

Gen-Z

Gen-Z are set to be the primary demographic for news publishers...
Here's how to engage them!

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Introduction

Gen-Z is now becoming one of the largest generations, comprising about **32% of the population**. It's no surprise that they're predicted to be the **largest future paying audience for news**. Estimates suggest that Gen Z will be the **primary demographic targeted by digital publishers** as early as 2032!

But since this generation has never experienced life without digital technology (and are thus a lot more tech-savvy), for publishers, embracing an **entirely different approach** in order to appeal to them is essential. Publishers can't treat audiences as one. Different user needs and reader habits require different strategies to keep them engaged.

With the new generation set to disrupt the industry, how can publishers prepare to meet the needs of this new audience?

This e-guide delves deep into everything Gen-Z; their preferences, differences compared to other generations, and what the implications are for digital publishing. Read on to discover the strategies leading publishers **are using to acquire and engage audiences of the future**.

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“Gen-Z represents an even bigger shift (compared to Millennials) in readership habits. It is [therefore] incumbent upon news media companies to understand this generation and learn how its habits affect news consumption — and what that means to the future of newsrooms.”

Paula Felps
Editor, INMA

01

How Gen-Z differs from other generations

There's intricacies and nuances with every generation, and to make content relevant, adapting strategies is essential to longevity. In this section, we'll discuss the factors that make Gen-Z unique, and offer real examples of how publishers have had successful engagement with them.

New social channels

To engage the next generation of news readers, digital publishers are looking to learn not just how to deliver the news Gen-Z is looking for, but also which platforms to deliver it on (and identify the ones they frequently engage with).

Digital publishers that can leverage these rising social media platforms well will gain an advantage in attracting younger users. For example, the German publisher Funke Zentralredaktion has been extremely successful in using TikTok to cover political topics via its channel Funke. Within a year of their TikTok social strategy, the channel has gathered over 70,000 followers and some videos managed to rack up an impressive 3 million viewers.

Examples of rapid growth on new social channels don't stop there. The Australian is focusing on Instagram to engage Gen-Z. A new weekly Instagram quiz series along with a changed appearance aided their channel in drastically increasing impact. This meant they were able to see results such as:

- 393%** Boosted average daily reach
- 22%** Increased followers
- 919%** Raised comments & engagement YoY
- 173%** Increase in website traffic referrals from Instagram

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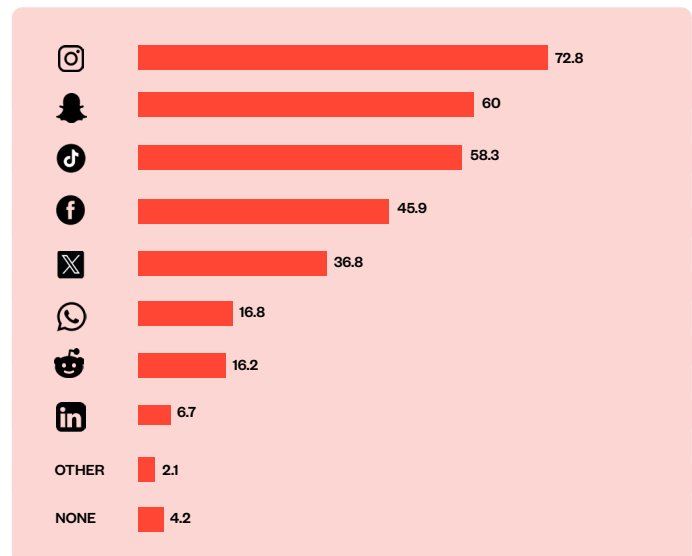
WhatsApp and Instagram usage continues to increase among 18-24-year-olds, but TikTok is the fastest growing network for news. An enormous 40% of 18-24-year-olds use TikTok, with 15% using it as their main source for the news.

—

Kirsten Eddy
 Researcher at
 Reuters Institute

But what are the best platforms to focus on and invest in?

Here's a breakdown of the most popular for Gen-Z:



Authenticity

If digital publishers want to better meet the needs of Gen-Z readers, it pays to do so in an **authentic** way. This younger generation is quick to spot companies that don't live up to their stated values, which can lead to a loss of trust, followers and ultimately, customers.

The concept of authenticity roughly translates into direct, casual, personality-led content that doesn't appear to have an agenda or seek to hide reality. According to an EY study on Gen Z, 92% of respondents stated that authenticity is more important than any other personal value. This includes the brands they follow and support. On top of this, more than any other generation, 24% of Gen-Z believes that successful brands of the future will be those which are authentic.

With that in mind, a purpose-driven content strategy could really pay off with the younger generation. Topics that cover big movements such as the environment, social justice, or health care can drive interest. But it is a fine balance, and publishers ought to be wary of too much crisis coverage. Reuters research found that too much political and Covid-19 coverage was one of the main reasons younger audiences avoided reading the news. Nonstop crisis coverage can have a negative effect on a reader's mood, stressing them out and making them distrustful.

Some argue that actually working with members of Gen-Z is crucial for content success.

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If you want them as users, they've got to be creators first. You've got to hire them, listen to them and branch off from that. If you do that, then they can build for this generation. If you just keep guessing at what this generation wants, that's not going to do it.

One thing is for certain- authenticity is favoured with younger audiences, and should be taken seriously if publishers want to stay relevant.

Corey Elliot
EVP, Borrell Associates

The advertising shift

On the surface, it would appear that Gen-Z are ad adverse. CM Group's recent study found that 52% avoid ads at all costs, a figure more than any other generation.

However, that doesn't mean advertising is completely irrelevant as a revenue stream. In fact, it brings with it new areas of opportunity. With Gen-Z's high usage of platforms like TikTok, they're used to seeing influencers in their news feeds demonstrating products through 'paid for' or sponsored content. And while Gen-Z notes that they dislike ads in the traditional sense, more than a third (35%) **said they are OK with native ads**, like sponsored content.

Better still, they're also more likely than any other age group to actually make purchases online based on the adverts they see, with **34% of Gen-Z making frequent purchases based on ads** (as long as they're delivered in the right way).

In other words, advertising is still very lucrative when done correctly. In order to keep this revenue stream alive, publishers might consider embracing different advertising strategies such as mimicking TikTok's 'sponsored content', and integrating sponsored ads into their material more smoothly. This will position publishers for long-term advertising stability.

While some publishers have already begun to introduce products as content (for example, the recent "explainer video" trend), the real value lies in creating a scalable strategy around this type of content.

If publishers hope to keep viewers on their adverts, they need to provide content that is not only entertaining, but also valuable. When publishers have native sponsored content that prioritises authenticity, they will likely notice growth in demand from both audiences and advertisers.

One example of a publisher who has found success in creating content that appeals to Gen-Zers is Bustle. Along with their innovative content, they also have The Bustle Shop; an online store that sells fashion items and beauty products. This revenue driver allows for a seamless on-site shopping experience.

Adopting this strategy of mixing shopping hauls and unboxing videos within article content could be the way forward for advertising without causing friction.

04

The drive towards subscriptions

Since Gen-Z dislikes advertising and craves authenticity, subscriptions can be a great way to gain their attention and earn their respect.

This could prove an extremely effective strategy, since 41 percent of Gen-Zers say gated content makes them feel rewarded, another 41 percent feel special, and 54 percent even go as far as to say they feel excited by the exclusivity. If the exclusivity of paid content actually makes Gen-Z users feel good about a brand, subscription models seem like a no-brainer for businesses looking to boost revenue and entice these new audiences.

01. Exclusivity

The key for publishers is to find a subscription model that works for their audiences by experimenting with different models. This could be in the form of offering a basic subscription tier with no ads, or providing access to exclusive events or early access articles for those who subscribe within a set time of registering.

03. Experimentation

Finally, experimenting with new price points has proven to have a significant impact on subscription revenue too. An infamous Harvard Business Review study by Michael Marn and Robert Rosiello found that a 1% improvement in pricing led to an estimated 11.1% increase in operating profits! This means that pricing optimisation is over 3x more influential to your revenue earnings than increases in sales.

02. Strategies

In addition to exclusivity, publishers might consider adapting subscription pricing and packaging strategies to entice and acquire more Gen-Z users. This could include strategies such as student discount offers, or video and podcast content packages (since these are preferred content types for Gen-Z).

So far digital publishers looking to focus more on subscriptions, how can they ensure subscription models have the best chance of converting new users?

Ultimately, subscriptions boil down to test, learn, and iterate. A one-size-fits-all pricing strategy will no longer work in this digital age, especially for younger audiences. These users want prices to match the value they receive from your products, and that perceived value will differ from user to user.

Personalisation

Gen-Z is more interested in building relationships with brands than previous generations, and this opens up opportunities because it means that, in order to appeal to Gen-Z, personalising content should be an important strategy for publishers to deploy

Those stats offer irrefutable evidence that personalisation ought to be at the core of every digital publisher's content strategy.

Furthermore, Gen-Z are least concerned about the ways companies use personal information, meaning publishers can safely employ more enthusiastic methods of gathering user information without fear of friction in the user experience.

77%

of Gen-Z believe it's important for businesses to customise interactions, while 76% are looking for companies that send them digital communications that they themselves can customise based on their own preferences.

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As a Gen-Z news reader, I find myself gravitating towards brands who have an understanding and knowledge of me as a person. Article and content recommendations that don't fit my preferences make me feel a disconnect and I feel less engaged. The experience has to feel like it's geared towards my interests in order for me to want to come back for more. That's why subscription businesses like Spotify have done so well. These platforms do a great job of learning your preferences and then recommending other content (music in this case) that matches your behaviour.

Dana Bahri

Junior Product Designer

With more information about their users, publishers can make these user experiences more valuable. This could manifest in a number of ways, from more accurate and aligned content recommendations and suggestions, to tailoring the experience based on the device type content is viewed on.

Personalisation can also be incorporated into brand messaging as well, e.g. a personalised welcome message with the user's name when they log on, or the use of more personalised language in headlines or emails.

Still, there are a few precautions to take when collecting user data and personalising experiences. Mainly, **value exchange remains fundamental for the success of modern subscriptions.**

Making it clear to users that trading a piece of personal information will grant them a better experience or service is a powerful incentive. Like other audiences, Gen-Z aren't going to give up personal information without some sort of reward in exchange.



I feel far more inclined to share personal data when a publisher or platform is open and transparent about how they will use it to improve my experience. The Guardian, for example, have a comprehensive explanation about data collection and the benefits of their personalised ads and content. Their transparency gives me a sense of trust, and I feel open to sharing my data to receive an improved experience.

Dana Bahri
Junior Product Designer

In order to keep the user experience enjoyable, **ensure the amount of information that is being requested in the first stage is minimal.** This removes initial resistance enough to start demonstrating value and gaining leverage. Once a Gen-Z audience can see how a publisher uses information to their own reading advantage, they'll be more likely to share additional information as their experience progresses.

Ultimately, deciding what's in initial registration forms relies once again on the **ability to build, test, deploy and iterate different experiences to find out what works best.** Once a publisher has tested and found the best type of data to collect, when to collect that data, and how to design data collection forms for the highest conversions, they'll be able to predictably move users along the subscriber journey.

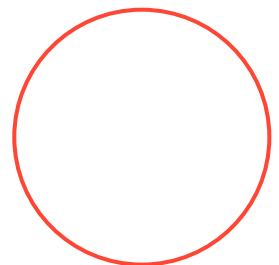
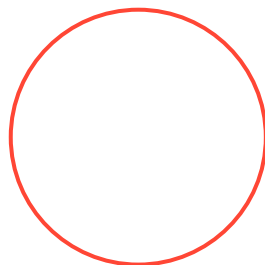
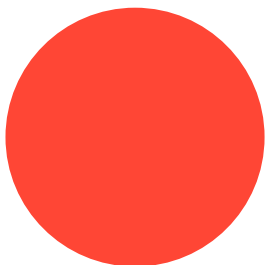
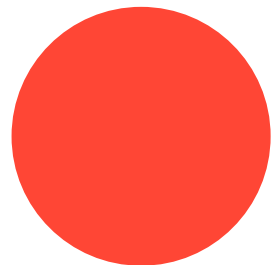
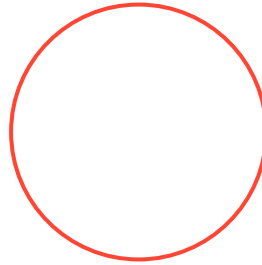
The advantage here is that knowing which state a user is in also helps publishers determine exactly what a user needs to progress in their subscription journey. For example, a registered user might need to build a trusting relationship with your brand before they commit to purchasing a premium subscription. This could come in the form of social proof, customer recommendations, or more recommended content. **The ability to convert users from one user state to another becomes far easier when you can meet the user 'where they're at'.**

Future playbook for Publishing Success

As we've highlighted previously in this guide, Gen-Zers are a unique generation to cater to when it comes to digital publishing. In this section, we'll talk specifically about how publishers can adapt their strategies to this new audience.

Before we dive in, here's a quick recap of the key takeaways we covered so far:

- Gen-Z prefer to access news on social media via their mobile phones, and use social channels that encourage participation and engagement.
- They look for thought leadership content that stands out and addresses big issues. Actively seeking authenticity, but avoiding heavy crisis coverage.
- Hiring a Gen-Z workforce could be crucial to understanding and developing effective engagement strategies.
- They're used to 'incontent' advertising and prefer native adverts that feel relevant to what they're reading.
- They enjoy the exclusivity of paid content.
- Happy to share personal information if it means they will receive a better experience.



Key takeaways

- 01 Leverage your platform for change
- 02 Embrace communityfirst social channels
- 03 Tap into the power of partnership
- 04 Lead the way with tech
- 05 Personalise the experience

Key takeaways...

So with those key points in mind, how can publishers form a robust strategy to appeal to these new audiences? Here's a few suggestions:

1. Leverage your platform for change

87%

of Gen-Z have loyalist tendencies and this loyalty is earned by establishing trust, according to a Compose[d] recent study.

The next generation of consumers view brands as extensions of themselves, which means **it's critical that companies are vocal about the causes they believe in**.

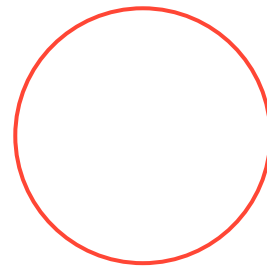
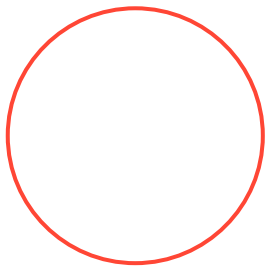
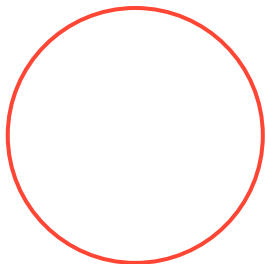
One way to do this is to actively ask users for their content preferences or for the topics that interest them. This can be in a registration form, or even a survey sent through an email newsletter. Gaining real feedback from your audiences will prove extremely valuable in determining what topics readers care about most.

2. Embrace communityfirst social channels

Today, nearly every successful brand has a mainstream social media presence. That's a lot of competition in the space! One way to break through the noise is to use community-centric social channels that have become popular with Gen-Z users such as Discord, Twitch, and TikTok. These channels invite participation and encourage discussions- both factors which will lead to greater engagement and more sense of belonging and affinity with your brand.

Through the rise of these social platforms, digital publishers have even more opportunity to tap into **community feedback** and two-way dialogue, allowing them to stay ahead of industry trends. This is a powerful tool because gaining **insider insight** into how an audience thinks will enable businesses to beat the competition that might try to steal away audiences.

However, to be truly successful here, **it's important that brands invest the time and resources necessary to truly embrace these channels and interact with audiences in an authentic way.** Specifically, publishers might consider hiring Gen-Z employees to manage social interactions and, in turn, give feedback on the content strategy.



3. Tap into the power of partnership

Gen Z's buying habits are influenced by the celebrities and influencers they want to emulate, gravitating towards respected influencers that are genuine and stand for what they believe in.

As a result, we've seen brands rethink their collaboration strategies in order to align with the modern consumer in a new way. Across niches, the biggest companies are working together with today's most culturally relevant brands and movements to appeal to a generation that values **exclusivity, individuality, and opportunity**.

While digital publishing might be slightly behind other industries, we can look to other industries to see the results of these partnerships. Dunkin' Donuts', for example, partnered with TikTok influencer Charli D'Amelio, and were able to increase their app downloads by **57%** in less than 24 hours as a result.

It's clear then, that by forging the right partnerships, digital publishers can see an impressive return on investment and shift audience perceptions.

4. Lead the way with tech

As we've discussed, next-gen news readers admire brands that act as vehicles for self-expression and inspiration, which means that **maintaining a relatable, impactful, and authentic customer experience is the key to success**.

This thought-leader culture has allowed **The Economist** to experiment with all aspects of its digital strategy, including different forms of paywalls as well as new content formats. The Economist capitalised on their flexible strategy by being very early to the podcast game, launching podcasts in 2006 as Apple started to champion this format. Having the ability to adopt **new content types** and test website changes at pace means the Economist is able to stay **competitive**.

The reason The Economist has been able to enjoy this flexibility and fast website and content iteration is down to the technology they employed. Technology today can enable better personalisation, data collecting, user experience, and content management, but in order to emulate The Economist's success, other publishers need to take a closer look at their tech stacks as a whole.

Technology used by digital publishers today should be adaptable, flexible, and future proof. Being able to fit in with other new software releases and industry changes enables your tech stack to stay relevant and useful no matter what happens in the market.

5. Personalise the experience

Personalisation is a key aspect of successful publishing, but it's about to become even more essential. With younger audiences being much more tech-savvy and actively wanting businesses to personalise their interactions with them, there's a much greater emphasis on personalised experiences today. This means that publishers need to be tailoring their content recommendations and suggestions, as well as their brand messaging, in order to appeal to this generation.

To stay relevant, consider investing in better ways to make user experiences more appealing and relevant. That doesn't necessarily just mean having more accurate content recommendations, but also experimenting with **personalised ads** based on the type of content being viewed, or creating a **personalised email sequence for each user segment**.

This is where subscription experience platforms come in. **Subscription experience platforms allow publishers to optimise and personalise user experiences on a granular level.** From custom ads and content, to personalised user journeys and email sequences, they help deliver powerful subscription relationships for life.

Less theory more implementation

In order to succeed, become more flexible and adaptable for new audiences. Future-proofing a strategy by remaining customer-focused and employing the right tech allows the capability. Authenticity and personalisation will be key factors moving forward, as well as the right teams and employees to 'meet users where they're at'.

Former Digiday Editor-in-Chief Brian Morrissey summarises, saying that successful publishers who are adaptable and have stable strategies for the future have three things in common:



01

A focus on niche areas, both consumer or business-oriented (here's where thought leadership and authenticity come in to play)

02

Diversified business models (here's where robust subscription models and native advertising come in to play)

03

Operational excellence (here's where having the right teams and the tech to execute the strategy comes in to play)

For more help planning a successful digital publishing strategy for the years ahead, take a look at our guide “Starter Kit: Succeed With Digital Subscriptions”.

[Speak to our team](#)



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