

# Marketing to all five generations of customers? Use the 3 Cs

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11:53am EDT June 8,  
2017

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*With insights from Lisa Wollan, director of Consumer Insight and Brand Strategy, Wawa*

A current survey from NewVoiceMedia shows that poor customer experiences are costing U.S. companies \$62 billion in lost revenue each year. How can you make sure that *all* of your customers have the best experience, and thus boost market share, sales, loyalty and revenues? How can you delight *all* of your customers?

## Focus on generational differences

Marketers have long segmented customers demographically. Over the past several years, the focus has been to tailor offerings and messaging to lure that all-important group: millennials. But given the widespread dissatisfaction with customer experience, plus customer expectations for more personalized treatment, we need to focus hard on something else: *generational differences*.

There are five main generational cohorts — traditionalists, baby boomers, Gen Xers, millennials and Gen Zers. Our research shows they differ across eight primary characteristics: how they make decisions, how they communicate, how they innovate, how they negotiate work-life balance and so on.

We know these differences matter in the workplace. *But they also help shape how people behave as consumers.* To produce the best customer experiences, you must consider generational differences. Otherwise, you risk alienating some of your customers — or at least failing to make your strongest emotional impact. (A 2016 Harvard Business Review article by Alan Zorfas and Daniel Leemon argues that emotional connections with customers are even more important to a business than customer satisfaction.)

## The Wawa experience

This convenience store chain has long sought to understand generational differences in its broad customer base, which spans all five generations. Lisa Wollan, Wawa's director of Consumer Insight and Brand Strategy, told me that the company has always taken very seriously the voice of the customer — and thus Wawa's focus is on the needs, wants and desires of all customers, across all generations.

This focus didn't just start with millennials, although Wawa has gone deeper with them, exploring significant differences between older and younger millennials. Older millennials are starting families and establishing careers, giving them more in common with Generation X and baby boomers than with younger millennials. This difference has important implications for how Wawa markets to these customers.

Wawa found that each generation views "convenience" in different ways. So it works to communicate and provide products using technology that best engages each generation. Explaining how Wawa upgraded its rewards program and mobile app, Wollan says, "This was the first time we really had to ask, 'How do we come up with a new technology or product that will fit a wide range of needs, from digital natives to digital immigrants?'"

## Use the three Cs

To improve the experience of all your customer generations, use the three Cs — communicating, connecting and caring:

- **Communicating:** Wawa uses a range of communication vehicles to reach the broadest possible audience. They use Snapchat to reach millennials and Generation Z. They run TV spots on traditional prime-time

channels to reach Generation X, baby boomers and traditionalists, but also run the spots on digital sites like YouTube and Hulu to reach the younger consumers. Wawa employs social media, including Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram, tailoring messages to the audience and venue.

- **Connecting:** Take time to talk with customers of different ages, getting to know them, understanding their needs and concerns.
- **Caring:** Nurture relationships with customers of different ages through genuine empathy for their needs. Wollan also notes that customers across the age spectrum share much in common, which is why Wawa designs its marketing with a broad reach.

If you want to delight customers — get inside their heads and add something meaningful to their lives — you must remain keenly aware of generational differences. Customer relationships are a “fragile ecosystem,” as Wollan puts it. Be a conscientious caretaker of that ecosystem, and make sure every customer relationship, regardless of generation, has an emotional impact.

***Kim Huggins** is a partner at [CLG Inc.](#) Kim is a nationally known voice on generational differences in the workplace. She has a passion for helping business leaders succeed by understanding and managing the diverse generations who work side by side in today’s corporate environment. Check out Kim’s thoughts and other leaders at CLG on the [organization’s blog](#).*