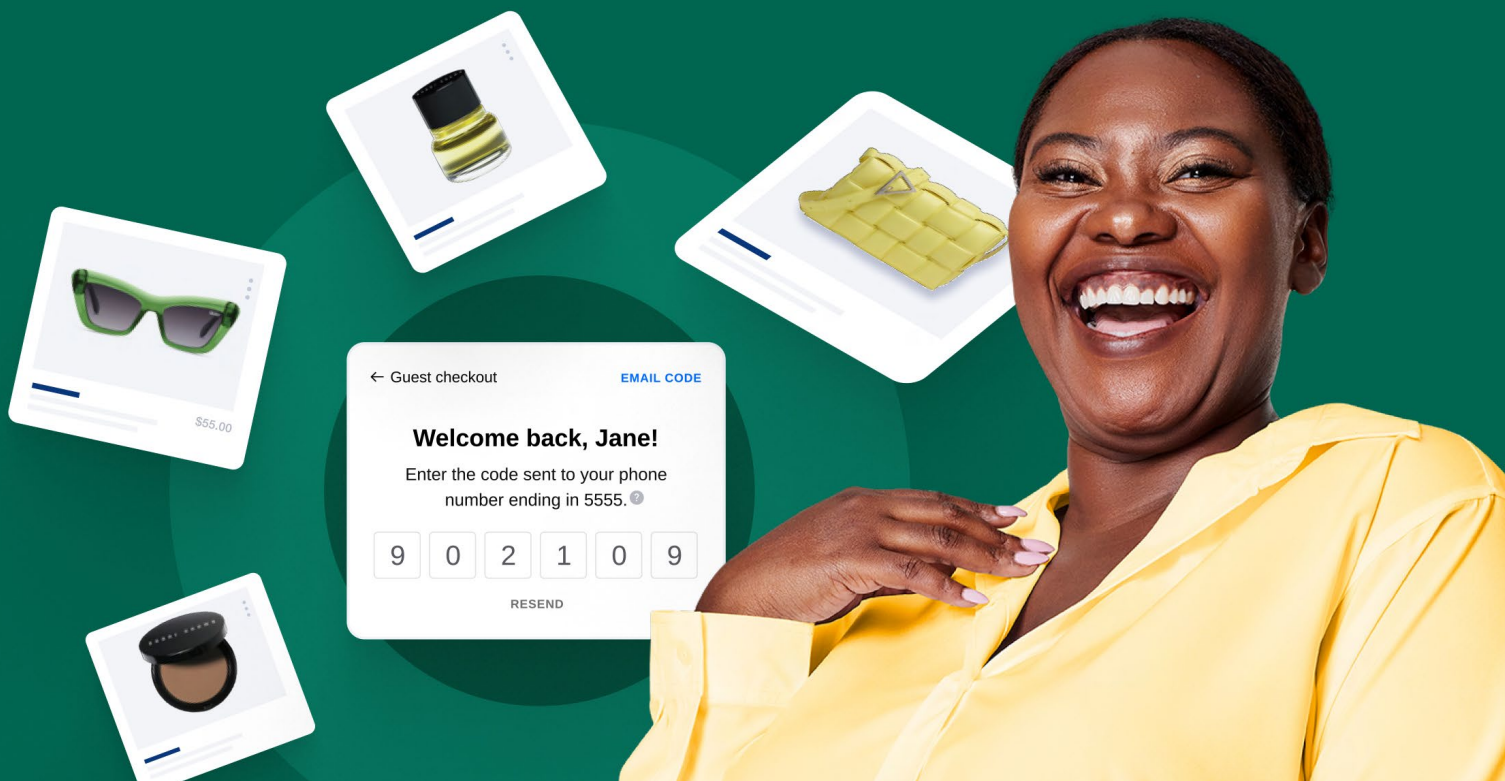
Delight Gen Z Shoppers with Bolt One-Click Checkout.

Customers who use Bolt's One-Click checkout have a higher rate of repeat purchase, thanks to a better shopping experience and easy account creation.

- ✔ **Shockingly simple checkout**
Whether your visitors are first-time shoppers or repeat customers, Bolt's One-Click Checkout offers them a faster, more convenient checkout experience.
- ✔ **Go from "hello?" to "welcome back!"**
Get to know more of your shoppers, thanks to easier store account creation and one-time passwords that offer simpler login.
- ✔ **Make things personal**
Build brand loyalty and bring customers back by giving them exactly what they're looking for from the moment they log in to the post-purchase experience.

Learn more about how Bolt can help you beat the cart abandonment problem and raise conversion.

[See the demo](#)



2. The Influencer Disconnect



Aly Raisman, gold medal gymnast and advocate

No discussion of marketing to Gen Z would be complete without a focus on influencers, the digital celebrities who have become more popular than Hollywood stars for new product discovery. Gen Zers' desire for transparency and authenticity has led them to shift their attention away from actors paid to endorse a product and toward real digital content creators, making way for a whole new definition of fandom.



Ziad Ahmed, CEO of JUV Consulting; Ellie Zeiler, actress, activist and digital creator; and Sheena Butler-Young, Senior Correspondent at *The Business of Fashion*

Brands that think they can get noticed and build a Gen Z business by simply paying an influencer for hire need to rethink that strategy. They need

to understand how the most successful Gen Z brands are working with influencers. They also need to be aware of how Gen Zers hone their voices and influence in a digital world and what Gen Z consumers look to influencers for during the shopping journey.

With more access to information than any prior generation, Gen Zers do their research before buying, and brands are no longer the only, or even the primary, voices educating consumers about their products. Content creators have democratized the consumer space and Gen Z taps into recommendations from friends as well as online reviews and educational content from influencers who are highly informed about products, ingredients, materials and brands within the respective categories they cover.

Brands that think they can get noticed and build a Gen Z business by simply paying an influencer for hire need to rethink that strategy.

Fashion brand Forever 21 works with a “whole pantheon” of influencers, according to CEO Winnie Park. Her aha moment regarding the best way to work with influencers came several years ago, when her then-preteen daughter summarily dismissed a promotion that an influencer had obviously been paid to post.

This gave Park valuable insight into the Gen Z mindset around authenticity. “[My daughter] was really into makeup tutorials, and we’re watching a tutorial on YouTube,” Park said. “In the middle of it, she says, ‘Oh, this is endorsed. This isn’t real.’ Being able to see through things is a very real thing for Gen Z.”

Aerie SVP of Marketing Stacey McCormick says making influencers part of the brand community that is wedded to the same causes is what sets Aerie apart. The brand’s partnership with gold

“With Aly, what’s interesting is that not only is she a paid influencer, but she’s also an advocate for our community. She’s also embedded into our philanthropy.”

— Stacey McCormick, SVP,
Aerie Marketing, AEO

medal gymnast and advocate Aly Raisman is a perfect example, she noted. “What’s important to us is that [influencers] become part of our landscape for what we’re doing as a brand. With Aly, what’s interesting is that not only is she a paid influencer, but she’s also an advocate for our community. She’s also embedded into our philanthropy.”

Actress, activist and digital creator Ellie Zeiler, whose Instagram followers total almost 11 million, credited her success as an influencer to a combination of chance and upbringing. “I was lucky enough to start my career in quarantine, when we had a bunch of time on our hands and when TikTok was really on the uprise,” she said. “I also was very lucky to be raised by two parents that showed me what hard work was. I instantly saw TikTok and social media as a business...and I had to let it not be a social platform where I communicate with my friends anymore.”

Zeiler’s collaboration with Levi’s grew out of an authentic affinity she developed for the brand half a lifetime ago, when she was in middle school. “Levi’s was probably my first pair of jeans, so, of course, I absolutely love them. Levi’s does a lot of charity work, and I love being connected with that as well. Also, working with a company that doesn’t

just throw a brief at you or throw a product at you and say, ‘I want you to promote this right now and promote it this way.’



Stacey McCormick, SVP of Aerie Marketing; Aly Raisman, gold medal gymnast and advocate; and Stephanie Mehta, CEO and Chief Content Officer at Mansueto Ventures, parent company of *Inc.* and *Fast Company*

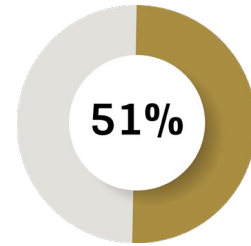
Brands need to understand that I built my following myself and I know my followers the best and so I know how to promote products in the most authentic way possible. Having brands really trust my perspective on things is really important to me.”

Consistency and taking the long view are also important. Zeiler has been selective about the brands she works with to ensure she becomes more of a credible spokesperson than a one-off promoter. “When I’m wearing jeans, people know that they’re Levi’s. When I’m wearing mascara, people know that it’s Lancôme. I try to create consistency for my followers, because you can lose trust by promoting three makeup companies in one month. I want to be an ambassador for a company and I want to work with them for a long time, so that people know that when I’m wearing something, it’s from that company.”

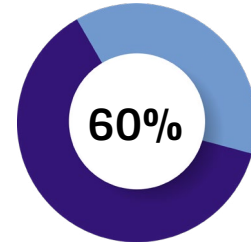


“I want to be an ambassador for a company and I want to work with them for a long time, so that people know that when I’m wearing something, it’s from that company.”

— Ellie Zeiler, actress, activist and digital creator



51% of Gen Zers have purchased a product their favorite online celebrity (influencer) recommended (YPulse).

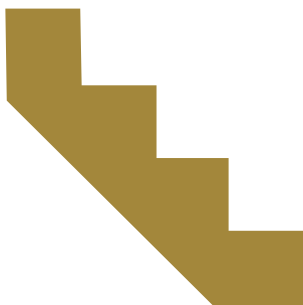


60% of Gen Zers follow online celebrities on social media, vs. 40% of millennials (YPulse).



Ariana Ferwerda, Co-Founder and CEO of Halfdays

In the past, Zeiler has turned down offers to work with brands she doesn’t think are authentic or that don’t value her perspective, regardless of the money they throw at her. “I think any brand that doesn’t want to listen to what I have to say is a brand that I will say no to. A lot of companies will see someone blow up on TikTok and they’ll instantly be like vultures, like, ‘Here’s money! Here’s the product! Write it right now!’ With those brands, that’s where I say no.”



Obsess

VIRTUAL STORE PLATFORM

Obsess is an experiential e-commerce platform enabling brands and retailers to create immersive 3D virtual stores on their e-commerce sites and on metaverse platforms. Obsess partners with leading brands, such as Dior, Charlotte Tilbury, Maybelline, Crocs, and more to provide discovery-driven, interactive experiences that increase brand awareness, while driving engagement and conversion.



Scan to book a demo



Contact Us
contact@obsessAR.com
www.obsessAR.com

3. The Sustainability Disconnect



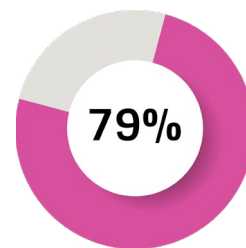
Gen Z's concern for the future of the planet cannot be overstated. Maya Penn, a 22-year-old entrepreneur, said she founded her sustainable fashion brand when she was in elementary school after learning that the fashion industry "produces more carbon emissions than all international flights and maritime shipping combined." Climate change is a hot-button issue for Gen Zers and they expect brands that want their business to commit to reducing their carbon footprint and waste.

However, Zers also want access to a wide range of affordable products and that desire is often at odds with the environmental concern. These consumers tend to be more frugal than prior generations and not only because the oldest members of the cohort are just starting their careers. Most Zers spent their formative years in the shadow of the Great Recession, leading them to be financially cautious and risk averse and to seek brands that offer great value. They want to buy from sustainable brands, but they frequently shop fast-fashion and mass-market names because, at the end of the day, low prices, convenience and accessibility are of more immediate importance.

This push-pull between sustainability and accessibility explains Gen Z's attraction to the rapidly growing upstart fashion brand Shein, whose prices, on-trend assortment and delivery speed often outweigh any questions Zers may have about the company's sustainability and ethical sourcing practices.

It also explains why Gen Z is the fastest-growing consumer segment for Amazon. Though Gen Z cares deeply about sustainable packaging and carbon emissions, the convenience of the marketplace is irresistible. Hilary Neve, VP of Communications at Bolt, pointed out during the forum that the brands and marketers that will succeed are those that can make the "last click" as convenient as possible. "We're seeing a generation that has grown up with lightning-fast speed where you don't need any passwords, you just go in and you get it and you buy," she said. "And so when they have something like a checkout or something in their shopping experience that isn't lightning fast, they're on to something else."

Gen Zers want to buy from sustainable brands, but they frequently shop fast-fashion and mass-market names because, at the end of the day, low prices, convenience and accessibility are of more immediate importance.

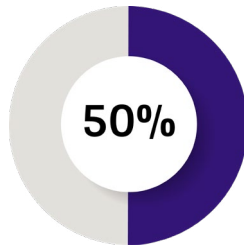


79% of Gen Z consumers agree that brands should take more responsibility for fighting climate change (YPulse).

While sustainability is much more than a nice-to-have for Zers, they realize that making a difference for the planet will require a massive effort by everyone. And herein lies the opportunity for brands: Gen Zers realize that the small, linear steps made by smaller brands built on an ethos of



sustainability are a great start. But they also know that nothing will really change until the big players catch on. So, Zers are challenging big brands and retailers to make sustainability a core pillar of their business model. These young consumers realize that once the biggest names commit to helping protect the planet and its people, the gap between sustainability and accessibility will narrow.



Half of Gen Zers would like to buy more eco-friendly products, but they admit to caring more about price (YPulse).

Gen Zers are also shopping recommerce channels more than previous generations, which will propel the growth of resale and rental business models going forward. Zers like these models because they offer a more sustainable and affordable way to shop, as well as access to unique and vintage items that allow them to express their individuality and style.

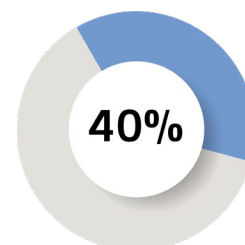
Many of The Z Suite members said at the forum that they rely on thrift stores, deep discounts and resale sites like Poshmark to get their clothes, especially luxury designer goods. Z Suite member Sophia Richter said that resale checks off both the sustainability and accessibility boxes, noting, "This take-make-waste system is not going to last for any company, so there needs to be something more circular. I love to talk about how I rented this blazer for this weekend and how it was 7% of the retail price for four days. It's a talking point. It's a new experience every time. For me,



Maya Penn, Founder and CEO of Maya's Ideas; Hilal Ibrahim, Founder and CEO of Henna & Hijabs; and Stephanie Mehta, CEO and Chief Content Officer at Mansueto Ventures, parent company of *Inc.* and *Fast Company*

as a consumer, accessibility is huge, and [the shopping experience] has to be fun."

Clay Lute, a member of The Z Suite, thinks that brands that really want to make a difference cannot price themselves out of contention. "If sustainability is not accessible, there's no point in doing it," he said. "Because until the masses are on board, there's going to be no actual change. You can have as many innovations as you want, but if I as a consumer in middle America do not have that available to me readily, it's not going anywhere."

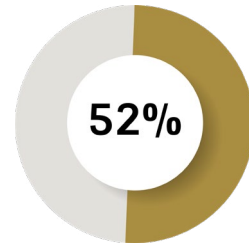


40% of Gen Zers go into a Walmart three to four times per month (YPulse).





Clay Lute, member of The Z Suite, and Ken Downing, Creative Director of Halston



52% of Gen Z teens don't remember a time before the Great Recession (YPulse).

“This take-make-waste system is not going to last for any company, so there needs to be something more circular. I love to talk about how I rented this blazer for this weekend and how it was 7% of the retail price for four days.”

— Sophia Richter, member of The Z Suite

1. Amazon

2. Shein

3. Walmart

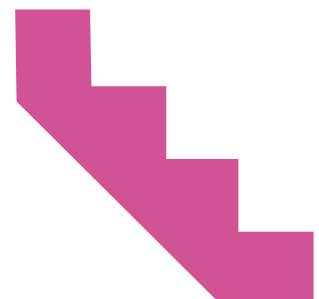
4. Target

5. Nike

Gen Z's favorite places to shop are Amazon, Shein, Walmart, Target and Nike, in that order (YPulse).



Lual Mayen, Founder of Junub Games



PURCHASING POWER



IN YOUR HANDS

Your needs and goals are unique. Synchrony's broad range of financing options are designed to give you the power to meet them.

mysynchrony.com

Building a Brand by Listening to Gen Z Customers

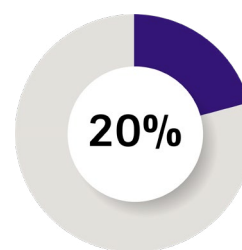
A Case Study: Bubble

Bubble Skincare CEO and Founder Shai Eisenman talked with then-Glossy Executive Editor Priya Rao about launching Bubble during the pandemic and how the brand hit its stride by talking and listening to its Gen Z customer community.



To find out what her Gen Z customers want, Shai Eisenman, CEO and Founder of skincare brand Bubble, takes a simple approach: she asks them. Bubble has become a Gen Z favorite by cultivating a community of 10,000 Gen Zers who have provided guidance and feedback on every aspect of the brand and its products, from testing to packaging to formulations to branding.

Bubble launched online two years ago, but Eisenman quickly realized that her customers also wanted to buy the products in physical stores. The brand recently launched in 4,100 CVS stores, and 4,000 Walmart stores, largely because its customer community said they buy most of their skincare products at these retailers. Although Bubble products are formulated with high-quality dermatological ingredients, the brand ensures all items are priced modestly enough for Gen Z shoppers to access them.



20% of the personal care purchases in the U.S. are made in Walmart (YPulse).

Alexis Hooks, a member of The Z Suite, is among the Gen Zers who like to shop both in-store and online. “Gen Z...we’re very attached to our phones, the internet,” Hooks said. “And personally, I do a lot of my research online, but I still would mostly prefer to buy the actual product in stores. We really shop both, but research online. And then there’s still a lot of value in that in-person shopping, being able to see the packaging, touch the packaging, make sure the look of the bottle really meshes with what you want. And I think online is not duplicating the value of being in a physical space, even for Gen Z.”

How Gen Z consumers learned about the brand involved an unusual convergence of events, according to Eisenman. “During the pandemic, a really interesting shift happened,” she said. “Obviously people spent much more time at home and had time and opportunity to go and explore.

‘Maskne’ became a big thing and, in general, there was this rise of skinfluencers who created so much educational content that was never before accessible to Gen Z consumers.”

The importance of TikTok in the beauty and skincare space is undisputed. The short-form video platform allows skinfluencers to connect with their Gen Z followers daily by sharing short videos where they demonstrate products and educate their viewers. The platform’s algorithm quickly tracks what’s trending, driving traffic and virality. A viral TikTok can result in products quickly selling out, in addition to creating superstars out of small, upstart brands and rising social media celebrities alike.

Another member of The Z Suite, Fay Shuai, noted that she often looks to TikTok to learn about skincare solutions. “When we were in isolation, we spent a lot of our time on social media and the internet in general,” said Shuai. “I spent a lot of time on Instagram and TikTok. And what I found is that when I was scrolling on TikTok, I would find a lot of informational videos about skincare and certain products. I’m searching for specific questions related to concerns I have about my skin that I think only TikTok can answer. You can’t really find that on Google.”

Eisenman said she has noticed a widening of the marketing funnel. “People used to say that the consumer needs to see a brand three to four times before they make a purchase decision. Now it’s like 9 to 12 times and there are so many touchpoints with the consumer before that purchase decision actually happens.



Shai Eisenman, CEO and Founder of Bubble

[They’re] looking at the views, looking at TikTok, looking at YouTube, and since that knowledge has become accessible through these channels, there’s been such an explosion.”

One of Bubble’s real competitive advantages, according to Eisenman, is its authentic dialog with customers. “Everything we do is embedded in listening to consumers,” she said. “I laughingly say we don’t have any decision makers in the company besides the community, because they decide everything. They tell us if what we’re doing is right or not and inform how we identify the small trends, the right influencers to work with and what platforms to use. So, it’s just constantly listening to consumers and being very transparent and honest with them.”

“Everything we do is embedded in listening to consumers. I laughingly say we don’t have any decision makers in the company besides the community, because they decide everything.”

— Shai Eisenman, CEO and Founder, Bubble



ROKT


Seize the Transaction Moment

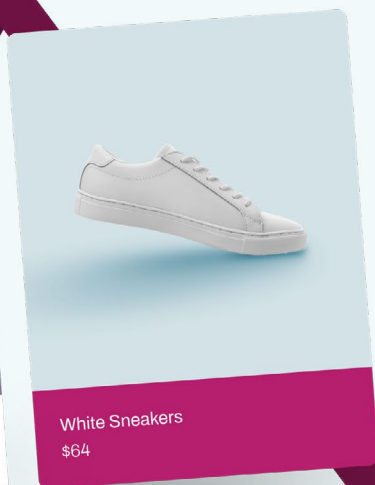
Whether you want to grow revenue on your site, acquire new customers at scale, or deepen relationships with existing ones, Rokt has a solution for you.

Add **\$3.3M** in additional profit per every 10M transactions with Rokt.

[Learn more](#)



 Thanks for your order, here's
40% off on a pair of sneakers!



White Sneakers
\$64



Interview Highlights: How Winnie Park, CEO of Beloved Gen Z Brand Forever 21, Is Transforming the Company

Meeting Customers Where They Are

Forever 21 CEO Winnie Park talked with CNBC Senior Reporter Jade Scipioni about how Forever 21 is connecting more closely than ever with Gen Z by redefining itself as a vehicle for self-expression.

Jade Scipioni: You've now been CEO at Forever 21 for nine months. Any impressions?

Winnie Park: In many ways, [Forever 21] is kind of the ultimate job. The brand was founded by Korean American immigrants. I'm a Korean American immigrant. I shopped the brand when I was 21, and I shop it today with my daughter who's 17. And we're definitely a brand that is on the precipice of transformation.

Really understanding the needs of Gen Z is central to what we do. Because we are all about the youngest generation, our relevance really starts with that beginning story for Forever 21. Making fashion a vehicle for self-expression has been part of the brand since its inception. And this notion that at 21, you're at this amazing place, and you have all the prospects ahead of you of life, and adulthood, but you're still holding on to that sense of play of childhood.

Jade: The prevailing thinking is that you have to market to Gen Z without them knowing. How do you really capture what's working for you in that aspect?

Winnie: This is the first time that the brand in its 30-year-plus history has actually tried to define who we are, what our values are and what role we play. And, truthfully, we're trying to move away from being a fast-fashion brand. I love everything

about the speed at which we deliver and curate fashion. But I think we can be a lot more.

We made an anthem video, getting behind the scenes of living in Los Angeles. For us, being in our birthplace is also an important point, in that it is about this notion of everything and anything goes—we want to take you from the lifestyle of the beaches all the way through to the streets of Los Angeles, and Koreatown, and start to get engaged on this journey. To speak to this customer in this generation is to meet them where they are.



Winnie Park, CEO of Forever 21

Jade: Gen Z wants you to be on trend with clothes, but they also want you to be sustainable. They also want you to have a voice when it comes to social issues. I mean, how are you finding balance with all of those?

Winnie: Regarding authenticity and sustainability, I would say that, for us at Forever 21, it's about progress and not perfection. The whole fashion industry has a lot of work to do when it comes to sustainability. The brand has been on this journey for the better part of a decade. Today, 40% of our women's denim is sustainable and recycled. Next year, it'll be 50%. But there's a lot more to do. We're in the active role of listening. How do we partner with Gen Z and bring them in as co-creators, as advisors? How do we actively listen?

The other piece of this is accessibility. Accessibility is on the opposite end of authenticity and sustainability. We love the fact that you can have two \$20 bills in your wallet and go to Forever 21 and buy some amazing fashion and self-express. For us, value is so key, and I would say Gen Z understands value better than anybody else. They're going to toggle from that amazing Balenciaga item to what they found thrifting at Salvation Army. And that whole notion of a circular economy, that's something that we're actively looking at.

And then the last piece of this is inclusivity. I think this is the most poignant value for us. Forever 21 is just an amazing place to work. I got there and I was like, "Oh, you guys look like me, except a lot younger." And what's amazing is this notion that it is really this United Nations. It's multiculturalism at its best. It's fluidity in everything we do and how we think. And, certainly, what we want to embrace on a go-forward basis as a brand is how we can actually really be present and engage on an inclusive basis.

"The whole fashion industry has a lot of work to do when it comes to sustainability. The brand has been on this journey for the better part of a decade. Today, 40% of our women's denim is sustainable and recycled. Next year, it'll be 50%. But there's a lot more to do."

— Winnie Park, CEO, Forever 21

Jade: How would you advise brands trying to appeal to this generation?

Winnie: Young consumers are shape-shifters. They don't identify with a single brand or single look. What's remarkable to me is the fact that they wake up Barbiecore and they go to bed rocking Y2K fashion—it's not about one thing. And tapping into that zeitgeist mentality is a big piece of what we're trying to convey.

Our biggest piece of advice in terms of how to speak to this customer in this generation is that you don't try to impose. Try to do it with a voice that's authentic. At Forever 21, what we try to do is honestly be an ally and a partner.

Jade: What is your hope for the brand? Like, where do you see it in five years?

Winnie: That it goes on for the next 100 years, becomes an even more important part of the social fabric of the world and that we remain relevant. I think for any brand, especially in fashion, the name of the game is relevance. And to stay ahead of that is about not just telling and imposing, but listening.

That's my aspiration for the brand. I'm merely a steward of this brand, and I'm along for the journey. I love it.

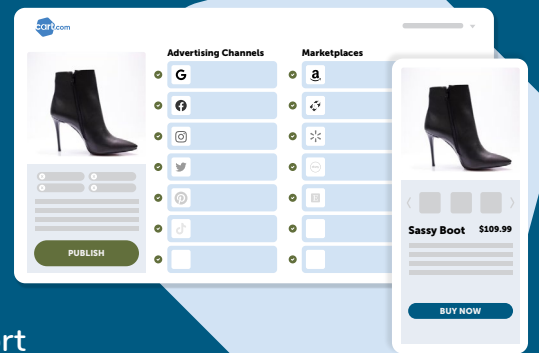


Cart Channels

Reach new customers across Amazon, Walmart, Google, Facebook and beyond.

Cart Channels is a powerful combination of tools that helps brands automatically manage and optimize fulfillment, pricing, placement and promotions across 2,000+ advertising channels as well as the world's leading marketplaces – all from one centralized location.

- ✓ Attract the right customers
- ✓ Motivate customers to convert
- ✓ 24/7 customer support
- ✓ Competitive Price Watch Tool



Cart Channels helps brands sell everywhere:

Increase sales & win the Buy Box

Win the Buy Box on Amazon and Walmart 72% of the time on average with our automated repricing engine.

Optimize listings & increase ROI

Our rules-based system helps you increase the ROI of your sales, marketing and advertising channels.

Sync inventory across sales channels

Save time with real-time inventory visibility across FBA, WFS, Cart Fulfillment, or your brand's own warehouse — all in one location.

Generate Google Text Ads at scale

Automatically create text ads to gain maximum coverage and clickthrough rates, while minimizing cost per click.

Manage products with ease

Schedule automatic product imports from any storefront. Apply bulk edits to reduce manual workload. Meet shopping channel and marketplace template requirements.

Best-in-class managed services

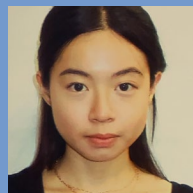
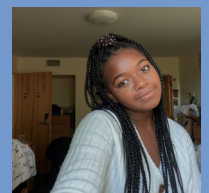
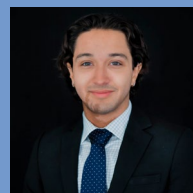
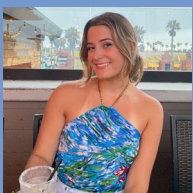
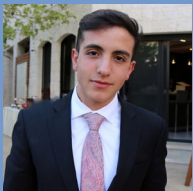
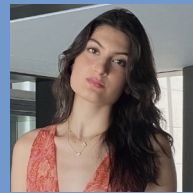
Let us manage day-to-day business operations — all while building strategies that drive sales growth and maximize profitability.

Discover how Cart Channels can increase your revenue up to 20% in 60 days.

[Learn more](#)



The Z Suite Members





Thank you to our sponsors.



BLUSHINGTON



coop&spree

esw.



Obsess

ROKT



TROV&

