



Mail & E-Commerce Through the Ages

A USPS® Generational Study

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About the 2020–2021 USPS Generational Research Report

Over the course of six months from mid-2020 to early 2021, Summit Research conducted a proprietary national study on behalf of the United States Postal Service to gain insights into consumers' perceptions and behaviors regarding household mail and packages.

Several waves of qualitative and quantitative research were conducted across four generations—baby boomers, Gen X, millennials and Gen Z. Each of the 4,120 participants:

- Was between the ages of 18 and 64
- Had checked their mail in the past three months
- Had received an online order in the past three months
- Represented a mix of mail and shipping usage

Here we explore the key findings, highlighting important differences and similarities among the generations so you can craft campaigns and shape operations in a way that makes sense for your specific audience.

Refer back to this report at any time to help guide your business decision-making and ensure success into the future.



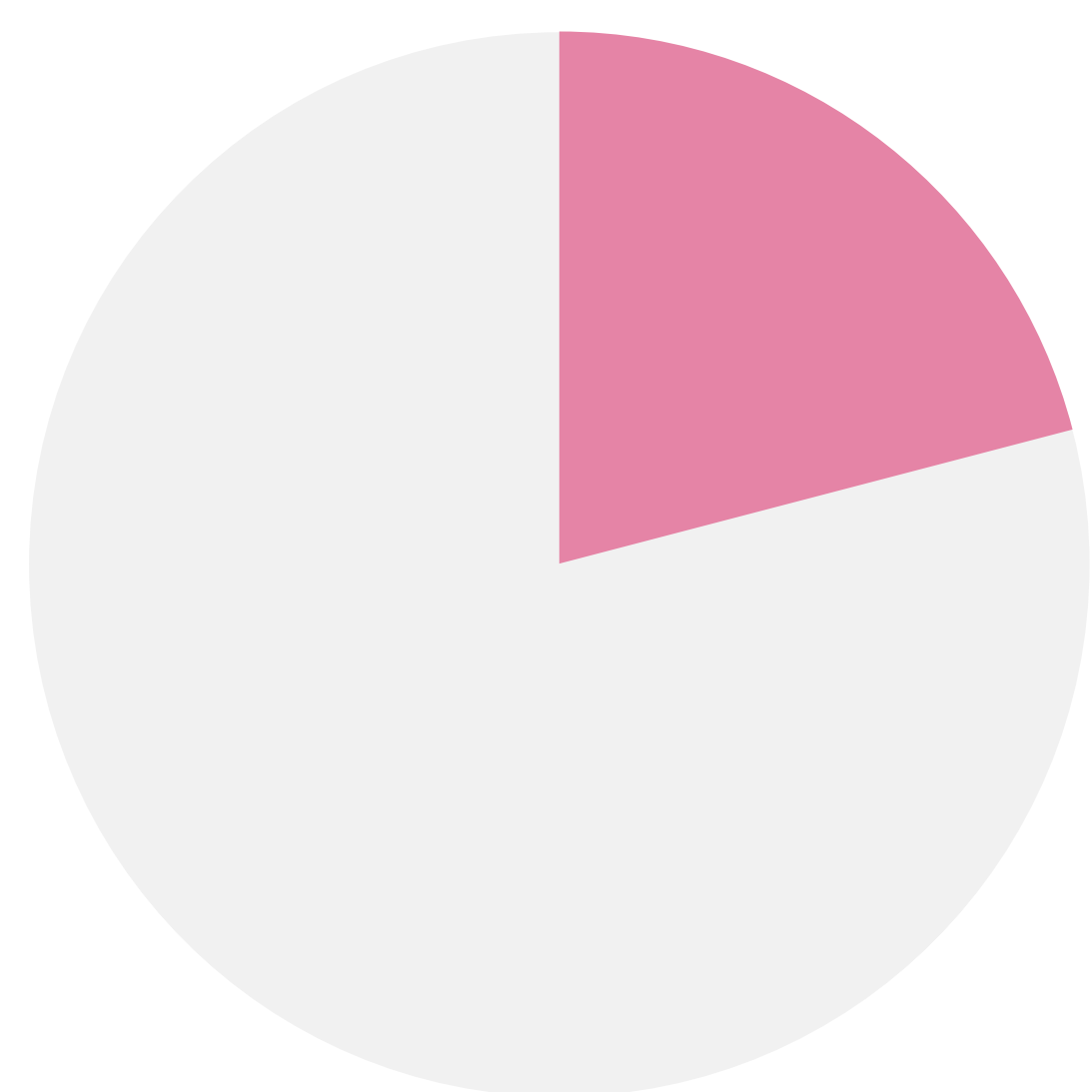
BOOMER

The children of the post-war baby boom comprise more than **69 million** Americans.^[1]

[1] "Resident population in the United States in 2019, by generation (in millions)," Statista, 2021.

Overview

Making up 21% of the population,^[2] baby boomers grew up in an age of change, witnessing the advent of the ZIP Code™ system, the heyday of mail-order catalogs and the invention of the internet.



21%

Baby Boomers make up 21% of the U.S. population^[3]

And today, they're a far cry from any stereotypes of a conventional, staid generation. In fact, many boomers are seeking adventure and new experiences, with more than one-third of them saying that they intend to travel in order to strike something off their "bucket list."^[4]

Baby Boomers at a Glance

56–75 years old in 2021

18% in retirement^[5]

77% own a home^[6]

85% use the internet^[7]

70% of disposable income in U.S.^[8]

YouTube & Facebook most used social media^[9]

[2] "Population distribution in the United States in 2019, by generation," Statista, 2021.

[3] Ibid.

[4] "Boomer travel: Targeting the 'most valuable generation,'" Circa 46, May 3, 2020.

[5] Richard Fry, "The pace of Boomer retirements has accelerated in the past year," Pew Research Center, Nov. 9, 2020.

[6] Rob Warnock, "Homeownership Rates by Generation: How Do Millennials Stack Up?" Apartment List, March 17, 2020.

[7] Emily A. Vogels, "Millennials stand out for their technology use, but older generations also embrace digital life," Pew Research Center, Sept. 9, 2020.

[8] Eric Roth, "What retailers must know about consumers over age 50 — Part 1," Digital Commerce 360, July 17, 2020.

[9] Jess Rozario-Ospino, "Where Your Audience Is Watching, Discovering, and Buying in 2020 [Infographic]," Animoto Blog, March 30, 2020.

To gain further insight into this generation’s specific habits, preferences and interactions, we surveyed baby boomers across the country, asking them about their personal experiences with direct mail marketing and online shopping.^[10]

This proprietary research uncovered a wealth of valuable insights—all of which can be used to help you better connect with boomers and set your business apart.

Baby Boomers and Direct Mail Marketing

More than any other generation, boomers say they would be very disappointed if they stopped getting mail, at 57%, compared to 45% of Gen X, 41% of millennials and 37% of Gen Z.

Boomers—and all generations—believe that mail brings a sense of daily discovery.

71% of boomers say that mail feels more personal than digital communications.
57% of boomers would be very disappointed if they didn't receive mail.

Discovery and Adventure

Boomers are adventurous.^[11]

TIP: Use this to your advantage by finding ways to delight and surprise your customers, whether with digital mail innovations, exclusive promos or eye-catching design.

Trust

Baby boomers are also the least likely to say that sorting through mail makes them anxious and stressed, with only 9% reporting such feelings versus 23% of Gen X, 34% of millennials and 27% of Gen Z.

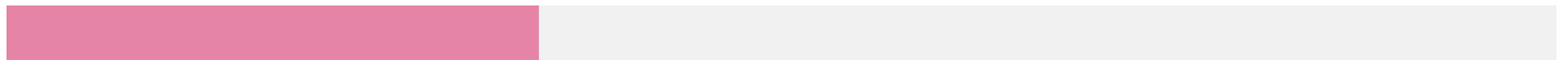
TIP: Boomers trust direct mail more than other marketing channels.^[12] This means you can be slightly more direct in your messaging: Rather than trying to convey why these customers should trust you, instead explain why they should respond to you.

[11] "Boomer travel: Targeting the 'most valuable generation,'" Circa 46, May 3, 2020.

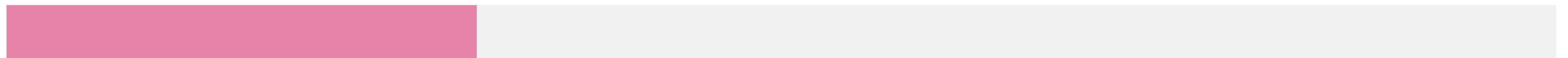
[12] "**DMA Insight: Channel Challenges Between Generations**," DMA, Jan. 25, 2021.

Promotional Communication Methods

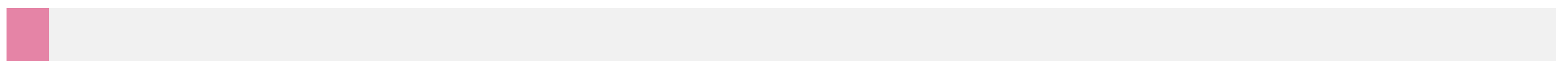
50% — Direct Mail



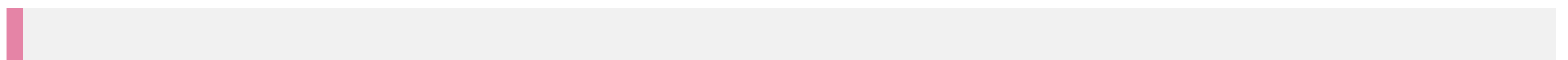
44% — Email



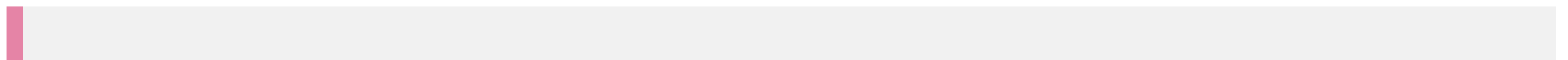
3% — App



3% — Text



1% — Online Pop-Up



More than any other generation, boomers prefer to read promotional deals and communications via direct mail rather than email. Depending on your target audience, this may mean that you use direct mail to send promos to your older customers, while using email or other digital channels for your younger customers.

Direct Mail / Categories

While levels of mail readership are fairly consistent across the generations, boomers receive more financial, food/beverage and political mail.

Categories of Marketing Mail Received

66%

Financial

66%

Political Ads

63%

Food/Beverage

52%

Utilities

44%

Home Improvement

41%

Apparel

39%

Automotive

32%

Health and Wellness

Direct Mail / Engagement

Boomers are the least likely to read political ads and the most likely to read bills.

TIP: Consider incorporating marketing materials into your boomer customers' statements and bills. You already know what your customers are subscribing to or purchasing, so try using personalized messaging that will speak to their unique preferences and needs.

Boomers' Engagement	Mail	Email
Bills/Statements	100%	98%
Promo Mail from Locally Owned Businesses	96%	85%
Promo Mail from Large National Businesses	92%	81%
Catalogs	89%	70%
Nonprofit Mailers	77%	62%
Political Ads	49%	42%

Compared to the younger generations, boomers are the most likely to read direct mail communications across most categories, with the exception of political ads and nonprofit mailers. However, they're the least likely to get a wide variety of marketing mail. In general, across the generations, mail is slightly more likely to be read than email.

Pro Insights and Tips

Expand each of the topics below to discover boomer-specific insights for direct mail design, direct mail deals, mail relevancy, and print and digital integration. General tips are also included throughout, so you can ensure your marketing efforts make an impact—no matter what generation you're targeting.

+ Direct Mail Design

Boomers are less likely than younger audiences to consider design elements in direct mail meaningful.

Boomers also care the least about seeing recycling information on their mail. But in general, they try to recycle as much as possible—nearly 23% more than all other age groups combined.

Boomers are almost 22% more likely than other age groups to find new products or services through catalogs. Use high-quality paper for your catalogs; this makes them more likely to be saved and read.

Pro Tips for Direct Mail Design

- Use higher-quality or thicker materials; these show that you've taken care to send out something special.
 - Use eye-catching colors and unique shapes that set your mailpieces apart.
 - Ensure ads are clear and easy to read so your message doesn't get lost.
-

+ Direct Mail Deals

The most effective element in marketing mail for boomers? Deals—whether in the form of discount codes, exclusive sales or coupons.

- **Cultivate customer loyalty** by including coupons or promos that are tailored to their needs. For example, you could include discounts for items they buy regularly, or for products that complement previous purchases.

Most Effective Elements in Direct Mail

89% — Deals

68% — Locally Owned Business

57% — New Information

52% — Personally Addressed with Name

47% — Easy-to-Find Branding

44% — Company's Contact Information

34% — Information Unique to Local Community

24% — Unique Size or Shape

24% — Large Text

14% — Thick Material/Paper

Along with Gen X, boomers are the most likely to take a closer look at mail from a local business.

- Remember, boomers have high buying power.^[13] If you can catch their attention by enticing them to support a locally owned business, you may be able to inch them closer to purchase.

Pro Tips for Direct Mail Deals

- Grab customers' attention with bold, easy-to-read deals.
- Consumers prefer exclusive direct mail deals—deals not offered via email or other channels. This helps make the mailpiece feel special and worth saving.
- A small discount may not be enough to move customers to act. Aim for at least a 20% discount.
- Consider your goals. Do you want customers to act immediately? A short-term offer can create a sense of urgency. Otherwise, deals should last long enough for customers to weigh their options.

[13] "Boomer travel: Targeting the 'most valuable generation,'" Circa 46, May 3, 2020.

Aside from the look and feel of the mailpiece, it's important to send out communications that will actually matter to your customers.

- Personalized messaging can mean the difference between a loss and a sale, so aim to send out tailored communications whenever possible. You can look at customer purchasing history, social media interaction and demographics to get a better idea of what will appeal to them.

+ Relevant Direct Mail

> **2/3** of boomers have a better impression of a brand that sends out relevant mail.

> **1/3** of boomers visited a brand's website after receiving relevant marketing mail.

Pro Tips for Relevant Direct Mail

- Consumers are more likely to look at mail from brands they've interacted with in the past.
- Think about what will be relevant to your customers. Boomers probably don't need ads for baby products, for example.
- In some industries, such as outdoor supplies, routine or seasonal mailings are expected.
- Pay attention to addresses and names; incorrectly addressed mail often gets ignored.

When it comes to mail frequency, it's all about balance—not too often to be annoying, but often enough to keep your brand top of mind.

+ Print & Digital Integration

Across all product/service categories, boomers are more likely to read communications received via direct mail than those received via email. They're also more likely than any other age group to read bills and statements sent via email.

Of all age groups, boomers are the least likely to prefer receiving deals via email.

Pro Tips for Print & Digital Integration

When creating omnichannel campaigns:

- Don't overdo it on the emails. Consumers say they receive them too often.
- Keep in mind that some customers get concerned about privacy when they receive emails about items they've viewed online.
- Make it easy for customers to explore your emails with clearly marked links.
- If you're looking to create a sense of urgency, consider using email. Customers perceive it as more time-sensitive than direct mail.

Digitally Enhanced Mail

Among all the generations, baby boomers are the least familiar with and least interested in **digital direct mail innovations**, including:

QR Codes[®]^[14]

Personalized URLs (PURLs)

Augmented reality (AR)

Virtual reality (VR)

Smart home-enabled features

Only 28% of boomers who are aware of VR have made use of it from a direct mailpiece. Among customers who are aware of these technologies, boomers use them the least.

More than any other age group, boomers expect **retargeted direct mail** to provide a better deal than what's offered in stores.

TIP: Make sure your retargeted direct mail offers something boomers won't find elsewhere, while using personalization to make them feel special in the process. Try offering a higher-than-usual discount to grab their attention, or a special promo code for a product line they buy from regularly.

Boomers and Informed Delivery

The baby boomer generation has the least awareness of the **Informed Delivery**[®] **feature**, at 54%. Of those boomers who are aware of it, 62% subscribe.

By far, they're the least likely to click on any included digital content within their Informed Delivery notifications.

Boomers' Informed Delivery Interactions

15% — Visit Website

12% — Click on Promo

12% — Click on Content

However, boomers who do subscribe to Informed Delivery alerts use it more than any other generation, at 83% (versus 79% of Gen X, 75% of millennials and 72% of Gen Z).

Baby Boomers and E-Commerce

90% of boomers have positive online ordering experiences—more than any other age group.

As with direct mail, the baby boomer generation appreciates e-commerce and makes use of it in their daily lives. In fact, more than any other generation, boomers say their e-commerce experiences are positive.

TIP: If you're hoping to garner more reviews or testimonials—and have an e-commerce platform in place you're proud of—boomers may be your ideal audience. Try asking some of your most loyal boomer customers to share their thoughts.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Online Shopping

More than any other generation, boomers said delivery to their home, monetary savings and convenience were the top drivers of online shopping. Boomers were the least likely to say that online shopping was more enjoyable than in-person, easier for buying bulk items and easier for restocking their household.

+ Benefits

In general, consumers feel e-commerce offers a range of benefits, including:

- Easier and faster than in-person shopping
- Easy to compare items
- Safer during COVID-19
- More payment options than in-person

+ Drawbacks

Across all age groups, the most commonly cited drawbacks of e-commerce include:

- Lack of tactile experience (e.g., can't touch items)
- Shipping delays
- Shipping costs
- Lack of in-person interaction and assistance

U.S.-Made Products

34% of baby boomers are buying more brands or products made in the U.S.^[15]

TIP: If your items are made in the U.S., make this known to your customers. Boomers have more spending power than any other age group and are one of the wealthiest generations to date.^[16] If they're moved by your commitment to U.S.-made products, they may be more likely to make a purchase.

[15] Generational direct mail and e-commerce research, GWI Q2 2021.

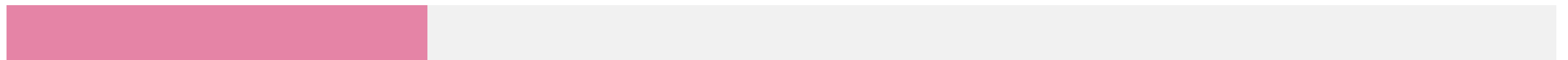
[16] "Boomer travel: Targeting the 'most valuable generation,'" Circa 46, May 3, 2020.

Boomers' Online Ordering Methods

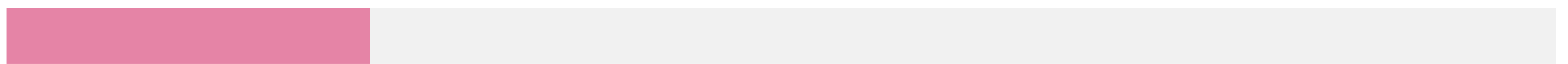
72% — Website via computer



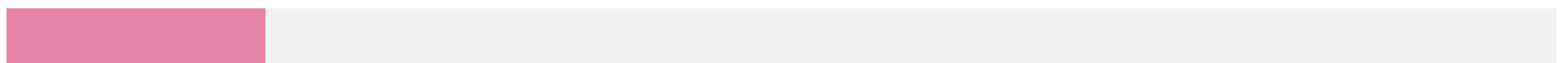
27% — Website via mobile device



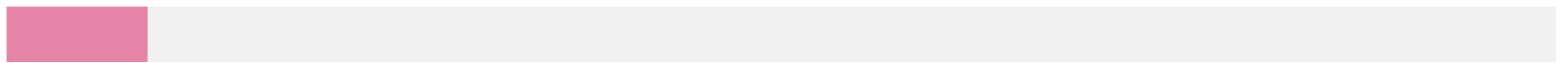
24% — App via mobile device



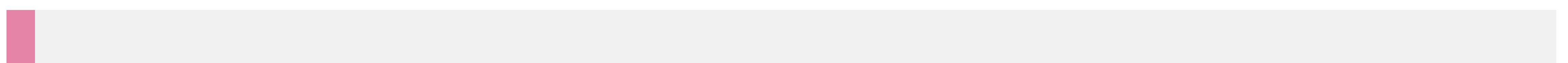
17% — Website via tablet



9% — App via tablet



2% — Smart home assistance



More than any other generation, boomers prefer to place online orders through a brand's website, using a computer.

Most Common Online Purchase Categories

Apparel — **53%**

Pet Products — **30%**

Food/Beverage — **29%**

Electronics — **27%**

Health and Wellness — **27%**

Cosmetics/Body Care — **26%**

Leisure/Entertainment — **26%**

As with the other age groups, boomers use e-commerce most often for clothing purchases. Across most other categories, though, they shop online less often than the younger generations.

Choosing an Online Retailer

When placing e-commerce orders, delivery speed trumps all, across the generations. Fifty-nine percent of boomers cite delivery speed as the most important factor when picking an online retailer. But free shipping and returns are close behind:

59% — Delivery speed

55% — Free shipping

42% — Free returns

Returns are trending up. Make sure you're **managing your reverse logistics processes strategically** to maintain efficiency while adding value for your customers.

Loyalty Programs

Loyalty programs, on the other hand, are less important to boomers than to other generations, with just 24% of boomers citing them as the most important factor when choosing an online retailer.

TIP: Only about 5% of advertising targets consumers over age 50, despite the fact that they spend more than other consumers in almost every product category.^[17] Don't waste the opportunity to earn this generation's loyalty.

Preferred Tracking and Delivery Options

While younger generations tend to turn to shippers' or retailers' apps, boomers are most likely to reference the shipper's website or look at the retailer's email updates to track their deliveries:

36% – Shipper's website

24% – Retailer's email update

Boomers agree with the younger generations that these are the two most important factors in creating a positive tracking experience:

74% – Receiving the expected delivery day and time

67% – Receiving delivery confirmation

But compared to the younger age groups, boomers care less about:

20% – Receiving an image of the delivery location

18% – Seeing how many stops are left on the delivery route

11% – Being able to reroute the delivery

9% – Accessibility to customer service via telephone for tracking purposes

Boomers, more than any other generation, say that receiving an alert when a package has shipped, in particular, helps create a positive experience.

+ **Pro Tips for Tracking and Delivery**

- Some consumers would like a choice in their carrier—especially if it means saving a little money.
- Customers like real-time, exact updates on their expected packages.
- Text notifications for shipping updates are appealing for their ease of use.
- Customer service should be easily accessible in case of questions or issues.

Taking No Action After a Delay

Boomers are the most likely to take no action in the event of delivery delays:

65% — Boomers

49% — Gen X

28% — Millennials

43% — Gen Z

Boomers are the most likely to have contacted a shipper about delays in the past. But now, they largely prefer to contact the seller directly.

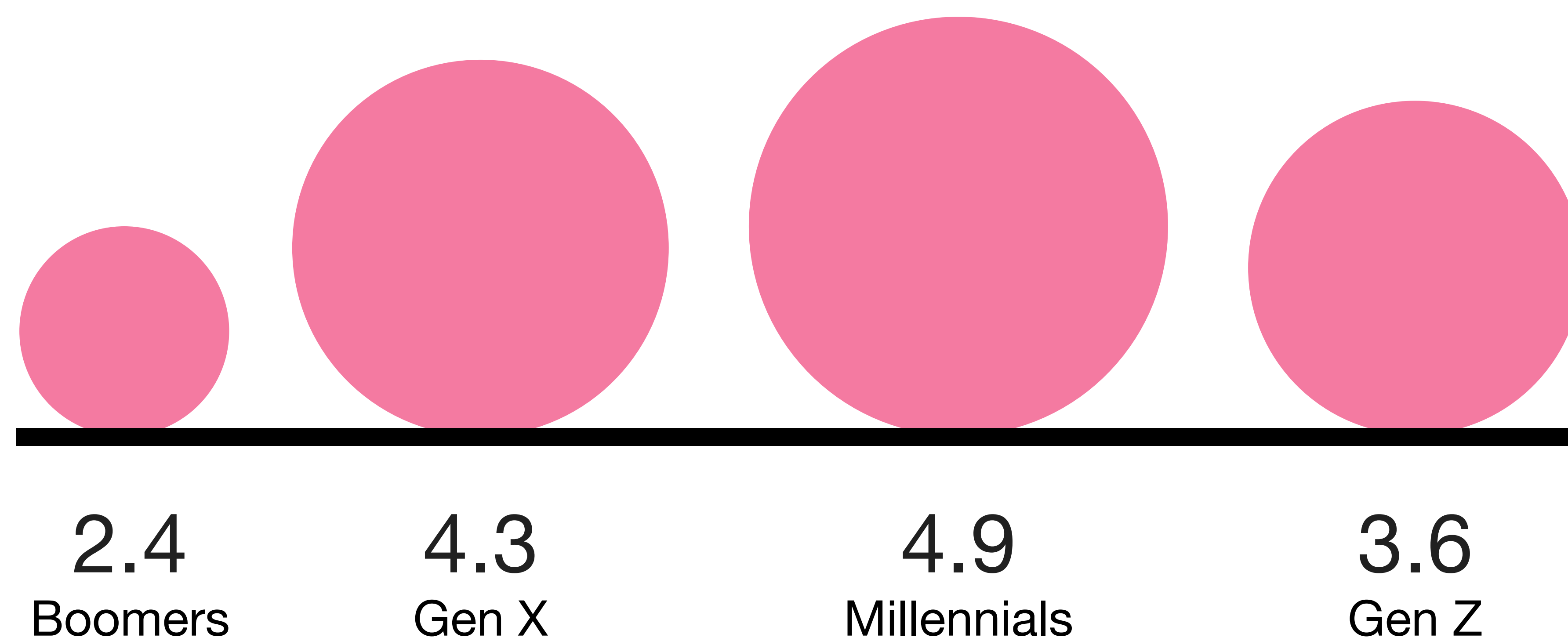
+ Pro Tips for Delivery Delays

- Consumers want to be notified of delivery delays as soon as possible.
- Despite delays, most customers will buy from a brand again if the communications are sufficient—especially boomers and Gen X.
- In the event of delays, customers generally consider the retailer’s customer service to be more helpful than the shipper’s.
- Consumers say they experience long delivery delays during the holidays.

Return Habits and Preferences

Of all the generations, baby boomers make the fewest returns:

Packages Returned Every 3 Months, on Average



Boomers are also the most likely to make returns via drop-off at a shipping carrier:

Consumers Who Drop Off Returns with Shipping Carrier

- 61% — Boomers
- 45% — Gen X
- 41% — Millennials
- 49% — Gen Z

Among all age groups, having a return label and easy-to-follow return instructions are most important—especially among boomers.

Easy returns can be a selling point. To help make the process as easy for you as it is for your customers, consider investing in **reverse logistics technologies** that can save both time and money.

Compared to the younger generations, boomers care less about choosing the shipping carrier and about tracking information being communicated via email or the retailer’s website.

USPS Returns®

Consumers like the idea of the at-home USPS return pickup service. But they have some questions about how it works:

- Boomers are most concerned about unneeded contact with the carrier.
- Boomers are less concerned than the younger generations about return items being stolen.

+ Pro Tips for Returns

- Most consumers expect returns to be free—and are disappointed when they’re not.
- Customers appreciate not having to supply their own box or print their own return label.
- Before checking out, customers often make sure that returns will be quick and easy.
- Consumers who make returns in-store often do so to get refunded faster.

Preferred Packaging Options

Among all generations, easy-to-open and reusable packaging has the strongest influence on customers' perception of a brand. Boomers are also the most likely to have a positive impression of a company as a result of the factors shown in the table below.

Packaging Factors That Create a Good Impression	Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
Easy-to-Open	65%	59%	54%	55%
Reusable	60%	48%	49%	46%
Specially Wrapped Items	52%	47%	42%	44%
Sustainable	48%	44%	47%	47%

Boomers are the least likely to be influenced by:

27% — Custom branding on the package

19% — Note inside the package

Only 17% of boomers would post an impressive-looking package on social media, compared to 58% of millennials.

+ Pro Tips for Packaging

- Customers notice when **care is taken in packaging**.
- They also appreciate when items are protected, whether with bubble wrap or other materials.
- Unique touches—like free samples or discounts for future purchases—can help your brand stand out.
- Sustainable packaging is appreciated but not a priority.

Boomers and Online Holiday Shopping

After the COVID-related surge in March 2020, online shopping increased even more during the winter holidays. Boomers were the least likely to have increased their online holiday shopping in the 2020 season from the 2019 season, but were the most likely to focus on early sales and deals.

Boomers' Holiday Shopping Behavior

Among all the generations, baby boomers were the least likely to:

- Look for coupons/discounts
- Depend more on online shopping to deliver holiday gifts
- Notice more sales and deals than in the 2019 season
- Shop more online due to concerns about the presidential election

In addition, boomers were the least likely to start holiday shopping earlier, because of:

- Uncertainty about when or if holiday gatherings would occur
- Fewer store-to-store visits and more online purchases, allowing for faster shopping
- Expectations of satisfactory shipping options for online orders

They were also the least likely to shop at more small businesses during the 2020 season, due to:

- Limited hours of operation because of COVID restrictions
- Concern about COVID exposure in stores, especially smaller stores
- Limited online presence or no curbside pickup options
- Few local or small retailer options nearby
- Smaller assortment of products

Boomers were the most concerned about COVID-19 safety, and therefore were the least likely to shop or browse in-store.

TIP: Make your retail locations as welcoming to boomers as possible. They appreciate cleanliness, wide aisles and organization when shopping in person.^[18] So make sure your stores are safe, welcoming and easy to navigate.

Holiday Shipping Delays

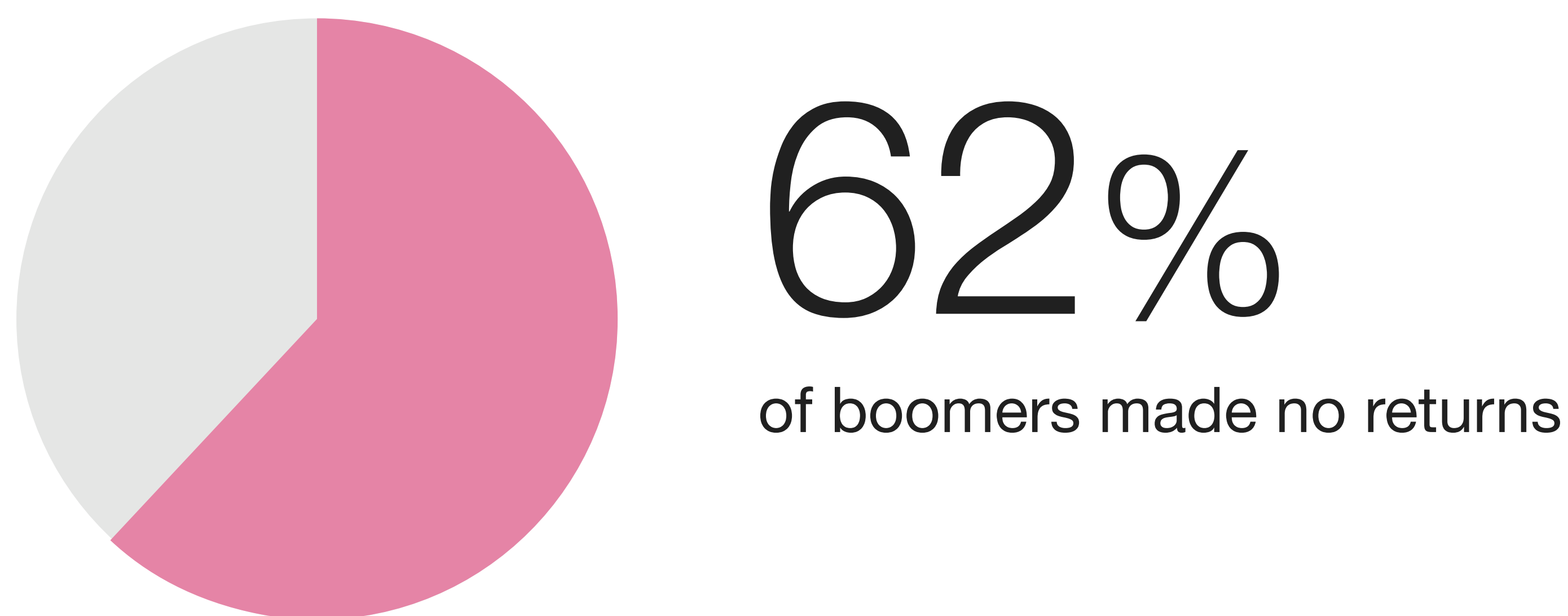
Nearly 40% of consumers said they experienced more shipping delays during the 2020 holiday season.

But compared to the younger age groups, boomers were by far the least likely to notice holiday shipping delays:

2020 vs. 2019 Online Shipping Delays	Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
No Delays	45%	25%	15%	19%
Fewer Delays	5%	8%	16%	11%
Same Amount of Delays	18%	27%	26%	32%
More Delays	32%	40%	43%	38%

Online Holiday Shopping Returns

The boomer generation was the least likely to make more returns than in the 2019 holiday season:



Boomers were also least likely to avoid making returns:

Avoided Holiday Returns Due to Inability to Physically Return Item

58% of boomers disagreed

40% of Gen X disagreed

26% of millennials disagreed

31% of Gen Z disagreed

Avoided Holiday Returns Due to Return Shipping Fees

57% of boomers disagreed

34% of Gen X disagreed

32% of millennials disagreed

34% of Gen Z disagreed

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Boomers feel that mail brings a sense of daily discovery, and they'd be very disappointed if they stopped receiving it.

Boomers are the least familiar with and least interested in digital direct mail innovations.

Easy-to-open, reusable packaging is very important to boomers.

Boomers are concerned about COVID-19 safety when shopping in-store.

Boomers consider home delivery, time savings and convenience the most important factors when shopping online.



GEN X

The 65 million U.S. residents now navigating middle age.

Overview

Comprised of nearly 65 million people in the United States who were born between 1965 and 1980, Gen X is the notorious middle child of the larger boomer and millennial generations—and the bridge between their varying behaviors and preferences.^[1]



19%

Just over 19% of
the U.S. population

Gen X at a Glance

41–56 years old in 2021

67% own a home^[2]

Most likely to be a **caregiver** for a parent or child^[3]

Highest post-tax incomes, outspending millennials and baby boomers by 41% and 18%, respectively^[4]

Follow brands they like on Facebook and YouTube^[5]

[1] “Resident population in the United States in 2019, by generation (in millions),” Statista, 2021.

[2] Rob Warnock, “Homeownership Rates by Generation: How Do Millennials Stack Up?” Apartment List, March 17, 2020.

[3] Ada Calhoun, “**Gen-X Women Are Caught in a Generational Tug-of-War**,” The Atlantic, Jan. 7, 2020.

[4] Stephanie Horan, CEPF®, “**How Different Generations Spend Money**,” SmartAsset, Jan. 16, 2020.

[5] Jess Rozario-Ospino, “Where Your Audience Is Watching, Discovering, and Buying in 2020 [Infographic],” Animoto Blog, March 30, 2020.

Without a doubt, Gen X is busy. They are at the height of their careers, most of them own homes, and they are raising their own families while often caring for aging parents. How can you get their attention?

To learn more, we surveyed Gen Xers across the country, asking them about their personal experiences with direct mail marketing and online shopping.^[6]

This proprietary research uncovered a wealth of valuable insights—all of which can be used to help you better connect with the Gen X audience and set your business apart.

Gen X and Direct Mail Marketing

Gen X grew up receiving pen pal letters, birthday cards and college acceptance packages. Mail was truly a thrill. The research shows it still plays an important role for this group.

The Power of Mail

70% are excited to discover what the mail brings every day.
45% say they'd be very disappointed to no longer receive mail.

Gen Xers are more likely to read direct mail items before throwing them away than similar emails.

“I look forward to seeing the coupons and deals offered in the mail.”

71% of respondents in Gen X feel mail is more personal than online digital communications.

- Are more likely to read promotional mail than emails
- Have very limited interest in receiving deals via an app or text
- Feel emails from retailers come too frequently—they set many to spam or quickly delete, unless they're looking for a certain offer

Direct Mail / Mail Engagement

Gen X can be harder to reach via traditional broadcast media, so their affinity for mail can play a critical role in connecting with this target.

Gen X Engagement with Direct Mail

Bills/Statements	98%
Promo Mail from Locally Owned Businesses	92%
Promo Mail from Large National Businesses	90%
Catalogs	86%
Nonprofit Mailers	76%
Political Ads	60%

Overall, Gen X receives more financial, food and beverage, and political marketing mail than younger consumers, and only around a third indicate receiving mail about electronics, cosmetics/beauty, travel and pet products.

Most Effective Elements in Direct Mail for Gen X

76% — Deals

56% — New Information

53% — Locally Owned Business

51% — Easy-to-Find Branding

50% — Personally Addressed with Name

48% — Company's Contact Information

38% — Information Unique to Local Community

31% — Unique Size or Shape

26% — Large Text

23% — Thick Material/Paper

Gen X, like most consumers, expects to see deals in direct mail. They also find promotional items from locally owned businesses important.

Discounts can play an important role in helping Gen X tackle their many responsibilities.^[7] To motivate them the most, however, the deals must stand out.

- Prominent placement
- Exclusive (not offered online)
- Compelling discounts (at least 20%)

+ **Pro Tips for Direct Mail**

Unique design, material and formats get noticed.

- Eye-catching colors and unique shapes stand out.
- Surprise elements such as a special gift can create excitement.
- Less clutter and a simple read imply a better retailer.
- Catalogs with higher paper quality are more likely to be kept and read.

+ **Pro Tips for Integrating Print & Digital**

To best connect with Gen X, integrate direct mail marketing with digital and other communications. Consumers point out particular benefits of email that include:

- It's easy to click on email links to explore products and offers.
- Email creates a sense of urgency, and offers can feel more time-sensitive.

Remembering their desire for an easy call to action and quick access to additional content can be used to your advantage in a multichannel effort.

Smart Targeting Is Key

All shoppers say they scan mail quickly, looking for relevant direct mail.

More than two-thirds of Gen X consumers are likely to have a positive impression of a company that sends out relevant marketing mail.

- The key to earning Gen X's trust is being honest, transparent and relevant.
- Be informative, but to the point.

Gen X is more likely than both Gen Z and boomers to visit a company's website after receiving relevant mail.

Generation X and Technology

Gen X came of age before the internet, email, cell phones and online shopping existed as a normal part of life. Yet this group has easily adopted new technology and shares many behaviors with younger, digitally native consumers.

In fact, 96% of Gen X own a smartphone, and it has become the primary device they use to access the internet.^[8]

Awareness of Mail Innovations	Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
QR Code ^[9]	62%	67%	66%	66%
Personalized URL	32%	42%	50%	46%
Smart Home-Enabled Feature	12%	24%	32%	24%
Virtual/Augmented Reality	7%	21%	28%	22%

Among those aware of personalized URLs, Gen X has used them the most.

Only 45% of Gen X consumers are aware they have received retargeted direct mail—but after learning how it works, this group is one of the most likely to open and enjoy receiving a personalized marketing piece.

Not surprisingly, all consumers expect retargeted mail to offer a better deal than what is offered in stores.

[8] GWI Core Q1 2021.

[9] QR Code is a registered trademark of DENSO WAVE INCORPORATED.

Gen X and Informed Delivery

Awareness of the **USPS Informed Delivery[®] feature** is high among Gen X, at 65%. Of those who are aware, a large number subscribe compared to other generations.

79% of Informed Delivery subscribers within Gen X use the feature more than once a week—many of them check their mail with it daily.

Informed Delivery Interactions

44% — Visit Website

45% — Click on Promo

41% — Click on Content

+ Pro Tips for Incorporating Technology

It's worth noting, 60% of Gen Xers prefer video when learning about a new brand or product.^[10] This presents a unique opportunity to incorporate **direct mail innovations** to connect with this target.

- Gen X also likes a call to action that's easy to spot and gives them quick access to online materials. Consider QR Codes with this audience.^[11]

Gen X and E-Commerce

Some of the most eagerly anticipated mail deliveries are packages from online orders. E-commerce is at an all-time high, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gen X enjoys online ordering and cites a range of benefits that make it a mostly positive experience.

More than other groups, Gen X says they shop online to save time.

Benefits of Ordering Online

- Easy, less hassle, saves time
- Easier to compare products and prices across sites
- Safer during COVID
- More payment options

Challenges of Ordering Online

- Miss the tactile experience
- Shipping costs and delays
- Miss the personal attention of in-store

E-Commerce / Online Ordering

As noted earlier, Gen X is busy juggling a lot of responsibilities, balancing family, life and work. This may be why Gen X in particular ranks time savings as a top reason for shopping online, as well as the convenience of home delivery.

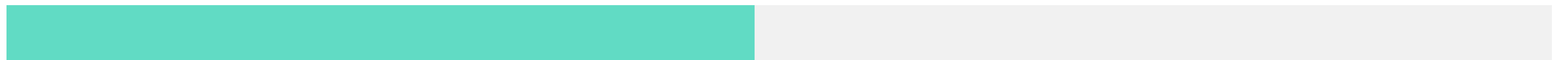
- The easier and more efficient you can make an experience, the better. Keep communications short, practical and impactful without requiring too much of their time.

Gen X Online Ordering Method

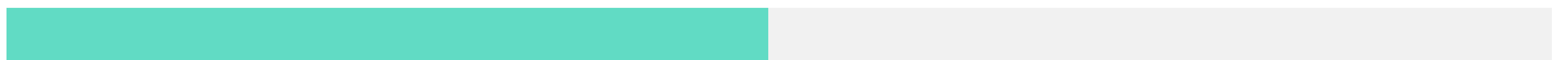
62% — Website via computer



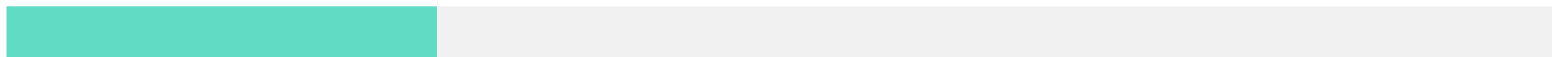
48% — Website via mobile device



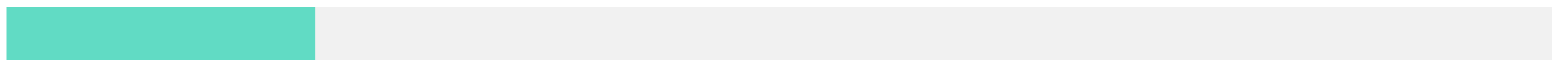
49% — App via mobile device



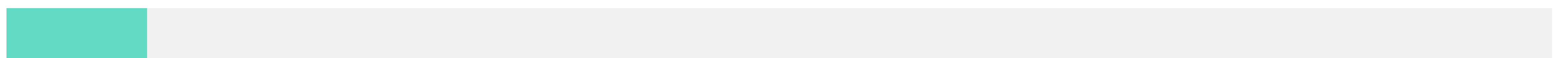
27% — Website via tablet



20% — App via tablet



9% — Smart home assistance



Gen X's most common online purchase is apparel, and they report making more pet product purchases than all other age groups.

Gen X Packaging Preferences

Gen X likes when a company puts thought into preparing their items for shipment.

59% enjoy easy-to-open packaging.

47% like specially wrapped items inside the package.

39% notice when a merchant provides custom branded packaging.

Sustainability is nice, but not a top priority.

Special touches that stand out:

- Nice tissue
- Plenty of packing bubbles
- Thank you notes
- Free samples
- Tied with a bow or somehow nicely enclosed

Consumers like extra effort and feel **thoughtfully designed packaging** makes a product worth a bit of extra cost.

However, in this instance Gen X resembles boomers—they aren't very likely to post about an impressive shipment on social media.

Consumer Delivery Expectations

The most important factor to Gen X when ordering online: delivery speed, followed by free shipping and easy returns.

Gen X mostly prefers to track their online orders via the shipping provider's website. They do, however, join millennials and Gen Z in being more likely to use a shipper or retailer's app to track a purchase.

Given that Gen Xers love transparency, receiving their delivery when expected is the most important factor in a positive tracking experience. Gen X again joins younger consumers in also caring about factors such as:

- Receiving an image of where package was delivered
- Seeing how many stops are left on the delivery route
- Accessibility to customer service via phone to track a package
- Being able to reroute a package

Gen X is not very likely to contact a retailer or shipper in the event of a delay. They're also the most willing to order from a retailer again after experiencing a shipping delay. (Some younger consumers said they would not.)

**A quarter of Gen X respondents have rerouted a package.
The main reasons why:**

- 46%** — A gift for someone
- 36%** — Unavailable to receive delivery
- 35%** — Risk of package left unattended/stolen

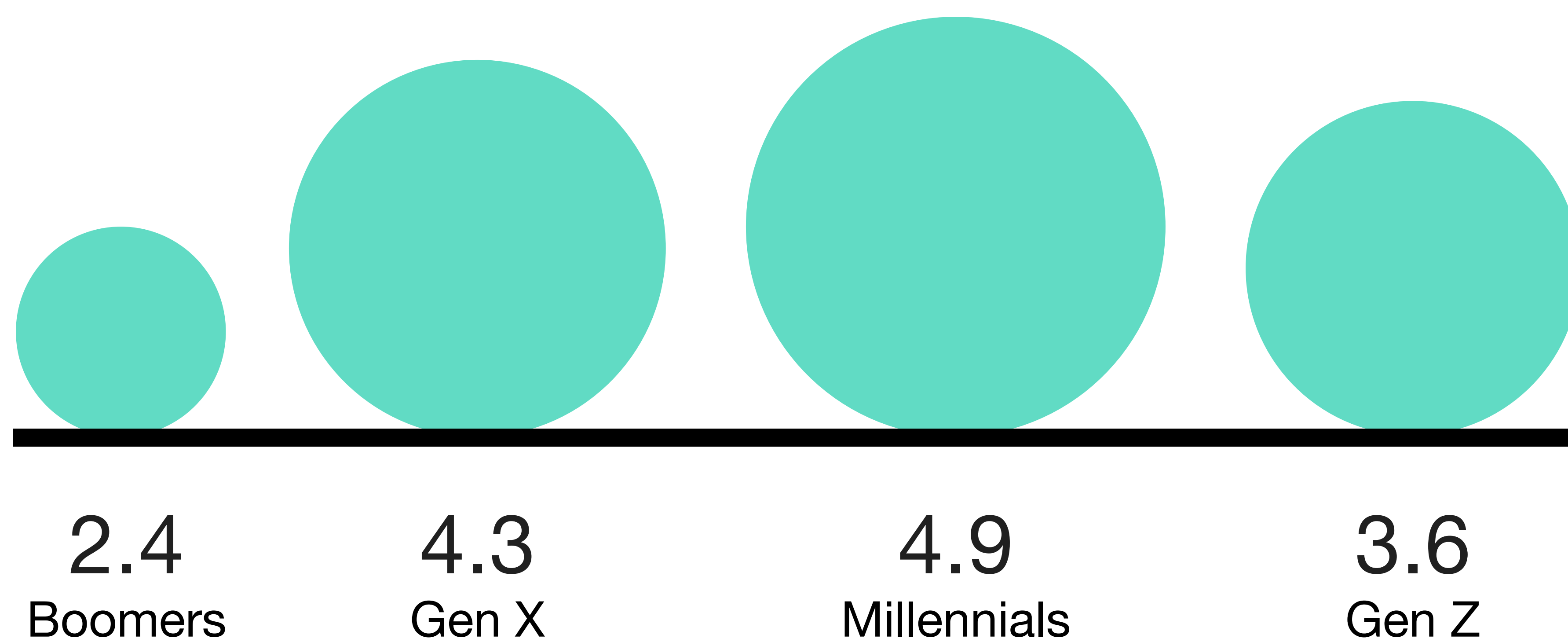
+ **Pro Tips for Online Tracking**

- Customers want real-time, exact status updates.
- They like to check to see progress being made.
- Updates via text notifications are appealing for their ease of use.
- If there is an issue, consumers want to be notified as soon as possible, and customer service should be easily accessible.

Importance of Easy Returns

Gen X returned 4.3 packages over three months, among the highest on average.

Packages Returned Every 3 Months, on Average



They are most likely to drop a return off with a shipping carrier instead of requesting a pickup or returning directly to the merchant.

What can a retailer offer to help with a return? Gen X wants to see:

- **Free returns**
- A return label with preselected shipping provider included with order
- Return packaging and materials included
- Convenient drop-off location
- Easy-to-follow shipping instructions
- Notification when merchant receives the return

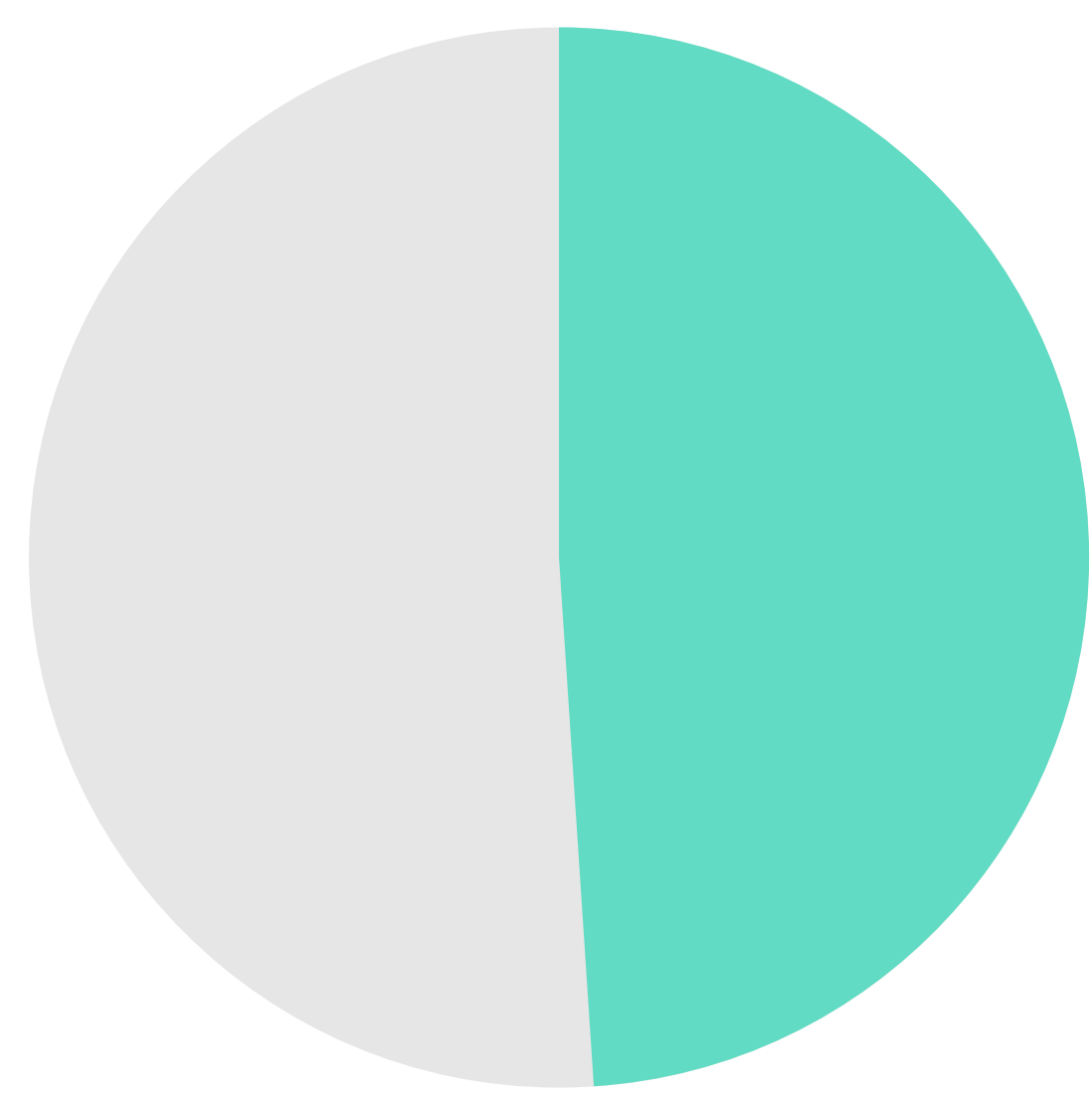
USPS Returns[®]

Consumers often check to make sure returns will be easy and convenient prior to purchasing. When asked about at-home pickup service, many expressed interest but have questions about how it works.

Gen X and millennials are most concerned about a return package being stolen.

Gen X and Online Holiday Shopping

Profoundly impacted by COVID-19, retail shopping shifted largely online during the 2020 holiday season.



49%

of Gen X reported doing more online holiday shopping this year than last.

While consumers ordered online in 2020 to avoid crowds or work around limited store hours and inventory, some admit they had already been shifting a large amount of their holiday shopping online in recent years.

Holiday shoppers were more mindful of:

- Price comparisons and finding the best deals
- Return policies
- Shipping costs and shipping speed

Like all consumers this year, Gen X did notice some shipping delays during the holidays, but most said they experienced the same, fewer or no delays.

Despite making more returns on average during the year, Gen X was actually least likely to make holiday returns.

- 37% of Gen X consumers said they did not make a return during the holidays because of return shipping fees.
- 32% avoided making returns because they couldn't physically take the item to a retailer.

+ **Pro Tips for Holiday E-Commerce**

- Holiday shoppers have gotten into the practice of comparing items across multiple sites looking for the best deal and fastest delivery timing.
- Shoppers are starting earlier, noticing more and better deals.
- Free shipping is expected, and some shoppers will abandon their cart or change to store pickup if they don't like the shipping charge.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Direct mail is an effective way to get Gen X's attention and increase purchase interest.

Gen X is family-focused and has a huge amount of purchasing power.

Many of the behaviors that increased during COVID-19 are predicted to stick around, especially online ordering, the need for convenience, and a focus on deals and value.

Gen X is just as interested in new technologies and mail innovations as younger generations.

Gen X makes the most returns and needs the process to be easy.



MILLENNIAL

Comprised of more than 72 million Americans,^[1] millennials are the nation's largest living adult population.^[2]

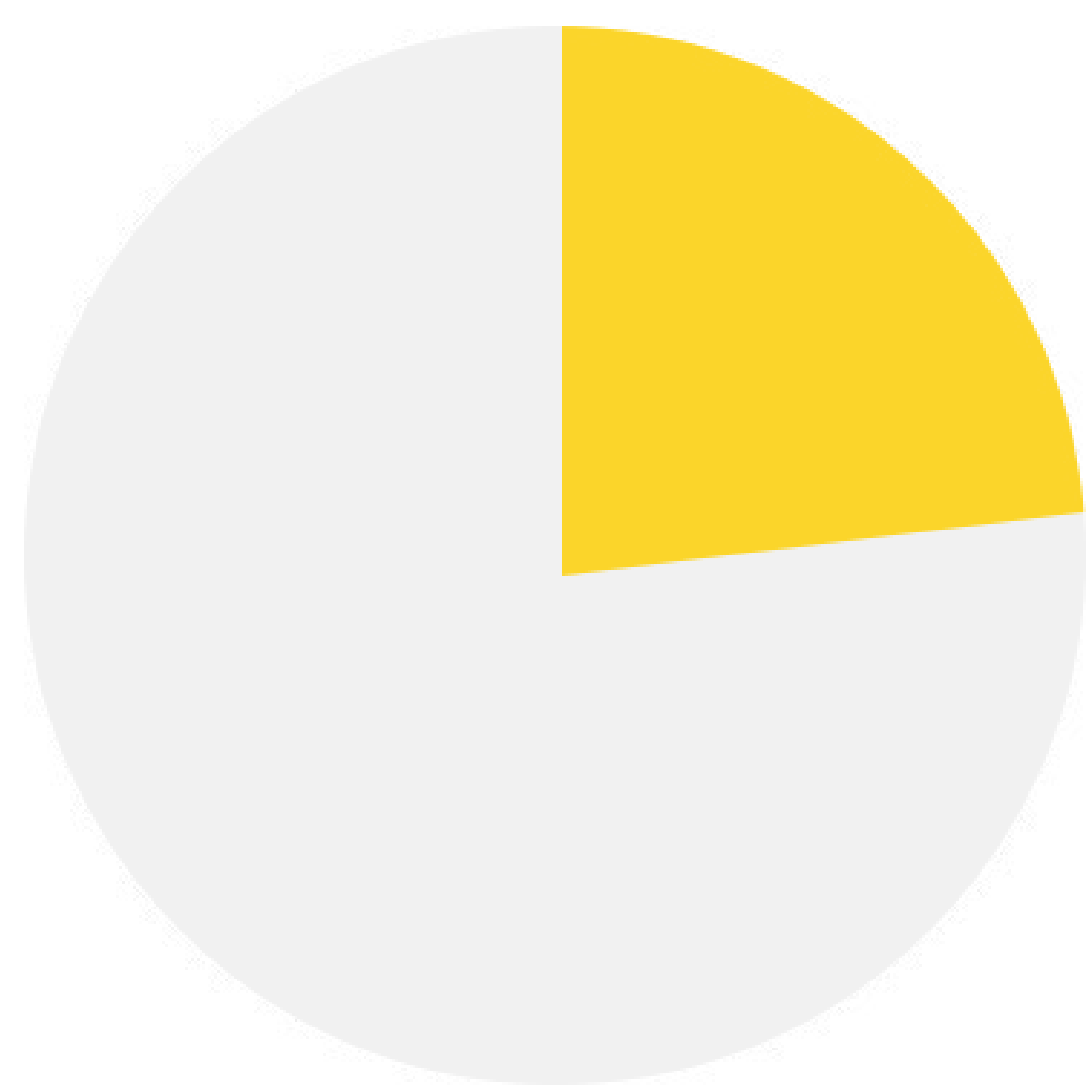
[1] "Population distribution in the United States in 2019, by generation," Statista, Jan. 20, 2021.

[2] Richard Fry, "Millennials overtake Baby Boomers as America's largest generation," Pew Research Center, April 28, 2020.

Overview

The children of baby boomers and older Gen Xers, millennials came of age in a time of disruption—marked by economic recession, technological innovation and political unrest.

Growing up during the invention of smartphones and the widespread adoption of the internet, millennials are comfortable using digital direct mail innovations, and shop online frequently. But they're also embracing print ads,^[3] and shop in-person more than the older generations.^[4]



22%

Millennials make up nearly 22% of the U.S. population^[5]

Often discussed, sometimes maligned, the millennial generation has been the center of conversation for years—though now, as Gen Z comes of age, businesses are increasingly turning their focus to these younger consumers. But millennials still represent the largest-ever group of U.S. consumers.^[6]

[3] Joe Mandese, "Havas Media Study Finds Millennials 'Embracing' Radio, Print Because Of COVID-19," Media Post, April 27, 2020.

[4] "Consumers who shop at least once a week in brick and mortar stores in the U.S. in 2018, by generation," Statista, Nov. 27, 2020.

[5] "Resident population in the United States in 2019, by generation (in millions)," Statista, Jan. 20, 2021.

[6] "Who Are Millennials? — Homeownership Demographic Research," Freddie Mac, 2021.

Millennials at a Glance

24–40 years old in 2021

Ethics & authenticity are key in choosing brands^[7]

43% own a home^[8]

Nearly 100% use the internet^[9]

67% say finances are a frequent worry^[10]

YouTube & Facebook most used social media^[11]

To learn more about how this generation interacts with direct mail and e-commerce, USPS conducted a comprehensive study of U.S. millennials, asking them about their experiences, habits and preferences around direct mail marketing and online shopping.^[12]

The research revealed many valuable, actionable insights, which we've compiled below for easy reference as you shape your campaigns and operations to best meet your millennial customers' needs.

[7] Leong Jen, "CSR and Ethical Marketing to the Millennial Generation," Lewis, Feb. 25, 2020.

[8] Rob Warnock, "Homeownership Rates by Generation: How Do Millennials Stack Up," Apartment List, March 17, 2020.

[9] Emily A. Vogels, "Millennials stand out for their technology use, but older generations also embrace digital life," Pew Research Center, Sept. 9, 2019.

[10] "Survey Finds Financial Stress High Among Millennials, Gen Z," PYMNTS.com. June 25, 2020.

[11] Jess Rozario-Ospino, "Where Your Audience Is Watching, Discovering, and Buying in 2020 [Infographic]," Animoto, March 30, 2020.

[12] USPSDelivers.com Research — Full Report, Qualitative and Quantitative Results, Summit Research, February 2021.

Millennials and Direct Mail Marketing

Out of all the generations, millennials—also known as Gen Y—have the strongest opinions and feelings about direct mail. For example, more than any other age group, they believe that mail brings a sense of daily discovery and look forward to seeing what deals or coupons are being offered.

They're also more likely than any other generation to say that mail:

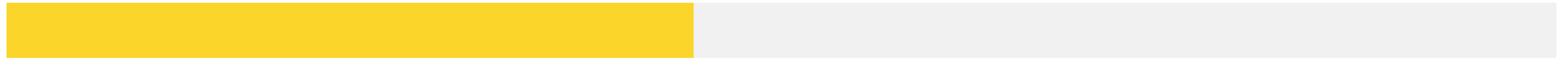
- Provides useful information
- Keeps them up to date on products and services
- Feels more secure than online digital communications
- Makes them more interested in a brand's products or services
- Makes them inclined to purchase when a product is advertised

Despite their positive attitude toward direct mail, millennials are also the most likely to say that sorting through it makes them anxious or stressed.

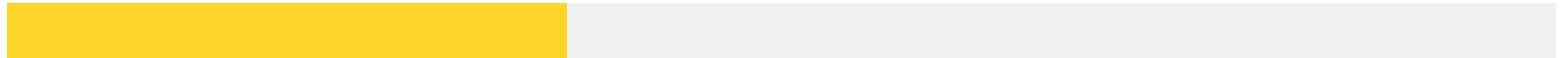
TIP: Make sure your mailpieces are easy to read and pleasing to look at—even if you're sending an invoice or bills. Keep copy simple and conversational, and don't overwhelm your customers with flashy or loud design.

Promotional Communication Methods

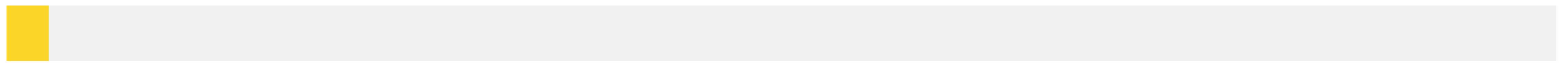
49% — Email



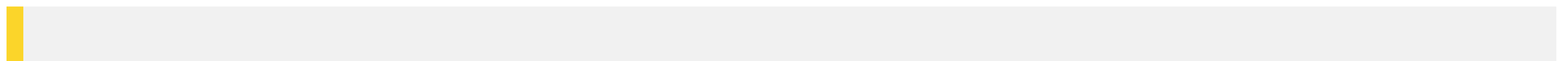
32% — Direct Mail



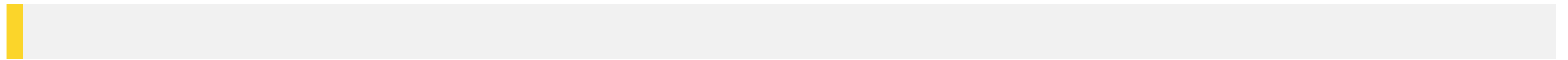
8% — App



6% — Text



5% — Online Pop-Up



More than any other generation, millennials prefer to receive promotional deals via email.

TIP: Combining email and direct mail marketing through the **Informed Delivery[®] feature** can help keep your brand top of mind and encourage customers to act. This allows customers to receive a digital preview of their mailpieces before they arrive, along with any additional content, such as digital coupons, that you want to include.^[13]

And while levels of interest in receiving promos via app, text or digital pop-up are fairly low across the generations, millennials are more likely than any other age group to prefer app-based deals.

[13] Exterior images are only provided for letter-size mailpieces that are processed through USPS' automated equipment. Package tracking information on Priority Mail[®], Priority Mail Express[®] and other trackable parcels is also provided.

Direct Mail / Categories

Levels of mail readership are relatively consistent across different age groups. But millennials are the most likely to receive mail from health and wellness brands.

Categories of Marketing Mail Received

53%

Financial

48%

Political Ads

55%

Food/Beverage

51%

Utilities

38%

Home Improvement

44%

Apparel

36%

Automotive

41%

Health and Wellness

Across generations, the top categories are financial, food and beverage, and political ads, though millennials are more likely than the older generations to receive a wide variety of marketing mail.

Direct Mail / Engagement and Effectiveness

Across all generations, deals are the most effective element in direct mail. Millennials, however, are the most likely to be directly motivated by a mailpiece—whether that means making a purchase or sharing the information provided with someone else.

Millennials are most likely to visit a website, go to a physical location and share information with others after receiving direct mail. In fact, they're the most likely to take action of any kind:

Actions Taken in Past 3 Months When Receiving Relevant Mail	Total	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Went to a company's website	42%	38%	47%	43%	39%
Learned something new about a product, service or company	29%	23%	28%	28%	24%
Went to a company's physical location to shop	26%	23%	28%	21%	8%
Shared the information with someone	23%	31%	36%	28%	20%
Made a purchase after seeing an item in a mailpiece	21%	25%	27%	22%	15%
Went to a company's app	20%	21%	25%	24%	13%
Made a purchase after receiving a reminder in the mail	19%	19%	24%	19%	12%
Took no action	21%	20%	16%	20%	27%

Millennials are also the most likely to consider mail effective if it includes information unique to their community. Along with Gen Z, however, they're the least likely to find mail from a locally owned business effective. But that doesn't mean they won't read it: 93% of millennials read mail from local brands.

Millennials' Engagement	Mail	Email
Bills/Statements	97%	95%
Promo Mail from Locally Owned Businesses	93%	86%
Promo Mail from Large National Businesses	90%	86%
Catalogs	87%	76%
Nonprofit Mailers	78%	70%
Political Ads	63%	60%

Young millennials are politically engaged and hopeful about the state of the country.^[14] It follows, then, that millennials are more likely than any other age group to read nonprofit and political mail.

Across all categories, the millennial generation is more likely to read marketing communications via direct mail than they are via email—and in general, all types of mail are slightly more likely to be read than email.

[14] Zoe Greenberg, "Young people are politically engaged, pro-Biden, and depressed, study finds," Boston Globe, April 24, 2021.

Pro Insights and Tips

Expand the topics below to explore expert tips on direct mail design, direct mail deals, mail relevancy, and print and digital integration. Drawn from the proprietary research, these best practices apply across generations. You'll also find some millennial-specific advice throughout.

+ Direct Mail Design

Design elements—like mailpiece size, shape, text and material—are more important to millennials and Gen Z than to the older generations.

Pro Tips for Direct Mail Design

- Use thicker, higher-quality materials to show that you're investing in your brand—and in your customers.
 - Consider using bold colors and unique shapes to help set you apart.
 - Incorporate surprise elements (like free gifts) to create excitement.
 - Keep your messaging simple and easy to read.
-

+ Direct Mail Deals

We already know that deals are the most effective element in direct mail marketing—no matter what age group you're targeting. But to truly capture customers' attention and encourage them to make a purchase, it's important to keep some best practices in mind.

Pro Tips for Direct Mail Deals

- Make sure the deal itself is prominent and easy to read, so customers don't miss it.
- Try including exclusive direct mail deals—those not also available online or via email—to make the mailpiece feel special.
- Include a discount that's big enough to entice people—ideally at least 20% off.
- Try not to include deals that expire in the near future, unless you're specifically looking to create a real sense of urgency.

+ Relevant Direct Mail

Nearly 70% of millennials have a better impression of companies that send out relevant marketing mail than ones that don't.

To keep your brand top of mind, it's important to strike the right balance—sending out mail often enough for customers to remember you, but not so often that your mailpieces become annoying or overwhelming.

Pro Tips for Relevant Direct Mail

- Keep your customer in mind. Millennials aren't likely to find much value in mailpieces about retirement destinations, for example.
- Try to create mailpieces that speak to customer needs, taking into account their shopping behavior and overall interests.
- Consumers expect to receive some mailpieces seasonally. Ski lodges, for instance, routinely send out direct mail ahead of the peak winter season.
- Check addresses and names carefully. Customers tend to ignore mail with errors.
- Consumers are more likely to look at mail from companies they've done business with in the past.

TIP: Every Door Direct Mail® campaigns can help you target customers strategically, based on their geographic location. If you want to get the word out about a new retail location, for example, you can send out mail only to specific nearby postal routes.

+ **Print & Digital Integration**

Out of all the generations, millennials are the most open to receiving deals via email or an app, so use this to your advantage—combining digital and physical communications to create engaging **omnichannel campaigns**.

To ensure you hit the right note, keep these tips in mind when sending out marketing emails:

Pro Tips for Print & Digital Integration

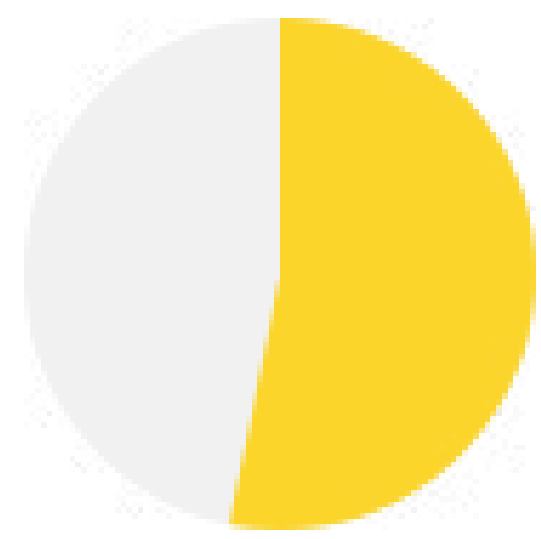
- Consumers say they receive marketing emails too often, so don't overdo it.
- Keep privacy concerns in mind; some customers find it creepy to get emails about products they've browsed online.
- Include easy-to-click links that make it easy for customers to explore further.
- If you're looking to create a sense of urgency—such as for a time-sensitive offer or event announcement—emails are preferable to direct mail marketing.

Millennials and Eco-Friendliness

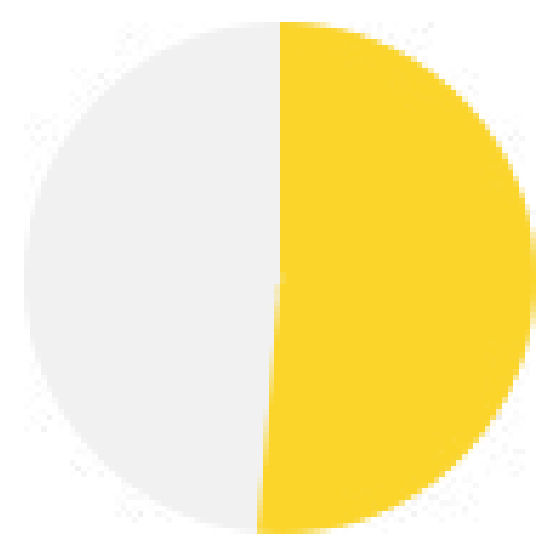
About six in 10 consumers recycle their mail and believe it's important to see recycling information printed on mailpieces.

Millennials, along with Gen X, are the most likely to actively recycle and think that direct-mail recycling information is important.

TIP: Aside from using eco-friendly mail materials, think about other ways you can help set your brand apart when marketing to millennials. Along with Gen Z, millennial consumers believe that **brands have a responsibility to help make the world a better place**. Three-quarters even say they actively seek out brands that support the causes they believe in.^[15]



64% of all consumers
Actively recycle their mail



62% of all consumers
Believe it's important to see recycling info on their mail

Digitally Enhanced Mail

Millennials have the highest awareness of—and interest in—digital direct mail innovations:

Awareness of Technology	Total	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
QR Code® [16]	65%	65%	66%	67%	62%
Personalized URL	43%	46%	50%	42%	32%
Smart Home-Enabled Feature	24%	24%	32%	24%	12%
Virtual/Augmented Reality	20%	22%	28%	21%	7%
None of These	17%	14%	11%	16%	28%

[16] QR Code is a registered trademark of DENSO WAVE INCORPORATED.

Interest in Technology	Total	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
QR Code	55%	59%	64%	58%	39%
Personalized URL	51%	52%	61%	53%	37%
Smart Home-Enabled Feature	46%	49%	59%	48%	25%
Virtual/Augmented Reality	51%	59%	64%	51%	30%

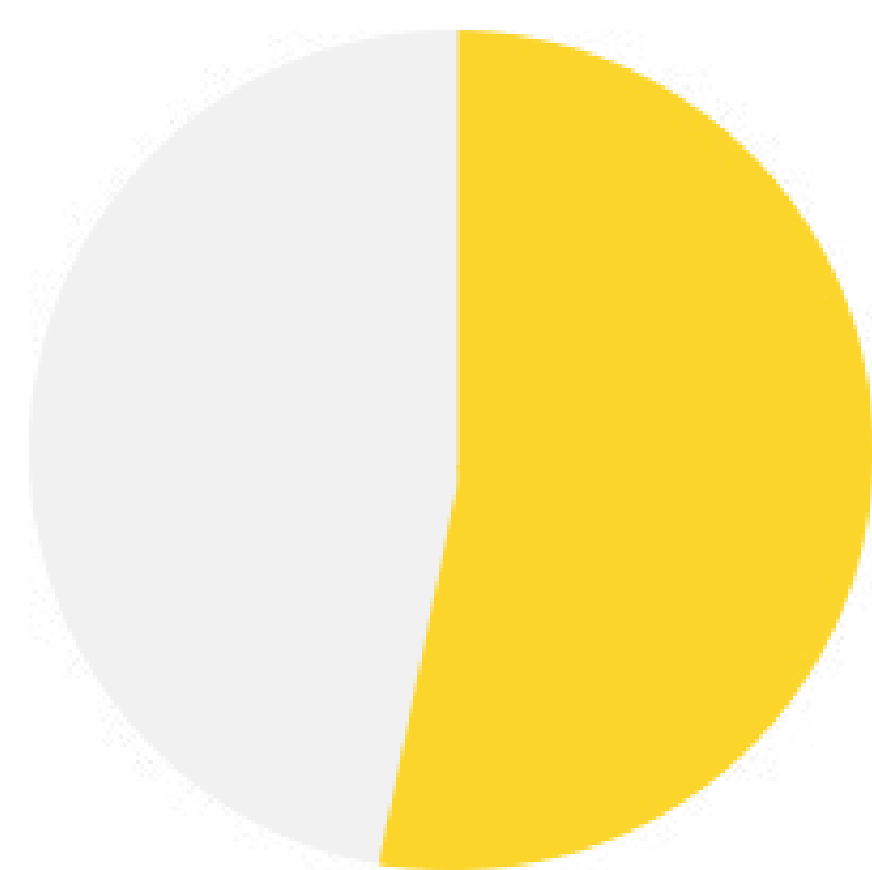
Millennials—and all age groups—have the most interest in QR Codes, followed by personalized URLs. And among the millennials who are aware of them, personalized URLs and VR have the highest actual usage, at 62% and 63%, respectively.

Millennials and Retargeted Direct Mail

Fifty-three percent of millennials are aware that they've received retargeted direct mail. And after learning how it works, 64% of all millennials surveyed said they would be likely to read it.

TIP: Across generations, consumers expect retargeted direct mail to offer a better deal than what's offered in stores. Make it worth their while, perhaps including a coupon or discount code.

Millennials also have the best perception of retargeted direct mail.



57%
of millennials enjoy receiving retargeted direct mail.

Millennials and Informed Delivery

Millennials have the highest awareness of the Informed Delivery feature, at 73%. And of those who are aware of the service, 71% subscribe—more than any other generation.

Seventy-five percent of millennials who use the Informed Delivery feature say it makes them more interested in mail.

The millennial generation is also the most likely to say that they always or frequently take action on Informed Delivery notifications.

Informed Delivery Subscribers Who Always or Frequently Take Action	Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
Visit Website	15%	44%	52%	45%
Click on Promo	12%	45%	48%	48%
Click on Content	12%	41%	48%	40%

TIP: It’s clear that millennial subscribers are likely to take action. Use this to your advantage by serving up content that’s useful and enticing—perhaps including a link to a new product line, a promo code or an immersive digital experience in your additional Informed Delivery content (referred to as “ride-along content”).

Millennials and E-Commerce

86% of millennials say that their online ordering experience has been positive.

Millennials make frequent use of e-commerce and, along with Gen Z, find it more enjoyable than in-person shopping and easier for buying bulk or larger items. More than any other generation—at 19%—millennials also say that online shopping makes it easier to maintain and restock their household.

TIP: Make it as quick and seamless as possible for your millennial customers to reorder the products they need often. You could consider setting up a subscription model, for example, or send out email reminders about items they buy regularly.

On the other hand, millennials were the least likely to say that they shop online based on the ability to get products delivered to their home, or for the added convenience when compared to in-person shopping.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Online Shopping

Expand the drawers below to explore what consumers across the generations say about the pros and cons of e-commerce.

+ Benefits

In general, consumers of all ages cited several key benefits of online shopping, including:

- Easy to compare products and prices from multiple brands
 - Safer during COVID-19
 - More payment options
 - Faster and more convenient than shopping in person
-

+ Drawbacks

Consumers also expressed a few drawbacks of online shopping, including:

- Lack of tactile experience (being able to touch products, etc.)
- Shipping delays
- Shipping costs
- Lack of in-person interaction and assistance

Millennials' Online Ordering Methods

55% — Website via computer



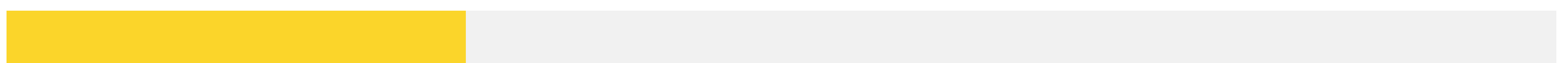
55% — Website via mobile device



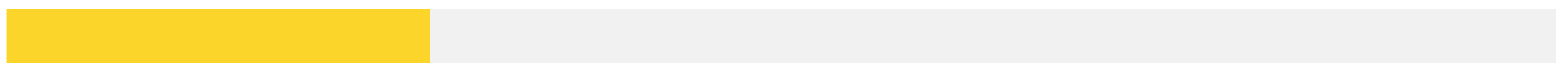
58% — App via mobile device



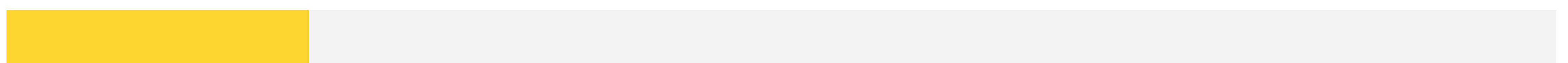
29% — Website via tablet



25% — App via tablet



18% — Smart home assistance



Millennials are the least likely to place online orders using a computer. Keeping in line with their on-the-go, digital-native reputation, they're more likely than any other generation to order from a website or app via a tablet, or to order via a smart home assistant.

TIP: Make sure your website is mobile-friendly so consumers shopping on a phone, tablet or other device have a seamless and enjoyable experience.

Most Common Online Purchase Categories

Millennials—and all generations—most often turn to online shopping for apparel purchases. And millennial customers, in particular, are big fans of online shopping in general, using it to make purchases—across most categories—more often than any other age group.

Most Common Online Categories Shopped in Past 3 Months	Total	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Apparel	53%	53%	52%	54%	53%
Electronics	37%	41%	40%	38%	27%
Food and Beverage	36%	33%	43%	37%	29%
Cosmetics/Body Care	35%	40%	41%	33%	26%
Leisure/Entertainment	34%	39%	37%	34%	26%
Health and Wellness	30%	25%	33%	32%	27%

Even among these less popular e-commerce categories, millennials are still more likely than other generations to shop for them online:

- Home Improvement
- Crafts/Hobby Supplies
- Household Appliances
- Bags and Other Accessories
- Sporting Goods/Outdoor Equipment
- Baby and Kids Products
- Office/Business Supplies
- Automotive
- Travel
- Other

Choosing an Online Retailer

Across all generations, delivery speed is the most important factor when choosing an online retailer. For millennials—and all age groups—free shipping, free returns when mailing items back, and an easy return process are the next most important factors.

Also keep in mind that millennials are more likely than any other age group to consider loyalty programs a top factor when choosing an online retailer.

Top 4 Drivers in Choosing an Online Retailer	Total	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Speed of Delivery	60%	62%	58%	60%	59%
Free Shipping	50%	48%	48%	48%	55%
Free Returns	39%	38%	37%	38%	42%
Easy Returns	38%	39%	37%	40%	35%

Preferred Tracking and Delivery Options

When it comes to tracking, millennials are the most likely to use a shipper's app, retailer's app or smart home assistant to check on the status of their package. Overall, though, most customers prefer to use the shipper's website to track an order.

25% of millennials use the shipper's website to check on delivery status.

Millennials are the least likely to say that getting a notification when a package has been delivered contributes to a positive tracking experience. And along with Gen Z, they're also the least likely to say that daily notifications are an important factor.

In general, the three youngest generations surveyed—Gen Z, millennials and Gen X—stand apart from boomers in that they care more about:

- Receiving an image showing where a package was delivered
- Seeing how many stops are left until a package is delivered
- Having access to customer service via phone to track a package
- Being able to reroute a package while it's in transit

And compared to boomers, they care less about:

- Receiving expected delivery day/time
- Receiving confirmation that a package has been delivered
- Receiving notification when a package has shipped/left the warehouse

+ **Pro Tips for Tracking and Delivery**

- Some customers like to choose which carrier they use—especially if it means saving money.
- In general, they like real-time updates on delivery status.
- Some customers—including millennials—like seeing the different stops a package makes on its journey.
- Text notifications are appreciated for their ease, but for very high-value or large items, more personal attention from the seller is preferred (such as a phone call).
- Easy access to customer service is an important factor.

Package Rerouting

Millennials are the most likely to have rerouted a package. This occurs most often when sending a gift or changing residences.

Millennials—who are more eager than any other generation to resume travel in the wake of COVID-19^[17]—are the most likely to have rerouted a package due to travel-related issues. They’re also more likely than other age groups to have rerouted a package because of an item needing special care, or because they needed the delivery sooner or later than planned.

Taking No Action After a Delay

After Gen Z, millennials—at 18%—are the least likely to order again from a retailer after experiencing shipping delays. Millennials also have the highest incidence of acting on a delayed order by contacting the retailer or shipper, or picking up the order in-store instead:

37% — Directly contacted retailer via customer service

36% — Contacted shipping provider

25% — Picked up order in-store instead

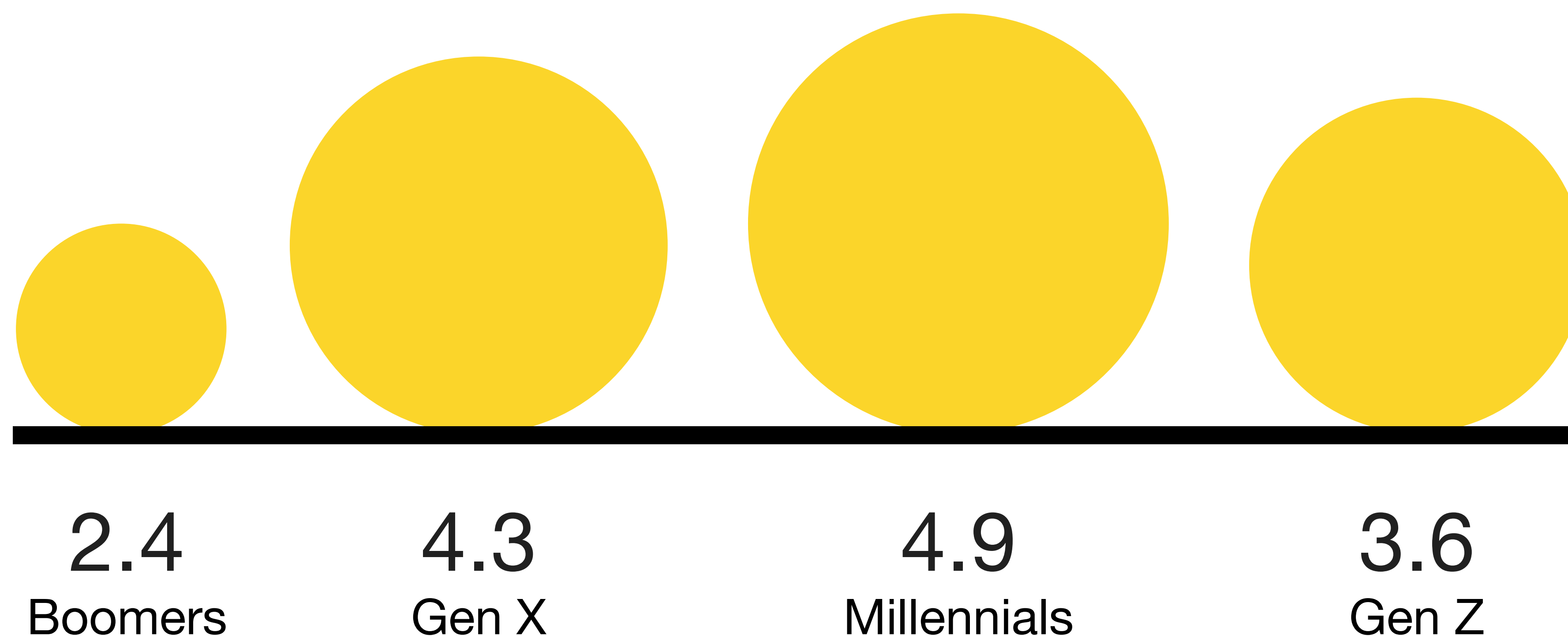
+ Pro Tips for Delivery Delays

- Customers like to be notified of delivery delays as early as possible.
- Shoppers have been frustrated by interactions with a shipper’s customer service—whether because of long hold times or because no new information was provided.
- Customers report experiencing unusually long delays during the holidays.

Return Habits and Preferences

Millennials make the most returns, with an average of 4.9 returns in three months. This makes sense, considering millennials are also less likely to buy from a company with a poor return policy.

Packages Returned Every 3 Months, on Average



Across generations, most returns are dropped off with a shipping carrier, but millennials are more likely than the others to drop a return with a partner retailer or use a parcel locker at a retail location. Along with Gen X, they're also the most likely to return directly to the merchant.

41% of millennials drop off returns with the carrier.

TIP: A seamless return process can set you apart and increase the likelihood of future purchases. Think strategically about how you can streamline and simplify returns for your customers by tracking return trends and finding ways to improve the accuracy and clarity in how your products are presented online.

Across all age groups, having a return label with a preselected carrier is very important to consumers, followed by easy-to-follow return instructions.

Millennials are the most likely to say that being allowed to choose the shipping carrier for a return is one of the most important factors in creating a positive returns experience. And along with Gen X, they're also the most likely to place importance on receiving communications from the merchant upon receiving their return.

USPS Returns®

In general, online shoppers like the idea of USPS' at-home return pickup service. However, they want to know more about how it works.

- Millennials, along with Gen X, are the most concerned about items being stolen.
- Millennials are less concerned than boomers about unneeded contact with the carrier.

+ Pro Tips for Returns

- Most consumers expect returns to be free, and are disappointed if they're not.
- Customers appreciate not having to supply their own box, and say that receiving a return label is important.
- Customers often make sure that a return process will be easy prior to making a purchase.
- Customers who bring returns into a store often do so to receive their refund faster.

Preferred Packaging Options

In general, easy-to-open packaging and reusable packaging have the strongest influence on how customers perceive a company. Millennials, along with Gen X and Gen Z, care more about custom branded packaging on or inside a package.

And after Gen Z, millennials are the most likely to have a positive impression of a brand that includes a note inside the package.

Packaging and Social Media

58% of millennials say they would post an impressive-looking package on social media—more than any other age group.

Likelihood of Posting Picture of Impressive Packaging on Social Media

42% — Total

46% — Gen Z

58% — Millennials

41% — Gen X

17% — Boomers

+ **Pro Tips for Packaging**

- Customers notice when extra effort is made with packaging.
- A carefully wrapped package—using bubble wrap, for example—is appreciated.
- A special touch—such as a note, promo or free sample—can help you stand out.
- Sustainable packaging is appreciated but is not a top concern.

Millennials and Online Holiday Shopping

As COVID-19 surged in March 2020, online shopping increased significantly—and during the winter COVID-19 surge, it increased even more.

Millennials’ Holiday Shopping Behavior

Millennials were the most likely to have increased online order frequency during the holiday season. In fact, 70% of millennials said they placed more online orders during the holidays than they did during the beginning of the pandemic. (Gen Z were the next most likely to increase their online shopping, followed by boomers, then Gen X.)



50%

of all consumers claimed their online holiday shopping increased during the 2020 season from the 2019 season—millennials more so than any other generation.

2019 vs. 2020 Online Holiday Shopping	Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
Much/Somewhat More Shopping Online	47%	49%	64%	54%
No Change	42%	38%	21%	26%
Much/Somewhat Less Shopping Online	11%	13%	16%	20%

Coupons and deals were especially influential during the 2020 holiday shopping season—with millennials more likely than any other age group to look for coupons or discounts. Across the board, millennials (followed by Gen Z) were more likely to change their shopping behavior.

Millennials' Change in Holiday Shopping Behaviors

76% — Looked for coupons/discounts

77% — Depended more on online shopping to deliver gifts

67% — Noticed more deals compared to the 2019 season

66% — Started holiday shopping earlier

66% — Shopped at more small businesses

Despite their uptick in online shopping, millennials, along with Gen Z, were also the most likely to:

- Still shop in-store (they also reported seeing smaller crowds in the stores they did go into)
- Feel more comfortable with in-person shopping than other generations
- Be more open to different product delivery methods, such as curbside pickup

Millennials were more apt to prioritize shopping “small” or local during the 2020 holiday season.

Holiday Shipping Delays

Nearly 40% of all consumers said they experienced more shipping delays during the 2020 holiday season. Millennials—at 43%, followed by Gen X at 40%—were the most likely to say they experienced more delays:

Consumers Who Experienced More Holiday Shipping Delays

- 38% — Gen Z
- 43%** — Millennials
- 40% — Gen X
- 32% — Baby Boomers

Online Holiday Shipping Returns

By far, millennials were the most likely to make returns during the 2020 holiday season, whereas Gen X and boomers were the least likely:

- 12%** – Gen Z
- 22%** – Millennials
- 11%** – Gen X
- 10%** – Baby Boomers

Millennial customers were also the most likely to avoid returns due to being physically unable to return something, or to avoid return fees.

Fifty-four percent of millennials avoided making returns due to physical inability, compared with 37% of Gen Z, 32% of Gen X and just 18% of boomers. Forty-six percent of millennials avoided returns due to return fees, compared with 40% of Gen Z, 37% of Gen X and 26% of boomers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

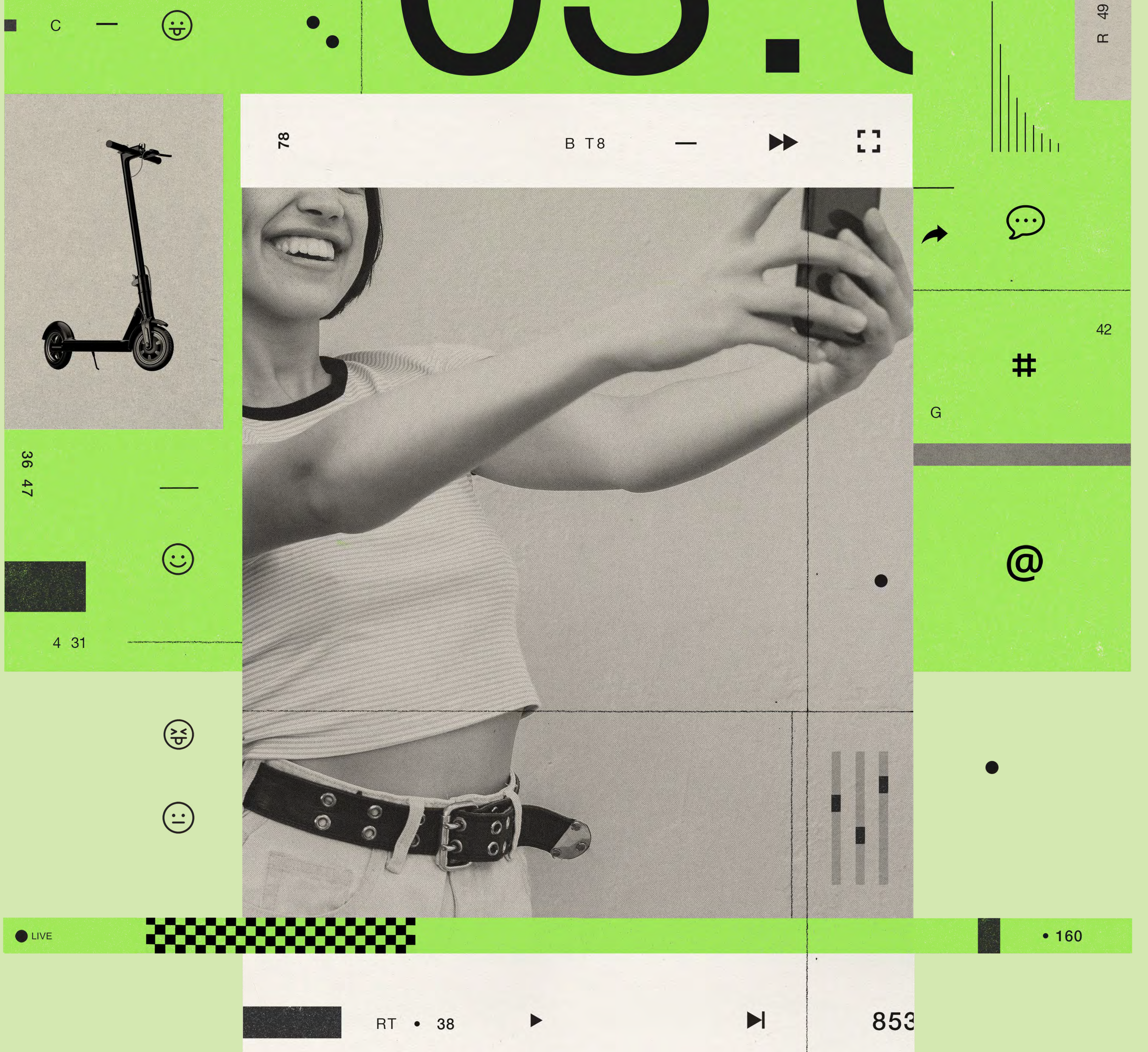
Millennials have the **strongest positive feelings about direct mail**, saying it provides useful information and keeps them in the know.

More than any other generation, millennials are **likely to take action after receiving mail**—whether by making a purchase or visiting a website.

Millennials have the **highest interest in digital innovations**, including QR Codes, AR and VR.

Millennials are the **least likely to place online orders via a computer**, instead turning to mobile devices, tablets, apps or smart home assistants.

Millennials **shop online more than any other age group**, across nearly all product categories.

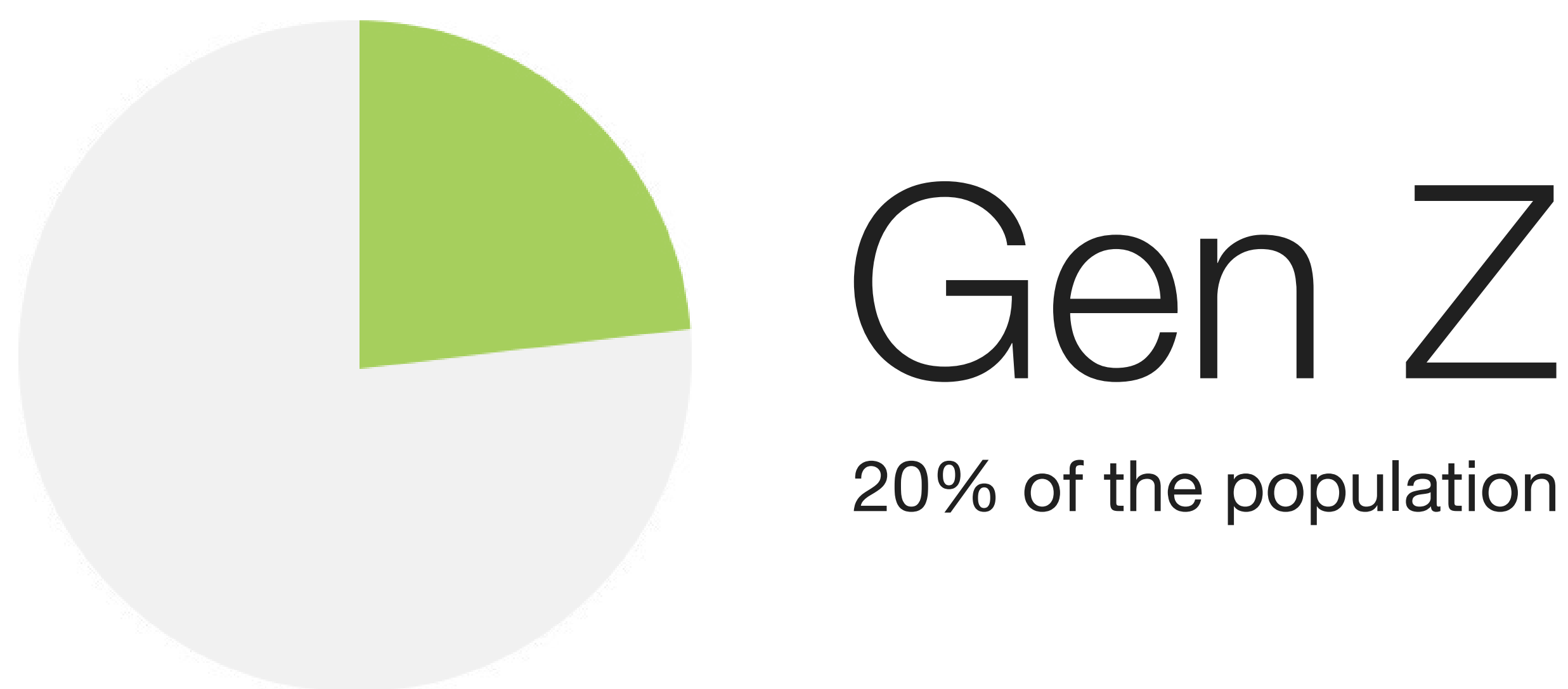


GEN Z

The digital generation.

Overview

Generation Z has never known a time without the internet and smartphones.^[1] For these 67 million Americans,^[2] having social media, digital tools and instant online connections at their fingertips has made the world infinitely smaller.^[3] And it's raised a new savvy, socially responsible, intensely creative generation of consumers.



Gen Z at a Glance

Born after **1997**

Today's teenagers and young 20-somethings

20% of the U.S. population^[4]

Starting to **enter the workforce**

95% of Gen Z teens have access to a smartphone^[5]

Estimated global purchasing power is **over \$140 billion**^[6]

[1] "Welcome to Generation Z," Network of Executive Women and Deloitte, 2019.

[2] "Resident population in the United States in 2019, by generation," Statista Research, Jan. 20, 2021.

[3] "Into Z Future: Understanding Generation Z, the Next Generation of Super Creatives," Wunderman Thompson Intelligence in partnership with Snap Inc., June 2019.

[4] "Population distribution in the United States in 2020, by generation," Statista Research, Jan. 20, 2021.

[5] Kim Parker and Ruth Igielnik, "On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far," Pew Research Center, May 14, 2020.

[6] Dominic-Madori Davis, "Gen Zers have a spending power of over \$140 billion, and it's driving the frenzy of retailers and brands trying to win their dollars," Business Insider, Jan. 28, 2020.

How does a group who communicates so easily online perceive and interact with mail? We surveyed Gen Zers—also known as zoomers—across the U.S. to learn more about their personal experiences with direct mail marketing and online shopping.^[7]

This proprietary research uncovered valuable insights on Gen Z characteristics, habits and preferences that you can use to connect with this coveted audience and set your business apart.

Gen Z and Direct Mail Marketing

The Generation Z reliance on technology has not lured this group away from physical mail. In fact, mail has a unique ability to appeal to Gen Z's creative side—giving them the personalized, tangible experience that texts and email can't provide.

Gen Z Engagement with Direct Mail

72% would be disappointed to no longer receive mail and say they are excited to discover what the mail brings every day.

33% are inclined to make a purchase if they see it in the mail.

Local and national promotional mailpieces are often read by most consumers, and all types of mail are more likely to be read than a similar email. However, Gen Z is least likely to read catalogs.

Interestingly, though this generation spends their days almost constantly online,^[8] they have little interest in receiving discounts and product information via text, app or pop-up notifications.

Most Common Marketing Mail Gen Z Receives

- Financial
- Food and Beverage
- Apparel
- Political Ads
- Cosmetics
- Electronics

Not surprising for a younger generation just starting to get on their feet, Gen Z reports receiving fewer utilities and automotive promotions than other generations.

Most Effective Elements in Direct Mail for Gen Z

Deals — **72%**

Easy-to-Find Branding — **54%**

Colorful Images and/or Text — **54%**

Personally Addressed with Name — **46%**

Unique Size or Shape — **45%**

Thick Material/Paper — **34%**

Large Text — **31%**

Important to note is how this list of priorities differs for Gen Z. Deals and special offers are always important, but this group ranks unique formats, premium materials and bold colors and branding much higher than all other generations.

Preferences of direct mail elements	Gen Z	Boomers
Thick Material	34%	14%
Unique Size/Shape	45%	24%
Includes a Deal	72%	89%
From a Locally Owned Business	45%	68%

As a highly creative generation—more inherently creative than any before it—it’s clear Gen Z enjoys more innovative, eye-catching elements.^[9]

70% of Gen Zers think it's important to see recycling information on their mail.

Gen Z is an environmentally and socially conscious group. Recycling is important to them, with more than six in 10 actively recycling their mail.

+ **Pro Tips on Resonating with Gen Z**

Generation Z is inundated with communications on a daily basis and has a much shorter attention span than older groups.^[10] Being clear and concise is essential to connecting with them through direct mail.

- Sales and offers should be prominent on the piece.
- Deals should be exclusive—separate from what is offered online—to feel special.
- Gen Z cherishes personalization. Mail should target them specifically and work to satisfy their creative side.

Gen Z also craves authenticity.^[11] They are not interested in marketing jargon and hyperbole. Your message should be relatable.

[10] "10 Vital Strategies to Use When Marketing to Generation Z," Oberlo, Nov. 3, 2020.

[11] "The Truth About Gen Z," McCann Worldgroup.

Digitally Enhanced Mail

Gen Z is aware of **direct mail innovations**, with QR Codes^{®[12]} having the highest awareness. They reported being slightly less interested than millennials in direct mail technology, including:

QR Codes

Personalized URLs (PURLs)

Augmented reality (AR)

Virtual reality (VR)

Smart home-enabled features

However, more than half have used or tried these on a promotional piece of mail.

38% of Gen Z respondents have gone to a company's website after receiving a relevant direct mailpiece.

This generation is a bit apprehensive about **retargeted direct mail**, but 46% say they would enjoy receiving mail based on their recent browsing or shopping behaviors.

+ Pro Tips for Engaging with Technology

- Provide a call to action that's easy to spot and gives this audience quick access to online materials.
- Stay authentic and make retargeted mail feel welcome and useful with exclusive offers worth their scattered attention.

Gen Z and Informed Delivery

When marketing to Gen Z, keep in mind that 65% of them are aware of the **USPS Informed Delivery[®] feature**, yet they have the lowest sign-up rate. Still, the younger generations are more likely to click on digital content from Informed Delivery.

Informed Delivery Interactions

45% — Visit Website

48% — Click on Promo

40% — Click on Content

Gen Z and E-Commerce

Generation Z finds shopping online more enjoyable than in person.

E-commerce continues to grow, but Gen Z has been shopping online for a while now. In fact, this group admits to finding online shopping more enjoyable than going to stores in person.

Benefits of Shopping Online

Gen Z reports several benefits of ordering online:

Delivers to home

Faster

Easier for bulk or large items

Easier to stock up for household

Gen Z's Online Ordering Methods

63% — Website via computer



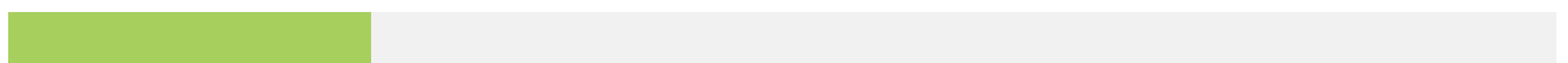
60% — Website via mobile device



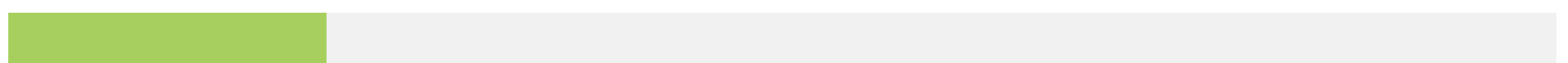
59% — App via mobile device



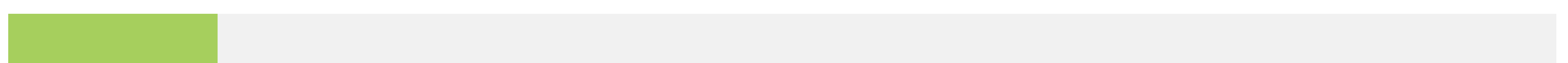
20% — Website via tablet



18% — App via tablet



10% — Smart home assistance



Gen Z is more likely than other generations to shop on their mobile device, and they value delivery speed as the most important factor when ordering.

Most Common Categories Gen Z Shops Online

53% – Apparel

41% – Electronics*

40% – Cosmetics

39% – Leisure/Entertainment*

*Gen Z shops these categories more than the other age groups do.

Gen Z and Brand Loyalty

Unlike many boomers, younger generations find loyalty programs important when ordering online. Gen Z ranks loyalty programs lower than millennials do, however, and can actually be less loyal to brands—they often like to experience new products, new brands and new adventures.^[13]

Preferred Tracking and Delivery Options

Gen Z and millennials are more likely to check a shipper's or retailer's app to track their packages than older generations, who usually head to the shipper's website.

The most important factors in creating a positive tracking experience:

63% — Receiving expected delivery day and time

52% — Receiving a delivery confirmation

But the younger generations, especially Gen Z, also place importance on:

30% — Seeing how many stops are left on the delivery route

28% — Receiving an image of the delivery location

24% — Accessibility to customer service via telephone for tracking purposes

20% — Being able to reroute the delivery

27% of Gen Zers have rerouted a package, with the highest percentage of them doing so because of a change of residence.

+ Pro Tips for Tracking and Delivery

- Some consumers would like a choice in their carrier—especially if it means saving a little money.
- Customers like real-time, exact updates on their expected packages.
- Text notifications for shipping updates are appealing for their ease of use.
- Customer service should be easily accessible in case of questions or issues.

Reaction to Delays

Gen Z is least likely to reorder from a retailer after experiencing a shipping delay.

Compared to other consumer groups, Gen Z expects packages to arrive on time, and if delays occur, they're more likely not to order from the retailer again.

Actions Taken with Shipping Delay

22% — Contacted seller directly via customer service

20% — Contacted shipping provider

19% — Cancelled the order and bought from different retailer

43% — Took no action

TIP: Consumers want to be notified of delivery delays as soon as possible.

Gen Z Packaging Preferences

As a generation that puts a premium on experiences and personalization, package design is very important to Gen Z consumers and often sparks sharing moments.



46%

of Gen Z is likely to post an impressive-looking package on social media.

Meaningful elements that stand out in packaging

Extra Attention

- Nice tissue
- Plenty of packing bubbles
- Tied with a bow or somehow nicely enclosed

Special Touches

- Thank you notes
- Free samples
- Discount on future purchase

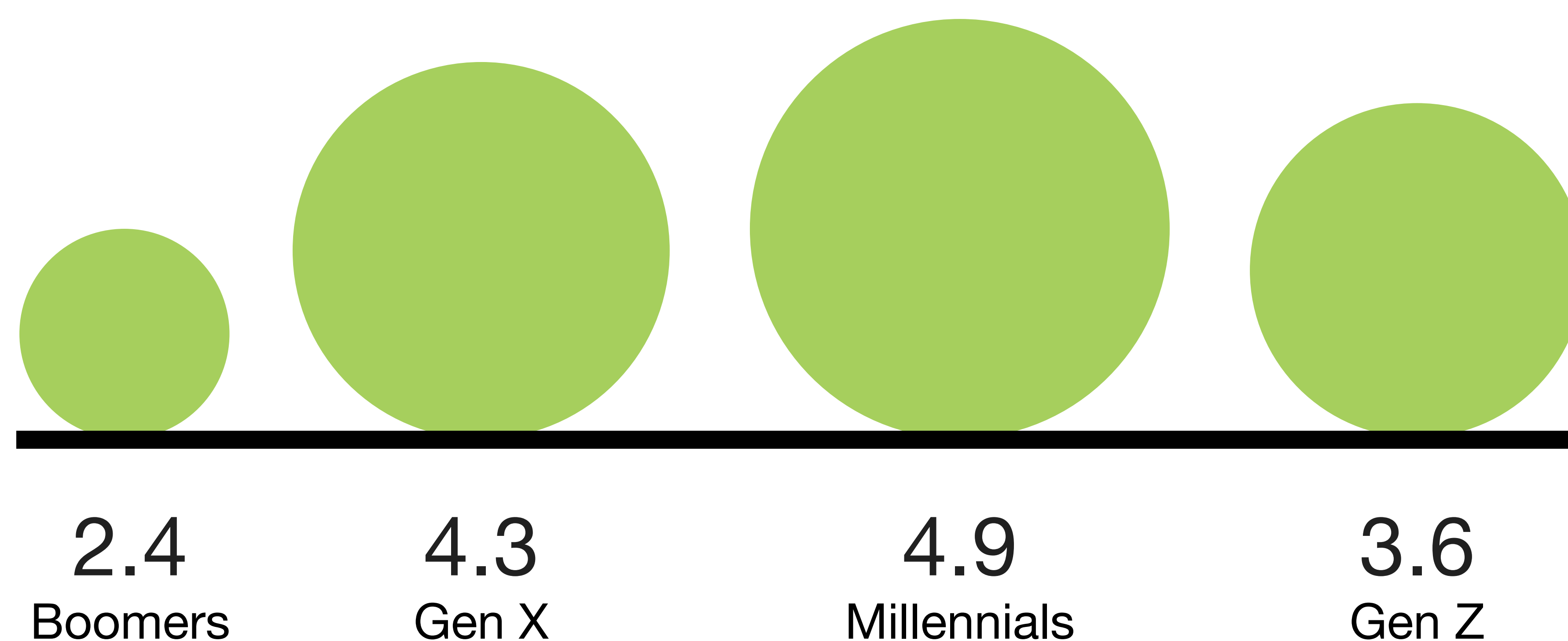
Sustainability

- Packaging that's recyclable
- Recycling information included

Return Habits and Preferences

Gen Z returned 3.6 packages over three months, often dropping off their return with a shipping carrier.

Packages Returned Every 3 Months, on Average



They are more likely to request a pickup from the shipping carrier than other groups when sending a package back to a retailer.

Gen Z wants return options.

- A return label with preselected shipping provider included with order
- Easy-to-follow shipping instructions
- Return packaging and materials included
- Convenient drop-off location
- Tracking info communicated via email
- Notification when merchant receives the return

+ **Pro Tips for Returns**

- Most consumers expect returns to be free—and are disappointed when they're not.
- Customers appreciate not having to supply their own box or print their own return label.
- Before checking out, customers often make sure that returns will be quick and easy.
- Consumers who make returns at the retailer often do so to get refunded faster.

Gen Z and Online Holiday Shopping

Profoundly impacted by COVID-19, retail shopping shifted largely online during the 2020 holiday season. Gen Zers and millennials in particular are most likely to have increased online ordering since the spring surge, as well as over the previous year's holiday season.

More Shopping Online This Year vs. Last

54% — Gen Z

64% — Millennials

49% — Gen X

47% — Boomers

Holiday shoppers were more mindful of:

- Price comparisons and finding the best deals
- Return policies
- Shipping costs and shipping speed

More than in past years, delivery speed and delivery costs influenced shoppers' decisions of where to buy. Nearly 40% of consumers said they experienced more shipping delays during the 2020 holiday season.

Gen Z's 2020 Holiday Shopping Behavior

71% — Looking for coupons/discounts

66% — Depending more on online ordering to deliver their gifts

62% — Noticing more sales and deals than last year

54% — Starting holiday shopping earlier

47% — Shopping more small businesses

Though shopping mostly online, Gen Zers and millennials were more likely to go into stores than older groups this season.

- Gen Z was more comfortable shopping in-store in general.
- Smaller crowds seemed to make shopping easier.
- They were more open to methods like curbside delivery.

Compared to previous holiday seasons, Gen Z made about the same number of returns. Forty percent claimed they did not return an item because of return shipping fees.

+ Pro Tips for Holiday E-Commerce

- Holiday shoppers have gotten into the practice of comparing items across multiple sites looking for the best deal and fastest delivery timing.
- Shoppers are starting earlier, noticing more and better deals.
- Free shipping is expected, and some shoppers will abandon their cart or change to store pickup if they don't like the shipping charge.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Gen Z is excited to discover what the mail brings and feels it is more personal than digital communication.

Unique formats of direct mail appeal to Gen Z's robust creative side.

Gen Z is shopping online more than ever and often finds it more enjoyable than shopping in person.

Gen Z is most likely to appreciate and share their experience with premium package design.

Gen Z prioritizes diversity and social and environmental responsibility and expects brands to do the same.



SUMMARY

Today’s businesses face more competition than ever.^[1] To help ensure continued success, marketers and shippers alike must find new ways to meet customers’ varying needs.

By providing the data you need to effectively connect with different audiences— from Gen Z to boomers—the 2020–2021 USPS Generational Research Report^[2] can serve as your go-to guide going forward. Some of the most valuable generational findings are compiled below.

[1] Josh Colter, “This year’s most valuable skill? Branding.” The Hustle, Jan. 23, 2021.

[2] USPSDelivers.com Research — Full Report, Qualitative and Quantitative Results, Summit Research, February 2021.

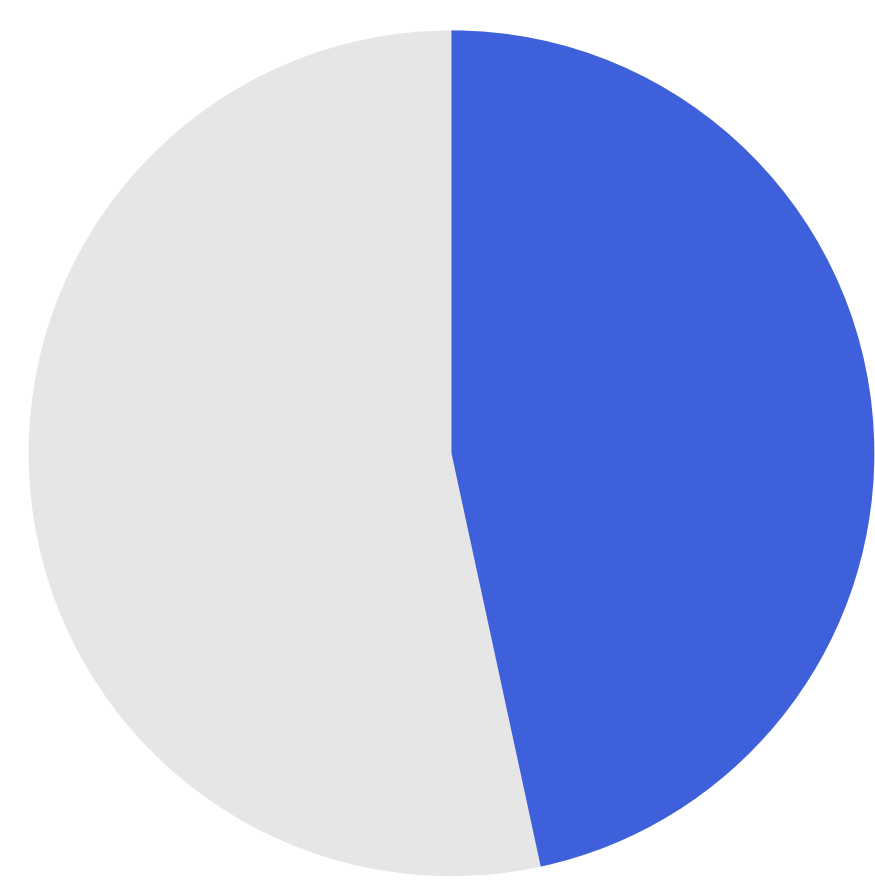
Direct Mail Marketing Drives Customer Action

Relevant mail can play a major role in driving customers to visit a company website. In fact, nearly half of millennial consumers went to a brand's site after receiving relevant mail.

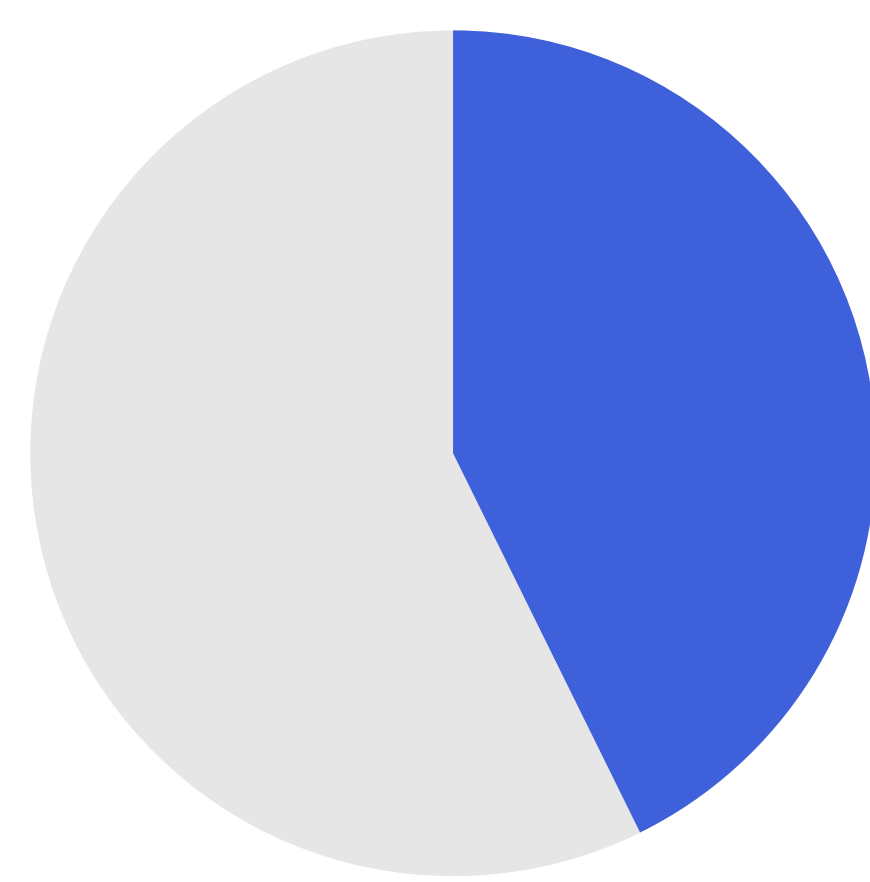
Went to a Brand's Website After Receiving Direct Mail



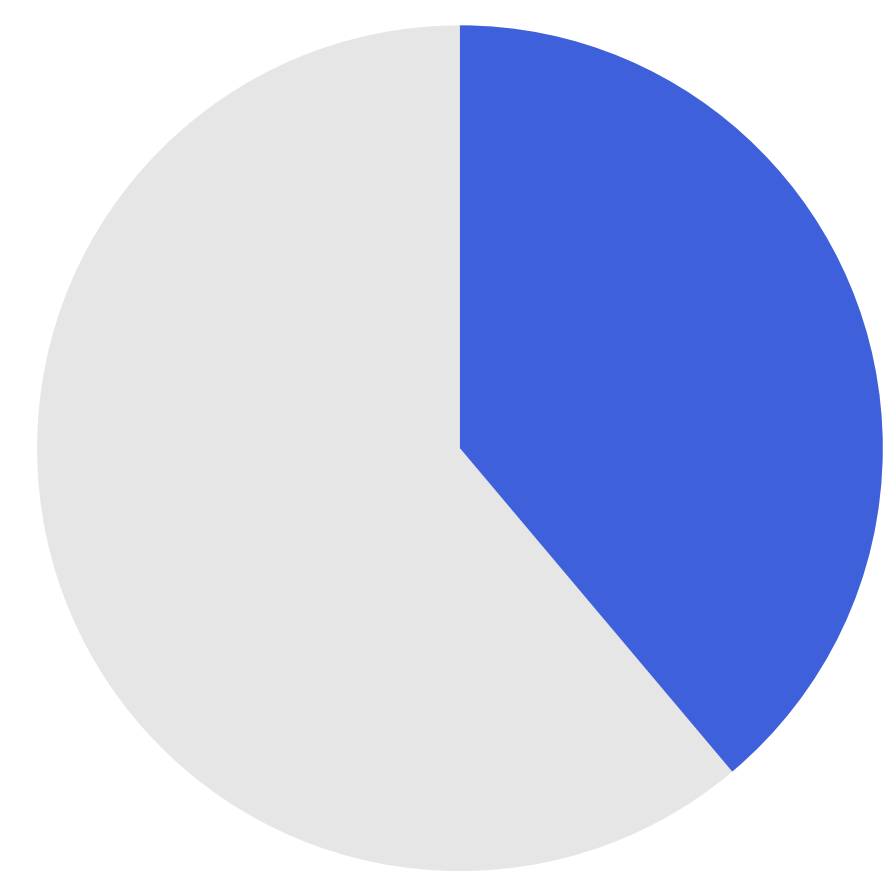
38%
Gen Z



47%
Millennials



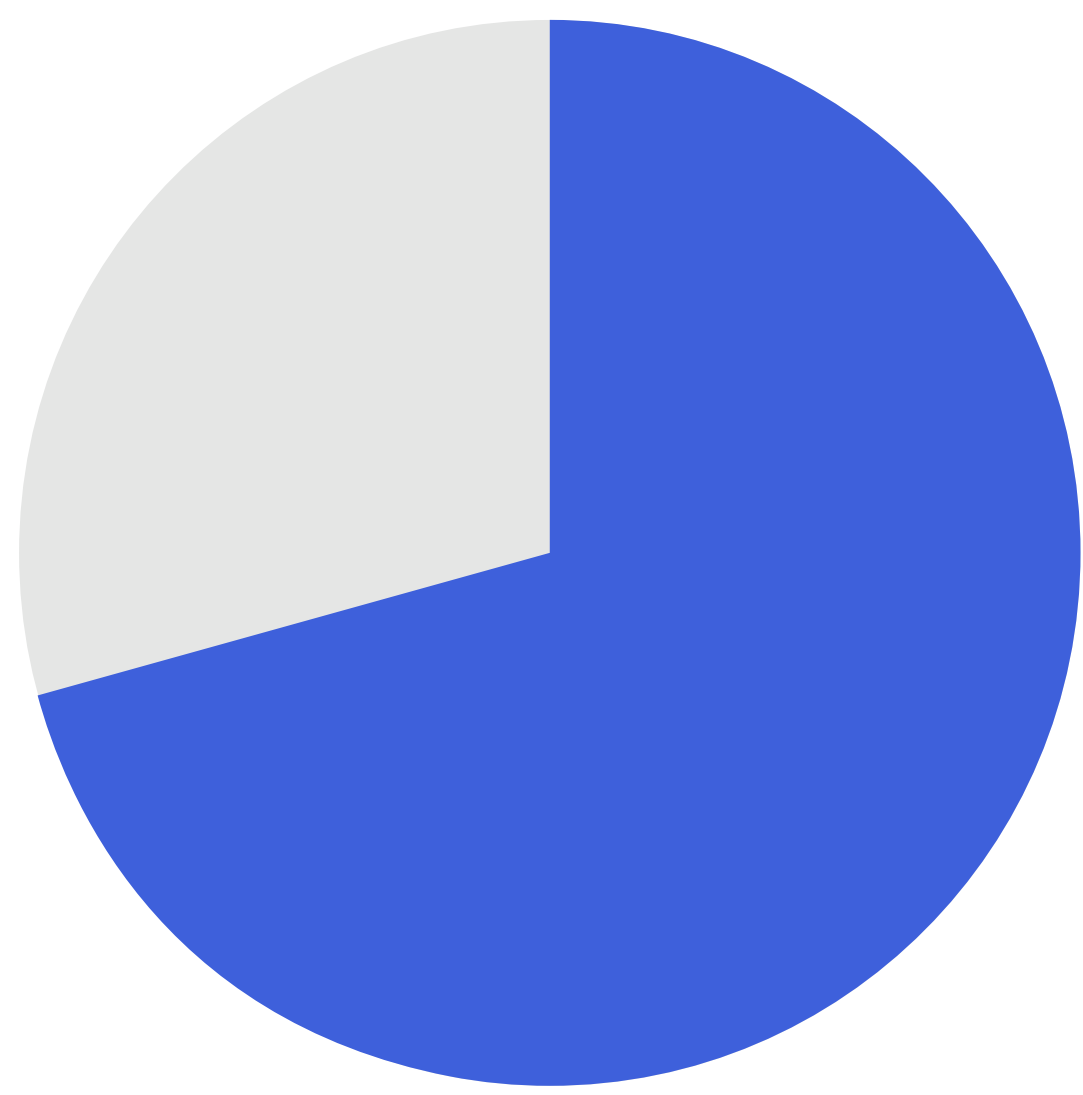
43%
Gen X



39%
Boomers

Direct Mail Is Read More Often Than Email

Both direct mail and email are likely to at least be skimmed, but mail actually has higher read rates than email across all age groups.



71%

of all consumers are excited to discover what the mail brings every day.

Younger Consumers Use Mobile Devices to Order Online

By and large, boomers—at 72%—tend to place their online orders using a computer. But the younger generations often turn to their mobile devices:

Website via a Mobile Device

60% — Gen Z



55% — Millennials



App via Mobile Device

59% — Gen Z



58% — Millennials



Did You Know?

Gen Z and millennials are most likely to post on social media when they receive an innovative package.

Consumers Want Convenience

In a world where they are juggling more responsibilities than ever before, consumers rely on online ordering to help simplify their lives:

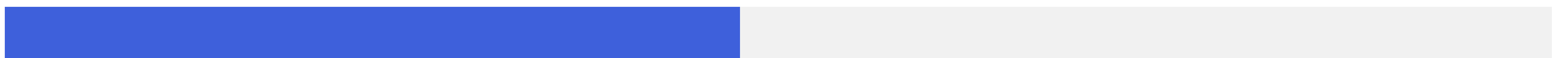
64% — Delivery to My Home



52% — Saves Me Time



48% — More Convenient Than In-Person



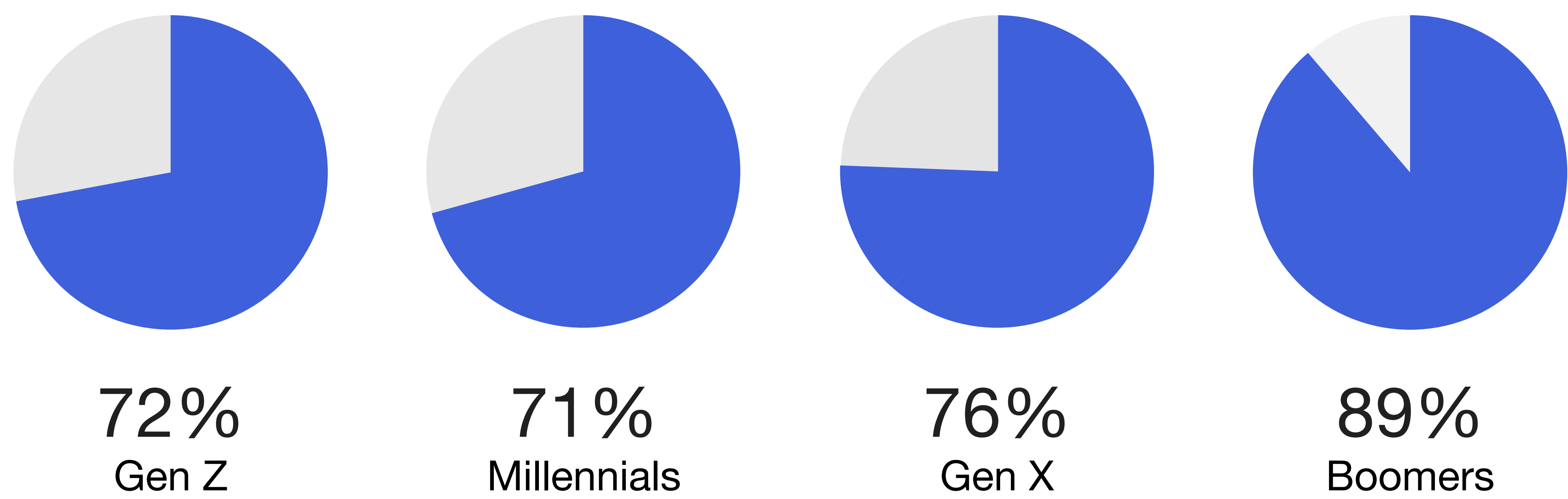
Likewise, when making online purchases, consumers of all ages prioritize:

- Delivery speed
- Free shipping
- Free/easy returns

Deals Are Key

All consumers expect and look for deals or special offers in the mail.

Coupons/Deals as Most Effective Element



Digital Innovation Usage Is Fairly Consistent

Across generations, QR Codes^[3] have the highest awareness—but most consumers are more likely to have used a personalized URL.

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Personalized URL	55%	62%	63%	45%
Virtual and Augmented Reality	59%	63%	60%	28%
QR Code	57%	60%	56%	36%
Smart Home-Enabled Feature	50%	61%	55%	27%

Boomer

The Habits and Needs of Baby Boomers

More than any other generation, baby boomers prefer to receive promotional deals via direct mail rather than email.

Being provided with a return label and having easy-to-follow return instructions are especially important to boomers.

Boomers are more likely than any other age group to find new products or services through catalogs.^[4]

Gen X

The Buying Behaviors of Gen X

Direct mail is a powerful motivator for Gen X, often generating interest in making a purchase.

Sixty-two percent use a computer to shop online.

More than half enjoy receiving retargeted mail based on their online visits.

Gen Xers, along with millennials, make more returns than other age groups, usually dropping packages off with a shipping carrier.

Millennial

The Millennial Direct Mail Mindset

Millennials are the most likely to be directly motivated by mail—whether by visiting a site, going to a physical store or making a purchase.

Along with Gen Z, they also value eco-friendly mailpieces more than other age groups. They actively recycle and like seeing recycling info on their mail.

Millennial consumers are the most likely to subscribe to the Informed Delivery[®] feature—and are also the most likely to take action on the notifications.

Gen Z

The Surprising Preferences of Gen Z

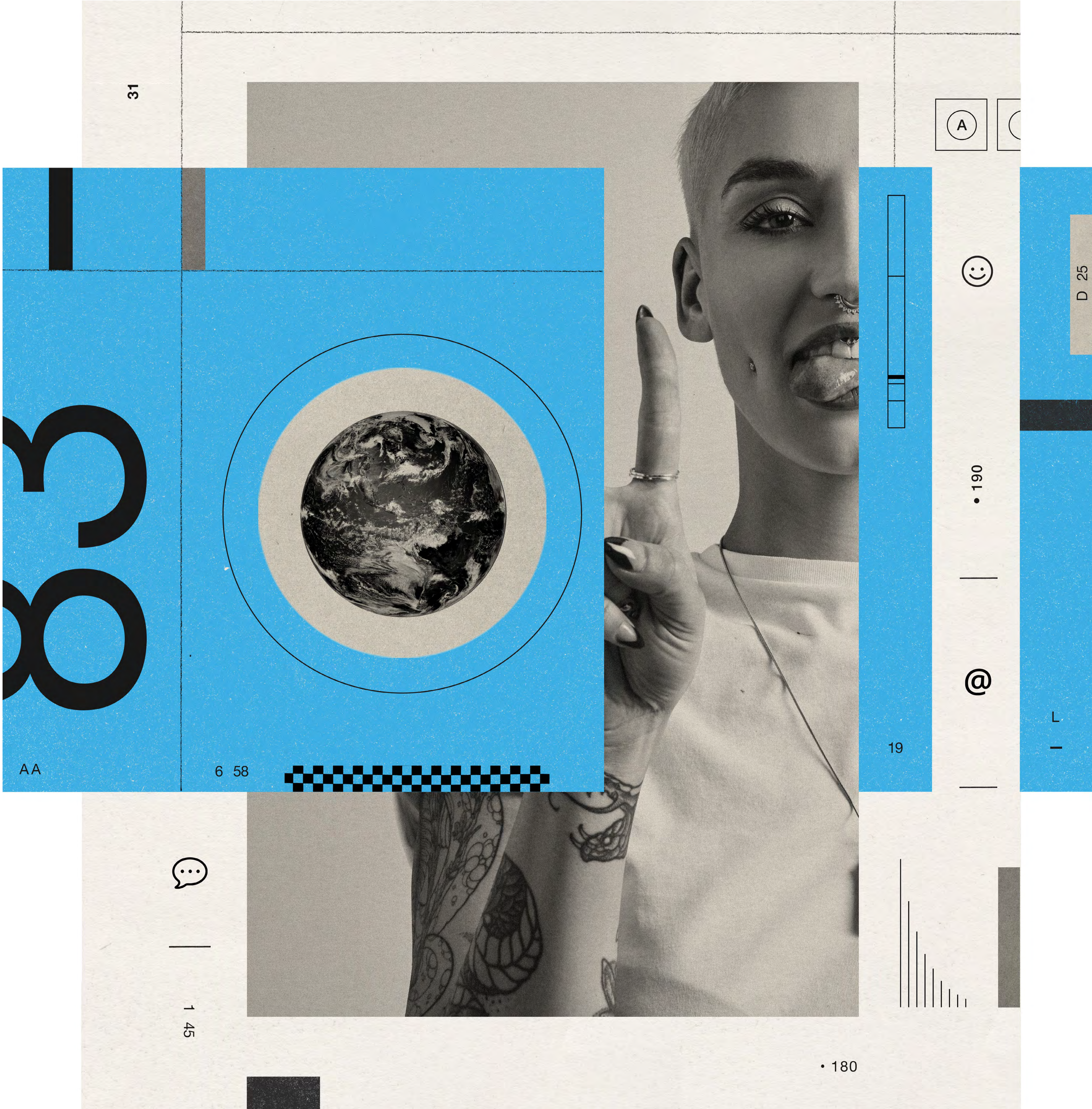
Inundated with digital communications, Gen Z likes the personal touch that mail delivers.

Unique, personalized mail stands out to Gen Z, and package design is particularly important to them.

Gen Z also finds online shopping more enjoyable than in-person shopping, and the frequency of their online shopping during the holidays continues to grow.

Now Let the Data Lead the Way

The demand for a seamless customer experience is greater than ever. The generational insights shared in this report can inform your strategies and campaigns going forward, helping to ensure that you keep pace—making connections that count, no matter your target demographic.





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