Catching some Z’s

Who are Generation Z, where can they be reached and how best to communicate with them? Eurofruit spoke to those researching and targeting these consumers to find out what they have discovered.

According to researchers, even goldfish are endowed with a longer attention span than Generation Z, the demographic cohort born from the mid-90s onwards. Members of this generation apparently struggle to concentrate on any one thing for more than eight seconds, rendering them a marketer’s nightmare – or at least an old-fashioned marketer’s nightmare. For the key lies in the means of engagement with this generation, which is poised to account for 40 per cent of all US consumers by 2020.

An alternative term for Generation Z, and perhaps the one that comes closest to defining its members, is the iGeneration – those practically born with smart phones in their hands. The ubiquity of their portable handheld device, as well as the internet more generally, has shaped the way this generation responds to external messages, and understanding how it does is central to communicating effectively to such consumers.

“One of the main problems is, Generation Z don’t think in terms of days, they think in terms of seconds,” offers Nic Jooste of Dutch group Cool Fresh International. “It takes time to develop strategies to engage in this way. We are working on creating a model with our retail partners.”

Cool Fresh started researching the behaviour of Generation Z last year, through online questionnaires and focus groups with 15-20-year-olds. “The main point from our discussions was that this generation is far more open and willing to participate in making the world a better place,” says Jooste. “They really seem to care. This comes from growing up with smart phones and having instant access to all kinds of information. They think they know everything, and in truth they do have a hugely diversified knowledge. For example, if you ask them about labour conditions in India, they automatically have something to say.”

This ready access to data offers marketers an opportunity, in that their target audience is better informed than previous generations. However, it equally presents a formidable challenge. “They already have fixed opinions before you even start communicating with them,” explains Jooste. “So you have to work really hard to get their attention, but then there is no guarantee that that attention will be positive.”

Elena Ozeritskaya, founder of Fresh Insight, and a regular keynote presenter on the subject of Generations & Food, suggests that the optimum means of engaging this group of consumers is by fully including them. “The best way to win loyalty with this generation is to start a conversation with them and co-create products and services together,” she says. “This is the generation that wants to create, connect and make a positive impact in the world, in contrast to Generation Y, which preferred to share rather than create. So let them create, be part of your organisation and offer ideas to assist in product development.”

Where do we go now?
“They are teenagers with food on their mind,” Ozeritskaya reminds us. “It’s their second favourite thing to spend money on after clothes.” So, believe it or not, Generation Y is not so different from previous generations in that food is still (almost) king. The chief distinction is in the ‘places’ – often purely online – where these consumers can be reached.

“YouTube is their go-to channel, whether that’s to watch music or to check in with their favourite vlogger like Zoella or Cherry Wallis,” she continues. “It’s where they spend huge amounts of time. When it comes to marketing you need to be present where they are, including on Facebook (although that’s decreasing), Instagram and YouTube, plus other platforms like Vine. They are very visual, so video is king. Running Instagram-specific promotional campaigns is a good way to directly reach out to Generation Z. Instagram recently added support for videos of up to 15 seconds in length, creating an interesting opportunity for promotional video campaigns on the network.”

The key to vlogs is their perception as genuine, in stark contrast to traditional marketing campaigns, which can seem specious and contrived in comparison.

“Vlogging is a way to get their attention as part of your marketing campaign,” says Ozeritskaya. “They want things that are real and raw, so don’t spend thousands on traditional marketing campaigns. Be creative and do stuff that gets their attention, such as food challenges and alternative uses for food, such as for facials. Team up with vloggers that matter to them.”

Ozeritskaya offers the example of YouTube channel Tasty, which offers short, simple, fun videos instructing viewers on how to cook various healthy meals. “That’s the stuff they watch, as cooking is cool for Generation Z, and food is on their minds,” she says.

To really capture their attention, Ozeritskaya continues, campaigns should feature a combination of social and other media. “Generation Z are multi-tasking individuals — 84 per cent browse the communications manager for the EMEA region. “People of this generation are very sensitive to fake and unreal brands and require a certain emotional bond in order to be interested.

“That is why as a brand you have to be transparent and go beyond the functional element of your products, while providing products that matter and don’t disappoint. This is exactly what Driscoll’s is aiming for and it inspires everything we do. It fuels our R&D programmes, but also the way we interact with consumers. Knowing this generation is incredibly digital, we are continually seeking the best way to provide content that matters and to explore new ways to connect to these target audiences.”

According to Appel, berries are the perfect product for such a generation, since they are both healthy and convenient. What remains is to offer the best possible product and to show the consumer what the company is really about. “That is the way to create loyalty,” she says. “It’s no longer good enough to have sophisticated marketing programmes that are just sending messages. It should all be real. A small example of how we do that is by using real people and stories to interact with consumers; no professional models showing the perfect life, but real people having real moments with Driscoll’s berries.”

Jooste agrees that those in the fresh produce industry are well placed to tap into the values of this new generation. “Fruit and vegetables is the healthiest industry,” he states. “Of course, it is difficult for an apple to compete with the likes of Red Bull in terms of advertising and reach, so we have to be really creative. At Cool Fresh, instead of going to advertising agencies, we decided to do it all ourselves. I even involved my own kids. I mean, who better?”

Jooste reveals that some FMCG companies that Cool Fresh works with have recruited 16-17-year-olds as advisors, especially for online apps like Snapchat. Otherwise, he says, it’s impossible for companies to speak their language. ‘If you try too hard to be he says. “We asked our discussion group which company they thought did this best, and the answer was Innocent.”

A different kind of convenience

Generation Z is known to value and demand immediacy, but the type of convenience is distinct. “It’s the generation that wants things the moment they think of them,” says Ozeritskaya. “So when they are in the park listening to some tunes and get hungry, they want easy access to great, tasty, healthy food. Companies like Deliveroo and UberEats are jumping on that need and developing very fast.”

Appel sees online shopping and delivery as an area that needs to be further explored. “For berries, this is still small today, but there is great potential for the future,” she says. “When it comes to berries, the big advantage of online shopping and delivery is that you can make the whole supply chain shorter, which is crucial for highly perishable items like berries.”

“Transparency and tracking are also key,” resumes Ozeritskaya. “They want to know how food is produced and where it comes from, as well as how long it takes to get to the market. They have health on their minds, but they are driven by cost, craving and convenience. The key is to provide them with solutions that are convenient for them, such as apps that allow them to customise and place an order easily and instantaneously.”

Jooste points out that the convenience desired by Generation Z differs significantly from the expectations of previous generations. “It’s still about satisfying immediate needs,” he says. “But in the past, this meant going to the supermarket and buying a packaged salad or a mixed fruit salad. Now they say, I want steak, salad and chips; how can I get these things as easily and as quickly as possible? So it’s moving from convenience products to convenience shopping.”

The incipient use of drones to facilitate deliveries, even of perishables, is indicative of the inexorable rise of convenience shopping. The challenge, according to Jooste, is for a slow-moving industry like


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internet while watching TV or, increasingly, YouTube vlogs and Snapchat,” she says. “These individuals experiment with new social networks and technologies frequently. The marketing campaigns that will best engage Generation Z are those that increase product awareness through a variety of media.”

**Transparency tops requirements**

For US berry giant Driscoll’s, how this new generation of consumers comes to regard the brand will largely determine future sales at the company. Efforts to tailor the brand to some of Generation Z’s primary concerns is, therefore, essential. “The way the population of Generation Z looks at brands has definitively played a role in our new brand positioning and strategy,” says Marieke Appel, Driscoll’s marketing cool, they will ignore you,” he says. “There are many examples of companies that tried to engage, but simply didn’t understand their target audience.”

Connor Blakely, a teenage entrepreneur and youth marketing strategist from the US, echoed this view with regard to companies’ overuse of acronyms such as OMG and WTF. “When brands use this type of language in an attempt to look trendy it comes off as inauthentic and fake,” he wrote. “Now more than ever, today’s youth act and behave like adults. They want to be treated as such.”

Indeed, according to Jooste, this is a generation that wants to enter into a dialogue with suppliers. “If you trigger an interest and get them to your website, they then want to engage.”

fresh produce to match such a rapid pace of change.

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Communication is set to change, and if we are unable to adapt, we will lose market share to those that are. It’s actually had a rejuvenating effect on our own team at Cool Fresh, both in terms of our communication and our way of thinking. The old dogs, who were initially quite sceptical, are changing their view as they start to see the impact such efforts could have in the future.”