

Eyewear Consumers

How Have They Changed? What Do ECPs Need to Know?



Image Credit: Getty Images

BY GWENDOLYN PLUMMER / SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR

NEW YORK—The past few years have seen massive, sometimes unpredictable, change in consumer behavior. From a pandemic none of us expected to social media-driven shopping trends that change at the drop of a hat, it can feel almost impossible to predict what consumers will want, or need, next.

In December 2022, *Ernst & Young* https://www.ey.com/en_us/consumer-products-retail/is-the-future-consumers-wallet-recession-proof shared reports from the 11th edition of its US Future Consumer Index, which found that 94 percent of U.S. consumers are concerned about the country's economy. In turn, Americans are doing their best to cut costs: E&Y reports that 49 percent of respondents said they are spending less on nonessen-

tials, and 26 percent shop with an “affordability first” mindset.

For the eyewear and eyecare industries, there is some good news: people will always need to take care of their eye health. The need to see an optometrist or update a pair of frames is a constant—but staying on top of consumer trends and changes is vital, too. It's imperative to know how to approach new consumers, keep old ones and offer something for everyone.

The Harvard Business Review <https://hbr.org/2023/01/what-do-your-customers-want-in-2023> spent the final week of 2022 surveying 500 adults from across the U.S., and found that “that the most common type of resolution was health-related.” While most of these resolutions

had to do with general weight loss and exercise goals, there's no question that Americans overall seem to want to get healthier in the new year—an overall resolution in which the eyecare and eyewear industries are perfectly situated.

As the economy and shopping habits continue to change, our industry will have to adapt alongside these changes. To do that, we have to identify how Americans shop—what they want, what they're not getting and how the eyewear and eyecare industry can change what they do to better serve their customers. What consumers expect varies by their age group—from the youngest consumers in Generation Alpha through to the Silent Generation—but the optical industry has the tools to reach everyone. ■

Meet Generation Alpha

We've heard a lot about Gen Z and their cultural and economic power in the past few years, but, while these young adults retain a massive influence on culture, they are no longer the newest kids on the block. Generation Alpha follows Gen Z—Shopify <https://www.shopify.com/blog/gen-alpha> defines it as “all children born in or after 2010—the same year the iPad was born.” This means the oldest members of Generation Alpha have become teenagers this past year, and have mostly lived a life marked by the massive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shopify reports that consulting agency McCrindle, which popularized the term Generation Alpha, estimates the generation “will number more than two billion” by 2025, making them “the largest generation in history.” Though Generation Alpha is still young, it would be shortsighted to discount the impact they have—and will continue to have—on the consumer landscape.

A report from *Getty CreativeInsights* <https://creativeinsights.gettyimages.com/en/trends/realness/the-next-generation> calls Generation Alpha “the new old fashioned,” citing the way the young group values family time and outdoor play, in part due to the amount of time they've spent at home due to COVID-19, interacting mostly with Gen Z siblings, Millennial parents and Boomer grandparents. Still, they are a particularly tech savvy group: many have done at least some amount of schooling online, and nearly all have grown up with technology as a central part of their everyday lives.

Because these kids are growing up with Zoom, FaceTime and social media as central pillars of their lives, *The Future of Commerce and Customer Engagement* <https://www.the-future-of-commerce.com/2022/08/09/generation-alpha-definition-stats-predictions/> reports that Generation Alpha is more visual, more social and more global than earlier generations. Like their older Gen Z siblings and cousins, they're also deeply concerned about “sustainability and the warming climate, so-



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“Many Millennials want their kids to have the same experiences that they did as children, so they’re emphasizing play with Legos, Hot Wheels, Barbies, Fisher-Price toys and other brands with retro vibes and packaging.”

– The Future of Commerce and Customer Engagement

cial and policy change, and rebuilding our societies into more equitable spaces for all,” according to *The Future of Commerce and Customer Engagement*.

As both of these groups age into the workforce and develop their consumer power, these social and environmental pillars will only continue to grow in importance. It does not seem to be a stretch to say that environmental and social causes should be an area of focus for all retailers moving forward—from frames made of bio acetates to ECPs running contact lens recycling programs, there's no shortage of ways to get involved.

The Future of Commerce and Customer Engagement also reports that Millennial nostalgia could play a role in how Generation Alpha shops. Heather Dretsch, North Carolina Poole College of Management assistant marketing professor, told *The Future*

of Commerce and Customer Engagement, “Many Millennials want their kids to have the same experiences that they did as children, so they’re emphasizing play with Legos, Hot Wheels, Barbies, Fisher-Price toys and other brands with retro vibes and packaging.” Thus, brands with a long history of customer loyalty, and with looks that we might consider classic or retro, could be well-positioned for Generation Alpha.

Generation Alpha is still young, and at this age most are not making purchases or decisions with their own money. As they grow into teenagers, though, Generation Alpha will begin to have a massive impact on both our economy and our culture. This is a large, powerful group that is facing a chaotic, climate warming and uncertain future—and when they shop, they want to do their part to make the world a little brighter. ■



Gen Z Grows Up

It might be easy to think of Gen Z as kids, but this powerful generation is growing up. Pew Research <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/> marks those born after 1996 as Gen Z, meaning the oldest members of the generation are now in their mid-twenties. As Pew Research reports, “Unlike the Millennials—who came of age during the Great Recession—this new generation was in line to inherit a strong economy with record-low unemployment. That has all changed now, as COVID-19 has reshaped the country’s social, political and economic landscape. Instead of looking ahead to a world of opportunities, Gen Z now peers into an uncertain future.”

Gen Z were the ones moving out of their college dorms in March 2020, and the ones who spent most of their collegiate experience on Zoom in their childhood bedrooms. They are the powerhouse on social media (mainly TikTok), making careers out of their presence online and setting the standard for what products “go viral” and sell out instantly. *Insider Intelligence eMarketer* reports <https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/generation-z-facts/> that Gen Z “spends as much time on their phones as older generations do watching television,” highlighting just how important it is for retailers to have an online presence if they want to meet their customers where they already are.

Like their younger counterparts in Generation Alpha, Gen Z tends to be a progressive group with concerns about social justice and the environment. Pew Research reports, “Members of Gen Z are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation, and they are on track to be the most well-educated generation yet... Pew Research Center surveys conducted in the fall of 2018 (more than a year before the coronavirus outbreak) among Americans ages 13 and older found that, similar to Millennials, Gen Zers are



Image Credit: Getty Images/ViewApart

“Members of Gen Z are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation, and they are on track to be the most well-educated generation yet.”

– Pew Research

progressive and pro-government, most see the country’s growing racial and ethnic diversity as a good thing, and they’re less likely than older generations to see the United States as superior to other nations.”

In 2021, *Rolling Stone* reported that Gen Z represented over \$140 billion of spending power <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture-council/articles/basics-marketing-gen-z-1241015/>, making them one of the most powerful consumer groups. Because they spend so much time online, Gen Z “can select from a wider variety of content

at the swipe of a finger, much of it created by their own peer group... In order to establish meaningful connections, brands need to have an even deeper understanding of how their target audience uses each platform than ever before. Ads should be both attention-grabbing and seamlessly fit into the type of content Gen Z is trying to consume on each app or site,” *Rolling Stone* reported.

This is why influencers have so much power for members of Gen Z. Generally, they are considered to be more relatable and trustworthy, operating “more like a friend giving you a recommendation than a hard sell,” said *Rolling Stone*. The magazine reports that Gen Z is nearly twice as likely as Millennials to buy something based on influencer recommendation.

And when it comes to shopping, Gen Z prioritizes trust, relatability and, of course, social and environmental causes. Keeping these foundations at the center of what you do is the best way to appeal to the Gen Z consumer. ■

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The Millennial Market

Those born from 1996 through to about 1981 are Millennials, a generational group that grew up in the shadow of 9/11 and the 2008 recession and that settled into adulthood in the COVID-19 pandemic. Though we've long thought of Millennials as kids, this group is grown up and powerful now; in 2022, *Forbes* reported <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2022/09/07/how-brands-can-connect-with-millennials-5-key-strategies-for-2022/?sh=684a258b5e3c>. “Millennials’ buying power currently eclipses that of other generations, and older members of this cohort are now poised to move into their prime earning and spending years... When it comes to overall spending power, Millennials haven’t even reached their peak potential yet.”

Social values are particularly important for Millennials, too. *PR Daily* <https://www.prdaily.com/report-83-of-millennials-want-brands-to-align-with-them-on-values/> reported, “For these young consumers, 83 percent want companies to align with their values and 76 percent want CEOs to speak out on issues they care about. That’s according to 5WPR’s 2020 Consumer Culture Report...



Image Credit: Getty Images/Westend61

About two-thirds (65 percent) of Millennials say they have boycotted a brand that took the opposing stance on an issue, and 62 percent favor products that show off their political and social beliefs.”

YPulse reported on its Cause Conundrum trend report, which “shows 79 percent of young people agree ‘Brands need to do more than just donate money to a cause,’ especially when that means breaking up with practices they find unethical.” Ac-

tual, actionable change is important to younger consumers.

Unlike Gen Z, Millennials seem to be a little less likely to be influenced by social media—*PR Daily* reports that 36 percent said they’d purchased an item recommended by an Instagram influencer. This is still a notable percentage, though smaller than their Gen Z counterparts.

Still, the ideas of authenticity and relatability are vital for Millennial consumers, too. Influencer partnerships remain valuable and help to build a level of trust and familiarity. *Forbes* writes, “Influencer marketing allows brands to connect with a variety of incredibly targeted audiences, on the social platforms where Millennials spend their time. It’s an effective way to leverage the power of genuine word-of-mouth perspectives and recommendations, from ‘everyday’ people to credible topic experts of all kinds.”

As they settle into adulthood and have families of their own, Millennials continue to shape our culture and our economy, reinforcing the importance of genuine, authentic and thoughtful connections between brands and consumers. ■

From Digital to Physical

There has been a lot of talk over the past few years about the metaverse, especially in relation to younger consumers ranging from Generation Alpha to Millennials. While this conversation is constantly changing, one idea seems to be taking center stage: the phygital experience, which straddles both digital and physical spaces.

These products and brand experiences take consumers offline and into the store—or from the store and onto the website. *YPulse* explains [https://www.ypulse.com/](https://www.ypulse.com/article/2023/01/05/ypulse-predicts-these-6-trends-will-effect-gen-z-and-millennials-in-2023/)

[article/2023/01/05/ypulse-predicts-these-6-trends-will-effect-gen-z-and-millennials-in-2023/](https://www.ypulse.com/article/2023/01/05/ypulse-predicts-these-6-trends-will-effect-gen-z-and-millennials-in-2023/): “Brands like Forever21 and Amazon have already deployed some successful examples: Forever21’s Roblox beanie proved the power of giving Gen Z the opportunity to match their virtual world and avatar products with real ones. Amazon, on the other hand, opened their first IRL clothing store, which implemented technology from QR codes to see information about items to touchscreens in the dressing rooms to request and rate items.”

These experiences allow both brands and consumers to have the best of both worlds, and are less alienating to those who might feel less tech savvy, or more suspicious of entirely online worlds.

The metaverse and Web3 are also perfect for adapting toward loyalty programs, *YPulse* explains. Their data shows that about half of young people belong to loyalty programs, and that some brands have been successful in “gamifying” their loyalty programs through apps and virtual reality. ■



Gen X, Loyal But Anxious

Gen Xers, born between 1965 and 1980, have just about reached their prime spending years. Many have careers, homes and families now, *Forbes* reported <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/05/12/three-tips-for-marketing-to-generation-x/?sh=294221a27cf9>, and slowly but surely the group is beginning to use more technology in their everyday lives. While they do use the internet and social media, they're not quite as reliant on it as younger generations—and it should not be the only place brands work to connect with Gen X consumers. *Forbes* noted that TikTok isn't necessarily the main market for Gen Xers—instead, many spend time on YouTube and Facebook, connecting with friends and family on those platforms instead.

This also makes traditional advertising important for Gen X. Rebecca Kowalewicz writes for *Forbes*, “Gen X is sandwiched between Baby Boomers (a traditionally, well, traditional generation) and Millennials (a more tech-savvy generation)... This creates an exciting opportunity for omnichannel marketing. It provides marketers the convenience of a full-fledged campaign that can start anywhere from a Facebook ad to a billboard on a popular highway and end with sales on an e-commerce website or with foot traffic in a store.”

Influencer marketing agency *The Shelf* <https://www.theshelf.com/the-blog/generation-x/> noted this too: “Cross-channel living is a way of life for Generation Xers. They will research the best product and price online to find what they want before heading into the store. Although they communicate much of the day through social media, they acknowledge that some things are better expressed with an old-fashioned handwritten letter.”

Generation X is also a brand-loyal group, writes *The Shelf*. They join rewards programs frequently, and are “the most likely to say they would pay more for a product from a brand they trust whether it was endorsed by an influencer or not.” Familiarity and quality are of the utmost importance to



Image Credit: Getty Images / FG Trade

Generation X, which might make it harder for newer, fresher brands to break into their circle.

In a similar vein, Generation X seems to be the generation most concerned by the current economic climate. While younger generations are focusing their energy on the environment and social problems, Gen X has an eye on the markets.

This might be because Generation X are often the head of multi-generational homes, as *The Shelf* reports: “Gen Xers are extremely family oriented. This is evident in the fact that they're more likely than any other generation to head a multi-generational household. 28 percent of Gen Xers are currently doing so... They're also more likely to be providing financial support to extended family members.”

This translates to major purchasing power, but also some anxiety. New York Life's recent Wealth Watch survey <https://www.newyorklife.com/newsroom/wealth-watch-2023-genx-financial-health> found “66 percent of American adults reported feeling confident in their ability to reach their financial goals, and 1-in-3 feel hopeful about their finances going into 2023. This optimism dissipates quickly for Gen X, however.”

“Thinking about their finances in 2023 specifically, 39 percent of Gen Xers felt stressed, 37 percent felt anxious, and 30 percent felt hopeful. Only 8 percent felt excited and 7 percent felt empowered.”

— *New York Life's recent Wealth Watch survey*

The survey found that Gen X showed the highest levels of anxiety and lowest levels of hope in comparison to other generations. About 68 percent “are most concerned about inflation impacting their finances in 2023,” and “thinking about their finances in 2023 specifically, 39 percent of Gen Xers felt stressed, 37 percent felt anxious, and 30 percent felt hopeful. Only 8 percent felt excited and 7 percent felt empowered.” In general, Gen Xers seem more worried about debt, inflation and financial goals than other generations.

For Generation X, it seems that brand loyalty, smart spending and caring for others are vital pillars—and understanding and appealing to those important categories can help brands make important connections with this powerful generation. ■

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Online With Baby Boomers

Long one of the most influential and powerful generations in our culture and economy, Baby Boomers are those born between about 1946 and 1964. They still maintain a massive impact on consumer power, writes *The Shelf*, “Not only do Boomers have control of their own \$7 billion of annual online spending, but they are also critical influencers in the lives of their adult children, young adult grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren.” They, like Gen Xers, are often part of multi-generational households, and are investing in younger generations, too, as they help their children and grandchildren get through college, buy their first homes and more.

Still, Baby Boomers are beginning to retire, and GOBankingRates <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/gen-z-vs.-boomers:-how-optimistic-these-generations-are-about-their-money-in-2023> reported that just 28 percent “believe they are in for financial growth in the new year.” Many Baby Boomers are beginning to adjust to living on a more fixed income as they retire, while some are pushing back their retirement years due to inflation.

It makes sense to look at traditional routes of connection when trying to reach Baby Boomers, but leaving them out of the technology talk would be a mistake, too. *Forbes* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunication-scouncil/2017/09/26/five-things-you-need-to-know-about-marketing-to-baby-boomers/?sh=35f2afb94e55> writes, “Baby Boomers have grown up with technology over recent decades. They’re more accustomed to technology than you might think, and they use it in different ways than Millennials.”

According to *Forbes’* report, 96 percent use search engines, 95 percent use email and 92 percent shop online rather than in person. Around 60 percent of Baby Boomers read blogs and online articles for information, and about 70 percent watch videos about products and services that they’re interested in. Baby Boomers



Image Credit: Getty Images/ Jose Luis Pelaez Inc

“Baby Boomers have grown up with technology over recent decades. They’re more accustomed to technology than you might think, and they use it in different ways than Millennials.”

– *Forbes*

are active on Facebook mainly, which they use to shop and connect with loved ones.

Yahoo! Finance <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/research-reveals-boomer-digital-buying-140300820.html> reported on research from Rain the Growth Agency that shows that online shopping is even growing with Baby Boomers. General use of search engines remains the “shopping gateway” for Baby Boomers, but 26 percent say “social media has inspired purchases from never before considered brands and products,” making space for everyone to connect with the Baby Boomer generation.

Baby Boomers are also quite health conscious, especially as they age in a time of constantly improving medical technology that allows for longer, happier lives. Many Baby Boomers are active and healthy—but there’s no question that aging

eyes pose a serious health concern for many older people.

Almost all will have to see an ECP at some point in the next year, and maintaining consistent, authentic contact with Baby Boomer patients is a vital cornerstone of eyecare. Because they are often part of multi-generational homes, or are involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren, establishing connections with Baby Boomers can also lead to authentic connections with their younger family members.

In many cases, the necessity of eyecare is a nonnegotiable for the Baby Boomer generation—but that does not mean our industry can or should take our connection with them for granted. Continuing to be authentic, proactive and being flexible benefits both Baby Boomers and the industry at large. ■



Connecting With the Silent Generation

Born before 1945, the Silent Generation have lived through an ever-changing world. This generation tends to be loyal to the businesses they patronize, *TechTarget* <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/feature/Generational-marketing-explained-Everything-you-need-to-know> reported, and “wants respect and value relationships with those they do business with.” This is a group with strong morals; *image.works* <https://www.image-worksdirect.com/blog/marketing-silent-generation> wrote, “The Silent Generation was shaped by both World War II and the Great Depression, so it’s no wonder they tend to be a disciplined, loyal and hard-working group.” Like Gen Xers and Baby Boomers, members of the Silent Generation value their families and multi-generation living.

Unsurprisingly, members of the Silent Generation tend to get more of their daily news and product

information from the TV and radio, but it would be a mistake to count them out of the online conversation, too. In 2019, Pew Research found <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/09/us-generations-technology-use/> that 4 in 10 members of the Silent Generation reported owning a smartphone and 33 percent owned a tablet. They use Facebook to stay connected with loved ones, and see both news and advertising online. A mix of both new and traditional marketing methods—including direct to mail—offers a great way to stay connected with the Silent Generation.

As members of the Silent Generation age, health care and eyecare become increasingly important to them and their loved ones. It’s vital that any kind of marketing or messaging aimed at this generation is simple in design and easy to read—and that face to face, in person experiences are



Image Credit: Getty Images/ David Sacks

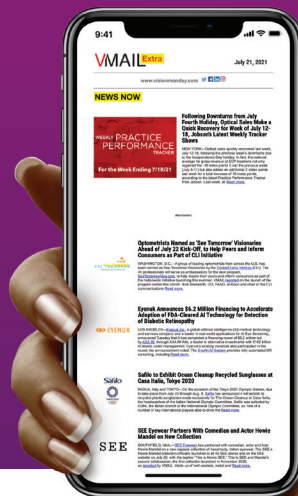
made available to them. Connection, respect and loyalty go a long way in helping bring us closer to the Silent Generation. ■

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