

Generation Alpha: Everything Brands Need To Know

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Ten-year-old Zy is afraid of needles. If she could invent one thing, it would be a device to help people get shots more easily—and without fear. Fia, who’s 11, would invent a submarine that picks up trash in the ocean. And 11-year-old Mylo says that although climate change is a “snowball” that’s just getting bigger, it’s still small enough to stop if we try.

We talked to Gen Alpha, and wow, do they have some *ideas*.

Gen Z, radicalized by social injustice and clad in '90s throwback leisurewear, might have stolen the spotlight from their millennial predecessors, but an even newer generation is quietly coming of age. And it’s a mistake to underestimate them.

[After Gen Alpha has aged into teens with agency, influence, and disposable income, it will already be too late.](#)

Parental controls, social media age restrictions, and, well, a global pandemic have kept Gen Alpha under wraps, but they’re quickly reaching their full potential. Founders [building brands](#) for the future need to pay attention to the under-12 set now. [After Gen Alpha has aged into teens with agency, influence, and disposable income, it will already be too late.](#)

Here, we take a deep dive into Generation Alpha: who they are, what they care about, and how they will shape the future of everything. We went to the source, speaking to a dozen kids aged seven to 12, as well as community leaders and researchers focused on this cohort.

Learn how you can start or grow businesses to meet the needs of this future generation of consumers, decision makers, and leaders.

Who is Generation Alpha?

Gen Alpha is the generation following Gen Z and currently includes all children born in or after 2010—the same year the iPad was born. The majority of this demographic is under 12 years of age, but the oldest of them will become teens in 2022. The term “Generation Alpha” was coined by consulting agency [McCrinkle](#) in a 2008 report on the subject. According to the firm’s [latest report](#), by 2025, this generation will number more than two billion—the largest generation in history.

Gen Alpha is heavily influenced by technology and the Gen Z creators who dominate their feeds. But the events of the past two years will have a significant impact on who they are. This generation of youth has been unofficially dubbed “Gen C,” as in Generation COVID, because of how much their lives will be shaped by this pandemic.

Ashley Fell, social researcher and co-author of [Generation Alpha](#), says that the impacts of COVID—economic, social, educational, psychological—will leave lasting marks on this young generation. She also predicts they will value family more, admire “everyday superheroes,” and see [work from home](#) as a normal way of life. “They will be a more creative and resilient generation due to the challenges they experienced,” she says.

What makes Gen Alpha different from the generations that came before?

Mylo, Fia, and Zy are just three of the kids who attend a weekly virtual after-school program called Upstanders Academy. There, they learn about social justice and ask tough questions of regular guests that include politicians, entrepreneurs, and activists.

Upstanders is the brainchild of mom, former federal program officer, and [World-Changing Kids](#) founder Lindsey Barr, who recognized a need to address world matters with kids in an age-appropriate way. “They *want* to talk about social issues,” she says. “They care about homelessness, they care about refugees.”

Social issues sprung to the forefront of family dinner conversations as kids in isolation were spending less time with peers in sports and IRL activities and more time in virtual spaces. It’s a shift from what Lindsey experienced herself as a child. “I was always told these issues were too big and I couldn’t do anything about them, so why bother?” she says.

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Lindsey Barr, *World-Changing Kids*

Generation Alpha may simultaneously be growing up faster—or “upaging”—because of their heightened awareness of the world around them, but they’ve also been cut off from critical in-person social interaction. This has increased their dependence on the technology that has replaced it.

What do brands need to understand about Gen Alpha?

Founders with plans to build long-term businesses need to get familiar with Generation Alpha—the largest generation of future consumers—now. While in many ways they resemble Gen Z, their unique experiences have affected how they see the world and what they expect from it.

Gen Alpha kids are raised on screens—and that’s not necessarily all bad news

Despite exposure to more of the issues plaguing the world, Gen Alpha is hopeful. Through technology, they have a window into ideas and cultures outside their bubble, and they see it as a way to be engaged. “Technology is such a big influence on the way they see the world, the kind of opportunities, the kind of skills they want to develop,” says Abdaal Mazhar Shafi, serial entrepreneur and co-founder of [UpstartED](#), an organization empowering equity-seeking, marginalized, and at-risk youth to discover their potential and make an impact.

Screen time increased dramatically over the course of the pandemic, with school, activities, and even play dates moving to a virtual format. While possible fallout from this could be shorter attention spans or delayed social function, screen time today isn’t the passive experience of generations past. It is a two-way street where kids can have input, interact, and collaborate.

Generation Alpha are using video games from a young age and it impacts their mindset in terms of being active participants to solutions.

Ashley Fell, social researcher and author, *Generation Alpha*

The generational technology gap is closing, too. Millennial parents have been raised in a digital world and understand the risks and challenges of connected kids—but also the benefits.

According to the McCrindle report, tech-enabled play can “increase connectivity, facilitate community, and develop social and global skills.”

Technology also gives kids agency. “Generation Alpha are using video games from a young age and it impacts their mindset in terms of being active participants to solutions,” says Ashley. This is exactly what Lindsey hopes to achieve with Upstanders, too. After learning about a topic, kids are provided with actions to take within their own communities.

Ownership over the solutions is some of what technology can offer. “With climate change and COVID, I guess we’re screwed,” says 11-year-old Hazel. “But I’m excited to see how much better technology becomes, because there are going to be really cool things.” Gen Alpha feels empowered to act because technology enables it, combatting some of the anxiety they may feel for the future. Mylo envisions a machine that converts carbon to water vapor, and eight-year-old Kenny* thinks technology could help save endangered bears (his favorite).

Gen Alpha feels a deep responsibility to reverse the damage of past generations

“These kids are starting to feel that they’re the ones who are going to suffer because of the consequences of inaction,” says Abdaal. “They want to move quickly. And it’s not just about reading—they want to do something about it.” In both Upstanders Academy and UpstartED, kids are introduced to social entrepreneurship, but many of the resulting projects and conversations are kid-led.

“We talk about sustainability, climate, nutrition, work, gender diversity, and race. These are topics that they bring up themselves,” says Abdaal. “They want to shed light on these issues that have been overlooked or even silenced in some ways to try to improve life for all.”

For millennials like Abdaal and those in the generations before, the sense of responsibility to protect the planet came later in life. “These kids have had it from day one,” he says.

Gen Alpha’s influences and inspirations are shifting

Lindsey says that with her own children, the rules went out the window once the pandemic hit. Her kids are now consuming content well above their years—supported by lively dinner conversation. “She’s watching *Dexter*,” she says of her youngest (who would like to be a blood splatter expert when she grows up). “It’s kind of a grand experiment. Are we ruining Hazel? I don’t know.”

At 11-year-old Kaaya’s house, it’s a different story. Her mom won’t let her have social media accounts yet, but Kaaya does get most of her best ideas from YouTube. On the platform, Gen Alpha creators like 10-year-old Ryan Haji create kid-focused videos that influence ideas, interests, and family purchases. In 2020 alone, [Ryan’s World](#) generated [\\$250 million](#) in merch sales.

Regardless of parental approach, Gen Alpha has access to more information than any generation before it. Because of this, it has broader influences beyond kid-centric programming. “There will be a shift in who they define as aspirational in the future,” says Ashley, “from traditional superheroes to everyday superheroes like medical researchers and nurses.”

Kids are seeing and being influenced by young champions like Greta Thunberg—people not that much older than them.

Abdaal Mazhar Shafi, UpstartED

It's already happening. "I'm inspired by the people making the technology today," says 10-year-old Mahaica. "The scientists making the COVID vaccines, our teachers, and my parents." For Zy, actor Emma Watson is her hero—not because she played a kid wizard but for her philanthropic efforts. "She has this organization called HeForShe," Zy says. "I did a project on her last year. I like how much she's helping women."

And in spaces like science, technology, and social justice, there is an increasing representation of youth. "Kids are seeing and being influenced by young champions like Greta Thunberg—people not that much older than them," says Abdaal.

Gen Alpha kids know how to shape their own outcomes

Kids have increasingly more say in parental decision making. With Gen Alpha consuming more on-demand media through multiple platforms, brands and advertisers are finding ways to understand and reach children (despite [strict legislation](#) on how they can collect data). For example, a [survey](#) found that 70% of parents say they have made purchases influenced by their kids' favorite show or character.

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Ashley Fell

Kids are being increasingly exposed to examples of characters and real kids who are inventors, trailblazers, and entrepreneurs. Kenny and his twin, Maisy*, were inspired to find an entrepreneurial solution to their own problem. "We're making rainbow loom bracelets, rings, and necklaces because we're trying to get enough money to buy a Lego set for Chinese New Year," says Maisy, while her brother adds, "We're selling them to our friends and our neighbors and people we know."

[Kid-powered entrepreneurship](#) is not a new concept, with every living generation dabbling in roadside lemonade sales. But technology and access to simple-to-use tools have provided more kids the opportunity to learn vital skills and earn their own money.

The [creator economy](#), largely driven by Gen Z, is crystalizing as a viable path for Gen Alpha. "They have ownership, authority, and influence in the realms they operate, and influence others of their own age," says Ashley.

How do you reach Gen Alpha today—and build long term brand affinity?

“The most significant aspect of marketing to preteens is that now they can talk back,” says [Common Sense Media](#), an organization guiding parents on choosing appropriate content for kids. Brands with staying power are those that recognize that the relationships they develop with these future consumers will be a two-way street. These relationships will be built on trust, participation, and authenticity.

Gen Alpha has been raised on responsive technology that no longer asks them to passively consume. “The platforms they have grown up using—like [TikTok](#), Minecraft, and Roblox—have defined them as active co-creators,” says Ashley.

“I like to play Roblox, because you can hang out with your friends while doing it,” says Fia. “I also like Roblox Studio, because it’s where you can create games for Roblox. It helps teach you how to code and other stuff like that.”

[You can do well as a business by also doing good. They're almost demanding it now.](#)

[Abdaal Mazhar Shafi](#)

Clever brands are going a step further to reach Gen Alpha, understanding that they will not only be future consumers, but also future employees. The McCrindle report describes Gen Alpha as “social, global, and mobile as they will work, study, and travel between different countries and multiple careers.” Businesses seeking the best talent will be selling themselves to candidates—not the other way around.

Abdaal, who also runs a technology consulting company, works with a brand who is thinking years into the future about talent. “The CEO launched an eight-week youth focused academy,” he says. “And he hires 100 young people over the summer.” This community building effort not only builds trust with Gen Alpha, it’s also a recruitment strategy. Through the program, kids experience a particular industry—in this case, retail—as a potential career path.

Transparency in business practices and a strong social impact position will also go a long way to building trust with Gen Alpha as they age into consumers. “You can do well as a business by also doing good,” says Abdaal. “They’re almost demanding it now.” As Gen Alpha is more aware of the damages caused by corporations, they will seek out brands that contribute to the solutions.

Millennial parents offer clues to Gen Alpha’s preferences

“Generation Alpha have brand influence and purchasing power beyond their years,” says Ashley. Millennial parents are shaping Gen Alpha’s preferences, but the influence goes both ways, with parents learning about new ideas and products through highly connected kids.

Rules designed to protect young people do make it challenging for brands to directly engage with and reach kids under 12. Their millennial parents and teachers, however, provide insights and

access points. Millennials, who were also brought up in a digital age, see the benefits that technology brings to their own lives.

Schools too, staffed by millennials, have shifted learning into more participatory and engaging formats powered by technology. Parents and teachers of this generation also see the school's role as being more holistic, building life skills and focusing on wellbeing. These ways of learning offer clues as to how Gen Alpha will work, learn, and engage with the world as they age.

“Fun toys which develop specific skills such as STEM, social competencies, entrepreneurial skills, strength and coordination, financial literacy, innovation and resourcefulness will be favored by parents and educators,” says the McCrindle report.

An emphasis on minimalist, high quality, “clean,” and Instagram-worthy products has become a status symbol for parents who were among the first to have their parenting put under the microscope of social media.

Gen Alpha's preferences will also be shaped by the choices made for them by millennial parents. An emphasis on minimalist, high quality, “clean” (natural, organic, free from chemicals), and Instagram-worthy products has become a status symbol for parents who were among the first to have their parenting put under the microscope of social media.

Children, by nature, identify with brands later in life if they were exposed to them by their parents at an early age. This is brand affinity by osmosis.

How to evolve your brand so it grows up alongside Gen Alpha

“Generation Alpha are growing up as super-informed and constantly connected consumers,” says Ashley. “This means that their attitudes and consumption behavior is different to generations past and is constantly evolving.”

Consistently incorporating youth voices and parental feedback into products designed for kids will be imperative for brands looking to grow with Gen Alpha. “As empowered consumers, products, advertising, and marketing will best reach them when it involves them and meets their expectations, aspirations, and values,” says Ashley.

Talk the talk (and walk it)

Mylo shares a story about shoe brand [Johnny](#), which sells biodegradable footwear with embedded appleseeds that grow trees once the shoe breaks down. “The fast fashion industry is one of the main leaders of textile waste,” he says. Nine-year-old Lilia, who aspires to be a fashion designer, adds, “I'd try and use scraps of fabric and sew them together and then use that fabric to make more clothes.”

Your story is important, if not more important, than the actual products that you're going to build.

Abdaal Mazhar Shafi

Gen Alpha has a deep understanding of the lifecycle of products around them, exposed to conversations at the dinner table about food ingredients and participating in sorting the compost from the recycling. As such, Gen Alpha will be seeking out this information as they become consumers. “Your story is important, if not more important than the actual products that you're going to build,” says Abdaal.

Your [brand story](#) should incorporate what you stand for, the impact you're making (good and bad), and how you're participating in solutions. “You have to think about the social challenges that matter to this generation, and you have to talk about them.” Within these conversations, authenticity is key. “This generation more so than others is going to be able to sniff out the BS.”

Build experiences before products

Shopify's latest [Future of Commerce](#) report highlighted the need for brands to combat rising acquisition costs by forming long-term relationships with existing customers and building a connected omnichannel experience.

If businesses fail to understand the world's largest generation of consumers, they will edge towards irrelevancy.

Ashley Fell

This approach will become even more critical for Gen Alpha, which has already grown to expect it. “As they grow up, they will increasingly integrate technology into their consumer behavior, and it will influence how they shop and interact with brands,” says Ashley. Brands therefore need to stay connected to the spaces where youth engage as they emerge. What, for example, will be the next TikTok, the next Roblox?

“These youth and their parents are looking for unique, personalized experiences that are digital first, and well integrated,” says Abdaal. “If companies aren't thinking about those elements then there's a whole slice of the population that may never even get to know you.”

Personalized experiences will also speak to a generation accustomed to creating their own avatars, game characters, and online personas. They will seek out brands that offer customization and expect marketing and customer service to be highly personalized to their preferences.

Reach Gen Alpha in meaningful ways—and on their terms

Marketers who want to reach this cohort need to think beyond the way they have engaged audiences in the past. “The generations before Alpha have been marketed to so frequently and

from so many different angles that there's a savviness to them," says Ashley. This has already trickled down to this youngest generation.

Gen Alpha is influenced by tech, social media, and, like generations past, their peers. Brands can leverage peer-to-peer recommendations through user generated content and referral incentives. [Integrated marketing](#) across IRL and virtual spaces with focus on product placement in media and interactive [social media campaigns](#) will be key.

Brands that see future consumers as stakeholders in their business will resonate. "Generation Alpha don't want products just pushed at them," says Ashley. "In many ways they are having a seat at the table and having influence over a brand."

What does the future hold for Generation Alpha?

Through Upstanders Academy, Lindsey's goal is to teach kids to become "empowered and compassionate leaders and engaged citizens." With news and social feeds dominated by bad news, she worries that kids may otherwise become apathetic or depressed. But both she and Abdaal are optimistic. "We're looking at 12-year-olds building ideas for sustainable companies and pitching them to us and to investors," says Abdaal.

When they talk about what their goals are and the kind of workplaces that they want to be in, they want flexibility.

[Abdaal Mazhar Shafi](#)

The kinds of futures and careers they envision for themselves are formed by what's happening in the world. "They're definitely looking for more meaningful work," Abdaal says. But they've also been exposed to new ways of working as they watched their parents' careers change over the pandemic. "When they talk about what their goals are and the kind of workplaces that they want to be in, they want flexibility," says Abdaal.

While Hazel thinks most jobs will be taken by robots in the future, the truth is, more jobs for humans are yet to be created. McCrindle predicted in 2020 that 65% of those starting school at the time of the report will end up working in jobs that don't exist today. Seven-year-old Evan, who aspires to be an inventor, is excited about his future. "I like how there's a job for everybody," he says. "No matter what they like, there's a job for that."

The future of work includes new career options that will result from Web3, cryptocurrencies, AI, alternative energy ("We need to stop fossil fuels," says Fia), [AR](#), and other emerging fields and technologies. Social and demographic changes will also impact this future. "The aging population is creating new opportunities, not just in the aged care sector but other related industries," reports McCrindle.

I like how there's a job for everybody. No matter what they like, there's a job for that.

Evan, 7 years old

Brands looking to recruit Gen Alpha to their teams and win them as audiences in the future need to incorporate their perspectives into decision making now. The biggest mistake brands can make, says Ashley, is not recognizing and embracing what makes Gen Alpha unique. “If businesses fail to understand the world’s largest generation of consumers, they will edge towards irrelevancy.”

The first of Gen Alpha’s generation will already be turning 13 in 2023, spilling onto TikTok and into puberty. They have arrived here wise beyond their years, skeptical but hopeful, and they are surging toward futures built and owned by them. Brands with a chance of surviving this transition need to recognize that it’s their world now, invite only.

UpstartED and World-Changing Kids are two Shopify partner organizations. Through partnerships like these, Shopify’s Youth Outreach team aims to reduce barriers for underserved and underrepresented youth to pursue careers in tech and entrepreneurship.

**Some children's names have been changed for privacy reasons*

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About the author

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Dayna Winter is a Lead Writer at Shopify, telling stories about the humans behind brands and the moments that motivate them to create. On the side, she resells vintage, runs a film-themed vacation rental, and is working on her green thumb.