



# GEARING MESSAGES TO GENERATION Z

**E**very student who receives a scholarship for overseas study from the Sydney Global Mobility office at the University of Sydney must agree to volunteer for six hours promoting the program and study abroad upon their return. They can speak about the experience at information sessions, staff a booth during orientation week or at the annual study abroad fair, write testimonials for the office's website and more.

"We know that peer-to-peer promotion is far more impactful, and having freshly-returned, inspired students promoting study abroad in their host university colors is our most powerful resource," says Priya Sivaraj, Short Term Mobility Adviser at the University of Sydney. This holds particularly true for today's students, members of Generation Z who were born between the mid-1990s and 2012.

In the past two years, the University of Sydney has evaluated and reinvigorated its study abroad marketing efforts to appeal to Gen Z, who dominate the student body at the Australian public research university—and will for quite some time. Relying on returning students to promote study abroad is one strategy that's helped the school increase participation in its global mobility programs from 28 percent in 2016 to 32 percent in 2017. But to market to Gen Z, you first have to understand them.

PROMOTING  
STUDY ABROAD  
TO THE LATEST  
GENERATION OF  
STUDENTS REQUIRES  
UNDERSTANDING  
AND PLANNING.



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# WHAT MATTERS TO GENERATION Z

“Gen Z is defined by the experience of growing up during the recession that started in 2008,” says Sara Dart, Regional Director for International Studies Abroad, a study abroad provider based in Austin, Texas. “They were highly affected by the experience of watching parents, older siblings and family friends struggle with financial insecurity.” Therefore, Gen Z students tend to be pragmatic and focused on security and stability. When considering study abroad programs, they want to see and understand a clear return on their investment (ROI).

Gen Z are also technologically savvy. Millennials—the preceding generation—were digital natives, born in the age of digital technology and well-versed in the language of computers, the internet and so on. Gen Z takes it a step farther: Technology is intuitive to them, simply understood without any conscious reasoning. Social media is a dominant presence in the lives of Gen Z, and they are swayed by social media influencers with a large following rather than celebrities or traditional advertising. “Gen Z finds [social media influencers] relatable versus airbrushed ad campaigns that end up becoming the inspiration for a sketch joke or meme,” says Sivaraj.

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Despite their penchant for technology, Gen Z appreciates face-to-face communication—if its value is clear. The University of Sydney recently converted its short-term, pre-departure sessions from meetings to webinars. Attendance quadrupled. However, the school also offers an optional, in-person meet-and-greet, where students can connect with each other and ask questions about pre-determined topics. “Students appreciate being able to curate their engagement with us,” says Sivaraj. “Open-ended, drop-in advising, where students often don’t know what to ask or expect, often results in low attendance and an opportunity for conversion is missed—all because the benefit of showing up is unclear.”

It’s also important to understand the role that Gen Z parents play in their children’s lives. While parents of Millennials have often been accused of being helicopter parents, many Gen Z parents are being defined as stealth fighters: honed in with digital surveillance, keeping a close eye on the target, and ready to strike and defend their child’s interests. And children appreciate it. “Finding out one of my parents had called my university to chase something up would have absolutely mortified me, whereas many parents are now actually asked to do this by their children, who see them more as partners in decision-making than previous generations,” says Sivaraj.







## HOW TO MARKET TO GEN Z

Study abroad offices and providers that consider the attributes of Gen Z and carefully craft marketing messages to this latest generation of students increase their chances to attract participants to their programs. Dart and Sivaraj offer several pointers for reaching Gen Z:

### Highlight tangible skills and ROI

“Where previous generations may have been pulled in by the simple allure of traveling the world, Gen Z are more attracted to framing that tells them exactly why the experience is going to be useful when they enter the job market,” says Sivaraj. Emphasize international internship opportunities and development of foreign language, leadership and problem-solving skills. Partner with your university’s career center to reinforce the connection between study abroad and employability.



### Rely on student ambassadors

“One of the most important things is to have good student advocates,” says Dart. “Gen Z students place a high value on authenticity and studies show that they are far more likely to listen to their peers than they are to admission counselors or guidance counselors. If returning students or young alumni can engage with students and show how they leveraged their study abroad experience, it helps students see themselves abroad.”

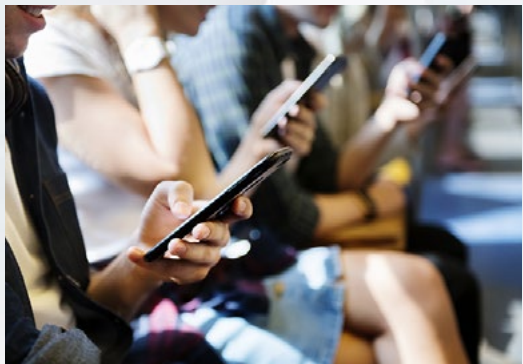
### Promote programs to parents

“We’ve seen at fairs and information days that it’s actually the parents who are often more interested in global mobility and aware of the benefits,” says Sivaraj. “This shift has led us to recently consider things like a parent information evening or different ways we can continue to engage parents to encourage their children to embark on an overseas program.”



### Create catchy marketing campaigns

"It's often said that Gen Z has an 8-second attention span, but it's more like an 8-second filter for prioritization," says Dart. "In about eight seconds, they will decide whether they are going to keep paying attention to your flyer, video, presentation, whatever." Marketing materials and communication need to be relevant, concise and aesthetically engaging.



### Come at them from different angles

The University of Sydney targets students through many venues, including active pages on Facebook and Instagram, personalized emails inviting students to information sessions and biannual articles on the benefits of study abroad in the university bulletin. It also recently began advertising its global mobility programs to students at point-of-sale monitors on every cash register on campus. So when students are buying food or books, they see a message about study abroad.

### Ask Gen Z students what they want

"Gen Z are far less standoffish to adults or authority than their predecessors, which you clearly see in the changing role of parents," says Sivaraj. "If you ask them what they want in a program, they will most likely tell you." Then it's up to your department, of course, to listen and follow through.



***Listening to Gen Z students and tailoring messages to their style and preferences will go a long way to ensure your study abroad programs will thrive in the generation to come.***



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