

GETTING TO KNOW GENERATION X

INTRODUCTION

Generation X is made up of individuals, born between 1965 and 1976, living in the United States of America. At the turn of the century this generation was 24 to 35 years of age. Today they are 30 to 41 years of age.

There has been a lot of bad press concerning Generation X (henceforth referred to as “Gen X”); they were seen as slackers with no discernable interests. That is not the case. Gen X is a small, highly educated and widely diverse group of individuals with values that greatly differ from those of the massive Baby Boomer generation. They have been overlooked and underestimated for a long time; but as the Baby Boomers retire, Gen X will be brought to the forefront of the workforce.

The first section of this paper examines the size, education, diversity, lifestyles, and Internet usage of Gen X, followed by a section that discusses the attitudes and priorities of Gen X. The third section puts forth recommendations of how best to reach, and then retain Gen X, based on what they value. This paper concludes with a brief summary.

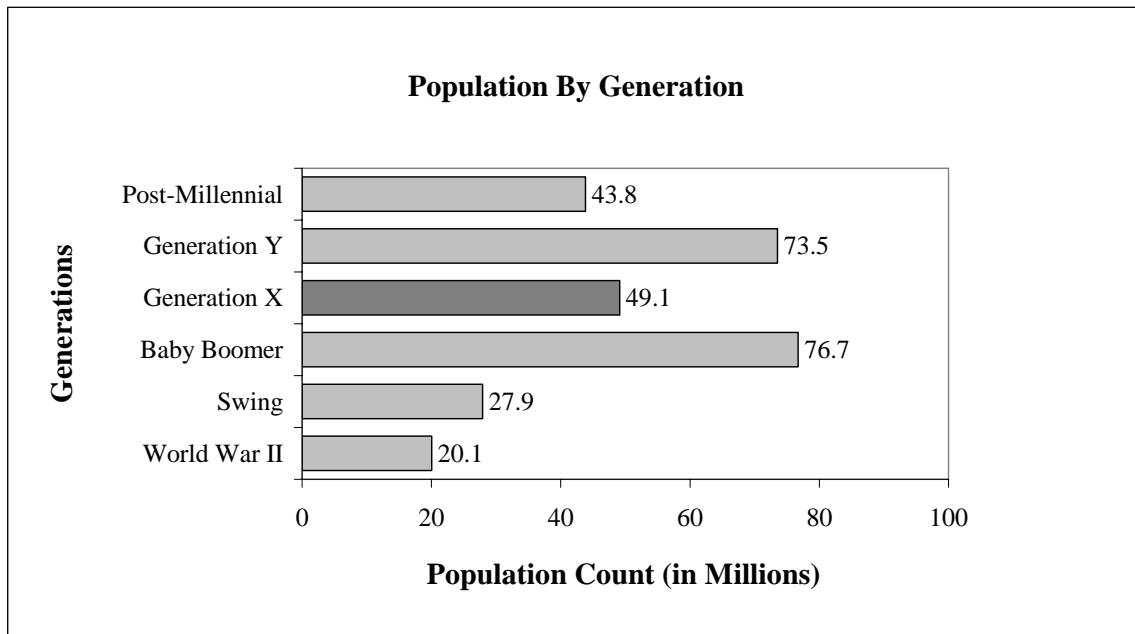
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THE MAKE-UP OF GENERATION X

Size

One of the most notable features of Gen X is its size. According to the Census, Gen X is very small in number (49.1 million people), compared to the two generations surrounding it (Baby Boomers with 76.7 million and Generation Y/Millennial with 73.5 million). This small generation has the task of taking care of two large generations: their parents and their own children. For reference purposes, Post-Millennial individuals are 11 years old or younger, and Generation Y individuals are 12 to 29 years of age, in 2006. The key generation for this report, Generation X, refers to individuals 30 to 41 years of age in 2006. Finally, in 2006, Baby Boomers are 42 to 60 years of age, Swing Generation individuals are 61 to 73 years of age, and World War II individuals are 74 years old or older. Figure 1 highlights the difference in generation sizes.

Figure 1
Source: 2005 US Census



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Education

Another notable feature of Gen X is its high level of education. According to Ansoorian, author of “Managing Generational Differences,” approximately 60 percent of Gen X has some college education, making them the best-educated generation in U.S. history. Reynolds, author of “Gen X: The Unbeholden,” states Gen X women are better-educated than men by nearly 3 percent. The Census data shown in Figure 2 supports both Ansoorian’s and Reynolds’ findings.

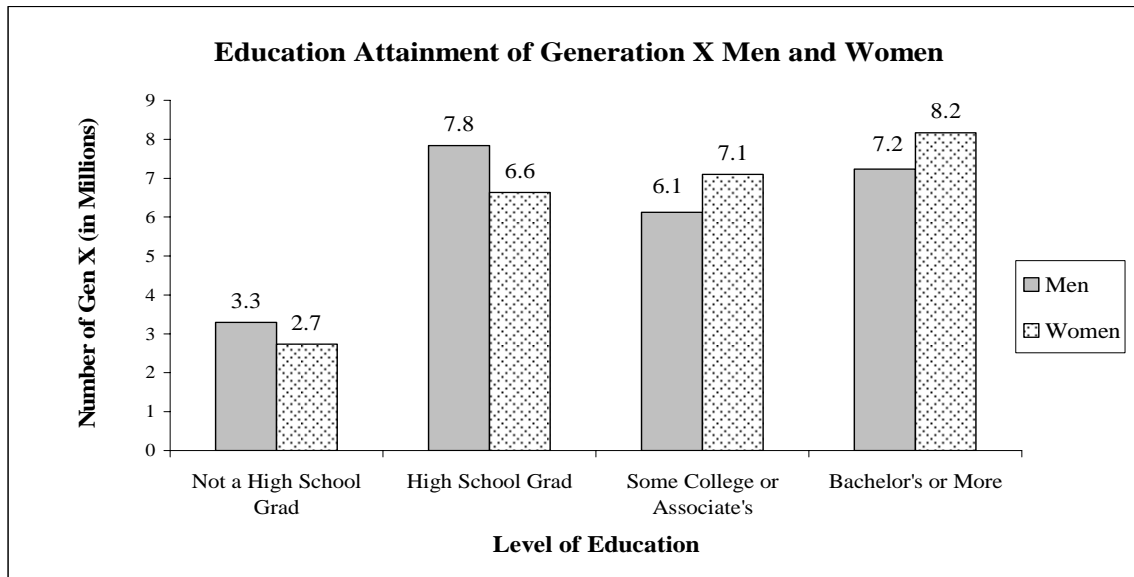
According to the 2005 Census, there are 13.3 million Gen X men with at least some college, plus 15.3 million Gen X women with at least some college, which makes up 58.3 percent (28.6 million) of Gen X total population, supporting Ansoorian’s findings. With respect to Reynolds, 978,000 (3.8 percent) more Gen X women than men have some college or an associate’s degree, and 929,000 (3.6 percent) more Gen X women than men have a bachelor’s degree or better.

To further qualify the educational attainment of Gen X, Reynolds goes on to quote the Current Population Survey: “The Current Population Survey estimates that 30 percent of the Gen X population has college degrees; they should be performing high-skilled level jobs. The results showed that 9 percent of Gen X respondents said that their job function was medical, 5 percent more than people older or younger than Gen X, and 2 percent more of Gen X members listed their job title as ‘Doctor.’”

Due to this generation’s lack of faith in the employer/employee commitment, Gen X is convinced real job security lies in their ability to develop the knowledge and skills to advance to their next job. Gen X is more inclined to stay with a company that helps them expand their knowledge and skills; therefore, continued learning and development is significant to recruiting and retaining Gen X.

Figure 2

Source: 2005 US Census



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Diversity

The most distinctive feature of this small generation is that minorities (African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians) account for a large portion of its whole. According to the 2005 Census, less than two-thirds (62 percent) of Gen X is White non-Hispanic (Figure 3). Hispanics make up 17.2 percent of Gen X, African Americans make up 12.6 percent, and Asians make up 5.7 percent. The need to target diversity groups increases even more when considering that 29 percent of immigrants are 29 to 40 years of age (Figure 4), the largest percent for any generation. According to Francese, at least 1 in every 7 individuals in Gen X is an immigrant.

Figure 3

Source: 2005 US Census

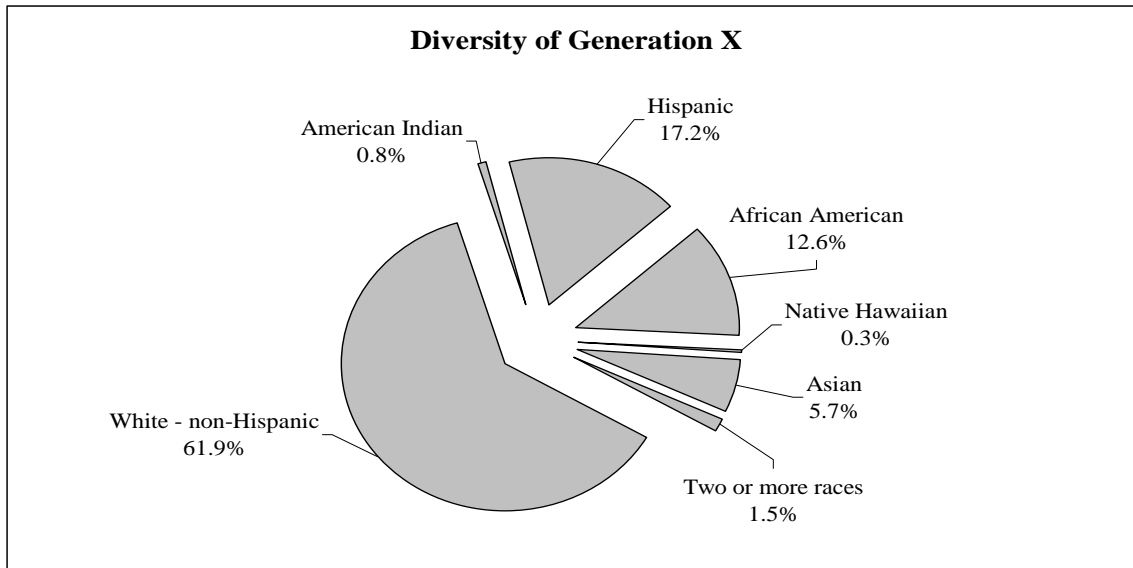
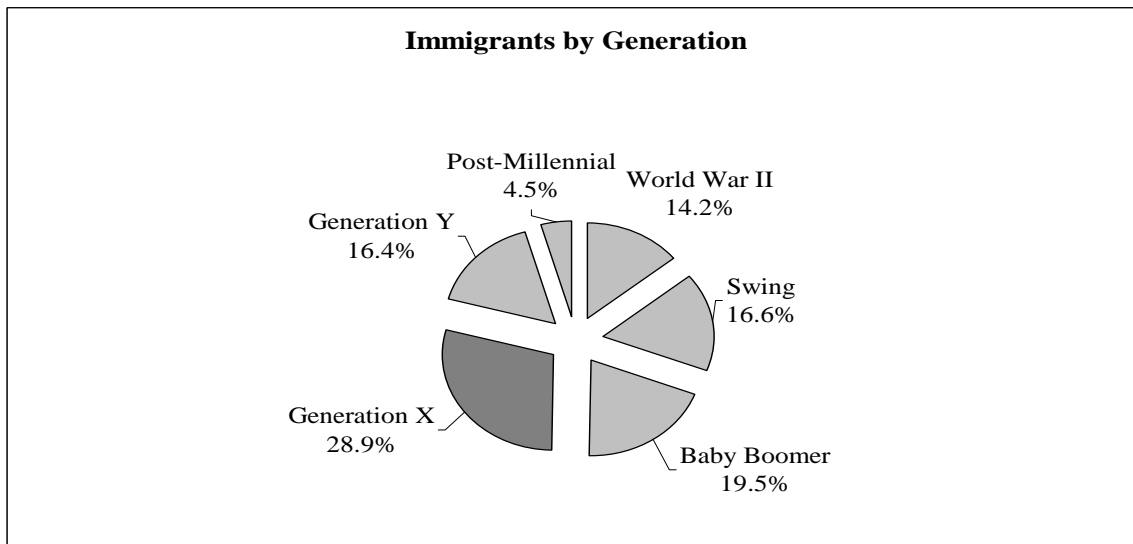


Figure 4

Source: 2005 US Census



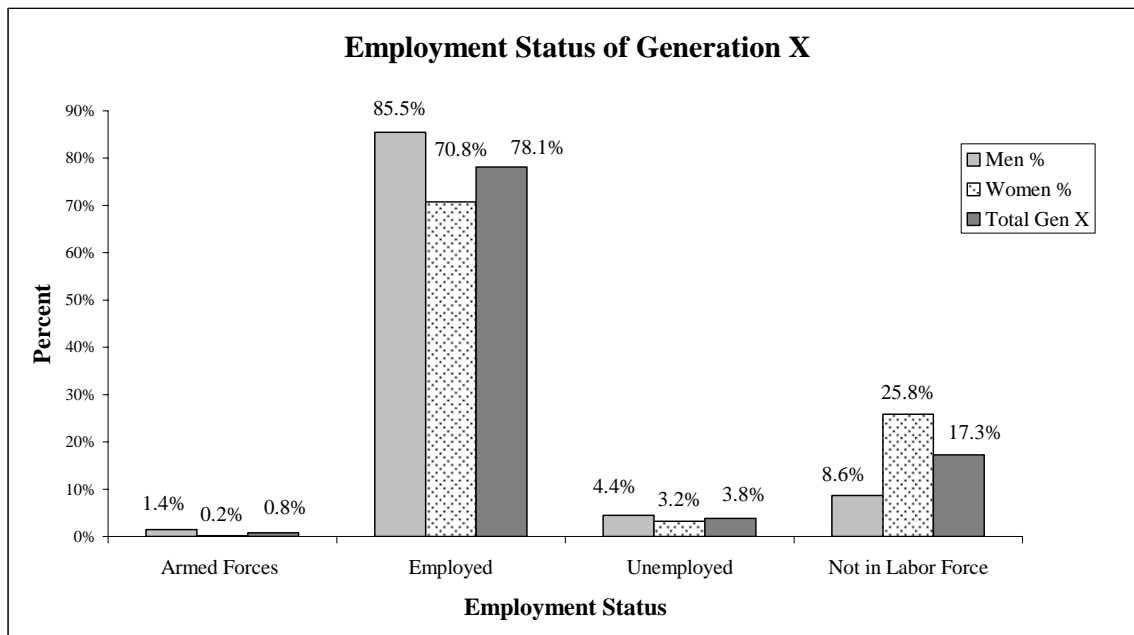
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Lifestyles

This small, highly educated, widely diverse group of individuals, who as teenagers were labeled “slackers,” are taking up space in the labor force. For the group of individuals 30 to 39 years of age, 56 percent are married couple households; this number is down 4 percent from a decade ago. Of these households, 80 percent have children and both parents work, most of which work full-time. Figure 5 illustrates the Employment Status of Gen X broken down by percent of Gen X men, Gen X women, and total Gen X population. According to the Census, 78.1 percent of individuals 29 to 40 years of age are employed.

Figure 5

Source: 2005 US Census



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Internet Usage

Internet usage has become a part of life with 87 percent of Gen X going online for various activities. Table 1 shows the top eleven reasons Gen X goes online. According to Moore, online comparison shopping was invented by Gen X. When Gen X is interested in something (a topic, product, job, etc.) they research it online via email, message boards, Google, etc.

Table 1

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project

Generation X Online Activities

Online Activities	Percent of Gen X users
Use Email	92 %
Get health info on at least one topic	84 %
Product research	80 %
Get news	76 %
Travel reservations	72 %
Online purchase	69 %
School research	60 %
Job research	59 %
Use government sites	56 %
Instant message	52 %
Job hunting	51 %

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Attitude

For many years, Gen X has been dubbed as “slackers” with no discernable interests; however, that is not the case. Gen X is a very small, highly educated and widely diverse group of individuals with values that greatly differ from those of the massive Baby Boomer generation.

First and foremost, they are individuals. When asked, most do not view themselves as part of a group generation. Gen X has no distinct defining characteristic. If you need to classify them as something, try a multicultural version of “The Breakfast Club” – a small band of diverse individuals that do not really fit in anywhere, not even with themselves.

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Gen X is made up of latchkey children who have had to fend for themselves on a regular basis all their lives. They are highly adaptable. This has helped them to become very independent and caused them to develop more life experience at an earlier age than other generations.

They were the first generation to be brought up in an “instant gratification” society full of microwaves, ATMs, and remote controls. Gen X has the mentality of “what’s in it for me.”

They are cynical about the commitment between employers and employees since they watched their parents and grandparents lose their jobs after years of dedicated service. They distrust corporations and hype. They distrust government control of anything. Gen X is committed to their professions instead of to a company.

Priorities - Work/Life Balance

Gen X individuals are not slackers; they just have different values, like putting their family first. While their parents (Baby Boomers) put their jobs before their families, Gen X is determined to put their families before their jobs. This small generation has the task of taking care of two generations that together are 40 percent larger than they are: their parents and their children.

Gen X believes they should be able to enjoy their jobs and also have time for their families. They insist you do not have to give up one to have the other. Gen X women are testing and defeating the “mommy track” stigma; defined as a career path that allows a mother flexible or reduced work hours but tends to slow or block advancement. They are taking time to have their children, and then go back to work with demands for flexible scheduling and work from home options.

HOW TO REACH AND RETAIN GENERATION X

Recruitment Ideas

In today’s electronic world, your company’s website speaks volumes to both Gen X and Generation Y. A well-designed and complete website is vital. Your homepage should have easy access to job links, privacy issues should be addressed, and receipt of resumes should be confirmed. Do not have dead links; if a portion of your website is under construction, clearly state the reason and when construction will likely be completed. If Gen X has a difficult time maneuvering through your website, they will lose interest in your company.

Promoting positive branding of your company is very important. Gen X’s perception of your company image can make or break the deal. Gen X will use their technical skills and online resources to research a company. They will check the company’s reputation on the Internet, with friends, message boards, Google, and ask around through whatever means are feasible.

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Free promotional items can go a long way. At a job fair, give away free knickknacks (pads, mugs, pens, etc.) when you receive a resume. Gen X wants something tangible; they want to know there is something in it for them. Plus, it is a great way to bring in branding – getting your logo out there is essential to your company's success.

When placing job advertisements, it is important to include an honest and accurate overview of the job expectations. Avoid using hype. Highlight opportunities for learning marketable skills and building relationships.

Employers need to literally woo Gen X, create an atmosphere that lets the individual know that they are important to the company, and give them opportunities to meet and interact.

Retention Ideas

After your company has found the correct Gen X individuals to fill your positions, you will need to focus on retaining them. To reduce turnover, below is a list of retention ideas/benefits geared towards the individuals making up Gen X:

- Flexible schedules (key benefit for companies that can do it) or extra time-off or telecommuting
- Continued learning and skill development – relevant training on cutting-edge technology
- Interesting work
- Sense of purpose
- Emphasis on accomplishments rather than tenure
- Minimal bureaucracy
- Casual business attire and atmosphere on a daily basis
- Constant feedback
- Recognition programs
- Open and honest communication between all levels of the organization
- Employee-friendly facilities – childcare, pleasant surroundings, on-site conveniences
- Diversity initiatives/training
- Appreciation and reward perks (monetary and non-monetary, recognition)
- Retirement savings plans

Gen X Value

Gen X values work/life balance. They want their careers to be exciting, as well as enjoyable, but they also expect to have plenty of time for their families. Flexible work schedules for arrival and departure times and the option to occasionally work from home help to create and sustain this work/life balance. Choa, author of "For Gen Xers, It's Work to Live," states "Gen X wants work to be only one component of a balanced portfolio of meaningful life experiences that include family, friends, fitness and fun."

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Many other authors reiterate the same sentiment making it a point companies should keep in mind when trying to attract and retain Gen X.

Gen X is convinced real job security lies in their ability to prepare for their next job. Since developing additional knowledge and skills is so important to Gen X, companies should provide opportunities for continued learning and skill development. Continued learning fulfills the “what’s in it for me” mentality; it is something they can take with them wherever the chips may fall.

As with every working individual, regardless of age, race, or sex, decent pay is valued; however, Gen X also values other benefits and perks that improve their quality of life. Gen X is willing to trade less money for more freedom.

They value feedback, clear communication, and recognition for a job well done. Companies should provide customized career planning and management with quarterly feedback sessions.

Gen X values being a part of the decision-making process, teamwork, flexibility, and being in a relaxed, comfortable environment. Gen X will not find a rigid bureaucratic hierarchy welcoming.

SUMMARY

Gen X is comprised of individuals; therefore, every situation is different. The key is to identify what factors motivate your particular candidate. Gen X wants to enjoy their jobs and have time for their own lives. It is important to keep in mind that Gen X is family-oriented; they value education and are quite cynical with respect to corporations. When dealing with Gen X, be honest, straightforward, and avoid hype.

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