

# Generation Z Why we need to future-proof universities - University World News

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Generation Z Why we need to future-proof universities



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Generation Z is destined to be the most researched of all generations in history. We understand consumer habits, how Generation Z communicates, even the exact details of how the media influences them. Living under a digital microscope, today's 15- to 18-year-olds are savvy. They have a comprehensive understanding of what they want and what they need when it comes to technology and education. And with this comes great expectations.

Brought up in a world of smartphones, high speed wi-fi and technology on tap, Generation Z's lives revolve around a digital world. So how can we ensure that, as education professionals, we remain ahead of the curve and totally relevant for this digitally advanced generation?

Considering that recent StudentCom research revealed that at present 83% of 15- to 18-year-olds state they could not live without high speed internet, 88% use Facebook daily to communicate with friends and 92% already own their own smartphone, it seems technology needs to be high on universities agenda.

In a world where the average 15- to 18-year-old owns at least seven internet-ready devices, we need to consider not only how we are targeting Generation Z but also how we are maintaining their interest.

This is not limited to ensuring that universities have competent high speed wi-fi. While that is of course key, it is also about considering how Generation Z accesses, consumes and shares content.

So, for example, how are we putting digital technology at the very heart of our education system? Let's take a lecture theatre, for example: how is this a digitally interactive experience for students? How can students access learning materials, resources and academic papers? Is an intranet system really going to cut it?

These principles can be applied throughout the entire university is it time to make your library digital? Do we offer e-books? How are students able to order their meals? Does our campus accommodation offer USB ports?

The list is endless, but in order to ensure you are positioning yourself as an attractive university, digital technology needs to be the number one priority.

## **Social media**

This is further supported by recent StudentCom research revealing that 73% of 15- to 18-year-olds rank high speed wi-fi as being the most important accommodation facility higher than laundry facilities and catered accommodation.

With 87% of Generation Z believing university will enable them to become more independent, it is essential that we provide them with the tools they need to sustain their digital lives when they arrive.

So what can universities put in place to ensure that they are reaching the needs of Generation Z from the offset?

It may seem simple, but social media is key.

Generation Z is already well ahead of the game when it comes to accessing resources and communicating via social media. Facebook remains the most popular platform with today's 15- to 18-year-olds, with a staggering 88% using Facebook every day.

But, and perhaps more interestingly, Snapchat is currently being used by 79% of 15- to 18-year-olds on a daily basis making it one of the fastest-growing platforms for Generation Z. This raises the question: how many of us are familiar with the platform, let alone using it to actively engage students?

Technology is obviously a key area where universities can make improvements. However, considering just how familiar Generation Z is with marketing techniques, smart and truly engaging content needs to be a major priority.

Students expect a more personalised online experience, so we need to consider everything from the tech available in-house be it wi-fi speeds or intranet platforms to the way content is being personalised to reach out and attract your target audience.

And, it is all well and good producing quality content, but Generation Z is spoilt for choice when it comes to digesting news, trends and information in general.

To really attract loyalty and build a lasting relationship with this audience, you need to go the extra mile and strike up a conversation. Engagement online should be a core tool to ensure you are establishing meaningful dialogues that stand the test of time.

Embrace change and the digital revolution

Finally, work to stay abreast of the changes that are happening and most importantly, invest in researching what is a changing market.

While the majority of organisations are time poor, taking time to research your audience and fully understand their needs will ensure you are strategic and targeted in approach. Failing to do so will mean your approach dates and becomes old hat quickly.

Take advantage of research other people have undertaken. Take StudentComs Great Expectations of Generation Z [research](#), for example. The greater the understanding you have of this audience, the more successful your approach will be.

Long gone are the days where you could rely on putting a finger in the air and seeing which way the wind was blowing. Your targeting of Generation Z needs to be considered, smart and fresh.

In short, our perception of what is contemporary is Generation Z's idea of what is dated. We need to shake up universities and place a major focus on technology be it wi-fi speeds or adopting Snapchat ahead of the game.

My advice research Generation Z, look at what they are doing and how they are doing it and apply it to your business model. If we fail to stay ahead of the game, we will fail to keep up to speed. Its time to embrace the digital revolution.

*Tom White is marketing director at StudentCom. For further information on StudentCom, or to download the research white paper on which this article is based or access the campaign video, click [here](#).*

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