

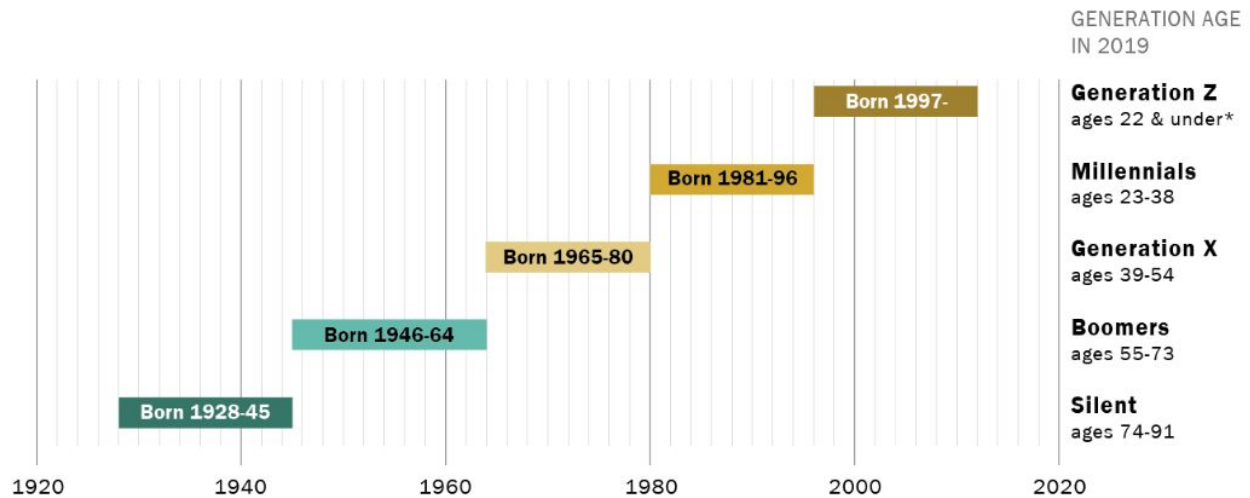
Gen X Communicators: Changing Times, Changing Competencies

A five-generational workforce leaves today's communication professionals--namely the "Forgotten Generation X"---with ever-changing challenges to stay relevant and current in professional competencies.

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Generations and Age



*No chronological endpoint has been set for this group. Generation Z age ranges vary by analysis.

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WHY THIS WHITE PAPER?

Gen X will be forming the backbone of organizational leadership for some time as the oldest Gen X workers will be in the workforce at least another 10 years and the youngest more than 30 years (CNBC, May 9, 2018).

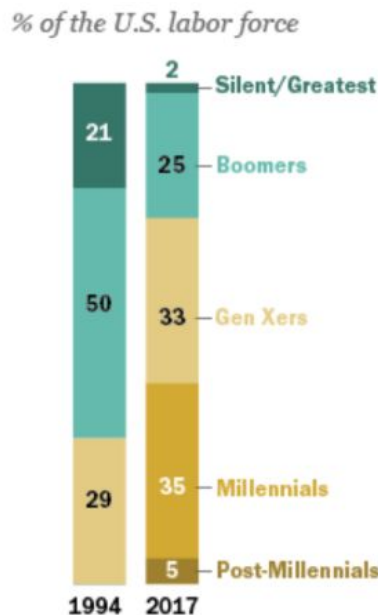
This white paper addresses the issues, opportunities, and solutions for Gen X communication professionals in today's changing digital professional landscape.

BACKGROUND

Generation X (1965-1980) (Pew Research), consists of 33% of the labor market. Generation X was labelled “America’s ‘neglected middle child’” in a 1994 Pew Research report, but is recently gaining attention as Boomers are retiring and Gen Xers are taking on those leadership positions. (“Generation X - not millennials -- is changing the nature of work,” CNBC, May 9, 2018.)

While millennials have dominated the discussion the past ten years, it's Gen X that is now commanding attention. In 2019, the oldest Gen Xers will be 54 years old and the youngest will be 39 years old. The diversity of age and experience creates challenges within the communication profession, with current competencies as a key factor.

Gen X and Millennials Dominate U. S. Workforce



Note: Labor force includes those ages 16 and older who are working or looking for work. Annual averages shown.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of monthly 1994 and 2017 Current Population Survey (IPUMS).

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Gen X experience ranges from mid- to senior-level, depending on time spent in and out of the workforce.

Despite being closely represented in the labor force market to Millennials, the fast pace in technological advances has changed public relations and communications dramatically over the past six years. Today, professional communicators are more likely to be reaching customers or constituencies directly vs. going through the traditional media filter. In turn, this has made keeping with professional communication competencies of crucial relevance. (“6

Essential Communications Skills for PR People,” Dorothy Crenshaw, Nov. 18, 2015.)

Further, the next generation is entering the communication profession. With the oldest in Generation Z (born 1997-present, as defined by Pew Research) turning 22 years old and entering the post-college labor force, Gen X communicators have a priority to keep abreast of quickly changing skills and competencies.

Communication thought leaders like Shel Holtz, director of internal communications for Webcor, identified just three ways to acquire competencies: 1. hire someone who has them; 2. train someone already on the team; or 3. outsource. (“Why and how your company should set communication competencies.” by Russell Working, Ragan Report, June 25, 2018.)

Whichever route is determined best in acquiring competencies, one thing for certain is the increasing difficulty to strategize and manage what is not understood.

DEFINITION

Competencies are defined by the Society for Human Resource Management as a cluster of highly interrelated attributes, including knowledge, skills, and abilities that give rise to the behaviors needed to perform a given job effectively. (Competencies Overview, Society for Human Resource Management, www.shrm.org)

The communication field and professional communicator roles are ever-evolving. As new channels and technologies transform communications, the need to develop and update competencies grows more urgent. (Holtz, Ragan Report, June 2018)

AUDIENCE

The focus of this white paper is Gen X professional communicators and marketers. The mid- to senior-level expertise of these Gen X “digital immigrants” experienced seismic technology shifts as teenagers, had to learn as adults and adjust to a world changing beneath their feet. Called digital immigrants because

Gen X is a hybrid of digital users who are extremely comfortable with technology but still remember a time when things were a bit more primitive. (“Gen X: The Cro-Magnon of Digital Natives,” Tom Kamber, Journal of the American Society on Aging, Fall 2017.)

Within Gen X, the communication profession is a large and diverse group. Data by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is broken down within the following categories of Media and Communication:

- Public relations managers
- Marketing managers
- Writers
- Editors

ISSUES

The “Occupational Outlook Handbook” (April 2019) projects a 10% growth in marketing managers, a 9% growth in public relations practitioners, a 7% growth in writers, and a -1% growth in editors. Although these aren’t phenomenal numbers and certainly not the top growth professions, the focus here are changes within the profession and of notable significance, those already employed in the communication/PR field.

Despite Gen X professional communicators currently close in numbers to Millennial communicators, the outer band generations (retiring Boomers and entering Gen Z) are changing the demographic and labor force every year. These changes make it necessary for Gen X professionals to sharpen their skill levels to not only keep competencies current with their employers and customer base, but also to stay in line with incoming professionals.

PROJECTIONS

In the charts below, the Bureau of Labor Statistics latest “Occupational Outlook Handbook” projected the following growth and decline in the communication field for (2016-2026):

Marketing managers have a 10% job growth outlook (3% greater than the total of all U.S. occupations); public relations managers have a 9% job growth (2% higher than the total of all U.S. occupations); writers and authors an 8% job growth (1% greater than the total of all U.S. occupations); and editors a -1% decline in job growth (or -8% compared to U.S. job growth).

DATA - JOB OUTLOOK (2016-2026)

Advertising, Promotions, and Marketing Managers

Percent change in employment, projected 2016-26

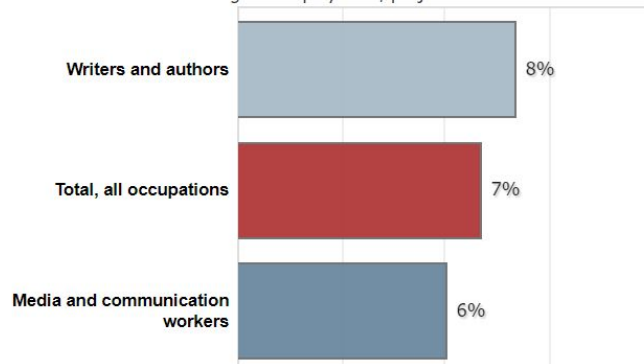


Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

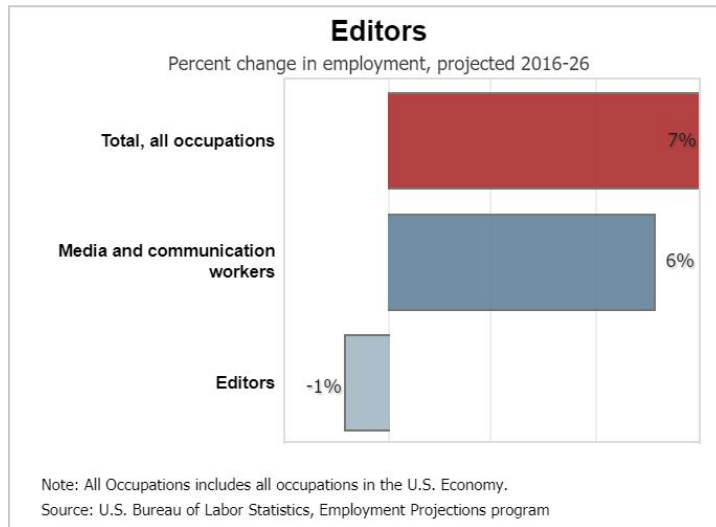
Writers and Authors

Percent change in employment, projected 2016-26



Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program



(All charts as of April 12, 2019.)

DATA - JOB OUTLOOK (EXPLAINED)

The BLS “Occupational Outlook Handbook” describes the job outlook for each of the positions below—all greatly impacted by the change-constant digital landscape.

Public Relations-- Organizations will continue to emphasize community outreach and customer customer relations as a way to maintain and enhance their reputation and visibility. Public opinion may change quickly, with good and bad news spreading rapidly through the Internet. As such, public relations (managers and specialists) will be needed to respond and maintain their organization’s reputation. (“Occupational Outlook Handbook,” April 2019)

With the growing use of social media, employment for public relations professionals, in turn, is expected to increase. Professional communicators will continue to find ways to appeal to consumers and the general public in new ways and help their clients use these new types of social media effectively. (“Occupational Outlook Handbook,” April 2019)

Marketing Managers--The most significant growth in the field will be with marketing managers as organizations seek to maintain and expand their market share. Included in this category also are advertising and promotions managers, who have been greatly employed and displaced from changes in technology and a declining newspaper industry. Skill sets will need to be transferred to manage digital media campaigns that target customers through the use of websites, social media, and the digital sphere

Writers--While writers for print will continue to decline, the job title writer will be sought after as fresh and relative content is needed to drive traffic to websites and engage with customers and stakeholders online. Writing skills are needed for public relations and marketing positions.

Editors---The title of editor is projected to have a -1% growth rate until 2026, largely due to the diminishing print world. What is not indicated by the BLS is the demand for editing, especially as non-native English speaker documents will need editing. The title editor may be less seen on its own. However, editing skills will be in demand as they go hand in hand with writing skills, which the profession will continue to need.

HOW SKILLS TRANSLATE TO TODAY'S COMMUNICATIONS/PR

In just a decade, many aspects of the communication/PR field have become unrecognizable. The infographic (PR Then & Now) on page 8 shows a side-by-side comparison of the transformation of public relations/communications skills from 2003 to this decade (Beth Monaghan, CEO, Inkhouse Media + Marketing, PR Daily, Dec. 2013).

Once upon a time (circa early 2000s), public relations practitioners were faxing pitches and mailing press kit kits. Today they're tweeting pitches and emailing virtual press kits. Advertising and communications/PR were separate disciplines run by different people with separate goals, strategies, and measurement criteria in the not-so-distant past.



Advertising and communications/PR were separate disciplines run by different people with separate goals, strategies, and measurement criteria in the not-so-distant past.

Now the lines between marketing and communications/public relations are blurred. Marketing is about creating content to educate and inform, not just advertising and branding. Advertising needed to appeal to the masses in the past. Now marketing is about reaching vast numbers of underserved audiences via the web. It's about delivering content at the precise moment of the audience need. Understanding buyers (not creativity in advertising) is the most important component of marketing today.

Gatekeeper news media outlets have been diminished so buyers may learn about a company's content in a press release without depending on journalists to publish the story.

The Internet has made communications/public relations "public" again after years of near exclusive focus and dominance by select media outlets. ("Marketing and Public Relations Then and Now," by David Meerman Scott, Oct. 14, 2015.)

CONCLUSION

Gen X may finally be in the spotlight. "Those that overlook Gen X in favor of focusing only on the youngest generations entering the workforce will miss out on a deep and valuable source of leadership potential." (CNBC, May 9, 2018)

As such, communication professionals need to adopt a digital mindset, including aligning older terms and

practices with more contemporary ones to maintain relevancy, along with transferring and learning new skills.

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