Reality bytes:
The digital experience is the human experience.

What's inside.

Being online.

Give me Internet or give me death!

61% of Gen Z can't go more than five hours without Internet access.

Members of other generations may depend on the Internet for certain aspects of their lives, but members of Gen Z are in a class of their own when it comes to being online. The Internet plays an almost intrinsic role in their lives, in a way that is unlike any prior generation.

Gen Z is the first generation to view the digital and physical worlds as one. While they may still shop in brick-and-mortar stores, they use their phones to price shop or seek out their friends' advice while doing so. For Gen Z, being digitally connected is an essential part of life.

This should hardly come as a surprise. Gen Z is the first generation to never know a world without the Internet, and they've spent their entire lives growing up side-by-side with it. It's a generation very much defined by the introduction of the iPhone in 2007. Steve Jobs' famous quote, "iPhone is like having

your life in your pocket," was a prescient lens that has come to define this generation's relationship with technology.

Just how Internet-dependent are they? **For starters, 61% of Gen Z can't go more than five hours without Internet access before becoming uncomfortable—32% can't go for more than an hour. Compare that with 13% of Baby Boomers, who have little difficulty going without Internet access for a week or more.**

Part of Gen Z's desire for constant connectedness is certainly tied to the ubiquity of mobile devices in today's world. When was the last time you saw a member of Gen Z without their phone? But another, more nuanced explanation may be rooted in the way they, and other generations, view the Internet, and how they use it.

Gen Z strongly associates the Internet with social media (85%) and entertainment or content websites (77%).

Gen Z views the Internet as an extension of their lives—it's where they socialise, shop, entertain themselves, search for information, and spend increasingly large amounts of time. For Gen Z, the distinction between "online" and "offline" is moot, whereas other generations still have clear boundaries between both.

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The average person will spend approximately five years and four months of their lives on social media.

Baby Boomers, for example, rely on the Internet for task-based activities such as gathering information or communicating rather than experiencing the Internet as an ongoing, cohesive part of their lives. When they're online, they're online for a reason, it's functional. Once that reason has been satisfied, they're perfectly happy to go offline again. They have a highly transactional relationship with the technology. **It's why, when asked what they associate the Internet with, Boomers overwhelmingly say email (91%) and search/informational tools (77%).**

By contrast, Gen Z strongly associates the Internet with social media (85%) and entertainment or content websites (77%).

What's interesting is the average person will spend approximately five years and four months of their lives on social media, according to a study by marketing agency Mediakix. The only activity the average person will spend more time on is watching television, at seven years and eight months, which came in well ahead of eating/drinking (three years, five months), grooming (one year, 10 months), socialising (one year, three months) and the necessary evil of doing laundry (six months). For Gen Z, they are already spending nearly twice as much time on social media as they spend watching TV.

BOTTOM LINE:

Each generation views the Internet differently, but Gen Z is in a league of their own. Gen Z isn't just dependent on the Internet; the Internet plays a vital role in their lives.

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Always on is not enough for Gen Z.

Just as Gen Z spends more time online than any other generation, they also continue to look for easier, more natural ways to interface with all of the devices they use. This includes accessing the Internet with their voice, using tools such as Siri or Alexa, but also with gestures, and hand and finger movements on a touchscreen.

Gen Z is fuelling the demand for many of these new forms of access, but they aren't the only generation that has expectations surrounding them. **Across all generations, only 7% of people are currently using their voice to access the Internet, but 29% expect to do so within the next five years. Similarly, 4% currently use gestures to access the Internet, while 19% expect to do so at some point over the next five years.**

That same data set also shows a high expectation that the Internet will become more predictive over the next five years. After all, Gen Z is a generation that has grown up in the hyper-personalised world of targeted advertisements, which has led to an expectation of personalised experiences across all digital channels. **Over the next five years, 25% of all generations expect the Internet to alert them to what they need before they need it, up from 6% today.**

As noted above, this trend is amplified when it comes to Gen Z: 27% expect the Internet to predict what they need and alert them before they need it within the next five years. That's compared to 24% of Millennials, 27% of Gen X, and 22% of Baby Boomers. Additionally, 40% of Gen Z would actively stop visiting a website if it didn't anticipate what they needed, liked, or wanted.

Gen Z also wants to see more things connected to the Internet, from clocks and refrigerators to vacuums, dishwashers, and a host of other appliances. Always on, 24/7 digital access is table stakes for this generation, and they will demand for everything to be much more connected in five years' time.

BOTTOM LINE:

Traditional means of accessing the Internet are not enough for Gen Z. They want new ways of interacting with the web, more devices to be connected, and they want improvements to predictive technologies.

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Entertain first, inform second.

Because Gen Z views and uses the Internet differently than the generations that preceded them, there are very real implications for marketers who want to successfully reach this demographic. If Gen Z is always on, it follows that your brand must always be on as well. If always on is not enough, finding new ways to connect with this generation is of the utmost importance.

That begins with reaching Gen Z where they are today—across a wide variety of social channels—but it also means having the courage to go places Gen Z hasn't fully reached yet. Experimentation with new technologies (voice, personalisation, AI and machine learning, etc.) must be top of mind and part of your budget, not an afterthought, if you're going to reach Gen Z.
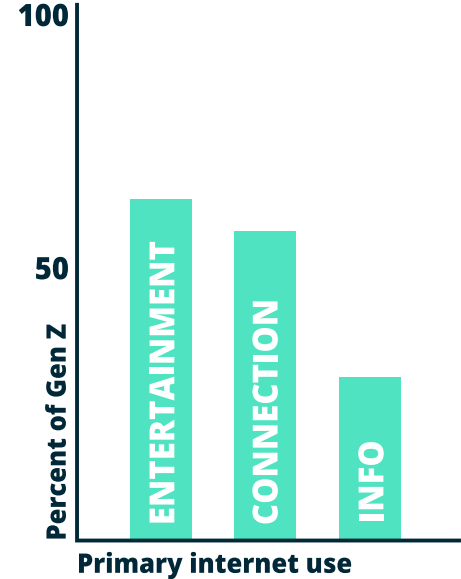
38% of Gen Z are more likely to provide their personal data for a more personalised digital experience.

Brands employing this strategy are already seeing success. From diversifying the social channels they use to developing more video and even VR-style content, businesses must have the bandwidth to meet Gen Z where they currently are, and branch out to some of the new channels they're gravitating towards. If brands choose not to do these things, they risk alienating this important demographic and their burgeoning buying power.

But finding where Gen Z will be is just part of the challenge. Deciding what to do once you're there is the next step.

One resounding message from the study is that an overwhelming majority (79%) of Europeans continue to prefer information over entertainment when interacting with a company's online content. An equally resounding

Primary internet use

Chart: Percent of Gen Z by primary internet use — Entertainment, Connection, Info

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point? Gen Z is reversing that trend, and 29% now prefer to be entertained rather than informed, compared to 6% of Baby Boomers.

That can mean a lot of things when it comes to deciding what type of content will resonate the most with Gen Z. Taking cues from the different content types that populate social media is one way to experiment. Another safe bet is leaning heavily on video. **The study found that a vast majority (66%) of Europeans believe video content will grow to dominate the Internet within the next five years.** It's exactly this trend that has driven the rise of YouTube and made it the most popular social platform among Gen Z.

While video is an excellent medium for entertainment, content still matters. Making sure your video content is short, pithy, and at times, lighthearted is a good way to keep it entertaining rather than strictly informational. At the end of the day, entertainment will mean different things to Gen Z. What you should keep in mind is that entertainment remains Gen Z's prime reason for accessing the Internet, and as this

generation shifts their attention to consumer content, they want the entertainment experience to follow them there.

They also want that experience to be increasingly personalised. In fact, members of Gen Z (38%) are more likely than members of any other generation to provide their personal data if it means they'll receive a more personalised digital experience over an anonymous one.

BOTTOM LINE:
**Don't be afraid of experimenting with new channels to reach Gen Z.
Your mindset must be to entertain Gen Z above all, regardless of where or how you're communicating with them.**

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Buying online.

The online shopper.

Given Gen Z's familiarity with the Internet, it's fitting that merely being online is no barrier when it comes to earning their trust as consumers. **When asked if an online-only company was somehow less trustworthy than a solely brick-and-mortar business, 61% of Gen Z say no.** However, more than any other generation, Gen Z also prefers businesses to have an online presence and a physical storefront, a clear reflection of the "clicks-to-bricks" opportunity brands such as Warby Parker and Bonobos have identified and are capitalising on today.

Another interesting note: despite Gen Z's eagerness to access the web using new methods and different devices, they still show a clear preference for a company's website over a mobile app when making purchases. This fact held true across all generations, with Baby Boomers leading the pack at 93%, followed by Gen X (89%), Millennials (71%), and Gen Z (69%).

Even though Gen Z is willing to push the limits of the Internet when it comes to new and different ways of connecting, they appear to become more conservative with regard to spending their money. Much like previous generations, Gen Z still has an affinity for shopping in a physical space, albeit alongside a digital one. Still, Gen Z is highly adept at not only finding

69% of Gen Z would prefer to use a company's website over their mobile app when making a purchase.

reviews but evaluating them, comparing prices across stores whether online or offline, and researching products from their mobile devices with unprecedented ease. This Gen Z customer is more empowered than ever, and as a retailer, that means you're never safe from your competition. Brands must reinvent before they have to and they must ensure the customer is consistently surprised and delighted in order to build trust and loyalty.

Gen Z's online shopping habits also overlap with social consciousness. Although it was Millennials that began to firmly plant the consumer flag on social causes (see Patagonia, TOMS Shoes), Gen Z appears to be advancing the tradition of holding companies accountable when it comes to taking a stand on social issues. Here authenticity reigns supreme. If a brand chooses to support a cause, they must ensure they are not only talking the talk but walking the walk.

65% of Gen Z are more likely to buy from a company that contributes to social causes, while 30% have stopped buying from a company that contributes to a social cause they disagree with.

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Nonetheless, the demand that brands be socially accountable, and imbued with a sense of real-life authenticity, plays a large role for Gen Z as online shoppers. Similarly, they want companies to provide them with content that's consistent and relevant. **In fact, Gen Z is the most likely generation (74%) to purchase from a company that provides consistent, relevant content.**

While the purpose imperative is clear, the downside is that more than 30% of all generations state that they would stop buying from a company that contributed to a social cause they disagree with. Not all businesses will be willing to take this risk on, so it poses an interesting dilemma for business leaders and marketers in determining the best course forward.

65%
OF GEN Z

are more likely to buy from a company that contributes to social causes.

BOTTOM LINE:

Gen Z wants to experiment with new channels of communication, but not when it comes to purchasing—they prefer a blended model of digital and physical when it's time to spend money. Purpose matters but it's also a double-edged sword. Authenticity in the purchase process is vital to Gen Z, and relevant, entertaining content to move them along the funnel is still paramount.

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Gen Z is the most likely generation to purchase from a company that provides consistent, relevant content.

Building online.

Building the future.

A staggering 62% of Gen Z would rather have unlimited access to the Internet than a university degree.

When it comes to building the future online, expect Gen Z to take a different approach than the generations that have come before them. This is true for all of the reasons listed in this eBook: Gen Z has a connection to the Internet that earlier generations simply don't share, and they already interact with the digital world in a completely original way. That behaviour could trigger runaway creative growth, a digital Cambrian explosion, that builds the future of our digital and physical worlds.

This integration with the physical world and the Internet has already begun to take root in more concrete ways. Take for example the case of the university degree. A university education has been viewed by all preceding generations as a must-have and the best one-way ticket to upward mobility. No longer.

Our study revealed a staggering 62% of Gen Z would rather have unlimited access to the Internet than a university degree. In an era where the Internet is viewed as the ultimate source of knowledge, traditional educational institutions will increasingly need to evolve as other industries have undergone their own digital transformations.

A similar trend was uncovered with regard to Gen Z's view of world leaders. While the managers of statecraft and world affairs were once seen as pre-eminent visionaries, nearly half of Gen Z (46%) views the people who manage or build the Internet as more important than political leaders around the world.

BOTTOM LINE:

Gen Z will continue to envision the future through the lens of the digital world, and traditions rooted in the analogue world will increasingly be challenged by future generations.

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When it comes to the future, these trends remind us that while the analogue world still has a place in the foundations of our society, many aspects of that society will be or are already being augmented by the digital world. Gen Z is leading this charge, and what they build, as well as how they build it, will be inextricably tied to the Internet.

Building their future.

When it comes to building their future online, Gen Z has strong opinions about where and how they want to do it. **For starters, Gen Z makes up 20% of Europeans who are planning to start a new business in the coming years. As expected, a majority of these digital natives (61%) plan to launch that business online first.**

Generational Breakdown of the likelihod of starting a buisness:

63% of Gen Z

54% of Millenials

32% of Gen X

19% of Boomers
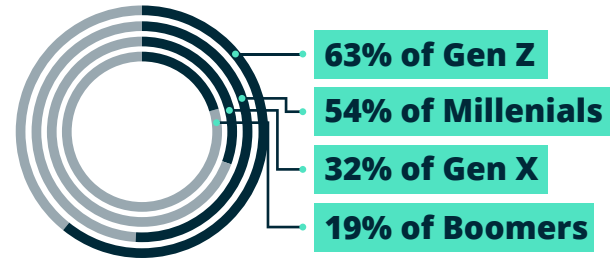
With regard to Gen Z, however, their preference for a blend of online and physical storefronts is once again visible. **While 61% of Gen Z would launch their business online first, 39% would still do so at a physical location. This is in stark contrast to Baby Boomers, who overwhelmingly (75%) would launch their business online first.**

BOTTOM LINE:

Gen Z has the highest aspiration for entrepreneurship of any generation. It's also the first generation to express an interest in building a tech business over retail, the preference of all other generations.

Building their brand.

Members of Gen Z are also highly purposeful and cautious when it comes to their personal brand and how they want it to appear online, more so than prior generations. Just as Gen Z is increasingly comfortable blending the digital and physical worlds in their own lives, this generation also sees their online reputations merging with offline consequences.

70% of Gen Z worry that their online actions, including social media posts and past purchases, will affect job offers—something Millennials and Gen X didn't always understand and had to learn the hard way. 47% of Gen Z believe their online reputation will determine their dating options, and 54% believe that soon, Internet usage will tell as much about a person as their credit score. Gen Z knows algorithms are determining not just who they date but how much they can borrow and whether they get that job interview.

Perhaps that's why Gen Z is fiercely committed to authenticity when considering the brands they use and buy. 82% of Gen Z will trust a company more if the images that brand uses are not photoshopped. 84% of Gen Z trust a company more if they use actual customers in their ads.

On balance, Gen Z is highly confident in the way they interact with technology and the online world. It's instinctive and not learned as it has been for other generations. At the same time, they are practical, empathetic humanists who want to stand out and make a difference in the world.

While they are the most digital generation in history, Gen Z also values distinctly human traits like uniqueness, authenticity, creativity, and purpose.

BOTTOM LINE:

Gen Z, like other generations, gravitates towards a unique mix of trends, which both embrace the future and respect certain aspects of the past. They value authenticity and perhaps because of all their exposure to technology and social platforms they have a far better sense of brand building than prior generations.

Raised on the Internet: Gen Z lives in a different world.

Gen Z has a growing influence over the way we interact online, and the ease with which they blend analogue and digital experiences has already begun to change the world as we know it. While other generations use the Internet as a utility that can be turned on or off, Gen Z was raised on the Internet, and sees it as a cohesive part of their everyday lives—a fusion of the offline and online worlds.

The implications of this shift are massive. Reaching Gen Z means understanding where they are and where they're going, both in terms of how they access the Internet, but also what they do once they get there. Embracing new technologies, experimenting with new forms of communication, and understanding the nuances of how

Gen Z is blending analogue and digital is the only way marketers will successfully cater to this generation.

From being online to buying or building online, Gen Z has already seized the digital future and begun to blend it into the reality we all experience, regardless of generational ID. While everyone from Baby Boomers to Millennials has interacted with the Internet in a bimodal fashion, Gen Z is the first generation to intrinsically combine the digital and the physical worlds, and they're bringing the rest of us along for the ride. From now on, the digital experience will be synonymous with our human experience.

Research methodology.

WP Engine and The Center for Generational Kinetics jointly led this research study.

The survey was administered to a total of 1,008 Western European respondents ages 14-59.

Gen Z is defined as those between the ages of 14-21, Millennials are defined as those between the ages of 22-40, Gen X is defined as those between the ages of 41-52, and Baby Boomers are defined as those between the ages of 53-59. The sample was weighted to the current census data for age, gender, and region.

The survey was conducted online from August 30, 2018 to September 3, 2018, and has a margin of error of +/-3.1 percentage points.

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About The Center for Generational Kinetics

The Center for Generational Kinetics is the leading research, speaking, and solutions firm focused on Millennials, Generation Z, and solving generational challenges. The Center's team of PhD researchers, strategists, and keynote speakers help leaders around the world solve tough generational challenges in areas ranging from employing multiple generations and recruiting Gen Z to selling and marketing to Millennials and across generations. Each year, The Center works with over 150 clients around the world, from car manufacturers and global hoteliers to insurance companies, hospital chains, and international software firms. The Center's team is frequently quoted in the media about the effect of generational differences on everything from shopping and parenting to work style and social media. Learn more about The Center at **GenHQ.com**.

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WP Engine is the world's leading WordPress Digital Experience Platform that gives companies of all sizes the agility, performance, intelligence, and integrations they need to drive their business forward faster. WP Engine's combination of tech innovation and an award-winning team of WordPress experts is trusted by more than 85,000 companies across 135 countries to provide counsel and support, helping brands create world-class digital experiences. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas, and has offices in San Francisco, California; San Antonio, Texas; London, England; Limerick, Ireland; and Brisbane, Australia. For more information, visit **WPEngine.com**.