



GEN C: The Generational Marketing Hybrid

In the last of this Generational Marketing series, **Neil Osborne** goes full circle and explains how, instead of separating ageist cohorts, the emergence of Generation C binds generations together.

A MARKET-MAKING merger has happened. You didn't know? M&Ms and chocolate bars merged, creating a deliciously successful conglomerate, and a whole new category. No longer separate crunchy colours, M&Ms are now bound together, in a block of choc-yumminess.

At the beginning of this series I likened generational marketing to sorting M&Ms into colours, "... each generation owns its distinct differences and shouldn't be marketed to (or eaten) together." Generation C breaks that mould; its closest likeness is the new M&M Block – a mash-up of previously distinct and ageist cohorts – bound together by the letter 'C' (but not as in chocolate). They're Generation Connected.

Traditionally, marketers grouped people into homogenous 15-20 year-of-birth chunks. However, with change happening in such compressed periods, the idea of using demographics such

as age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or geography as a group's defining characteristic, has vanished. As I said of Gen Z, things are changing too fast. "... a five-year old today, is likely to have a very different frame of reference to either a teen or 'tween, because the evolution of technology has changed their world so fast."

Now, marketing must be mindset-focused.

Part Six: Generation C – not bound by age

As early as 2004, researchers at trendwatching.com were noting the emergence of a new cross-generational group, made up of digitally savvy people. These people were creating and curating content, building online communities and finding and consuming products in distinctly different ways.

Then in 2012, digital analyst Brian Solis defined Generation C as the 'Connected Consumer.' He said, "It is how people embrace technology, from social networks to smartphones to intelligent appliances, that contributes to the digital lifestyle that is now synonymous with Gen C."

So first, let's clear up what Gen C isn't. It's not a niche. It's not a cohort. And its members are not born between certain years. It's actually not even sequentially placed to its generational predecessors.

So what is it? It's a hybrid. Generation C is a psychographic group of individuals (as opposed to a demographic group), who share a similar state of mind – whether that be certain personality traits, values, attitudes, interests, or lifestyles.

The Gen C moniker crosses over the Silent Gen, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z, and highlights how the people (of all ages) who are 'connected,' are poised to transform the consumer marketplace and society, throughout the 21st century. They are now defining and driving popular culture – through their photos, videos, memes and mash-ups – via their phones.

Gen C is connected to everything and everyone, in the fullest sense.

Who's not in Gen C?

There's really no generation not represented in Gen C. The investment firm, Fidelity International, estimates (based on high mobile usage across Europe, Nth America, Aust/NZ and Japan) that Gen C comprises:

GEN C GENERATIONAL BREAKDOWN

Generation	Date-of-Birth	Gen C Percentage
Silent Generation	1927-1945	11%
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	22%
Generation X	1965-1980	21%
Generation Y	1981-2000	20%
Generation Z	After 2001	22%

Source: <http://www.fidelity.com.au/insights-centre/investment-articles/21st-century-themes-generation-c/>

The growth of this group is being fuelled by two things: the spread of mobile internet across emerging markets, and the growth in connectivity of the youngest age cohort, Gen Z. Already the largest generation in the US, as Gen Z matures, Gen C will further grow to be, by 2030, over 60 per cent of the global population.

The four Cs

Google defines Gen C as:

"Gen C is a powerful new force in consumer culture. It's a term we use to describe people who care deeply about creation, curation, connection, and community. It's not an age group; it's an attitude and mindset defined by key characteristics."

The eight characteristics they use to define Gen C are:

1. It's a state of mind

They spend more time online than watching TV – their lives are digitally driven.

2. Always striving for expression

Heavy social media users, they share photos, curate content and love creating music, videos and mash-ups.



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3. They're taste-makers

As early-adopters, they set trends and rely heavily on peer approval before making purchases.

4. Defined by social network

Almost 90 per cent have a social profile, 65 per cent update it daily, and they tend to form active communities or tribes, where their water-cooler moments are driven by links, tweets or tags.

5. YouTube is their entertainment habitat

They're likely to be a light TV viewer and twice as likely to be a YouTube viewer than the general population.

6. Constantly connected

They eat, sleep and breathe the internet and live on their smartphone.

7. View content on all screens

They move seamlessly between devices – desktops, laptops, tablets and smartphones – no matter where they are, every waking hour.

8. Value relevancy and originality

They're opposed to ads that aren't relevant to them and want content and conversations that align with their interests.

Members of this group aren't merely online – they actively engage in communities, social

networks and product review sites. They don't passively consume content; they create and curate it and view technology as a tool to be used, to help them participate.

Purchasing expectations

Gen C is not a target audience, but a community of digital collaborators. Therefore, to successfully market to them, your brand must create fresh, relevant material for them to talk about, as well as things that give them 'status' amongst their cohorts, tribes and social networks.

They're used to having information at their fingertips, so when looking to make a purchase decision, they want immediate facts, opinions and reviews. Their heavy reliance on mobile devices also means they prefer to communicate via technology, rather than face-to-face.

It's not unusual for their tribe to mobilise like a swarm of bees, around a topic or product that interests them. Powered by their aggregated social media feed of information and opinions, when it comes to buying decisions, 85 per cent of them rely on peer recommendations. To them, a thumbs-up is trusted and priceless.

As you'd expect, they desire 24/7 connection and social interaction. And immediacy is so important that research has shown 91 per cent of them sleep next to their smartphone – so they can react and respond, as content comes through.

Smartwatches, the next generation of connected devices are their next love affair. Why? By eliminating the 5-10 second lock-screen lag when entering an app, a smartwatch saves them an estimated 20 minutes per day. For Gen C,

that timesaving gives them 300 digital sessions per day on their smartwatch, compared to 120 for the average smartphone user. Smartwatches also aim to help bridge the gap from digital to physical – enabling contactless payment, key-less entry and faster messaging. All perfect, for Gen C.

Ways to engage with Gen C

The three keys to motivating Gen C to engage and spend with your business and brand, are:

- 1. Relevance**
- 2. Conversation**
- 3. Shareable content**

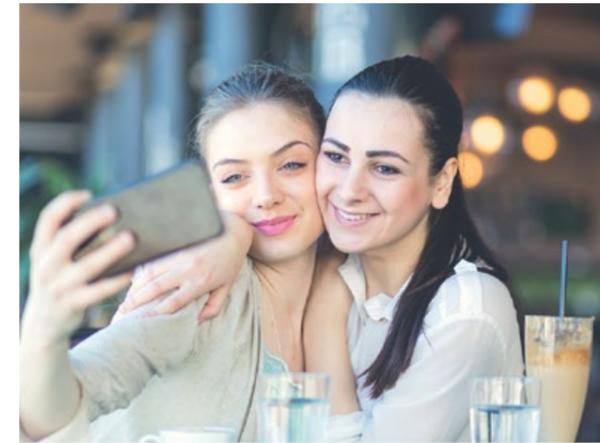
By having a digitally driven customer engagement program based on these three drivers, you're more likely to build an ongoing relationship.

Engage with Gen C by:

- Having a very easily navigable website that must be mobile friendly
- Make all interactions frictionless – either swipecable or clickable
- Have a consistent outbound content program, without hard sell
- Have an online appointment booking system, for 24/7 access
- Send auto appointment reminders to their smartphones
- Set up online chat and enquiry lines
- Create and post helpful YouTube videos
- Establish a strong social media presence on the 1-2 platforms that reflect your business/brand position

Yes, society has changed. But you can't blame it on the youth. Business has also changed. But you can't blame that on people. You can however, fairly blame it all on technology.

Now, age is nothing. Technology is everything. ■



Neil Osborne is an elite sales trainer and brand coach who is unique in the salon marketplace. He has devoted more than 30 years of his working life to the Salon Industry and has been responsible for dramatically growing brands and businesses by helping

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