

GEN Y IS FROM MERCURY

Courtney, twenty-eight, a new attorney living in Washington, D.C., had a “destination wedding” in 2007 and was delighted that her parents were able to stay for the honeymoon. Her five bridesmaids (all friends from college) and their husbands also stuck around. Courtney had been a bridesmaid in each of their weddings, which had taken place in locations scattered around the globe over the past three years, and her parents and brother had attended each of those weddings as well. Courtney and her mom, who lives across the country in San Francisco, planned every aspect of the wedding together—from the custom M&M’s to Dad’s outfit. They emailed ideas, web addresses, and photos to each other almost daily, and both said with big grins and giggles that it was “so much fun!” Friends and family could follow along with the wedding plans on the couple’s website and view photos and videos immediately following the ceremony. Gift selection was a snap thanks to a coordinated online registry, and wrapping and shipping was done in a click.

Courtney’s egalitarian friendship with her parents and her enduring pack of friends from college are part of what makes this generation different. So is the technical ease with which they communicate and shop, their comfort navigating the globe and different cultures, and even their delight in (and willingness to spend big bucks for) customized M&M’s.

This generation, the product of a transformed world, is to previous generations as man is to woman and Mars is to Venus. Which is

to say: basically the same, but entirely different. Generation Y is unquestionably unique, and some say potentially one of the most powerful and influential generations ever.

Gen Y is diverse, adaptive, and confident. Fewer than two-thirds of them are white, over 25 percent are raised in single parent households, and three-quarters have working moms. Their generation's size—almost eighty-four million members—helps give them unprecedented influence; their confidence and their ability to connect with others guarantee it.

Raised in an era packed with cultural and economic shifts, technological wizardry, and the “self-esteem movement”—to name just a few of the major changes—it's no wonder Gen Yers are motivated by different messages, want different products, and relate to each other, marketers, and retailers differently from previous generations.

Before we spill the beans: want to test your knowledge of the world of Generation Y? Take our quiz.

Kit and Jayne's True and False YQ Quiz

1. Email is the preferred form of digital communication for teenagers.

False. A 2008 study by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project showed that email is teens' least favorite form of digital communication, with only 16 percent of teens using email daily, compared with 36 percent texting daily and 29 percent sending instant messages every day.¹

2. Working teens are likely to have greater discretionary spending power than their parents.

True. According to Harrison Group's *Teens in the Marketplace Report*, working teens pocket an average of \$597 each month—and without those pesky nondiscretionary

expenses like mortgage payments, on average they end up with more spending money than their parents.²

3. Teen girls are more likely than teen boys to have online friends that they've never met in person.

False. According to the "Marketing to Teens and Tweens" study by EPM Communications, boys ages fifteen to seventeen were more likely than any other age or gender group to have friends they've never met in the flesh, at 47 percent. In the tween category, 29 percent of boys ages twelve to fourteen and 22 percent of girls twelve to fourteen had friends they know only in the virtual world.³

4. More people watched Sarah Palin's appearance on *Saturday Night Live* online than on TV.

True. While fifteen million people watched on TV, even more watched on NBC.com, YouTube, Yahoo, MySpace, and Hulu.⁴

5. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today's learners will have nine to ten jobs by the age of thirty-eight.

False. They're expected to have ten to fourteen jobs by the age of thirty-eight.⁵

6. "Omg jk!! LOL u kno ily. nyway whatchu doen 2nite? I g2g 2 din wit da rents but bbl. u hangen out?" (a text sent to Irina, seventeen) translates to: "Oh my God I'm just kidding! Laughing out loud. You know I love you. Anyway, what are you doing tonight? I have to go to dinner with my parents but I'll be back later. Are you hanging out?"

True.

7. Eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds are more likely than any other adult group to think that technology makes people lazy.

True. Eighty-four percent of eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds said technology makes people lazier, compared with 67

percent of adults over twenty-six. They were also slightly more likely to believe that technology was responsible for isolation and time wasting. And almost three-fourths of the age group claims their generation posts excessive personal information on the Internet.⁶

8. Gen Yers may love their computers, but when it comes to entertainment nothing beats the television.

False. According to Deloitte, three-quarters of fourteen- to twenty-five-year-olds view their computer as more of an entertainment device than their television. The 2009 report also found that 59 percent of Gen Yers use their mobile phone as an entertainment device (versus 33 percent of all consumers).⁷

9. A majority of young adults see their generation as unique.

True. A 2007 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press survey showed 68 percent of eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds found their generation to be unique and distinct from all others.⁸ According to a 2008 Harris Interactive survey of nearly four thousand Americans aged twenty-one to eighty-three, Gen Y is seen as the most “self-indulgent” generation, Gen X as the most “innovative,” boomers as most “productive,” and our eldest generation as most “admired.”⁹

10. When asked how they spend their day, average teens will tell you that nearly half of their activities are driven by technology.

True. Four out of their five top activities involve technology. As of November 2008, the average teen expects to spend over \$300 on consumer electronics in the next six months, according to the Consumer Electronics Association.¹⁰

11. The number of text messages sent and received each day exceeds the population of the earth.

*True.*¹¹ 'Nuff said.

12. Twitter is the chirp of a small bird and has nothing to do with technology.

False. Twitter is a free microblogging service through which users can send and read others' major and not-so-major updates on their lives. The site, which once seemed to specialize in mindless minutiae ("I'm eating a really good sandwich!"), has now expanded so that brands, retailers, celebrities, and politicians regularly use Twitter to get their messages out. Flight cancellations, new product arrivals, job availabilities, and peanut salmonella updates can all be found on Twitter. Launched in 2006, Twitter grew by over 1,382 percent between February 2008 and February 2009. In February 2009 there were 9.8 million unique visitors.¹²

13. A new blog is created nearly every second of every day.

False. Make that over two new blogs created every second of every day, and 1.6 million posts are made on existing blogs each day.¹³

14. If you started today, it would take you just under a year to view all the material on YouTube.

False. It would take you over four hundred years.¹⁴

How'd you do? If you got nine or more right, we're impressed. And because you're the kind of person who craves information, we've got some whys behind those facts coming up, so read on. Eight or fewer? In the spirit of Gen Y, you get a trophy too, but you might also want to keep reading—you need to know Y, and you've got some catching up to do.

The Two Greatest Influences

Though some may point to social or political events such as the Columbine shootings, the Bill Clinton–Monica Lewinsky scandal, the fall of the Soviet Union, and even the death of

Princess Diana as the forces that have shaped Gen Y, there are two profoundly influential factors that outweigh the rest: *their adoring parents* and *the digital world*.

Adoring Parents

Gen Y children are considered to be the most wanted children of all time, and they've grown up in an era of exploding interest in and knowledge about child development and psychology. Unlike previous generations of parents—who certainly wanted and loved their children, but also saw them as responsibilities—or even earlier generations, who felt the same way but saw them as potential laborers—today's parents prize their children as more equal and central members of the household. Additionally, no society in history has had a greater focus on, interest in, and understanding of the child.

And even though nearly half of Gen Y children have divorced parents, and one-third come from single-parent households, those parents still spent more focused time with their Gen Y kids than any previous generation. The greater attention and parental involvement of fathers as central figures in parenting has also had a great effect on the sense of Gen Yers that they are important and central. Additionally, technology brings families even closer, thanks to the frequent contact between kids and parents that cell phones afford.

Gen Y parents have been criticized for coddling, for impairing their child's independence by hovering like helicopters, for being enmeshed in or overly dependent on their kid's approval. These characteristics are generally more true of this generation than of previous ones, and in the course of our research we certainly did see examples of just the sort of behavior that's inspired these descriptions (including moms who know who's asking whom to the prom before their kids do), and also *plenty* of parents dependent on their kids' success for their own egos. But what we also saw were "helicopters" who might also have been described as

simply interested, involved parents; “coddlers” who could have been called warm, nurturing parents; and “overly dependent parents” who might have been seen as folks who value their kid’s minds and opinions.

“My parents are super homey,” says nineteen-year-old Brendan, a member of our Portland focus group. “My mom is the chilliest of all our parents; she trusts me.” Of course, one Portland participant spoke for many when he described some moms as “grown-up high school girls” or “too concerned about their image. They need you to get on honor roll so they can tell their friends ‘my kid got on the honor roll.’”

We found it most helpful to view Gen Y parents on a normally distributed curve, with those clearly overinvolved, coddling helicopters at one end; some relatively disengaged parents at the other end; and most of the group in the middle—registering more kid-centric than the last generation of parents, but not ‘coptering coddlers either.

Being a wanted kid in a child-centered household adds to your clout, of course. Gen Y households are the most egalitarian of all time, and Gen Y parents tend to be nonauthoritarian and to value their friendships with their kids. This is one of the primary reasons behind Gen Y’s confidence and power—and also helps to explain how Gen Yers were able to earn their impressive shopping stripes so young and have such a tremendous impact on the purchasing decisions of older generations.

Their Digital World

The second most important factor that’s shaped the uniqueness of this generation is their enmeshment with technology and their ability to harness the power of the Internet. This sophistication has increased their influence in their households, added a pedal-to-the-metal element to their cognitive and social styles, reinforced and equipped a team mentality, and empowered them.

Household Clout. In addition to their kid-centric clout, Gen Yers typically provide in-house tech support for their parents, which has reinforced their stature as equals—or even superiors, at least in the IT department. It’s also made them *the* great force to be reckoned with by electronics marketers. When they have prized knowledge and expertise, it becomes pretty hard to discount the thoughts and abilities of a kid. Previous generations had to pretend or humor their kids (“Let’s frame your Picasso!”), but in the case of this generation, their intuitive ease with technology and their ability to adapt to technological shifts is a genuine asset to any family. Having never experienced a world without computers, the Internet, cell phones, and digital cameras, Gen Yers are free of anxiety and full of playfulness when they interact with the Internet and technology of all sorts. This makes learning easier for them than it is for all but the most tech-savvy parents.

Seeing as we all know better than to tick off the techies, the glow of this expertise has contributed to the confidence of this generation. It also means that kids have more of a vote and more power in family decision making. That includes far more than technology and extends to things like vacation destinations, cars, and Dad’s outfits too. To give you a sense of the pervasiveness of these junior in-house techies, according to a survey of over six thousand of our youngest Gen Yers—the eight- to fourteen-year-olds—most say that they have “online chores” that include sharing pictures with relatives (38 percent) and getting driving directions (35 percent), and a few even help with income tax returns (14 percent).¹⁵

Speed, Power, and Self-Reliance. Put simply, they want what they want when they want it. As the first generation raised from day one under the influence of the Internet, the world, as they know it, means speed; multitasking; instant answers; always available friends, parents, teachers, and experts; a connection to others that defies geography and hierarchy; less necessity

for face-to-face (or voice-to-voice) human interaction; and free access to information for everyone.

Kit noticed, during a recent guest lecture at UC Berkeley, that at least half of her students were typing. A quick cruise around the room revealed about half of those typists were looking up her articles, an international student was checking a word definition, and the rest were on Facebook. In other words: multitasking, available to their friends no matter where they were, and instantly accessing free information.

“They are a very different generation,” says Jenny Floren, founder and CEO of Experience, which helps recruits students from nearly four thousand colleges and universities for its business clients. Because they’ve been online often since they were toddlers, they process information very differently. “That’s where their friends are, where they shop, and where they study,” says Floren. “In many regards, being in person is the same as being online.”

The digital world that Gen Y inhabits is credited with shortening their attention spans, increasing their need for immediate gratification, and helping them to become super speedy at processing visual data—Gen Yers live in a faster world than anything previous generations have known.

Gen Yers are also proactive and empowered when it comes to information. They seek out only the information that’s relevant (or that they perceive to be relevant) to them. Previous generations, unaided by the power of search engines, acquired information in a more passive way. For example, most boomers wouldn’t have had a way to learn more about a physical symptom or health malady—those answers were in the hands of physicians and households lucky enough to have a set of encyclopedias. There was no such thing as an instant answer. Not to mention that the answers available had been edited and vetted prior to publication. So when we say “empowered” we truly do mean power. From the information (though not the wisdom) of a physician to the latest Van’s hoodie available to a skater living 350

miles from a mall, Gen Yers have known only one world—one in which they can get what they want when they want it.

Consequently, there has been an important social shift toward a mentality of self-reliance and the flattened hierarchy that accompanies democratized information. Contributing to this is a disappointment in social institutions ranging from our schools and religious institutions to our political leaders and even athletes and celebrities—all widely (and sometimes hysterically) reported through an increasingly competitive media. Businesses, in particular, have taken a big hit in confidence. Once the most likely villain in the movies was a Communist, monster, or alien—today it's a white businessman.

My Posse. Gen Yers, already trained in school to work as teams, have embraced technology as a way to facilitate group connections. They can and do unite with likeminded (physical) strangers from around the world to champion causes, play computer games such as World of Warcraft, stay in touch with school and business friends and colleagues indefinitely through social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook, and text their moms' group about sales at Baby Gap. Whatever the interest, connections—already the social DNA of Gen Y—are enabled through technology. Gen Yers between thirteen and twenty-four tell an average of eighteen people about a website or TV show that they enjoy, whereas older adults tell an average of only ten people.¹⁶

Although older folks sometimes struggle to learn and adapt to technological advances, they've also had the opportunity to weigh consequences and compare outcomes. Some of the anxiety we've seen in older generations regarding Gen Y is due, in part, to their fear that Gen Y won't know what they're missing or losing by relying on technology. Will all that speed and multitasking result in superficiality? Will Gen Yers have the patience to think deeply about things? Will online relating replace or diminish intimacy? Will shorthand communication, like text messaging and Twittering, and the highly portable nature of technology

result in social rudeness (like loud cell phone chats in elevators) and poor formal writing and communication skills?

We all know the answer to the social rudeness question—and it's certainly not just the younger members of our community who are at fault. As to the other questions, some of the answer resides in the asker: it's a time-honored tradition of every senior generation to ask, "What's with these kids?" And though our Gen Yers shared some serious struggles and concerns—many of which are related to technology and even more to the high expectations they have for themselves and the world—we found overall that the kids are alright. They'll have their own set of problems to solve, just as every generation before them, but they'll also have powerful gifts and new tools to help—namely confidence, teamwork, technology, and their desire to make a positive contribution to the world.

The Big Four Gen Y Characteristics

Although the kid-centricity of our society and our digital world have been the two most profound factors influencing this generation, other influences include: a reign of relative economic prosperity that lasted until the economic meltdown of 2008, globalization, the September 11, 2001, attacks, and the sheer volume of information (often unedited, unexplained, and uncensored) available anytime and anywhere.

So what's the result? What makes this generation different from the rest?

Four characteristics stand out: their confidence; their connectedness to each other, their parents, and the world; their management of an overwhelming array of choices; and their warp-speed living and all that it entails.

Confidence

Sure, we've heard others call Gen Yers narcissistic, entitled, arrogant, and inflated. We think that for the most part, or at least

for the majority in the middle, they're simply, well, confident—and often charmingly optimistic as a result.

There are many reasons for this boosted level of confidence, and there's genuine support for our reasoning that this group is not simply puffed up with ego, but truly empowered. Let us count the ways.

In addition to being wanted and doted on by parents, they've been told they were special by everyone from Mr. Rogers to their grade school tutors. Kate Perry, twenty-eight, of San Ramon, California, remembers how her mother convinced her to wear a helmet when bicycling: "She told me that the government required it because my brain was so special it should be protected."

The self-esteem movement in our schools made everyone a winner. Garrison Keillor's statistically impossible Lake Wobegon exists across America today—every child is above average (at least in their parents' eyes). Grade inflation has kept pace with ego inflation: the average high school graduate today has a grade point average of nearly 3.0, and many high schools have twenty-five to forty valedictorians a year. Forty-seven percent of college freshmen enrolled in 2005 had an A-equivalent grade point average, compared with 20 percent in 1970.¹⁷ Though psychologists and sociologists often point to the problems associated with fluffed-up feedback—most notably that when these kids start working in a competitive global economy their feedback isn't likely to get much fluffing—the self-esteem movement has also lessened competition among Gen Yers, who are truly team players, and has genuinely boosted their self-confidence.

Their ability to "find out for themselves" and share ideas on the Internet has empowered them. Gen Yers, no question, believe in themselves and their power to find solutions. And they believe in the power of their opinions. More than any other generation they blog about their experiences, interests, and opinions and rate everything from pedicures to professors online. Through these venues, they use their power to effect social change, make or break retailers, and popularize (and occasionally destroy) other people.

The Twitter campaign of a few young moms brought down a Motrin ad in less than a weekend. The ad's attempt to connect with moms over the physical pain associated with carrying a baby around hit a sour note with a blogger, who sent a tweet to her 1,018 followers. By the next day a blogger had collected tweets from offended moms and created a nine-minute YouTube video that was viewed twenty-one thousand times that weekend. By that Sunday night, McNeil Consumer Healthcare had taken down their Motrin.com site—and the offending ad.¹⁸

Gen Yers can get backup in a snap, and they use it to embolden themselves and to effect change. Through their natural ease at forming teams and with their ability to connect online, they're empowered and consequently more confident about themselves and the value of their opinions. If you want to get your way, "we all feel" has more of a punch than a single opinion.

Along with their doting parents and the power of the Internet, they benefit from the fact that today's society clearly values what belongs to their generation alone: youth. There has simply never been a time when simply being young has held such value. Once upon a time we had wise old men (okay, gender roles have expanded too); today, older isn't wiser—it's, umm, just old. Jessie, on the eve of her nineteenth birthday, summed it up this way: "I'm not very excited about this birthday. Eighteen was big, next year I'll be twenty, and then I'll be in my twenties!! Then twenty-one and I'll be legal. Then, after that, it's all downhill."

Beth Teitell, author of the book *Drinking Problems at the Fountain of Youth*¹⁹, describes what she says has become a societal obsession with all things youthful. According to Teitell, "when society changed to a service economy it became more about the visual." Add to that the influence of the Internet, and now more than ever, "people get to know you based on how you appear. "There are no stores called Forever 41 or Forever 51," says Teitell. "We value youth over anything else."

Wrapping up the reasons, Gen Y enjoys the confidence that comes with a more egalitarian workplace. Many wrongly

assume that Gen Y's insistence on different work values and their resilience in the face of the more traditional demands of the workplace (like putting in eleven-hour days, or doing what their bosses say without question) have *created* this shift. In fact, every generation of workers for over a hundred years has enjoyed a more empowered workforce—though Gen Y is undoubtedly speeding it along a bit faster than previous generations were able to. Just as parents have benefited from a wealth of new knowledge on child-rearing, the workplace has also invested a great deal of energy over the past twenty years in understanding how to motivate and inspire their workforce. Gen Y is bolstered and empowered by employers that *want* to understand them.

Between parenting, workplace changes, a youth-oriented society, the power of the posse, and all the Internet has to offer, it's no wonder that the 2008–2009 Horatio Alger Association's *The State of Our Nation's Youth* found that 62 percent of Gen Y college students say they are “very confident” about achieving their own goals in life. Add in the 31 percent that said “fairly confident,” and you've got an overwhelmingly confident generation.²⁰

Connection

This is a generation that knows how to cultivate a group. They're inclusive and team-oriented, and they harness technology to get and stay connected to each other. From parent-coordinated play dates to group dating in college, Gen Yers form families around their interests and in the workplace.

Though there are an abundance of stories about generational struggles in the workplace, in our research we found that, at least on an individual level, Gen Yers and boomers in particular seem to appreciate each other. Millennials are traditional in many of the same ways boomers are—and like boomers, they tend to be hard working, generally optimistic, and genial. People who study generational difference in the workplace—like Kate

Perry, who works in human resources at Chevron and is active in their XYZ Group—point out one other unifying similarity: both generations are change agents at heart. According to Perry, a Gen Yer herself, “Boomers identify with Yers because they had to deal with the same things we did. Boomers were after change—they brought us maternity leave, flex time, a lot of changes. We feel the same way, we want change.”

The primary difference seems to be the less competitive nature of Gen Yers. Boomers—fueled by a scarcity of jobs and often raised by parents who were children close enough to the Depression to fear poverty—were taught to be competitive with each other, which makes team-building less instinctive. Perry recalls how her boomer manager had to explain to her what she means when she says she’s going to get coffee: “My boss had to tell me, ‘When I say I’m going to Starbucks that means, what can I bring you?’ but to me, when I say I’m going to Starbucks that means that I’m looking for a group of people to go with me.”

Off the job, Gen Yers are also collaborative and team-oriented. Even in their dating. To the confusion of many of their boomer parents, when Gen Yers are asked if they’re dating anyone, most honestly reply “no” (as opposed to previous generations who evasively replied “no” to get out of telling their parents about their new boyfriends or girlfriends). Rather than the old “ask out, pick up, dinner and a movie” routine of yesteryear, Gen Yers are famous for hanging out in groups in which the possibility (or actuality) of romance exists. And they’re also perhaps a bit infamous for “hooking up”—which we’ll explore more fully in Chapter Five.

There’s no place more famous for connecting than the Internet, and we’re not just talking about the explosive popularity of dating sites like Match.com and eHarmony (one in eight couples married in the United States in 2008 met online).²¹ From diet buddies on SparkPeople to the unique cat language that’s sprung into our vocabularies from Gen Y enthusiasts on icanhascheezburger.com, Gen Y forms communities, teams, and

groups online. Consider the difference between Gen X and Gen Y moms—both groups use the Internet for research and to connect with other young moms, but Gen Y moms are nearly twice as likely to own and read blogs than Gen X moms. Anderson Analytics' 2009 *U.S. College Student Report* indicates that students are four times more likely to blog than other online adults, and women students are three times more likely to maintain a blog than men are.²²

The cornerstone of Gen Y's ability to work well in teams and connect with each other is their tolerance—even celebration—of differences and their comfort with diversity. They are an increasingly diverse group themselves; nonwhites and Latinos account for more than 40 percent of the under-twenty-five population, and 20 percent of Gen Y parents are immigrants. In February 2009, only two of the top ten most highly regarded public personalities in the Davie-Brown Index, which uses surveys to quantify the marketing appeal of celebrities, were white. Gen Y is part of a globalized world—more connected with, interested in, and affected by their counterparts around the globe. Certainly, Gen Y women aren't finding the gender struggles their mothers encountered, though surveys of Gen Y girls and women suggest that gender discrimination is far from resolved. Nevertheless, women now earn 57 percent of all bachelor's degrees, 58 percent of all master's degrees, and nearly 50 percent of law and medical degrees.²³

Choice

Gen Y is the most educated, affluent, diverse population the United States has ever seen. They belong to a global world and have been told they can do anything by parents and a society that loves them. Their options for dates, mates, jobs, and handbags have exploded with the Internet and portable, digital technology. As Jen, twenty-six, of Atlanta told us, "I found my

job, my boyfriend and my apartment on the Internet, oh and I get my clothes there too.”

Tom, a fifty-nine-year-old father from McLean, Virginia, notes just how much things have changed. His twenty-year-old daughter Marcy wanted to do something “exciting” recently, so she signed up for a six-week stint teaching English as a volunteer in northern Thailand. The photo she emailed home was of herself preparing to bungee jump off a bridge over the Mekong River, “proving that a new generation of daughters has developed even better methods of terrifying their parents,” says Tom.

Though abundant choice has been inspiring to many Gen Yers, we’ve also seen that it’s a double-edged sword. We’ve heard from a number of older Gen Yers that being told that they can have it all and do anything makes it hard for them to feel like anything other than perfection (in a mate, in a job, in themselves) is good enough. They’re not sure what’s “settling” and what’s normal accommodation, understanding, or compromise. Emily, twenty-six, of Atlanta puts it this way: “No relationship is perfect and nothing is fun 100 percent of the time, but the expectation is that you’re supposed to be passionate about your job, have this 100-percent great relationship, find the thing you love. It’s not a favor to be told that I can have it all.” And here is Marie, also twenty-six and from Atlanta: “There is so much emphasis on ‘you can be whatever you want to be,’ so much pressure. Find the thing you love and do it. I feel so overwhelmed. How do I find the thing I love when I have so many options?”

Speed

Gen Y is a high-speed generation, and as such, compared with older generations, they’re easily bored and highly attuned to the power of visual symbols. But hasn’t every generation thought the simple life of their elders seemed a little boring? Needlepoint in the parlor? Hanging out by the radio in the kitchen? Huddled

around a black-and-white television with only three channels? Still, even compared with previous generations, Gen Y seems to have gone to warp speed.

Gen Y brains have been trained on “more and faster” and consequently process visual information quickly and get bored more easily. Older folks tsk-tsk over Gen Y’s shorter attention spans because they fear that Gen Yers won’t take the time necessary to think deeply, and that they’ll place too much emphasis on the superficial. This, of course, has ramifications that touch everything American—from democracy to family—so it’s no wonder there’s an outcry. We’ve found that Gen Yers certainly do respond to the visual, the fast, and the immediate—and that their passions fuel intense and focused deep dives.

Our world, with or without Gen Y’s speedy brains, simply is faster and more superficial. Consider this, and it’s easy to see how Apple can launch at least one new version of the iPod every year with resounding success.

What comes with speed? Here are a few of the words and phrases we’ve seen used to describe Gen Y in dozens of publications and surveys: *impatient*, *convenience-oriented*, *blunt*, *image-driven*, *stimulation junkies*, and *needing immediate gratification*.

According to WeMedia/Zogby Interactive, 55 percent of adult Gen Yers say they get most of their news online. *The State of the News Media 2008* states that news is shifting from being a product, such as a newspaper or a broadcast, to becoming a service.²⁴ In other words, consumers are more in control of the content they wish to receive—on demand—and less passive (or patient) about being exposed to news in a broader sense. The report also says the agenda of the American news media continues to narrow, not broaden. The media covers fewer issues and focuses more intently on those that are personally relevant to consumers, such as gas prices and toy recalls—and the media has shown a “marked shorter attention span.”

In upcoming chapters we'll explain how these characteristics and forces have shaped the way Gen Y shops, which, in turn, has changed the way we all shop. From their fashion authority to their shorter attention spans, the power of Gen Y will be felt by brands ranging from Starbucks to Bank of America.

