

Higher Ed Marketing Insights
from Gen Z to Boomers

How to Tailor Marketing for Different Generations

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Reaching students and alumni with the right message takes more than one great idea. Everyone is unique, and the more you know about who you are reaching, the better you can tailor your message to fit their tastes, needs and preferences.

For higher ed marketers who often communicate with a wide range of individuals - such as students, parents, alumni, donors and more - understanding these differences can help in creating audience segments and custom messages that will be more relevant and more effective.



This report gives higher ed marketers actionable data about different generations to make every message count. Marigold, Emma's parent company, partnered with innovation and market research company, F'inn, to survey 1,000 US adults about their preferences and behaviors across communication, education, work, and more, to bring you a clearer picture of each generation.

The study looked at four generations as identified:

- Baby Boomers (*born 1946–1964*)
- Generation X (*born 1965–1980*)
- Millennials (*born 1981–1995*)
- **18+** Generation Z (*born 1996–2010; 1996-2003 included in this study.*)



Get a better understanding of the different generational profiles when it comes to their education, career and charitable behaviors, as well as how they prefer to communicate, gather information and share data in different ways.

“

Generational trends are important to understand with research and data, because sometimes we can fall victim to assuming that the next generation will amplify trends from the previous one, and that may not be the case.”

Lou Riordan

Director at F'inn



Education, Career and Social Good

When it comes to education and career preferences, each generation is a bit different. Gen Z is not only on track to become the most educated generation the US has ever seen, but also the most ambitious. Gen Z has high aspirations for their future income, while Gen X cares more about having a fulfilling job.

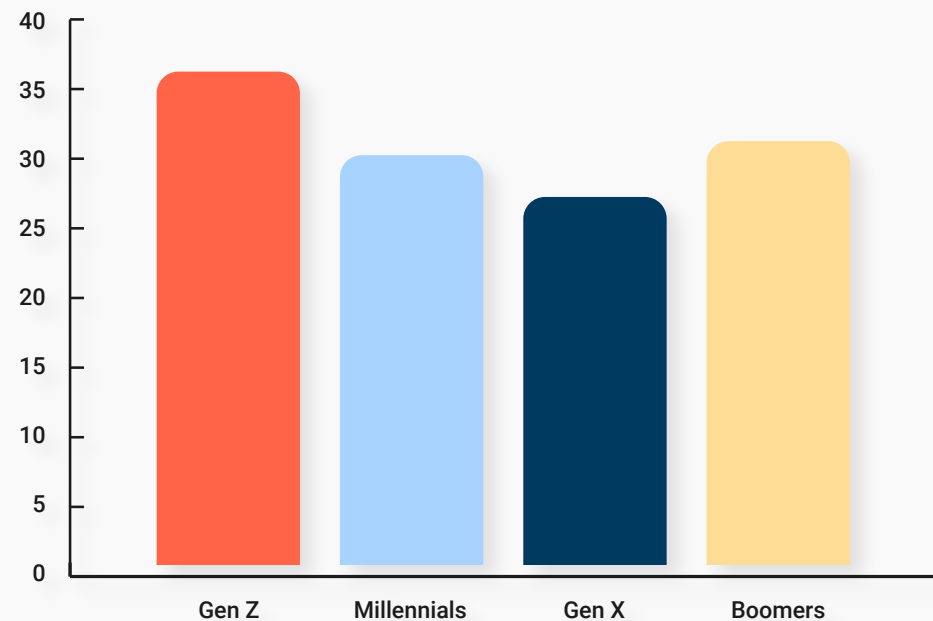
In terms of how they like to learn, contrary to what you might expect, baby boomers are actually likely to embrace attending online classes. Use these insights to tailor messaging when marketing different education options and resulting career opportunities to appeal to each generation.



Fast Facts

Education

Whether in person or online, each generation has their own opinion about going back to school.



Likelihood that each generation is interested in attending educational classes online.

On track to become the most educated generation

Even as the youngest generation of adults, 94% of Gen Z already has a high school diploma or higher, which is on par with boomers and close to millennials at 96%, who have had much more time to get there.

Educated, but eager for more

5% of Gen Z would go back to school if they received a financial windfall - the highest of any generation.

Embracing online ed

Surprisingly, older generations (millennials and Gen X) are slightly more likely than Gen Z to embrace online learning and boomers are not far off. A digital classroom has appeal to different generations for very different reasons, such as willingness to travel or a need for convenience.

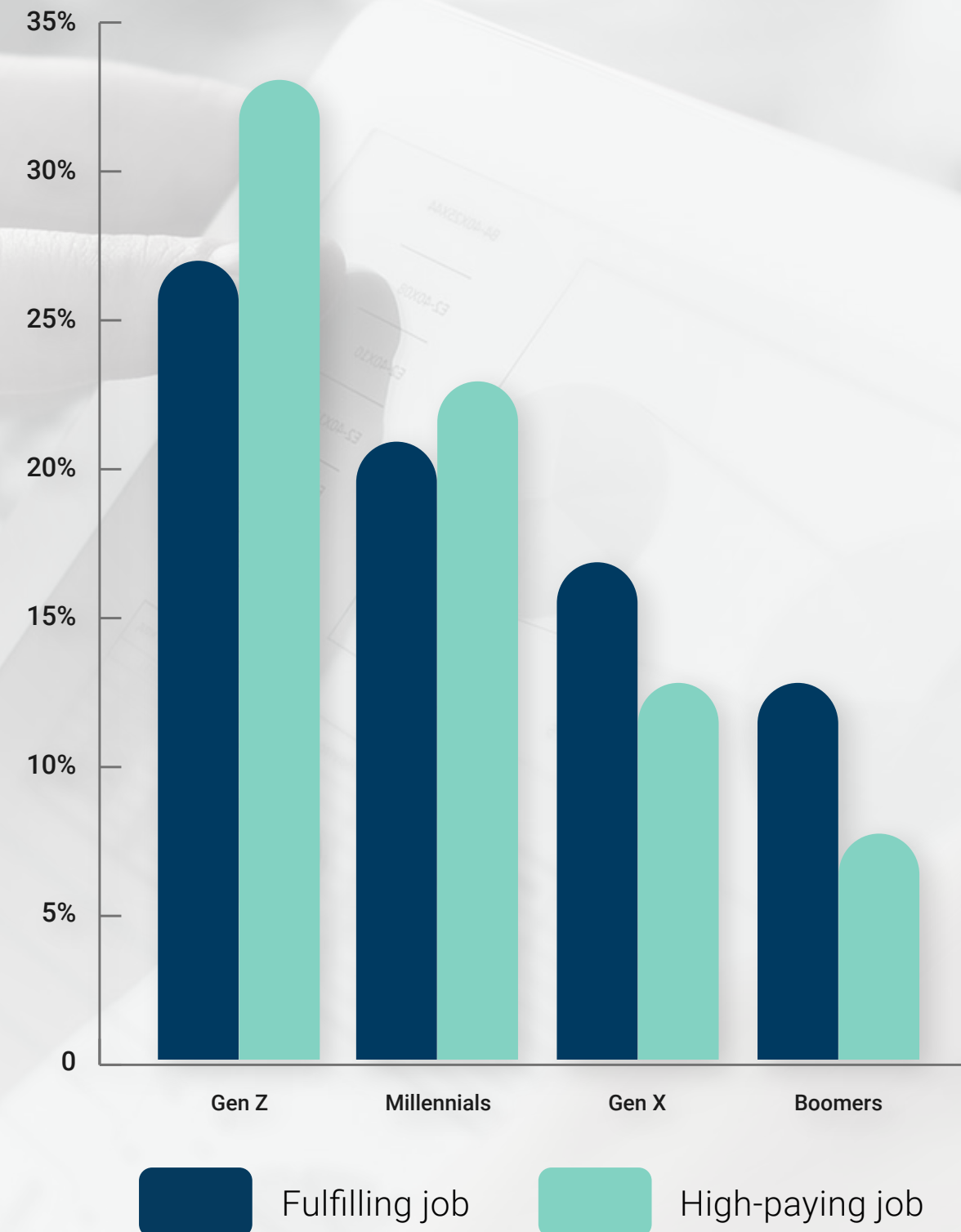
Fast Facts

Career

Today's students want to get ahead. Gen Z shows the most ambition, with their whole career journeys ahead of them.

- ✓ **32% of Gen Z prioritizes a high-paying job, more than any other generation**
- ✓ **Gen X and boomers, who are nearing the end of their careers, care more about having a fulfilling job than they do about pay**
- ✓ **In another study, 60% of millennials noted that they'd be willing to leave their jobs, and are considered a "job-hopping" generation**

Career Aspirations



Fast Facts

Social Good

Millennials and boomers are most likely to care about doing good. Not only do these generations want to make their communities better, they are also more charitable than their generational counterparts who are focused on other elements of their lives.

- ✓ **10% of millennials care most about making their community better**, the highest of any generation

- ✓ **Boomers are the generation with the highest percent who give to charity**, followed by Gen Z. However, millennials give the highest dollar amount, while Gen X is considered the “sandwich generation”, and may be strained by caring for both parents and children at the same time.

Data in Action

- ➔ Marketing a new series of continuing education classes? Don't assume that only the younger crowd will embrace online learning. If you can segment by generation, instead, **tout what the resulting outcome might be.**
- ➔ For Gen Z, a subject line like “Get ahead with online classes” might play more to their ambition, while Gen X might be motivated more by a subject line such as: **“Classes for a fulfilling future.”**

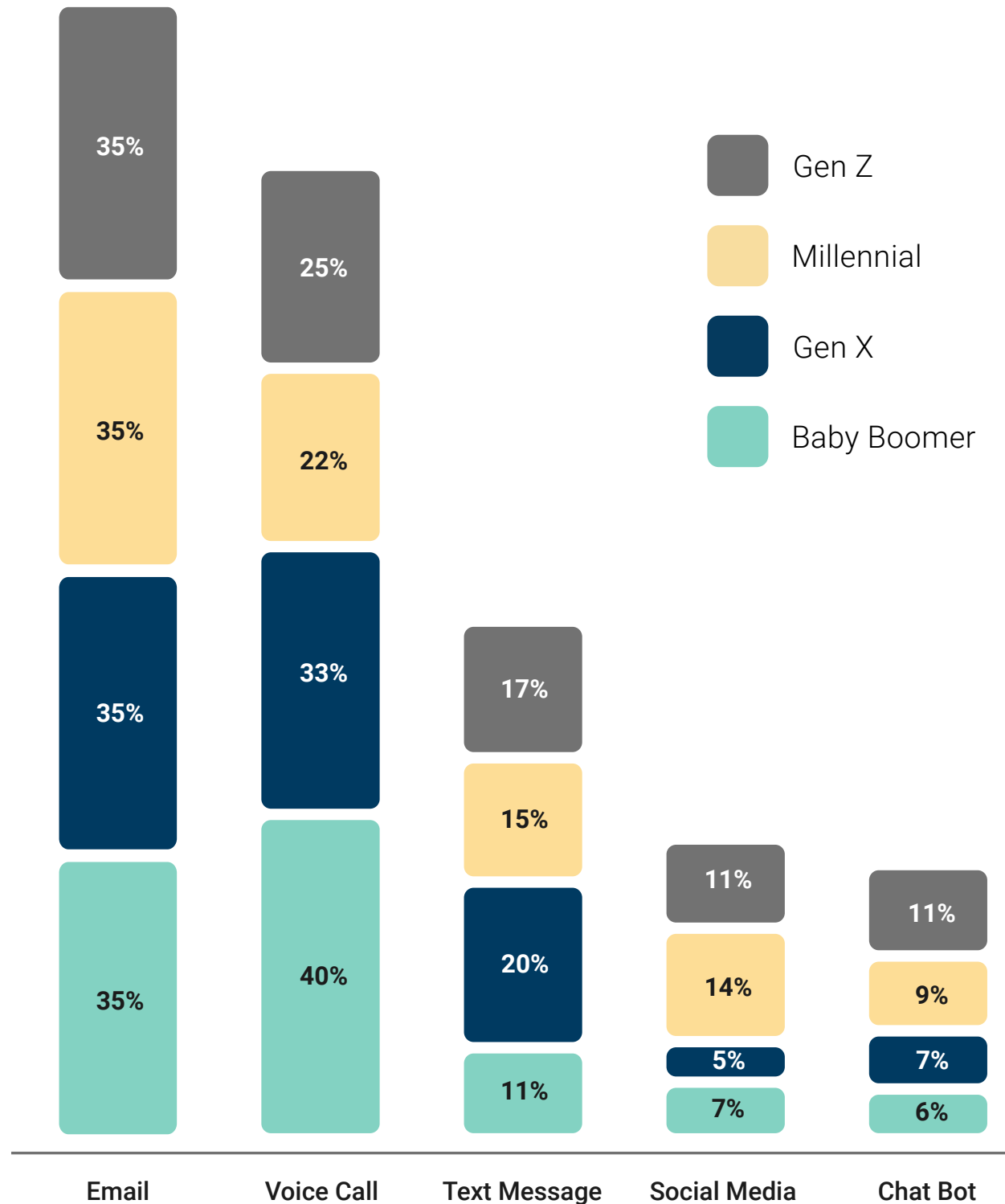
Communication Preferences

People use different channels to gather information, connect with others, and share. If your students are in Gen Z, they may like getting news from a YouTube video, or a text about something happening this weekend on campus, while alumni may likely appreciate an email newsletter that can be read at their convenience.

Not only do different generations prefer to communicate on different channels, they also get their news and information from different sources. For higher ed marketers, creating the right channel approach can mean the difference between engagement and being overlooked.



How Each Generation Prefers to Communicate with Organizations



When looking at channel preferences on average, email is the #1 preferred channel for people to communicate with organizations, at 35% across generations.

However, Gen X is the most interested in mobile/text communication while boomers still prefer voice calls best.

When it comes to getting news and information and being entertained, younger generations have shifted away from TV news in favor of social media channels.

Fast Facts

Communication & Sharing Preferences



56% of boomers and Gen X prefer *getting* their news and information from TV news, the top choice for these generations



At 37%, millennials are the biggest fans of *getting* news and information from Facebook compared to other generations, but also turn to TV news and YouTube to stay informed



49% of Gen Z gets their news and information from YouTube, their top choice, but Twitter also ranks highly (37%), and is the highest of any generation



When it comes to sharing news, 23% of Gen Z *shares* news and information on TikTok, twice that of any other generation

Where the generations get their news

	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Baby Boomer
<u># of People Surveyed</u>	<u>169</u>	<u>410</u>	<u>309</u>	<u>115</u>
TV News	32%	41%	56%	56%
Newsletters	23%	23%	19%	20%
Email	29%	29%	28%	25%
Text	23%	23%	21%	18%
Facebook	31%	37%	34%	19%
Instagram	30%	24%	16%	10%
Twitter	30%	21%	17%	11%
TikTok	41%	22%	11%	9%
YouTube	49%	37%	33%	20%
Online Search	45%	38%	37%	32%

Data in Action

- ➔ For traditional college-age students, lean into YouTube and TikTok content and be sure to monitor for comments and respond. Try tutorials, updates about what's new on campus, and interviews with successful alumni on how they've achieved success.
- ➔ Generations who embrace social media may also respond well to more two-way communication such as comments, suggestions and even contests to submit photos, videos and posts.
- ➔ Don't forget millennials when marketing on social media. [eMarketer](#) notes that social media holds the most sway over millennials, so while Gen Z is highly engaged, millennials are most influenced.
- ➔ Save time and money by tailoring outreach by generation. Perhaps reduce the number of fundraising calls for younger generations, relying more on email. And instead, test text options for Gen X.



Privacy, Data & Marketing

Times have certainly changed since the typical boomer was a college student. While this older generation has had to learn about digital media as adults, today's students grew up with smartphones, social media profiles and online ads.

Younger generations are well aware of data and privacy issues that go along with using the internet and are quick to dismiss organizations that don't provide a good reason (or value exchange) for them to share information and engage.



The good news for higher ed marketers is that younger generations are willing to share information with organizations they trust - even if they are wary of advertising overall. What's more, younger audiences don't mind relevant native advertising that resembles what they regularly see on their social feeds — and which brings direct value to them.

- ✓ **Baby boomers** are most concerned about their **online privacy at 87%**
- ✓ **60% of Gen Z** prefers ads that are **relevant** to their needs and lifestyle; even in older generations, the majority agree
- ✓ **35% of Gen Z** avoids most ads, but are OK with content-based native advertising similar to what they often see on platforms like TikTok and Instagram

Data in Action

- ➔ When reaching out to boomers, emphasize that their privacy is safe and use personalization that's valuable without being too overt. For example, add a gif with the year they graduated or another engaging fact or visual.
- ➔ For younger generations, take a page from social media and design for engagement, with a more content-forward approach instead of a traditional banner campaign. Use fun gifs and imagery to make every communication more engaging for this group.

5 Tips for Segmenting Marketing by Generation

With so many new insights, now's the time to set the data in motion! Creating custom - and tailored - messaging for different generational segments can improve performance.

The work to create targeted messaging is worth it. In today's fast-paced and crowded online environment, it can take a lot to stand out — to get a student to read an email, let alone click on a link, or to engage alumni for another year of events and fundraising. Here are some tips for getting the attention of your students and alumni, across all generations:



1.

Tailor messages to generational preferences

Today's college-age students are ambitious and excited for their future success, while older students typically care more about a fulfilling career. These insights can help higher ed marketers create email subject lines and content that's personalized to fit these different preferences. For example, younger students might be more likely to click on something that says "get ahead" while continuing-ed students in their 40s and 50s are more engaged by a message like "make a difference."

2.

Lean into the right channels

Email is preferred across generations, and can serve as a foundational channel. However, not everyone prefers voice calls. If strapped for resources, perhaps focus on boomers when reaching out by phone to alumni, while creating an SMS campaign for younger generation students who have a preference for text.



3.

Create videos for YouTube

Knowing that nearly half of Gen Z prefers getting news and information from YouTube videos, it's valuable to give them what they want. To appeal to more than one generation with YouTube, include this video content in other marketing campaigns, such as an email newsletter.

4.

Segment by interest

Personalized content is more interesting, and Gen Z in particular prefers messages tailored to their interests. Even if you don't create individually personalized messaging for each student across every generation, creating audience segments based on major or career, the city they live in, groups they were a part of, or other shared interests can help create more relevant campaigns.



5.

Think “content” over “ad message”

Younger generations in particular are used to seeing ad messages that are integrated seamlessly into TikTok videos and Instagram posts. Influencers tell stories about products that are engaging as content in their own right. This approach can be used in newsletters and other campaigns by creating more relevant text and imagery rather than loud taglines and trite headlines.



Reach Your Audience with Emma

Emma helps universities graduate to better email.

You support your university, let us support your inbox. With an easy-to-use platform, award-winning service, and powerful integrations, our platform serves institutions like yours, because great communication starts with consistent, on-brand emails—every time.

Want to learn more about how Emma can help your university deliver better email and learn how to make your email more effective?

Check out more helpful resources from our EmmaU event, [here](#).



Survey Methodology

Marigold partnered with F'inn on a cross-generational survey of more than 1,000 consumers, between Sept. 30 and Oct. 7, 2021. The results of which were analyzed by our panel of retail and media experts to reveal meaningful insights and action plans for brands.



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And as always, if you need any assistance to make these determinations or have questions along the way, we're always here to help you at myemma.com