



Kelton

Gen Z

Doesn't
NEED
your brand

5 Steps to win them over

GEN Z DECODED

With **\$29B in buying power and up to \$333B in influence**, Gen Z remains a huge focus for marketers at Fortune 500s and challenger brands alike.

Considering Gen Z will make up a whopping **40% of consumers by 2020**, understanding what this generation wants and needs has never been more urgent.

In the following pages, we explore core Gen Z characteristics and shifts that have influenced their world, and what it takes to reach them.



Kelton Global is a full service strategic consultancy specializing in insight, strategy, and design. We help the world's biggest and best loved companies build brands for the next generation.

**Today
you'll
learn:**

What makes Gen Z different

What they want and need

**How to build a brand strategy
for the next generation**



We asked 1,000 Gen Zers how they feel about brands today...

*Survey conducted among 1,000 US teens age 15-18.

**And Gen Z
thinks most
brands are
getting it
wrong.**





80%

Think brands
only care about
making money



3/5
don't trust
what
brands say.

70%

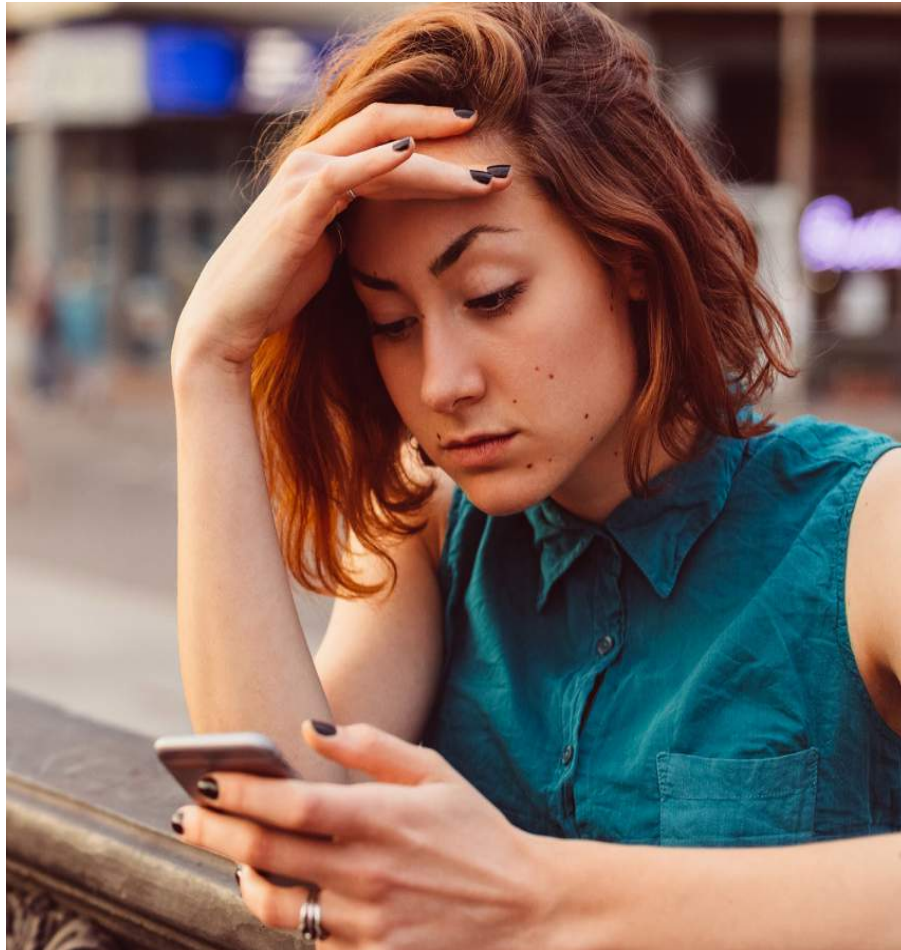
Think brands try too
hard to be cool





**57% feel
brands try
to label or**

/ stereotype them. /



**2/3
think
brands just
add to
the noise.**

Meet Gen Z:

The

**Make
shit
happen
generation**



Three critical things to know about Gen Z:

They're Informed Reformers

- Gen Z was born into systems failure. They question everything from trust and faith in politics, religion, higher education, capitalism, public safety, and even objective truth.
- They're more aware and informed than previous youth generations.
- Unlike Millennials, more Gen Zers feel a responsibility to take action and make change.

They're Identity Champions

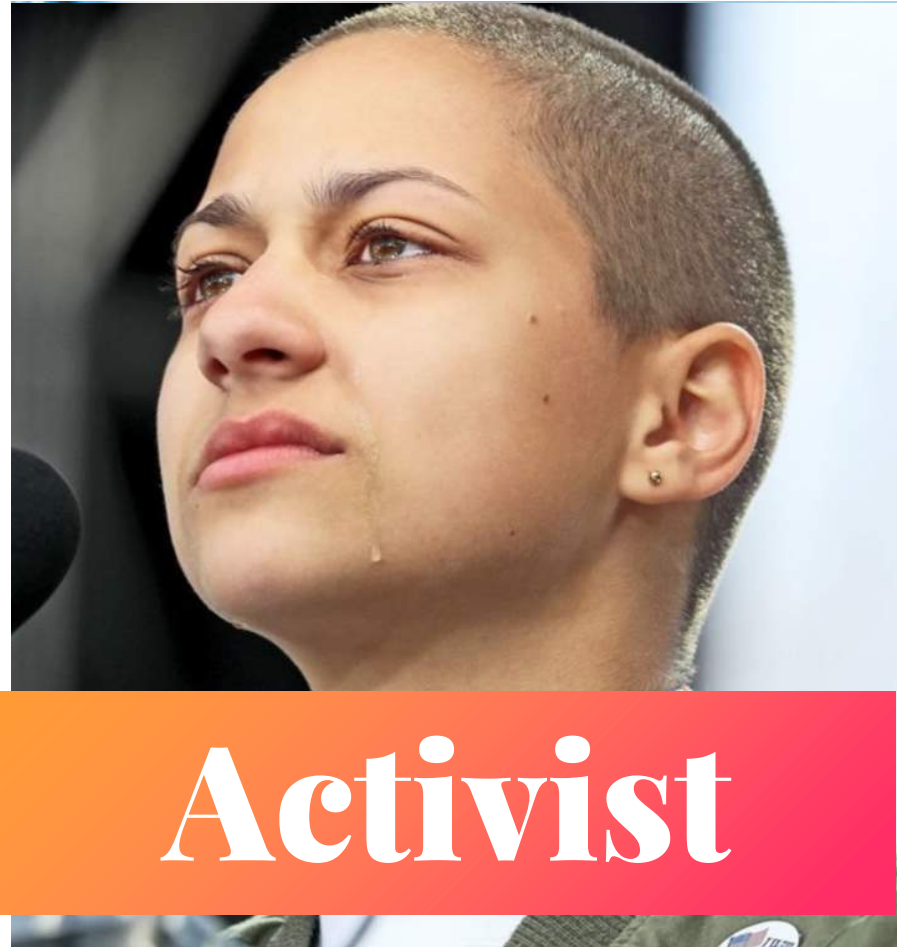
- Gen Z is part of the most diverse, connected, and fluid generation to date – and it shows.
- They value their personal identities, and believe in every individual's ability to freely express themselves.
- They're highly empathetic to others' identities.
- They have a strong set of principles around ethics and fairness, and they want these values reflected in all of their choices.

They're Digital Powerhouses

- As the first generation to grow up with a screen in their hand, they are digital natives and being constantly plugged in is their normal.
- Gen Z may be glued to their screens, but look closer – they're using digital spaces to have dialogue, organize, gather inspiration, create, remix, find the truth, and broadcast their own.

Gen Z steps up and speaks up when they see something as broken, wrong, or unjust.

Parkland survivor and activist, **Emma Gonzalez**, is an incredible example of this — working with her fellow students to call national attention to gun control reform and put pressure on government officials to prevent future mass shootings.





Collaborator

Gen Z works together to create something bigger than the sum of its parts.

Mars and Sage helped found the Art Hoe Collective as a way to create a safe space for young women of color to create and showcase their work when they saw a lack of such dedicated spaces.

Gen Z takes charge when the powers that be don't take meaningful action.

Boylan Slat, environmentalist and founder of The Ocean Cleanup project, developed a system to contain and clean up the Great Pacific Ocean Garbage Patch, with the hopes to pave the way towards a plastic-free ocean by 2050.



Innovator



Unapologetic Individual

**Gen Z doesn't
subscribe to the
mainstream
definition of cool.**

Billie Eilish, the first person born after the year 2000 to have a #1 album, exemplifies Gen Z's individualistic "you do you" attitude. Her debut album pulls in an eclectic mix of genres to create something uniquely cohesive, yet uncategorizable.

Gen Z challenges standard binaries and rigid societal norms.

Manny Gutierrez or Manny MUA as he's known on Instagram, is a poster-child of the 'beauty boy' movement — challenging traditional notions of gender and making beauty history by becoming Maybelline's first male brand ambassador.



Non-Conformist



Creator

Gen Z consumes + remixes content to express, connect, and entertain.

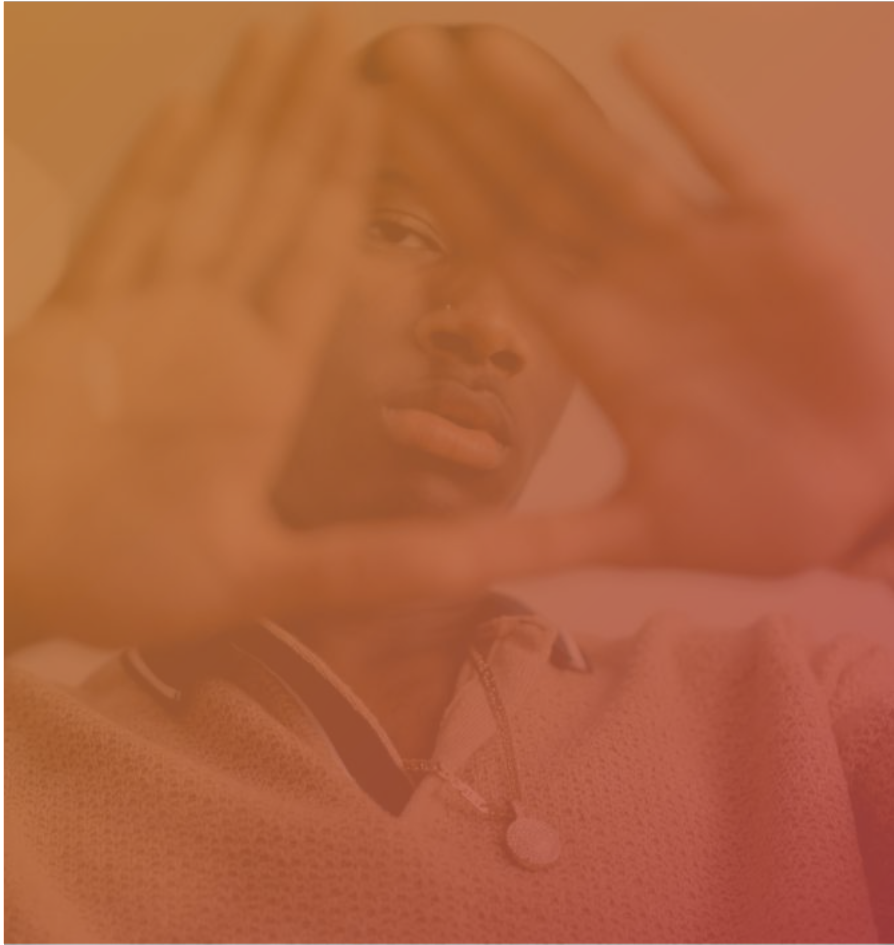
German twins **Lisa and Lena Mantler** run one of the most followed accounts on TikTok (AKA, Vine 2.0) where they make bite sized lip-sync and dance videos along with other skits for their audience of over 30 million followers.

Gen Z lives out their passions and values through pure hustle.

Referred to as “The Internet’s It Kid” and “Kanye’s protégé”, **Luka Sabbat** has built himself up as an influencer and created a concurrent modeling career by leveraging his personal brand of casual cool.




Brand Builder



**If you want
to be a part
of their
lives...**



**help them
make shit happen.**



**To do this,
you need
to be two
things...**

Authentic



Electric

Our independent research study on Gen Z found:

Authentic Brands...

Are reliable + trustworthy

58% want brands that do what they say they're going to do.

51% think brands make promises they can't keep.

Offer quality products + services

28% of Gen Zers want a brand that consistently delivers high quality products or services.

Have a higher purpose

Almost two-thirds (**64%**) of teens think brands are just adding to the noise.



Help me be my best self

48% of Gen Zers want brands that help them be their best selves, and 47% want brands that help them express themselves.

Inspire and excite me

Gen Z gravitates towards cool (**41%**), inspiring (**38%**), Creative (**28%**), and exciting (**27%**) brands.

Are recommended by friends

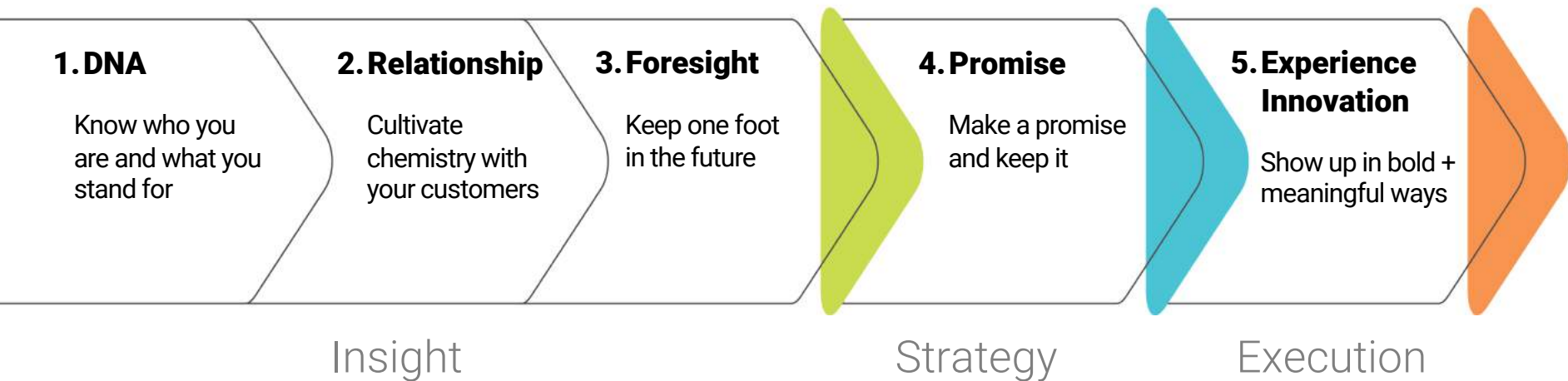
44% believe brand messages are exaggerations or lies.

Electric Brands...

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Authentic + Electric

Brand Roadmap



Step 1: DNA

A group of four people are shown in a celebratory mood, surrounded by falling confetti. The image has a warm, reddish-orange tint. The people are smiling and looking towards the camera. One person in the center is wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses. Another person to the right is also wearing sunglasses and has their hand raised. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an outdoor event.

**Know who you are and what
you stand for**

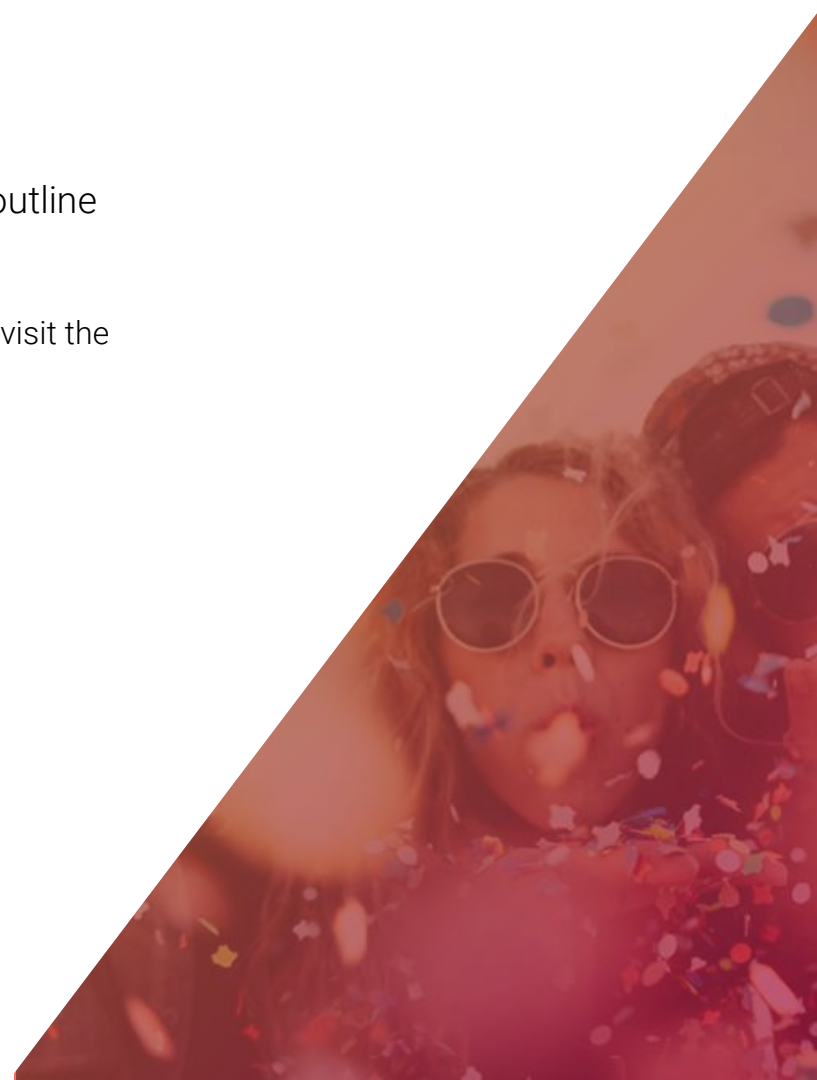
Step 1: DNA

FIND YOURSELF – Define what makes you unique, and outline your core principles.

- **Audit Your Brand** – Talk to your stakeholders, do a research review, visit the archives.
- **Match Core Values** – Compare your brand values against Gen Z's.
- **Think About Impact** – What is your brand doing to benefit society?
- **Write DNA Statements** – Brainstorm statements from functional to philosophical that reflect what you're all about.

INSIGHTS TOOLKIT

- ✓ Stakeholder Interviews
- ✓ Archive and Research Review
- ✓ Semiotic Brand Deep Dive



Step 2: Relationship

A photograph of a young woman with a tear drop tattoo on her cheek, smiling warmly. The image is overlaid with a red-to-orange gradient. The text is centered over the lower half of the image.

**Cultivate chemistry with
your customers**

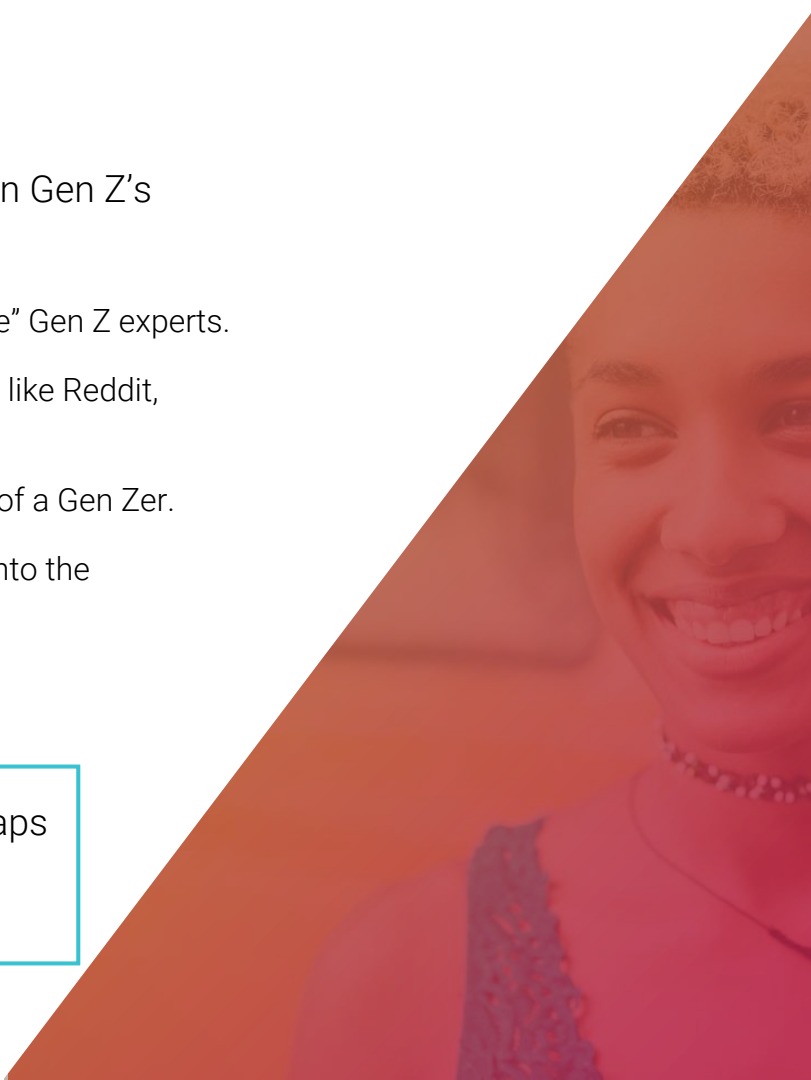
Step 2: Relationship

FIND YOUR PEOPLE – Hone your audience, immerse in Gen Z’s needs, and partner with them to create value.

- **Tap Your Experts** – Search your personal network for literal “in house” Gen Z experts.
- **Listen Up** – Follow relevant conversations on Gen Z social platforms like Reddit, Instagram, and TikTok.
- **Live a Day in the Life** – Immerse yourself (and your team) in the life of a Gen Zer.
- **Create With Them, Not For Them** – Use Co-Creation to bring them into the development process as partners.

INSIGHTS TOOLKIT

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| ✓ Online Anthropology | ✓ Customer Journey Maps |
| ✓ Ethnographic interviews | ✓ Segmentations |
| ✓ Attitudes & Usage Testing | ✓ Shop-alongs |



Step 3: Foresight

A group of five young people are shown in a city street, riding bicycles and walking. The scene is overlaid with a red-to-orange gradient. On the left, a young man in a white and black baseball-style shirt and blue shorts is riding a yellow bicycle. In the center, a young man in a white t-shirt and blue jacket is walking, with a young woman in a yellow shirt and blue jacket riding piggyback on his shoulders. To the right, a young woman in a white tank top and blue overalls is riding a bicycle, and another young woman in a white crop top, blue denim jacket, and blue shorts is walking. The background shows brick buildings and a street.

Keep one foot in the future

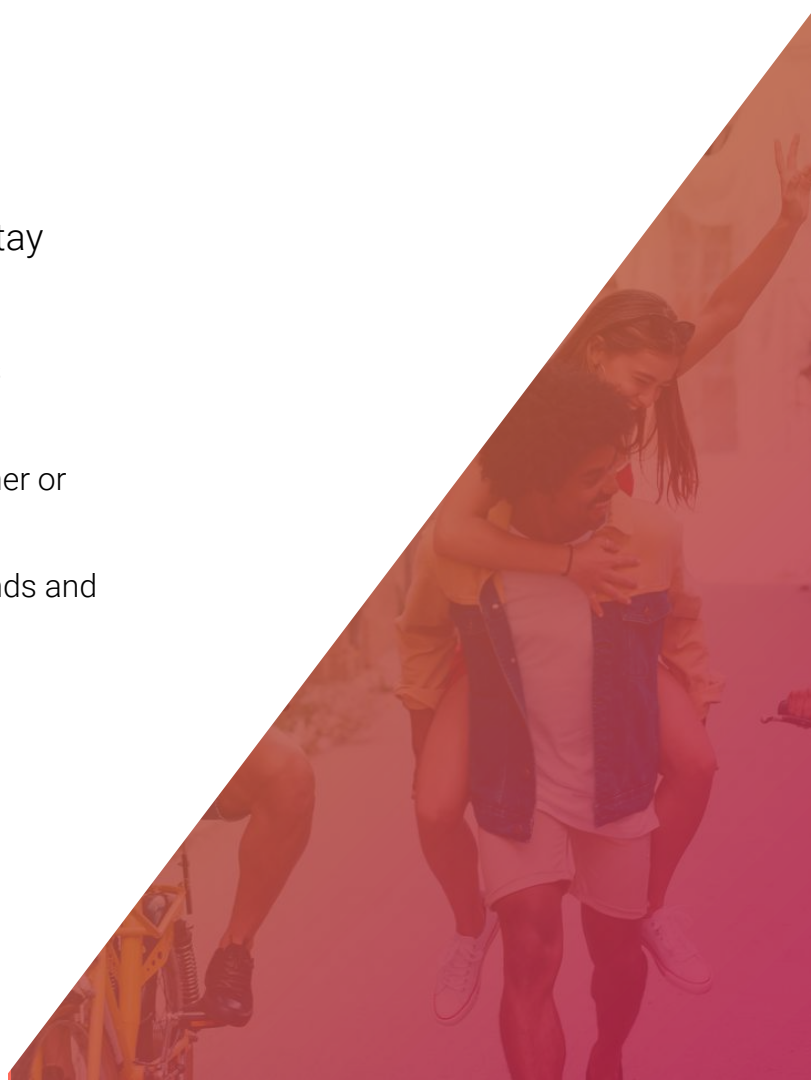
Step 3: Foresight

LOOK AHEAD – Make sure the brand you are today will stay relevant for the audience of tomorrow.

- **Immerse in the Emerging** – Take a Cultural Safari to discover what's influencing shifts in your category.
- **Assemble an Influencer Panel** – Recruit Gen Z influencers for a dinner or panel discussion.
- **Forecast Scenarios** – Brainstorm future narratives based on the trends and shifts you're seeing.

INSIGHTS TOOLKIT

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| ✓ Trendscans | ✓ Influencer Dinners |
| ✓ Cultural Safaris | ✓ Future Scenario Forecasting |



Step 4: Promise



Make a promise and keep it

Step 4: Promise

MAKE A PACT – Take your brand building blocks from steps 1-3 and craft the single amazing feat you can help Gen Z accomplish.

Keep your promise...

- **Direct** – Say it straight before you say it great
- **Human** – Write your promise in a relatable way
- **Aspirational** – Use bold language that inspires
- **Credible** – Stay true to who you are



Step 5: Experience Innovation

A hand holding a smartphone displaying a collage of photos. The photos include a woman with a red lollipop, two women, a man with sunglasses, and a woman with a 'ALPHA PH' sign. The background is a rainbow flag.

**Show up in bold and
meaningful ways**

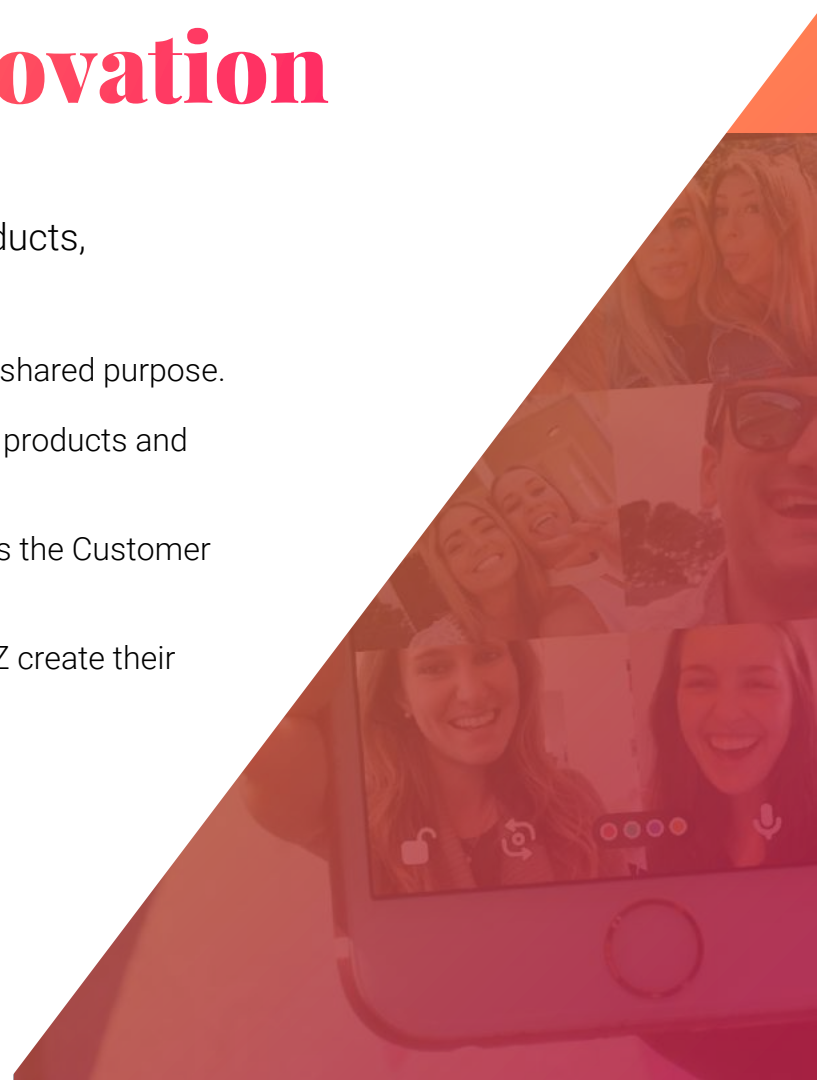
Step 5: Experience Innovation

LIVE YOUR PROMISE – Relentlessly pursue new products, experiences, and tools that deliver your promise in their world.

- **Show, Don't Tell** – Create opportunities for Gen Z to participate in a shared purpose.
- **Embrace Impermanence** – Give Gen Z something to talk about with products and experiences that are fleeting or limited edition.
- **Live in Beta** – Commit to experimenting, iterating, and testing across the Customer Journey.
- **Empower Play** – Build tools and inspirational materials to help Gen Z create their own products or content.

INSIGHTS TOOLKIT

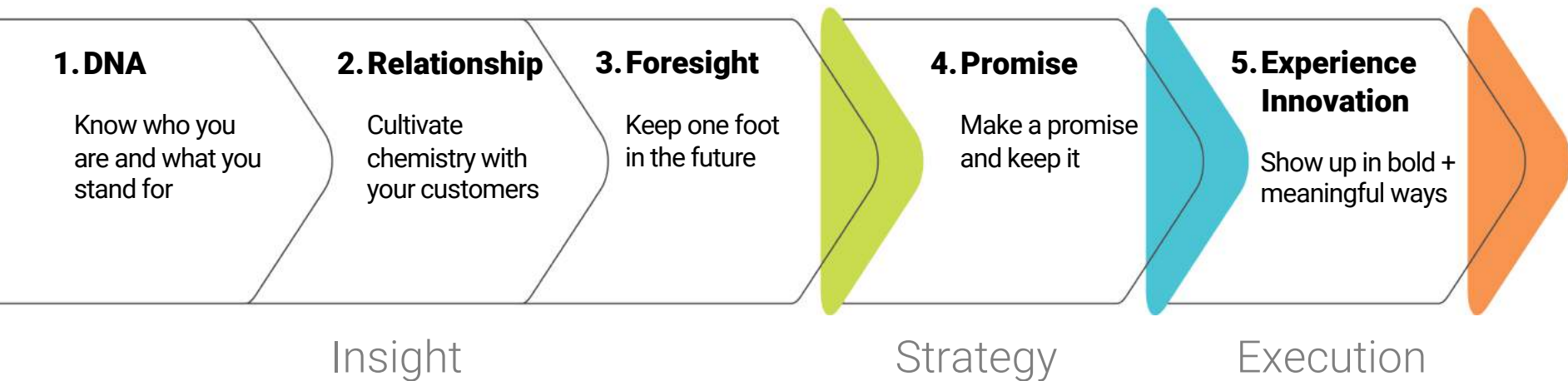
- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| ✓ Product & Service Design | ✓ UX/UI Testing |
| ✓ Employee Engagement | ✓ Category Analysis |
| ✓ Communications Strategy | ✓ Concept Testing |



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Brand Roadmap





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LET'S BUILD YOUR

Authentic + Electric

BRAND

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