

Adrenaline

Winning Gen Z

A Data-Driven Brand-to-Branch Playbook for Financial Leaders



Inside This Report

Born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z represents not just a pivot but a true strategic reset for all brands. Gen Z are digital natives, yet they're deeply disconnected. This paradox – online all day but craving real connection – is your financial institution's biggest opportunity.

To learn more about Gen Z and how financial institutions are prioritizing this up-and-coming generation, Adrenaline partnered with analytics and insights firm Alexander Babbage on **original research to identify top priorities for Gen Z and Millennials when selecting a financial institution**, gathered industry data on generational preferences, and conducted a quantitative survey of banks and credit unions. This playbook will help institutions win with this generation in their peak financial years by bridging the gap between digital convenience and human guidance, from the brand to the branch.

57% of Gen Z report feeling isolated, lonely, and disconnected from relationships¹

50% of Gen Z say they wish major social platforms didn't exist²

Why Gen Z is Non-Negotiable

Financial leaders must treat Gen Z as a core business priority, not as an afterthought. Entering their peak earning, spending, and borrowing years, they're on the receiving end of an \$85 trillion intergenerational wealth transfer over the next two decades.³ Their economic influence is immediate and will have a massive impact. But financial influence alone doesn't guarantee loyalty. **Understanding Gen Z's confidence gap is what will determine whether that opportunity is captured or lost.**

30% of the U.S. workforce will be Gen Z by 2030⁴

\$12T in global spending power over the next five years⁶

70% are mostly or completely financially independent⁵

4M new bank accounts opened annually by Gen Z through 2026⁷



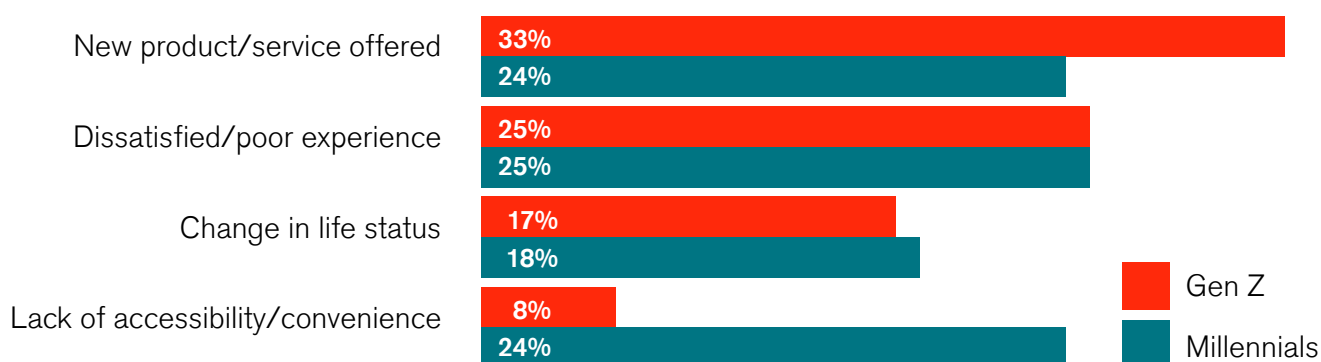
50% of Gen Z are optimistic about their financial future²

Harvard Federal Credit Union, Rebrand, 2024

Gen Z has big aspirations and high expectations that come from their fast-growing financial power, but a significant confidence gap threatens their potential. While 47% expect household finances to improve,² one out of three find financial topics overwhelming.² This dissonance actively erodes loyalty. Roughly one-third of Gen Z and Millennial consumers switched primary providers in the last year in search of greater value. And half of young people remain optimistic about their goals but report limited confidence in their financial knowledge.⁵

Even with a positive outlook, our research reveals that 36% of Gen Z say financial matters are confusing, driving the need for financial guidance.

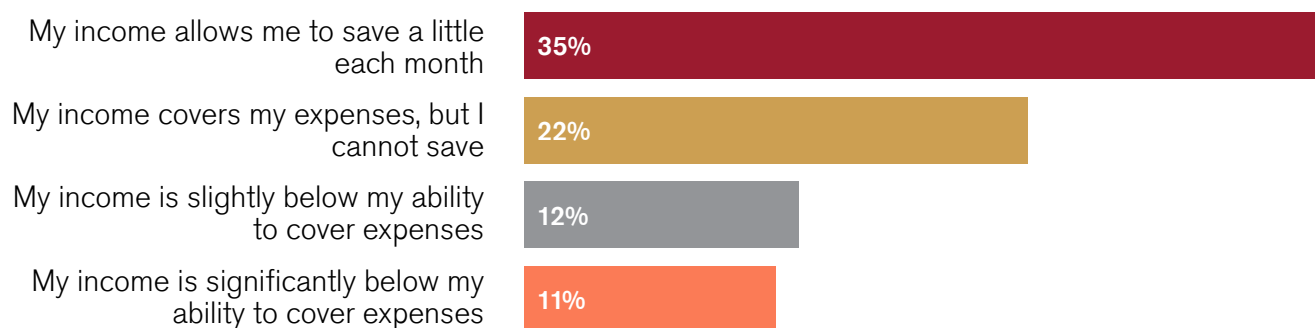
Millennial & Gen Z reasons for switching financial providers²



And while Gen Z has an eye on saving and investing, the financial realities of today’s economy hit most of Gen Z particularly hard.

A third of Gen Z Americans are able to save some of their income every month⁸

Which of the following best describes your attitude towards your level of income?



Your Takeaway

Prioritize Gen Z and build strategies around their needs.⁷ The winning strategy positions your financial brand’s human expertise as a core competitive differentiator, designed to foster engagement at high-value, loyalty-forming moments.

The Gen Z Paradox: Digital Immersion vs. Human Connection

Banks and credit unions must understand the behavioral disconnect that defines Gen Z. They are the most digitally immersed generation in history, yet digital fluency doesn't fulfill their need for connection.

While amplifying digital presence is essential, the craving for genuine relationships is a strategic opportunity for banks and credit unions. **Personal finance is, after all, personal.** When Gen Z needs clarity, guidance, or support, they are more likely than other generations to seek human-led experiences – in branches, through trusted relationships that digital channels alone cannot match.

That tension between digital immersion and human connection shows up clearly in how Gen Z chooses – and switches – financial providers.

42% of customers recall receiving personalized financial advice inside the branch

yet

76% acted on personalized recommendations when they received them²⁰

Your Takeaway

Don't conflate digital fluency with a desire for purely digital relationships. In other words, don't just meet Gen Z online. While you market digitally, connect and nurture relationships with this powerful population in person. In a digital-first world, the human touch is your financial institution's competitive edge – and key to driving loyalty.



How Gen Z Banks: Loyalty is Low, Options are High

Like generations before them, Gen Z's influence is reshaping every industry – especially banking – through their attitudes toward technology, trust, personalization, and purpose.

The generation's emerging financial behaviors demand a nuanced channel strategy. Gen Z is less loyal to single financial institutions, with 60% spreading assets across multiple providers,² and customers hold accounts with an average of two banks and two digital wallets.⁹ Even more telling, a whopping 20% are likely to change their primary institution within the next six months.¹⁰

Despite this fragmentation, traditional institutions remain the primary pillar: 80% of Gen Z consumers hold their main account at a bank or credit union.¹¹ However, the marketplace is crowded with non-bank contenders.

The Gen Z banking competitive landscape

Primary Provider/ Platform	Traditional Banks	Peer-to-Peer Payments	Online-Only Banks	Investment Platforms	Credit Unions	Buy Now, Pay Later
Gen Z Usage	64%	56%	39%	36%	31%	31%

Your Takeaway

Banks and credit unions should consider themselves the central hubs, while fintechs are the spokes. **Defend your position as the primary banking relationship by doubling down on what differentiates you.** Support your omnichannel strategy with brands and experiences that deliver on human connection, relationships, community purpose, advice, and expertise.

Branches Reimagined: Bridging the Gap

In theory, it would seem the most chronically online generation wouldn't leave the couch (or their screens) to go into a bank. But in practice, Gen Z turns this idea on its head – they use the branch as a key source of guidance and advice. For Gen Z, the branch becomes a strategic channel reserved for high-complexity, high-emotion financial decisions. Banking leaders agree on the importance of the branch to serve this increasingly influential generation, and now must align their investments in the branch to meet Gen Z's needs and expectations.

65% of Gen Z prefer to open new accounts in person¹²

25% of those under 44 seek in-person advisors for key milestones¹³

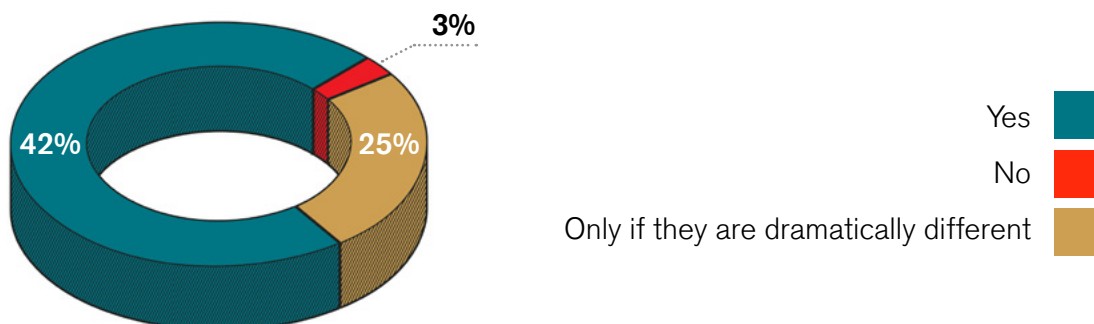
Would branches exist without transactions?

At the 2025 Future Branches Austin conference, surveyed attendees reported that even if bank locations had no transactions, their financial institutions would still invest in the branch channel to meet emerging consumer needs.

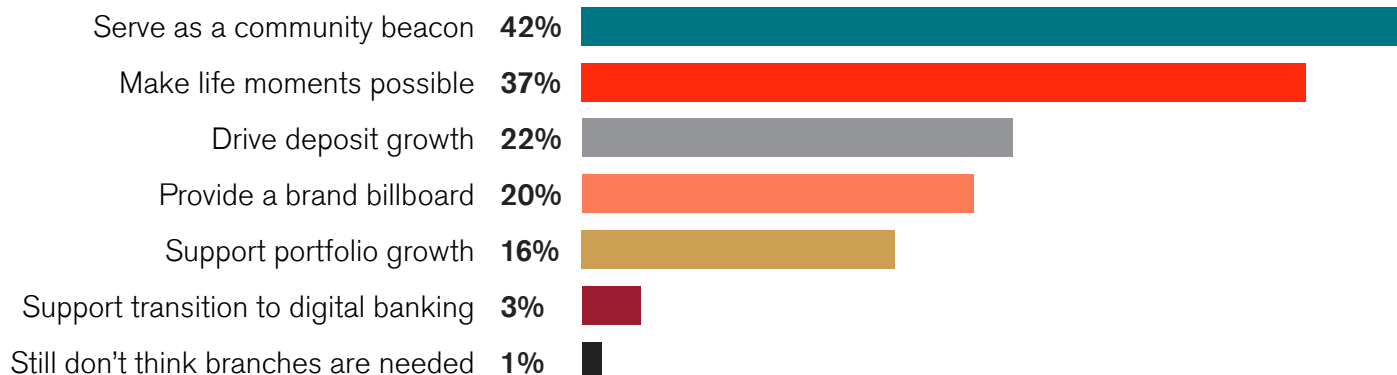
Yet a profound delivery gap exists. While Gen Z flocks to the branch for human guidance, 66% of in-branch interactions feel like a sales pitch, not a conversation.¹⁴ And while only 42% of customers recall receiving personalized advice in the branch, 76% acted on it when they did¹⁴ – a significant untapped opportunity for branches to deliver on what this generation wants.



If your branches had zero transactions, would you still invest in them?



If transactions were at zero, why is the branch channel needed?



How important is branch experience to attract and retain Gen Z customers?



Your Takeaway

Transform the branch into an advisory hub. Continue investing in the drive-up, which offers Gen Z the best of both worlds – human connection and on-demand convenience. Measure success with this cohort less on transaction volume, and more on consultation quality, financial progress, and relationship deepening.

Solid investments

begin here.

Beginnings
Credit Union,
Rebrand, 2025



The Winning Experience: Seamless Digital + Human Integration

Gen Z expects a hybrid experience: flawless digital for daily tasks, and easy human access for complex ones. Our research shows their top three demands are:²

1. Access to human support
2. A seamless mobile/app experience
3. Budgeting and savings tools

Given those demands, the real way to stand out with Gen Z is through a relevant experience, whether digital or analog. In fact, 22% of Gen Z choose their primary bank specifically for personalized service.² But even the best-designed experiences fall short without trust. And for Gen Z, trust is earned through transparent values.

Your Takeaway

As branches transform into digitally-informed, advice-led strategic hubs, your bank or credit union must **consider the Gen Z lens across design and staffing.**

Four customer experience imperatives for Gen Z

- ✓ **Design for guidance:** Intuitive wayfinding and comfortable, private consultation zones support the personal connections Gen Z seeks
- ✓ **Equip with digital tools:** Arm staff with accessible tech tools to bridge digital/physical interactions
- ✓ **Train for discovery:** Shift staff behavior from product pitching to needs-based coaching via active listening
- ✓ **Activate the brand environment:** Ensure architecture, signage, merchandising, and messaging reflect a modern, relevant brand that centers customers and their needs



Civic Federal Credit Union, Branch Design, 2024

The Brand/Trust Equation: Purpose as a Performance Driver

More than perhaps any other generation, trust is the non-negotiable foundation of a financial relationship with Gen Z, and it's earned through action, not just words. This generation is highly skeptical. That's why 95% of consumer brands track lower trust ratings among younger adults.¹⁷

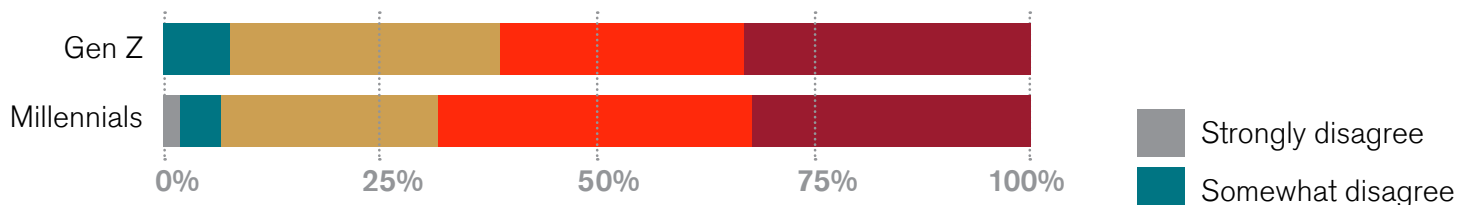


For Gen Z, trust is built on four key factors

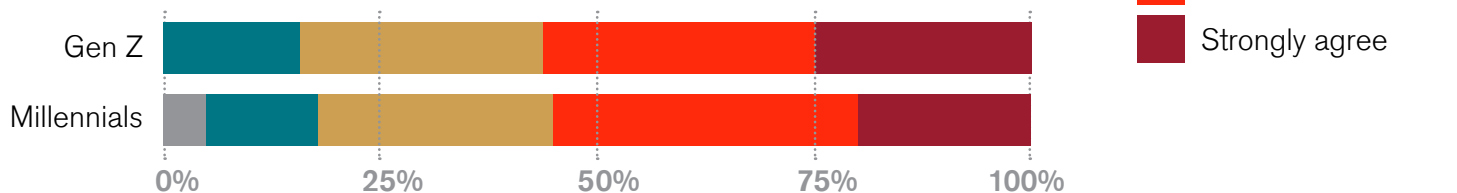
- 1. Authentic values:** 77% say a company's purpose significantly influences their support¹⁸
- 2. Cultural relevance:** 73% would trust a brand more if it meaningfully reflects today's culture¹⁹
- 3. Community impact:** 69% show greater loyalty to brands that give back²
- 4. Transparency:** 42% consider clear business practices in selecting an FI²

A brand's values also play an outsized role for Gen Z (and Millennials before them), which is especially true for financial institutions.

I prefer to do business with companies whose values align with mine



I would switch financial providers for values alignment



Your Takeaway

Your brand platform must be an operational blueprint, lived by everyone at the organization – not simply a marketing slogan. Every touchpoint must consistently demonstrate your core values. Inconsistency, lack of transparency, or misalignment with your brand values will be perceived as inauthentic.



Beginnings Credit Union, Rebrand, 2025

Mirastar Federal
Credit Union,
Rebrand, 2024

Jasmine and Biscuit *on the rise*



We have flexible auto loans that fit all budgets, so everyone has the chance to explore the world ahead.

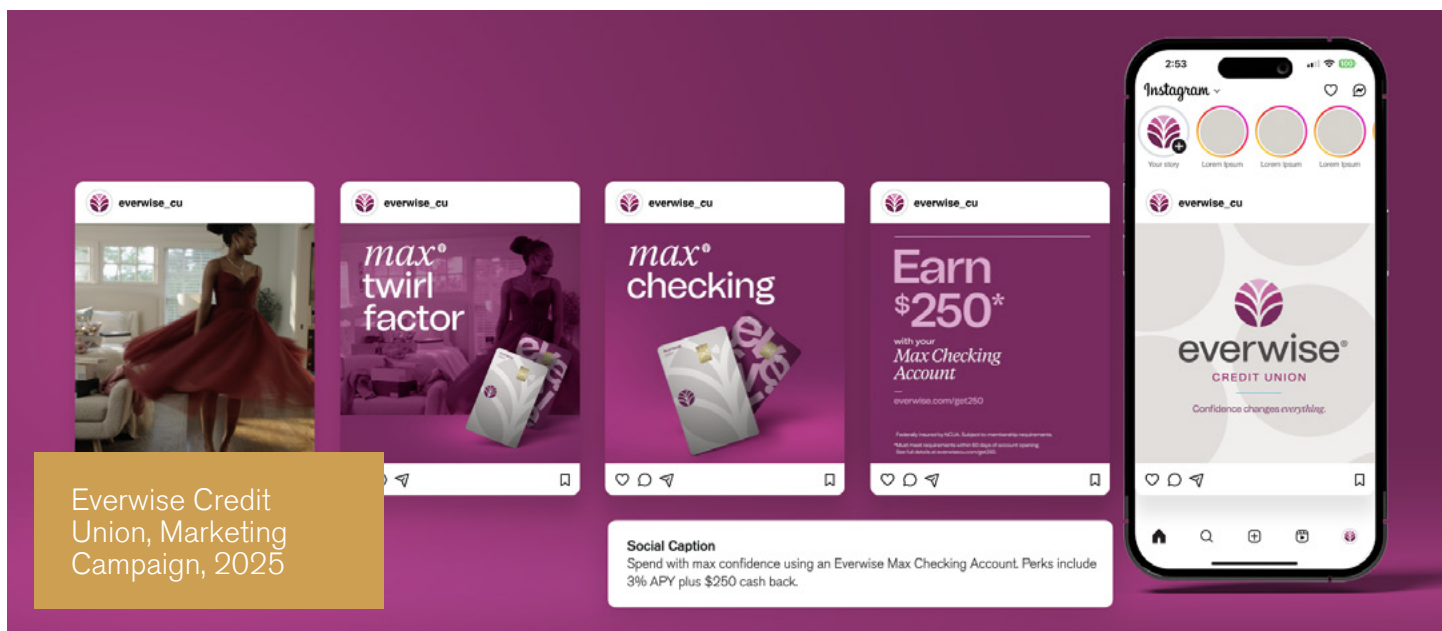


Come talk to us about
opening one today.



To win Gen Z, brands must:

- 1. Lead with purpose.** Gen Z values brands that demonstrate commitment in their actions
- 2. Modernize your brand.** Outdated visuals or inconsistent messaging signal misalignment with young audiences
- 3. Leverage your brand for credibility and trust.** Brand messaging must be authentic and speak to real institutional purpose. Demonstrate your value proposition clearly and early



The Human Advantage

Gen Z is entering its peak financial years with expectations shaped by both digital fluency and a desire for human connection. For banks and credit unions seeking to earn their lifetime value, one truth is clear: **in an age of AI, authentic human expertise is the ultimate premium service.**

The path forward requires intentional investment in culture and capability, including empathetic advisors who understand Gen Z's realities and a unified brand experience that makes expert guidance accessible across channels. Gen Z values advice that is personal and relevant, grounded in their goals and delivered by people who understand the "why" behind each decision.

When brand purpose, digital ease, and human guidance work together, institutions move beyond transactional service to true financial partnership. The opportunity for institutions is not simply to attract a new generation, but also to build enduring relationships that drive long-term loyalty and competitive advantage. **▲**

Citations

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Adrenaline is an end-to-end brand experience company serving the financial industry. We move brands and businesses ahead by delivering on every aspect of their experience across digital and physical channels, from strategy through implementation.

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Thank you.

