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Gen Z Sales Representatives Are Here. Are You Ready for Them?

Medical Leverage

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3 Ways Pharmaceutical Companies Will Need to Modify the Sales Training Experience

For years—decades even—the typical pharmaceutical sales training process has consisted of traditional elements. Pre-reading, testing, online modules, in-person group discussions, and other activities have all been training staples. Their focus has been on making sure sales representatives are prepared to present a specific product in a specific way to a specific audience. This approach has worked. In many—if not most—cases, it has worked *very* well. But, like so many other tried-and-true processes, the pharmaceutical sales training process might be tried, but it's no longer exactly true. The reason? The emergence of Gen Z in the workforce.

Those in Gen Z have always been connected. They have never known a time when there were not mobile phones, the internet, email, texting, apps, and so many other technologies. They are what is referred to as, digital natives. This term describes those who have grown up in the era of ubiquitous technology, including computers and the internet.[i] They are comfortable with technology and view it as a necessary part of their daily lives—and that includes how they engage in the learning process.

According to elearningindustry.com, the following are key characteristics of digital natives:

- They enjoy being connected constantly.
- They prefer to use their own ubiquitous technologies—such as laptops, phones, etc.
- They have short attention spans.
- They are pervasive users of texting and instant messaging apps, and they use the abbreviated lingo of those platforms—such as TL;DR, LMK, TBH, TTYL, and IDK.
- The first place they check for information is the internet.
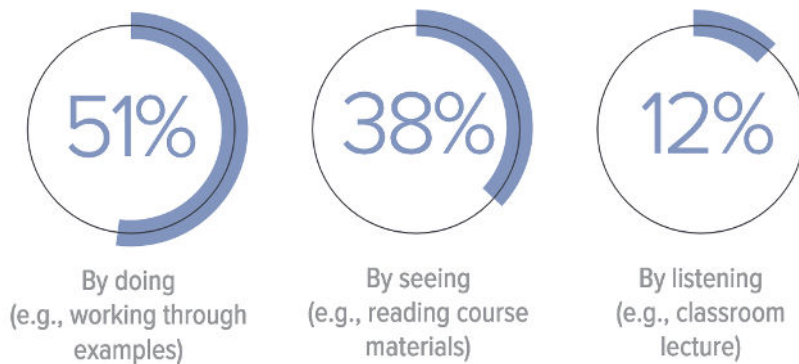- They often prefer socializing online and can have weak in face-to-face communication skills.

So, what does this mean for pharmaceutical sales training? It means changes need to be made, changes that take into account how members of Gen Z interact with the world in which they live (and in which they sell). It doesn't mean that we must completely move away from what's worked in the past. But it *does* require us to evaluate the effectiveness of those techniques through the perspective of our Gen Z employees.

Gen Z Learners: What Do They Look Like?

Those in Gen Z are considered social learners.[ii] They enjoy collaborating with and *competing* against others. This includes sharing their lives openly on social media, using game-based apps like Kahoot in their secondary school classrooms, and engaging with collaborative annotation tools in college classrooms.

While they *do* love their devices, those in Gen Z also enjoy being in the presence of others. Independent learning—including online learning—is not a strong point for this generation.[ii] This is why it is crucial for training programs to incorporate the latest technologies and innovations while also providing ample opportunities for human interaction. Additionally, as noted in the graphic below, training should also include a significant amount of hands-on learning activities rather than reading and/or lectures.

HOW DOES GEN Z LEARN?

51%
By doing
(e.g., working through examples)

38%
By seeing
(e.g., reading course materials)

12%
By listening
(e.g., classroom lecture)

Source: Barnes & Noble College

Employees belonging to earlier generations might have gone to school when listening to the professor speak for an hour or more during each class period was the norm. However, Gen Z learners demand a different learning experience. Information cannot just be delivered. Instead, it needs to be provided in ways that are consistently engaging and entertaining. Distractions abound. If what is being presented is not interesting to your Gen Z trainees, they will be pulled toward information that *is* interesting to them—like messenger apps on their laptops, texts coming through on their smartwatches, or the social media platform they are logged into on their smartphones.

If revamping training for Gen Z sounds daunting, you're not wrong. It *does* take focused and informed effort to make modifications or to develop entirely new approaches. But it can also provide unexpected benefits—including opening up new perspectives on old(er) content and/or delivery methods.

We now know the "why" of redesigning sales training for Gen Z sales representatives. But *how* can that be done? That is what we will focus on for the remainder of this paper.

Use Video—A LOT

According to a study conducted by Pearson, YouTube is Gen Z's preferred way of learning. Forty-seven percent "spend 3 or more hours per day on YouTube." And, to dissuade you of the idea that Gen Z is merely an extension of the millennial generation, only 22% of millennials in the study spend 3+ hours daily on YouTube.[iii]

Keeping in mind that Gen Z learners are digital natives, incorporating video into sales training—whether it is posted with password protection on YouTube or another video platform—makes a lot of sense. These videos don't need to (and, in most cases, shouldn't) be long and information heavy. The attention span of Gen Z is said to be around eight seconds, as compared to 12 seconds for millennials. This is not to say that you need to shorten all of your content to such a miniscule length. However, what it *does* suggest is that microlearning should be included within the structure of training programs.

When it comes to retaining information, cognitive overload is the enemy.[iv] When too much information is presented at one time, learners tend to tune out. However, microlearning involves the use of short, "snackable" content that can be consumed quickly by the user. For example, a two- to five-minute video that focuses on a specific topic and provides ONLY the information the user needs is much more effective than a 15-minute video that surrounds the essential information with nonessential content. However, Gen Z learners *will* watch long-form content (which is often defined as 10 minutes or longer) *if* they find the information and the way it's presented interesting and engaging.

Providing videos on a platform that allows commenting—such as YouTube, Wistia, Vimeo and others—provides a more collaborative experience for learners. This can help build an online learning community for sales representatives that can last long after the formal training has been completed. This is particularly the case if how-to videos are provided post-

training to answer questions or address issues that sales representatives might encounter in the field. Also, consider making your videos searchable so that users can find the content they're looking for quickly.

Another significant advantage of using video as a training tool is that it works well on mobile devices. Most of those in Gen Z can't remember a time when they *didn't* have access to a smartphone. First, they used their parents' phones. Then, as they got older, they had their own.
Rather than trying to keep Gen Z learners *away* from their phones, look for ways to incorporate those devices into your training process. Again, video is an effective method.

Give Them Opportunities to Play in the Collaborative Sandbox

In addition to video, there's one thing Gen Z learners consistently state a preference for: learning by *doing*. In a <u>LinkedIn survey of approximately 400 learning and HR professionals and 2,000+ members of Gen Z,</u> results showed that 55% of those in Gen Z preferred learning by doing and 38% preferred learning by watching a video or online course. Only 7% preferred learning by listening.

What this finding—and others that have come to the same conclusion—means for sales training is this: If you cannot completely eliminate passive learning—such as an online or in-person lecture—limit it as much as you possibly can. Replace it with opportunities for your Gen Z sales trainees to break out into small groups so they can attempt to solve a specific problem. Provide simulations they can work through as a team. Consider gamifying activities to create a healthy sense of competition. These are the types of activities Gen Z learners crave.

Collaborative, hands-on learning opportunities in your sales training program can take many different forms. Regardless of the content being taught, there are always methods of adapting it to some type of immersive and experiential learning activity.

According to <u>Panopto</u>, "Gen Z isn't content with simply checking a box or taking a quiz to certify they've mastered a new skill. They want the opportunity to practice implementing their new knowledge and prove that they understand what they've learned."[v] This level of active engagement not only makes the learning process more fun, it also helps participants *retain* what they've learned during the training process.

Gamification is another way to engage Gen Z learners in the training experience. (That makes sense considering that 90% of those in Gen Z consider themselves to be gamers.[vi]) Many of them grew up using online game-based learning platforms like Kahoot in the classroom. Platforms like this one allowed them to compete against other students in the room to see who could get the answer first, who could get the highest number of correct answers, etc. They also used these platforms to respond in real-time to polls initiated by the instructor.

There are many different types of activities that can be used to gamify learning. These include, but aren't limited to, those in the following elearningindustry.com list:

- Visual elements more akin to video games than traditional education materials
- Interactive elements that engage multiple senses and physical movement
- Puzzles and challenges
- Goals split into small, quickly achieved benchmarks for quicker, intermittent gratification
- The existence of narrative and characters
- Immediate feedback
- Collaboration and/or competition
- Increasing difficulty as initial skills are mastered
- Player-driven progress

Many of these elements may already exist within your training program. However, "gamified instruction makes them more visible and immediate. Doing so produces a variety of improved results."[vii]

Provide Detailed (and Frequent) Feedback

Those in Gen Z want to know their status—right now. This does not come as a surprise considering the fact that the majority of these individuals have grown up using social media and are used to constantly seeking validation in the form of likes, share and comments.

According to Inc.com, "Feedback delivered to Generation Z should be prompt (as close to the behavior as possible is ideal), swift (one sentence or an emoji will suffice), and tracked." So, when looking at the sales training process, it's important to build in frequent and consistent opportunities to engage with

trainees one-on-one to provide constructive feedback about their performance regarding a specific activity.

In general, Gen Z employees prefer to receive feedback in the form of coaching. Provide them chances for self-reflection by asking questions, such as "What challenges are you facing with this?" or "It looks like you might be struggling with this a bit. How can I help you?"[viii] When they respond, make sure you listen and have a complete understanding about where you might be able to provide assistance. Likewise, acknowledge when they have done something well.

As mentioned previously, gamification is an excellent way to deliver immediate feedback. Participants can see when they get an answer right or wrong. However, as much as they love technology, members of Gen Z also place a high value on human interaction. According to The Center for Generational Kinetics, Gen Z employees "want consistent recognition. Gen Z wants to know that you see them and that you appreciate their effort." This is important to keep in mind not only during the training process, but also as these individuals begin to go out into the field.

Be prepared for Gen Z trainees to question the status quo. And, when they do, do not automatically assume they are being disrespectful of you or your training. They need to understand why what they're learning is relevant to them and what they'll be doing. So, take time to explain this—preferably before an activity begins. It's helpful to provide context for what's being taught upfront.

Although the focus of this paper is on what needs to be done to create training that will be effective for Gen Z sales representatives, it's also important to acknowledge the value employees of previous generations can bring to the table. Consider creating a way for Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials to be formally or informally involved in the training process. For example, consider creating specific points within the training where participants work directly with an older and more experienced employee. As the Harvard Business Review stated, "Mentoring, too, can be a powerful way to leverage generational diversity. Research demonstrates that, properly coached, new professionals will develop faster because their learning has been enhanced and guided."

The Courage to Make Bold Changes

When it comes to modifying your existing training program or creating a new one from scratch, be willing to be both bold and purposeful in what you do. Look at it as an opportunity to teach this new generation of employees in a way that not only engages them, but also motivates them to become stellar, long-term sales representatives for your organization.

Additionally, be sure that your training provides an accurate reflection of your corporate culture and strives for authentic engagement with an emerging age group and creates an experience that participants will feel is relevant to them and that provides a specific roadmap they can use to achieve success.

If you're looking at either revising your current sales training program or creating a new one, Medical Leverage can help. Our team of instructional designers, writers, creative directors, programmers, and others can work with you to build a program that is not only effective—but also consistently engaging. **Contact Carl Roselle at Medical Leverage. We would love to help you tell that story.**

[i] https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/digital-native.asp

[ii] https://www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/2019/04/gen-z-learning

[iii] https://www.pearson.com/ped-blogs/blogs/2018/05/generation-z-millennials-expect-technology-education.html

[iv] https://elearningindustry.com/7-tips-elearning-professionals-enhance-knowledge-retention

[v] https://www.panopto.com/blog/rethinking-training-and-development-for-generation-z/

[vi] http://theagency.jou.ufl.edu/blog/2020/12/21/pixels-to-profit-what-brands-can-learn-from-the-gaming-industry/

[vii] https://elearningindustry.com/6-ways-gamification-boosts-gamified-learning

[viii] https://www.aeulead.com/main-navigation/insights/article/how-to-deliver-feedback-to-employees-from-different-generations