SCREEN TIME: UNDERSTANDING GENERATION Z

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"The aim of a generational study ... is not to succumb to nostalgia for the way things used to be; it's to understand how they are now." *—Jean M. Twenge*

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Sean Patrick Hill, Senior Content Writer for Capture Higher Ed, and I am a tried-and-true member of Generation X.

When I was growing up in the 1970's, we called each other on rotary telephones. We sent Hallmark cards through the U.S. mail. My parents took pictures of me on a little Kodak camera that shot 35 mm film, which they had processed down at the drug store and stored away in albums. If we wanted to know the weather, we read the newspaper that showed up faithfully at our door each morning, which was also rife with not only news, but the classifieds, help wanted, graduation announcements ... everything. If we wanted to learn something, we went to the library and browsed books and (do you remember?) encyclopedias.

We watched television — too much television, certainly — and to get a good signal, we had to adjust the antenna. We had, generally, thirteen channels. If we wanted to see a movie, we went to the theater. *Star Wars* was the first movie I saw, and once it was out of the theaters, we couldn't see it anymore. We

watched movies in school too, on film projectors that made that clickity-clack sound I associated with the classroom.

In the early 80's, my father brought home a VCR. It was a massive block of metal, wiring and gears — not that videotapes were any different, bulky as they were with plastic and spools of magnetic tape. We bought an answering machine. We got cable TV! It was like life itself was multiplying in choices. And whatever you bought, if you didn't have cash on you, you could write a check.

I had a checking account in high school. When I got paid, I got paid with a check that I had to deposit at my bank — at least we had drive-thru tellers. By the time I was in college, I had a debit card. I started writing my college papers on my mother's 1960's Smith Corona electric typewriter, then later an IBM word processor with a dot matrix printer. Before I knew it, there was the cell phone. Email. Social media.

Today I deposit my checks on my phone. I use a chip card at the grocery store — if I don't just order my food online. I assemble my photos on Adobe Portfolio, and I stream most of my movies online. If I want to buy the new *Twin Peaks* series, I can do it on iTunes. My fingers have long since learned to text — though I prefer using the microphone. I used to think about how much had changed in my grandparents' lifetimes: radio and early television, the surge of automobiles, 747's, satellites in space. But I was born into all that. Cars and airplanes and movie theaters have always been a fact of life. For me, it's the computer technology that's changed — and changed me. It's almost embarrassing to say that I didn't even know about the Internet until 1999. Until that point, I'd thought computers were just fancy typewriters.

Recently, I was walking with my daughter through our neighborhood, and I pointed out the enormous antenna on top of one of the houses. In an age where we increasingly see solar panels on the roof, or else the occasional satellite dish — itself quickly becoming passé — a giant aerial antenna is, to say the least, an anomaly, if not prehistoric. I had to explain, best I could, how such a thing even worked. The technology at that time must have seemed so ... space age. Like *The Jetsons*.

My daughter, born in 2009, is entirely different from me. Her birthdate places her at the tail end of what is today known as Generation Z, a 65 million strong rising population that, by 2020, will account for 40 percent of U.S. consumers. Like her peers, she's deft with technology — whether it's the Internet, iPad apps, or texting — and this makes her native to a world I had to grow accustomed to over the course of some forty-odd years. But for the most part, this technology has been around from the moment she was born. In less than ten years she will, most likely, begin plumbing for the college of her choice.

Or will she? The more I learn about her generation, the more I realize the college search for Gen Z is not guaranteed. How did this come about? I'll wager that we've all read about the fear of student loan debt that these kids harbor, not to mention an economy that can't actually guarantee a job. Is there more to this than meets the eye?

By way of analogy, let's consider MTV.

Remember MTV? You know, "Music Television"? Its launch in 1981 seems, to someone like me at least, a lifetime ago. Being a member of "Gen X" — I was ten years old when I first watched Pat Benatar and The Pretenders, and all that was to become the defining sounds of the decade in which I came of age — MTV is

a fixture in my sensibility. For one thing, I grew up on FM radio, where all my favorite songs were not only on the home stereo, but in the car, or carried around in a newfangled transistor radio.

The transition that occurred on August 1, 1981, from FM radio to video, was clearly revolutionary. "We'll be doing for TV," said VJ Mark Goodman on that day, "what FM did for radio."

Now try explaining "FM" to an 18-year-old. Not that they wouldn't know what it is, exactly, but they could scarcely say, I imagine, why it was so important for its time.

Think about your favorite song in the 1970's: unless you owned it on record or, at least, one of those 45's, you had to hope that the DJ would play it. Naturally, you could have made a request by calling the radio station on your rotary phone, saying you wanted to send it out to so-and-so. The 1980's were no different, but the format had begun to change. Now you could sit around, as I did, hoping that they would finally play the Def Leppard song I loved.

If there's one thing I share — we all share — with today's teen and tween, it's the fact that I can listen to any song I love, right now, thanks to YouTube, or Spotify. But here the analogy ends.

MTV learned this the hard way. Between 2012 and 2017, MTV saw its audience of 18 to 24 year olds — the last of the Millennials and the first of Gen Z — decrease by 50 percent. Like other ventures in the corporate world, they were slow to respond to the increasing viewing of video on social platforms. If MTV had anything going for it, it was name recognition, which amounts to brand recognition. When 42-year-old Chris McCarthy became president of MTV Networks, he had to "salvage an old-media brand that had lost its way in an era of nimble You-Tubers and audience-sapping diversions like Snapchat."

And that's how *Fast Company* explained the latest *MTV Movie & TV Awards* as the ultimate deep-sea salvage project. The iconic "Moonman" award statue became the "Moon Person." Award categories did away with gender. Pink gave a speech about resisting gender conformity and Kendrick Lamar sang about black identity.

At this point, the names I'm quoting may confuse you. As an enrollment manager, you don't need to know the names — but you need to know *what these actions represent*. What made the awards show and its performances so prescient to the target audience, Gen Z, were the values of diversity and empowerment. *That* is the message that MTV harnessed — and the network's ratings have responded favorably. In a single year, their prime time rating went up 31 percent.

MTV is conducting an ongoing study of Gen Z: their tastes, values and habits. They found that the kids today spend two-thirds of their waking day consuming content. They do not appreciate multicultural humor — i.e., racist or gay jokes. And, of course, they are digitally connected to a level that the older generations probably can't fathom. So when MTV rebooted *Total Request Live*, a show last seen a decade ago, *Fast Company* explains, it was "engineered to generate viral moments … spread, in various says, across platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Musical.ly, and YouTube."

Do you need to know who Nicki Minaj is? Probably not. Do you need to know what Snapchat is? Yes.

But why? One answer, surprisingly, comes from *Teen Vogue*. If you haven't heard about the entirely revamped *Teen Vogue*, you're missing a key to understanding the kids who will soon be your prospective students. *Teen Vogue's* Facebook page posted a video where undocumented youth — teen girls, to be exact — talk about their experience. They publish articles about toxic masculinity and rape culture. *Teen Vogue* is, in short, revolutionary. And they know exactly whom they are talking to.

And so should enrollment managers. Case in point: *Teen Vogue* recently ran a slideshow showing twelve schools that make excellent use of community geofilters on Snapchat. Now, I am well aware that the phrase "community geofilters on Snapchat" may be gobbledy-gook to some of my readers, just as it would have been for me … if, that is, I hadn't have done my homework. Here's what Marissa Miller says on *Teen Vogue's* site:

"Once you begin your search for the perfect college, you might be torn between listening to what your parents tell you and what your guidance counselors advise. Here's an unconventional approach: Before a campus visit, take a look at how students celebrate their institution through the art of Snapchat geofilters. You'll familiarize yourself with their sports teams, official colors, mascots, and more.

"With a mix of creativity and a love for their campus," she continues, "a Snapchat representative shared with *Teen Vogue* an awesome batch of geofilters that show a side of student life only a prospective student could appreciate." As my daughter says: Wait, what?

> **"** After all, this is a generation that wants empowerment. If they do it themselves, it will express one of their inalienable values: **authenticity**.

Penn State University. Ohio State. Florida State. University of Maryland. Michigan State. Even Harvard has a geofilter! Where's yours?

I'm not suggesting you run out and work on a Snapchat filter today. In fact, I'm not suggesting the enrollment office do this at all. What I *am* suggesting is to find out if your students already have one! And use it. And if they don't, then put it on the calendar — and, better yet, ask a student to help. After all, this is a generation that wants empowerment. If they do it themselves, it will express one of their inalienable values: *authenticity*.

This past January, Capture hosted Resolve, an enrollment management conference, in Louisville, Kentucky. The first keynote speaker was Ryan Jenkins, an expert on Millennials and Generation Z, and his discussion left the audience of college counselors gaping.

First, what is Generation Z? According to Jenkins, there are at least four major factors to consider. One is their age, and most of this generation is *younger than 20*. Another is the fact that they are *digitally dependent* — not surprising, considering they are the first generation that is fully and inarguably *native* to the technologies that even thirty years ago would have been unbelievable. Because they are so linked in to a system that circles the earth, they are members of the *first global generation*, which is to say, a young

person their age halfway around the world probably shares more in common with them than, well, you do. Finally, the Internet and globalization, with its attendant access to information that has become for them an expectation, allows them to be *continuous learners*.

Do you know what the second biggest search engine after Google is? **YouTube.** That's not surprising, as it's not about cat videos anymore. It's about thousands upon thousands of DIY videos. I should know: I've used YouTube to fix my doorknob, remove scratches from negatives using Photoshop, and learn about the health benefits of Tai Chi. I even learned humane ways to catch the mouse that was nibbling at my flour. That's only the beginning.

Here's what this has to do with college: everything. Consider these statistics, as presented by Jenkins:

- 43% prefer a digital approach to learning and find it easiest to learn from the Internet. It's kind of like those *Great Courses* you see advertised in magazines. Only it's entirely free and a click away.
- 63% think entrepreneurship should be taught in college. Of course they do. Generation Z is about *self-empowerment*. They don't want to work for someone else in a cubicle. They want to live their life on their own terms.
- And if they do go to college? 72% want the right to design their own majors. And why not? It almost doesn't matter — they're going to continuously learn anyway, so college is only a start.

And here's a big number: 58 percent of adults aged 35 and over from around the world resoundingly agree that the kids today share more in common with their global peers than the adults in their own country. No wonder the Resolve audience was trembling!

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Jenkins himself is a Millennial — and it was only a few years ago that we consistently used that term "Millennial" to denote whom it was we were communicating with. Until we wised up, that is. He pointed out the key discrepancies between his generation and the quickly rising Generation Z. But let's stick to Generation Z, as that's truly who we are now communicating with.

Speaking of communication, one of Jenkins' points is that Gen Z prefers a mix of communication techniques; talking face-to-face is important, though they certainly make use of the myriad other digital communication devices, whether email or texting. In terms of their social media, they prefer the privacy of something like Snapchat — where their post disappears in a certain amount of time — rather than the very public and more-or-less permanent postings of Facebook. They look at what they want to do in their lives as *roles* rather than *jobs*, and they know that they will change those roles throughout their lives.

What is probably most important for any college admissions offices to realize, says Jenkins, is that Gen Z strongly prefers "on-demand learning" rather than the concept of a formal education. Consider: if you know, as a young person, that you want to follow your interests as they show up, then why would you be thinking about a "career" that lasts 30 years? They don't think like "The Greatest Generation," who had the opportunity to work at Ford for their whole lives, or even like the Baby Boomers. College, in fact, in its

more and more pointed direction toward "job training" — with its emphasis, for example, on career centers and internships — means, in short, a 30-year career. Instead, as their interests, and thereby their roles, change, they can go to YouTube, or Creative Live, or any number of online platforms and learn what they want to learn in real time. They are, remember, digital natives, and their equation of this technology with their own lives is tight.

No wonder that more than half of adults worldwide see the writing on the wall: the "kids today" are not at all like them, and this means a profound shift in how we think about communication, the economy, and, let's face it, education.

It is time for a reevaluation.

The Millennials came of age in a world where, because of technological developments and the increasing power of the Internet, developments in the world happened far faster than the world had ever known. Consider your stay in a hotel. In our lifetimes, you could call ahead — using that rotary phone or, later, your cell phone — and make a reservation. Marriott Hotels managed to book 1 million rooms this way — since 1927.

But Airbnb has booked *twice* the amount of rooms — in only ten years! Why? Because it is easy, it's on-demand, and, to my mind at least, the experience is authentic. In many cases, I'm staying in a one-of-a-kind place, not a cookie-cutter hotel room. And the technology has only accelerated, so that Gen Z can now depend effectively on Uber, or Amazon Go, or Mission U. The expectations of this generation, says Jenkins, are elevated: what they want must be effortless and seamless.

So what Jenkins has to say about the way Gen Z views learning is essential. Let's compare them with the Boomers, who in many ways have set the model for college. The way a Boomer got their education was either in a classroom setting or on the job. But for Gen Z, because there are so many options for online learning, their education is entirely mobile. Their smart phone is the classroom! The Boomers were also trained in a specialized fashion, refining a niche job, which means a career; Gen Z, as we've pointed out, wants the freedom to shift roles, and therefore education is continual. Education was, for the Boomers, the realization of a dream, but for Gen Z, Jenkins hastens to tell us, *it may in fact be a mistake*.

Jenkins offers three statistics that indicate the concerns of Gen Z in relation to higher education:

- *65% of the youth entering school today will work jobs that do not currently exist.* How can college prepare them for that? And further, because this century promises to change as fast, if not faster, than any other, how can one career be suitable?
- *67% of Gen Z says their top concern is affordability.* They want to avoid debt at all costs — no surprise, as they are clearly attuned to the American conversation about the crippling student loan debt. And because they're "global," they surely can't help but notice the preponderance of free education in other countries. Naturally, they will consider their alternatives.
- *75% of Gen Z says there are other ways of securing an education than traditional college.* There's a difference, says Jenkins, between "learning to work," which can be done on the job by companies that offer that kind of training and are, therefore, ideal, or they can "work to learn" in higher education.

Among the older generations, we have a particular idea of the meaning of *work*. That definition has not only become dogmatic but detrimental. The Boomers are largely retiring, and with them the ideas of the traditional classroom and career specialization. Gen X — and I count myself among them — are now largely the power structure, with the Millennials firmly entrenched along with us. It is we who have to change.

Education is not necessarily something delivered to us from on-high, which is to say, from an institution and all that institution entails: professors, specialized in their fields, and authorities in the classroom. Education is not a single authority delivering knowledge to a large coterie of willing students. Neither is education the sole dream of our way of life, the ticket to advancement, something that specializes and differentiates us from the "competition" — it is not even a cultural norm. Everything we think we know, all that we have come to depend on, is slipping away. The world has changed. This is the fact.

We have, really, only one choice: sink or swim.

Ryan Jenkins lays out three strategies, beginning with high-value content that answers the top questions in the minds of Gen Z. We know, for one, that affordability is a top one. *How* that content is shared is equally important. At Capture, we have long built emails, but we have expanded to try different venues. Sure, colleges still send out viewbooks. But Gen Z expects podcasts, videos, infographics and blogs. We've certainly used infographics and emojis, and they've proven successful.

We've also incorporated videos into our communications because, point number two, *this is a visual generation*. Gen Z experiences the world visually — thus, the popularity of Snapchat, Bitmoji, and Group Me (and remember that YouTube is second only to Google, which owns them, as a search engine). In fact, 93 percent of Gen Z visits YouTube at least once a week, and 54 percent visits several times a day.

> " Technology can make the *experience of college* — including researching colleges — "effortless and seamless"

They will use their mobile phones, first. And what they see — especially visuals and video — must help them visualize themselves at your institution. This is Marketing 101, anyway; nothing has changed in the message — just how the message is delivered. They want to know what the college is like, its culture, values and benefits — and they want to know the perspectives of their peers, not those of administrators, or counselors, or professors.

Finally, the way to enhance the prospective student's experience, says Jenkins, is to shift the way Gen Z sees college — not as a *material* purchase, but an *experiential* purchase. For me, watching a video on how to use Photoshop is an experiential purchase, done at my leisure in my home — I can even watch on my iPhone, if I want. I use Airbnb for all my overnights because I want an authentic experience, rather than a room without character. (I can hardly believe I stayed in cheap motels all those years!) Technology can make the experience of college — including researching colleges — "effortless and seamless," says Jenkins.

Now let's look at what some research has found in regards to how to do that.

First, there are *influencers*. YouTube stars, Google found, are far more influential than your typical celebrity — movie and television stars, musicians, athletes and so on. "YouTube creators listen to and interact with their fans," says Google, "resulting in communities that look more like friendships than fanships." I've been watching many YouTube channels by photographers, each of which I can subscribe to and, if I post a question, will respond to me. Google found that "70 percent of teenage YouTube subscribers say they relate to YouTube creators more than traditional celebrities."

Here are some numbers on how popular some stars on YouTube can be, as compared to videos owned by the traditional celebrity:

- Three times as many views, and
- Two times as many actions, which include
- Twelve times as many comments.

Of YouTube fans, including Millennials, 70 percent say "YouTube creators change and shape culture," and 60 percent say they would "follow advice on what to buy from their favorite creator over their favorite TV or movie personality." So, what does your YouTube page look like? Because you don't need a celebrity — only a trendsetter. And that trendsetter can take many shapes, but none better, I think, than a *student*.

Business Insider reported on a study by Ernst & Young, which included 400 teens, which found that 49 percent shopped online once a month, a number that will likely increase once they get their hands on credit cards (at this point, the number for Millennials is 74 percent).

As far as shopping online, the study also found that 63 percent of Gen Z-ers do so because it saves time, and 53 percent say the selection is better online — something to consider in online marketing for higher ed. Teens, *Business Insider* notes, care more about experiences than products — the new "fast casual" Korean restaurant going up in my neighborhood would appeal to Gen Z, in fact.

In all, because of the incredible amount of technology at their feet — and the speed at which it works — Gen Z's expectations are far higher than any previous generation, for good or ill. "They expect businesses, brands [and] retailers to be loyal to them," says Marcie Merriman of Ernst & Young. As for *loyalty*, "if they don't feel [it], they're going to move on."

> Gen Z has "grown up in a world where their options are limitless but their time is not."

Teens today are not going to give a difficult website another try. "Either it works," says Merriman, "or doesn't and they're on to something else." Finally, Merriman says that Gen Z does not have "brand loyalty." They could shop anywhere — admissions, take note.

Here's a statistic floating in cyberspace: the attention span of Gen Z is eight seconds, whereas for Millennials it's at least twelve. In short, Gen Z is, according to Merriman, "Millennials on steroids."

Fast Company reported on a small study with a few teens — and granted, the small sample size of "just over a dozen" should give us pause — conducted by the firm Altitude that said it's not an eight-second

attention span that's the issue. In fact, they have an "eight-second filter." Why? Because Gen Z has "grown up in a world where their options are limitless but their time is not." They sort tremendous amounts of information quickly — they have to. Their commitment and focus comes when they find what they like.

It's notable that Gen Z carries a label as being "entrepreneurial," though Altitude points to this being more of a "survival mechanism." Their participants were looking at jobs that could not be automated: education, for one, as well as health and sales — and nursing programs, as I've seen in my research, are certainly growing and will continue to. This means that they are not so much "entrepreneurial" as "down to earth," pragmatic and practical.

One of their 17-year-old participants had this to say: "I need a job that will come out with money, otherwise college will be a waste. I want to pick a career that is stable."

> " Gen Z's commitment and focus comes when they find what they like.

In light of all this, *Forbes* writer Deep Patel offers some simple things to think about in crafting communications for Gen Z — easy enough to shape for higher education. Rather than creating an advertisement for your institution, create a sense of value. "They want resources, channels and profiles that give them what they're looking for, whether that is entertainment, knowledge or tutorials," Patel writes. Give the student what they need, when they need it, whether that's information about the growth of the nursing profession, how to negotiate financial aid, and so on.

"Gen Z knows the power of technology and the Internet," Patel says. "In fact, many of them see becoming an influencer online as a career choice on par with graduating with a relevant degree." Now before we go shaking our heads, consider that they "see that dream manifested every single day in their Instagram feeds." Several writers have noted that what Gen Z is effectively doing — and think, they had a social profile way earlier in their lives than you did, which means they had an audience — is building a *personal brand*.

Therefore, Gen Z is not merely the target of your communications, let alone a consumer. They are, says Patel, your *competitor*. "So when you put out content," Patel says, "don't think about it as asking them for something. Think about it as helping them, empowering them and collaborating with them." You are aiding their building of a personal brand.

And where do you do this? On all the channels. Five of them, as Patel makes clear: smartphone, TV, laptop, desktop and tablet. Modernize your website. Make sure it works on a handheld device, especially the smartphone. Infuse it with engaging content. In short, don't look "out of style." And as far as that "eight-second filter" goes, get the message to them quickly, or they'll be off to the next site, the one that *can* help them.

Citing a report by Marketo, Patel reports "60 percent of Gen Z-ers want their jobs to impact the world, and 76 percent are concerned about humanity's impact on the planet." Much has been made of the anxiety and what is not apparently exhibited by Gen Z, and the blame falls roundly on things like "too much cell phone time," but the counter to that is that Gen Z sees clearly what is happening to the world they will inherit,

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> *– Deep Patel, Forbes*

and they're not happy about it. This throws things that many colleges offer — including studying abroad, missions, and service learning — into relief.

When *Fortune* magazine says teens today are "sheltered," what is it they are sheltered from? They cite an infamous *Atlantic* article from September of 2017 that suggested Gen Z is in the midst of a mental-health crisis. The *New York Times* suggested that teens today are replacing drugs with cell phones, and that they're actually addicted to social media. Granted, the reason for the big change between Millennials and Gen Z, says researcher Jean M. Twenge, is not only that their generation is ultimately shaped by both smartphones and social media — we can take that for granted now — but that this has resulted in them valuing independence less than any previous generation.

We might pause here for a moment and clarify the message: what is the value that we are trying to communicate to teens? Not the value we are trying to sell them, but the value that can ultimately help them? Suppose the crisis is what *The Atlantic* says it is in the 2017 article, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" What is the role of higher education?

This is not to cast a pall on my argument, but to show what is facing not only enrollment managers, or colleges, but our society itself. I want to propose that our purpose is not to fill seats, but to lend guidance to an entire generation. That is the purpose of the institution of colleges and universities.

Here are some statistics that, although from 2014, are significantly skewed more toward the positive. According to Marketo, 76 percent of Gen Z teens wish their hobbies could become full-time jobs, and 72 percent want to start their own business someday. This alone, if actualized, would radically change our conception of the economy, and probably for the better. The fact is, I see all around me — at least from my vantage in Louisville, Kentucky — the steadily increasing numbers of small businesses: coffee shops, restaurants, clothing stores, art galleries and more. Gen Z sees this too.

Remember, 60 percent want jobs that impact the world, and 76 percent are concerned about human impact on the planet. Though we may have trouble getting the disturbing trends of climate change onto the table of discussion, these teens are vested — after all, this is their future. To boot, 26 percent of 16- to 19-year-old's (in 2014, at least) volunteer. Again, remember those service learning programs.

Here is a seven step list, courtesy of Marketo — it appeared on the *Mashable* website — to marketing to Gen Z:

1. Communicate visually to a diverse audience across screens.
2. Keep it short (think "snackable content").
3. Feed curiosity. Tap into an entrepreneurial spirit.
4. Empower users with control over preference settings.
5. Connect viewers with collaboration and live-streaming technology.
6. Inspire audiences with social causes to rally behind.
7. Educate and build expertise.

How many of these fit the mission of your institution? Number seven, clearly. What about three? Six? What about all of them?

To return to Ryan Jenkins, he offers a few more important statistics. Despite the purported screen time, 53 percent want face-to-face communications. And 64 percent are considering advanced degrees, though this is a slight drop from the 71 percent of Millennials who are thinking the same.

In all, we have to appreciate how skeptical a generation this is. Many lived through the Great Recession and saw the effect on their parents. They've seen wars go on and on. And National Security Agency spying? Naturally, their confidence is low. No wonder they want to hold on to their money. When a digital education is at their fingertips, why would they consider what they view as "the system" that has been breaking down their entire lives?

But why listen to me? Benjamin Tanmoy Shapiro, a junior at Manhattan's Stuyvesant High School, published early this year an op-ed in the *New York Post*. Its title: "How colleges spam high school students at the worst possible time."

"Each January and February," he writes, "just as NYC high-school juniors are dealing with finals and term papers, our inboxes are engulfed by college-admissions marketing e-mails."

Note how he automatically refers to such emails that you send out, as we at Capture send out, as marketing. Why? *Because he sees right through us.* That's a kindly way to referring to our emails, though he elaborates a bit more: "an avalanche of college junk emails trying to dress up dreary college locations." Ouch.

Insightful as he is — and he is — he points out the obvious: that the College Board "shares" their names for money. That the messages are often unwittingly ironic (" 'Zero boundaries. Infinite paths,' from Brandeis, a school with limited bus service.")

Still, he admits that his peers *do*, in fact, want information. "If they're gonna get in our face," he writes, "they should at least know what's on our minds ..."

Scholarships, for one ("I opened that one, fast," he admits). Another, from New Orleans, details the food delicacies in the French Quarter (remember what I said about "experiential?"). Tulane in Louisiana even sent a recipe for the famous Po' boy sandwich. Get creative.

If there is one thing to know above all else, it's that Gen Z wants authenticity — they want to see the man behind the curtain. As Deep Patel reports, they "have made it clear that what they care about more than anything is feeling like they know the brand or the person behind the camera. They don't want to feel marketed to — they want to feel like they're part of something." The campaign must be "relatable and lifelike as possible."

Josh Perlstein at *Adweek* — he defines Gen Z as 22 and younger — insists that "marketing emails to Gen Z consumers that don't tell a quick story with relevant value might be ignored by consumers who are eager to check out the next message." In addition, "marketing messages need to be clear about what they stand for so that their brands are not interpreted as uninvolved in or opposed to social causes important to Gen Z-ers.

"Gen-Zers want to get straight to the point and move along to the next post," he contends, and it's hard to argue with that. The goal is to enlist Gen-Zers in the message; this kind of communication connects to Gen Z because Gen Z is, itself, participating in the message. Highlight real people — and whatever you do, don't use stock images.

To put it simply, keep it real.

In summary, the members of Gen Z not only admire *influencers*, they want to actively be one — and social media is a way to do that. Make a radical use of your institution's social media to reach these kids. Be the influencer.

What is it Gen Z wants to influence? Social justice, for one. A study published online by Cone Communications suggests that the hot button issues teens support today are not limited to racial equality, women's rights, immigration and climate change, and reducing the cost of college. Economic security is important to them, too — and 81 percent of Gen Z believes they can impact these issues by using social media.

This is the time to see that one of the deepest values of education is to promote social and economic justice: *that is the message*. Look at your academics, your clubs, your programming. Wherever you find aspects of your institution that promote equality — and shouldn't education be egalitarian, anyway? — then promote those things.

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>
> *– Josh Perlstein, Adweek*

Any communication must touch on the fundamental values of your audience, and I hope I have shared the values of this generation. College must be a viable opportunity for students, and it must offer as much, if not more, as learning online.

My daughter depends on it.

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