

WINNING GEN Z

A MARKETER'S GUIDE TO DIGITAL TRUST

New consumer research reveals how Gen Z is rewriting the rules of digital trust – and what it means for brands

About This Guide

This guide draws on a survey commissioned by Usercentrics and conducted by Sapio Research in May 2025, capturing the views of 10,000 consumers across the US, UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands. It uncovers generational divides in digital trust – spanning privacy, data sharing, and control over personal information – and shows where Gen Z is breaking away, with insights distilled into actionable takeaways to help marketers earn trust, fuel growth, and stay ahead of shifting consumer expectations.

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Fresh survey data confirms what many marketers are already sensing:

Gen Z is rewriting the rules of digital trust.

They'll trade privacy for convenience, yet click "accept all" less often than ever. They're the demographic most open to sharing data for AI, yet the most cautious about how they're profiled. They put more faith in social media companies than governments, but still expect honesty and transparency above all else.

The power and paradox of Gen Z

Seems contradictory? It isn't. It's a generation actively deciding who earns their loyalty and on what terms. With spending [projected to reach USD 12 trillion by 2030](#), Gen Z is the generation no brand can afford to ignore.

For marketers that means one thing: **the playbook shifts from "capture data" to "earn permission."** This report unpacks six shifts that matter most and shows how to respond – clearly, credibly, and on their terms.

"Brands that act now, with cultural fluency, transparency, and respect for data, will shape the trust framework that defines the next decade of customer relationships."



Adelina Peltea

— CMO at Usercentrics



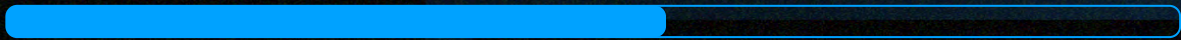
SHIFT 1

The privacy gap: from unaware to power users

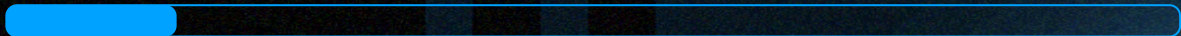


If Gen Z is rewriting the rules of digital trust, privacy is where the divide is clearest. Most of them are still in the dark about their rights, but a smaller, more confident group is already setting the pace.

56% of Gen Z either don't know or believe they have no data privacy rights.



14% are not only aware but actively exercising those rights – more than any other generation.



It's not a contradiction, it's two starting points: a majority are still learning, and a minority are raising the bar for everyone else.

What this means for marketers

If you can make privacy part of your brand's personality – accessible, approachable, and even entertaining – you'll start building lasting trust early on. Educate and empower now, and you won't be shut out when expectations rise.



Trust builder: Replace legalese with human language and interactive formats. Use short-form video, quick explainers, and in-app information flow. Show why you collect data in ways that make sense in their world, like how Duolingo uses playful pop-ups to explain why permissions are needed.



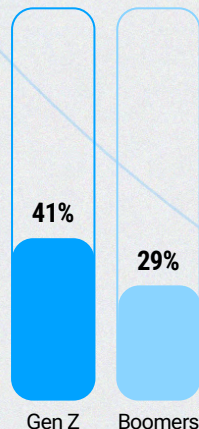
SHIFT 2

Convenience rules: on their terms

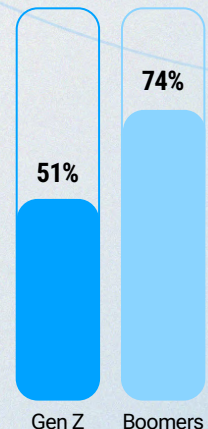


If privacy is where Gen Z is divided, convenience is where they're united. They're willing to share data, but only if the payoff is clear.

41% of Gen Z
**say online
convenience
outweighs
privacy concerns,**
compared to just
29% of Boomers.



74% of Boomers
**feel they've
"become the
product" online,**
but only 51%
of Gen Z agree.



For Gen Z, data sharing isn't blind trust, it's a deal. If it makes life go more smoothly or makes experiences more personal, they'll say yes. But the conditions are non-negotiable: transparency, security, and clarity come first.

What this means for marketers

Convenience may open the door, but trust keeps it open. Show how you protect data every time you ask for it, or risk losing them to a competitor.



Trust builder: With interactions like sign-ups, checkouts, or cookie pop-ups, put trust signals front and center. Short, clear text on why you need the data, with user-friendly visual signals like lock icons, a "We'll never sell your data" statement, quick to-click consent. These help turn hesitation into an easy yes.

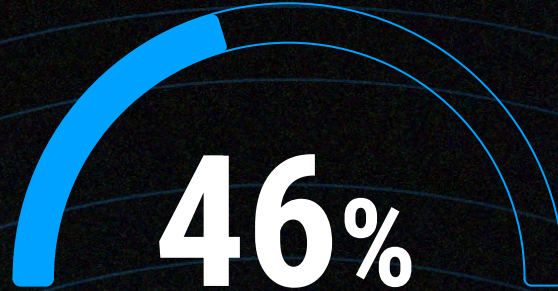


SHIFT 3

The rise of selective consent



Even when they say yes, Gen Z is becoming more selective. Convenience matters but not at any cost. Every pop-up is now a trust test.



say they click “accept all” on cookie banners less often than three years ago.

A verbose, unclear, or pushy request tells them everything they need to know about how you handle data – and they’ll act accordingly.

What this means for marketers

Consent is no longer a box-ticking exercise. It’s an early brand impression. If you want trust that lasts, start by earning it at the first click.



Trust builder: Treat cookie banners like a handshake: short, decisive, and confidence-building. Highlight the upside of saying yes and enable confidence by making control feel effortless.



SHIFT 4

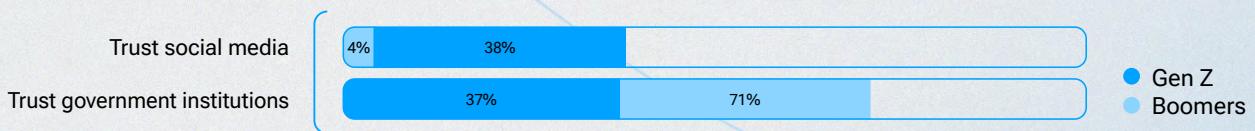
Platform loyalty over institutional faith



Gen Z doesn't place their trust where older generations do.
For them, familiarity often outweighs authority.

✔ 38% of Gen Z say they **trust social media platforms with their data**. By contrast, just 37% trust government institutions, the lowest level among all generations.

✔ For Boomers, it's the opposite: 71% **trust government institutions**, and only 4% trust social media.



Trust for Gen Z lives in the platforms they use daily, not in institutions.

Most trusted industries when it comes to data collection and handling

	GEN Z	MILLENNIALS	GEN X	BABY BOOMER	MEN	WOMEN
Banking and financial institutions	51%	60%	74%	86%	62%	61%
Government / public sector services	37%	45%	60%	71%	49%	46%
Medical and pharmaceutical companies	40%	43%	57%	68%	51%	42%
Technology services	37%	37%	25%	23%	30%	37%
Technology hardware	33%	30%	23%	16%	27%	30%
Social media platforms	38%	29%	16%	4%	27%	28%
Travel and hospitality companies	26%	22%	19%	18%	23%	23%
Retail brands	24%	24%	20%	12%	22%	22%
Automotive brands	13%	10%	7%	2%	9%	11%



What this means for marketers

Don't lean on perceived institutional credibility or seals of approval alone. To earn Gen Z's trust, show up where they are, in the spaces and communities they value and speak the language those spaces demand. But more importantly, listen and learn more than you broadcast.



Trust builder: Be culturally fluent. Partner with creators, use native formats, and let your values be visible in every interaction.



SHIFT 5

Redefining “sensitive”: from security to identity



What counts as private is shifting. Older generations focus on protecting hard data like phone numbers, health records, and logins. Gen Z still cares about that but they're even more protective of details that reveal identity, like location, age, gender, and even subtle signals like shopping cart contents or AI assistant history.

For Boomers, the fear is being hacked and becoming victims of crime.

For Gen Z, it's being profiled, judged, or stereotyped based on the breadcrumbs of their digital lives.

What this means for marketers

Guarding passwords and payment details isn't enough. Gen Z wants reassurance that you're protecting the information that defines who they are, not just what they buy.



Trust builder: Audit your personalization strategies to ensure identity cues create relevance, not boxes. Think beyond one-off actions. A single on-sale purchase doesn't make someone a 'budget shopper.'

Explain what data you collect, why, and most importantly, what's in it for them. Provide users with effortless control so personalization feels like empowerment, not profiling.



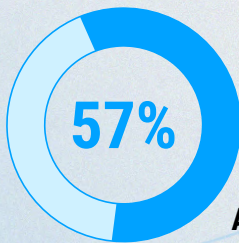
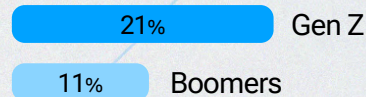
SHIFT 6

Open to innovation: on their terms

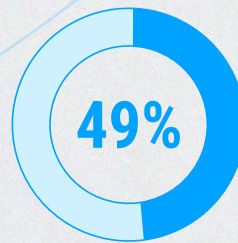


Gen Z is cautious, but they're not closed off. Among all generations, they're the most open to data sharing for new technologies. But only when the value is clear.

21% of Gen Z are **comfortable with their personal data being used to train AI models**, nearly double the percentage of Boomers at 11%.



of consumers remain **uncomfortable with AI data use.**



of consumers say they **trust AI with their personal information less than humans.**

Openness doesn't equal blind trust. It's conditional. Trust must be earned, not demanded or assumed.

What this means for marketers

If you want Gen Z to fuel your innovation, invite them in. Give them transparency, let them choose, and credit their role in shaping what's next.



Trust builder: When requesting data to train AI or test new features, make it part of the story. Share the purpose, show the benefit, be clear about the security measures and limits of the data use. Highlight how their input makes a difference.

Turn beta testing into co-creation. Ask questions or for input openly, share outcomes, and give visible credit for shaping the product.



The Gen Z trust playbook: 10 things marketers can do today

Learning about a new audience, evolving your marketing strategies, and building solid trust take time. But you can get started today with concrete and privacy-first actions.

1. Brand your consent touchpoints

✔ Treat cookie banners, sign-ups, and opt-ins as the brand interactions that they are. Use your voice, design, and honesty to build confidence.

2. Rewrite in plain language

✔ Strip out legal jargon from banners, forms, notices, and policies. Test with users until anyone from your target audience can explain the message.

3. Show the value exchange

✔ Pair every data request with the benefit to your audience: “We ask for X so you get Y.” Keep it to one sentence.

4. Collect only what matters

✔ Audit data flows. Stop asking for information you don’t need, especially identity-linked details like location or demographics. They recognize nosiness and will call you on it (or walk away.)

5. Publish a data promise – and keep it

✔ Create a short, visible statement in your brand’s tone of voice about how you collect, use, and protect data. Share it at onboarding and at key touchpoints.

Then do what you say, updating messaging and operations to keep that promise over time.



6. Keep consent alive

✔ Build check-ins: Prompt users to update preferences regularly. Always close the loop with confirmation: *"Here's what we changed because you requested it."*

7. Make privacy interactive

✔ Replace static text with tooltips, graphical info presentation, swipeable explainers, or short videos. Meet Gen Z with the formats they already consume.

8. Design privacy with your best UX practices

✔ Build your privacy features with the same care as your product or campaigns. Clear options, clean design, easy navigation.

9. Equip your frontline

✔ Train customer support, social, and other audience-facing teams to answer privacy questions clearly, quickly, and in public when needed.

10. Co-create innovation

✔ Involve Gen Z in testing new initiatives. Use beta programs, feedback channels, and highlight their role as collaborators. As always, make it clear what the benefits are for their participation, and/or offer proportionate incentives for it.



Closing thought: Gen Z is defining the future of digital trust

Gen Z isn't just another generation to market to. They're a stress test for the future of digital trust. Their choices today signal where consumer expectations are headed: demanding relevance without intrusion, transparency without jargon, and value without compromise.

For marketers, this is a turning point. The brands that will thrive in the next decade won't be those shouting the loudest or treating their customers as passive consumers, but those trusted the most.

Trust is the new growth engine. The window to earn it is open now, but it won't stay open forever.

"The next decade of growth will be powered by deeper trust. Gen Z is setting the pace – and the rest of the market will follow."



Adelina Peltea

— CMO at Usercentrics



Join the Privacy-Led Marketing **movement**

Privacy-led growth isn't just possible – it's already happening. Join our community of marketers who are turning trust into their most valuable brand asset.

Explore **strategies**. Share **ideas**.
Lead with **trust**.

We've got your hub for insights, tools, and more.

EXPLORE NOW



About Usercentrics

Usercentrics is a global market leader in solutions for data privacy and activation of consented data. Our technology solutions enable customers to manage user consent for websites, apps and CTV. Helping clients achieve privacy compliance, Usercentrics is active in 195 countries on more than 2.3 million websites and apps. We have over 5,400 partners and handle more than 7 billion monthly user consents. Learn more on usercentrics.com

