

# WHAT GEN Z EXPECTS IN A STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Here is what today's students expect from a modern campus environment — and how colleges and universities can deliver

Improving the student experience is a critical recruitment and retention strategy, and technology-driven services play a key role in this effort. To design a modern campus environment that students will find appealing, higher-education leaders must understand what today's students demand from their campus experience.

The current generation of college students, Generation Z, is unlike prior generations. While we think of Millennials as the first wired generation, the truth is that most Millennials were at least teenagers when the iPhone was invented. Members of Gen Z, on the other hand, have only ever known a world of touch screens, swiping and mobile apps. The ubiquity of mobile smart technology in their lives has affected how they learn, communicate and interact with services in profound ways.

Here are some research-based insights into how Gen Z likes (and expects) to use media and other services — and how these preferences are shaping the student experience.

23

the number of hours Gen Z spends streaming video content per week<sup>9</sup>

### Learning and communication

Gen Z spends more time on their mobile devices than any other generation. Their smartphone is their lifeline to the world. According to a recent study, U.S. teens spend around seven and a half hours each day (that is over 200 hours each month) on their smartphones.<sup>1</sup> Three key observations about Gen Z that derive from their mobile phone usage include:

**They are almost constantly online.** Nearly all U.S. teens (95 percent) say they have access to a smartphone, according to Pew Research, and 45 percent say they are “almost constantly” on the Internet. Large numbers of teens say they use their phone to connect with other people (84 percent) and learn new things (83 percent).<sup>2</sup>

**Everything is a shared experience for them.** Gen Z uses social media to connect with others and post photos and opinions throughout the day. It's not a distraction for them; it's integral to their daily lives. They are regularly sharing their experiences with a global community.

- 76 percent are on Facebook<sup>3</sup>
- 73 percent are on Snapchat<sup>4</sup>
- 75 percent use Instagram<sup>5</sup>
- 44 percent use Twitter<sup>6</sup>

**They are highly visual.** As many as 93 percent of teens say they watch digital video online. More than 80 percent use YouTube, with about two-thirds doing so daily.<sup>7</sup> They also create, post, watch and share videos through platforms like Snapchat and TikTok — streaming 23 hours of video content per week.<sup>8</sup>

IT leaders must ensure that networks have enough capacity to handle streaming video connections anywhere on campus.

### Implications for colleges and universities

Colleges and universities need to make reliable, high-speed WiFi service ubiquitous throughout campus to satisfy the expectation among students that they'll always have an Internet connection. This includes not just classrooms and dorm rooms but cafeterias, quads, athletic stadiums and other common areas where students might gather.

What's more, colleges and universities should incorporate video into the curriculum and in their communications with students. While Gen Z is happy to read, many would prefer to watch. IT leaders must ensure that networks have enough capacity to handle streaming video connections anywhere on campus.

### Student services

Gen Z is the mobile app generation. In their experience, any product or service can be requested online at anytime, anywhere, from the convenience of one's phone — from scheduling a ride (Uber or Lyft) to choosing and requesting a meal (Uber Eats or GrubHub). Here's how this reality has shaped their expectations.

**They prefer highly personalized interactions.** Gen Z has grown up in the hyper-personalized world of big data algorithms that generate targeted ads and services. They're used to receiving a personalized feed of information, entertainment and suggestions based on their preferences and personalities.

As a result, they're willing to trade privacy for highly customized experiences: More than two in five (44 percent) will give personal data to support a more personalized experience over an anonymous one. Forty four percent say they'd stop visiting a website if it didn't anticipate what they needed, liked or wanted.<sup>10</sup>

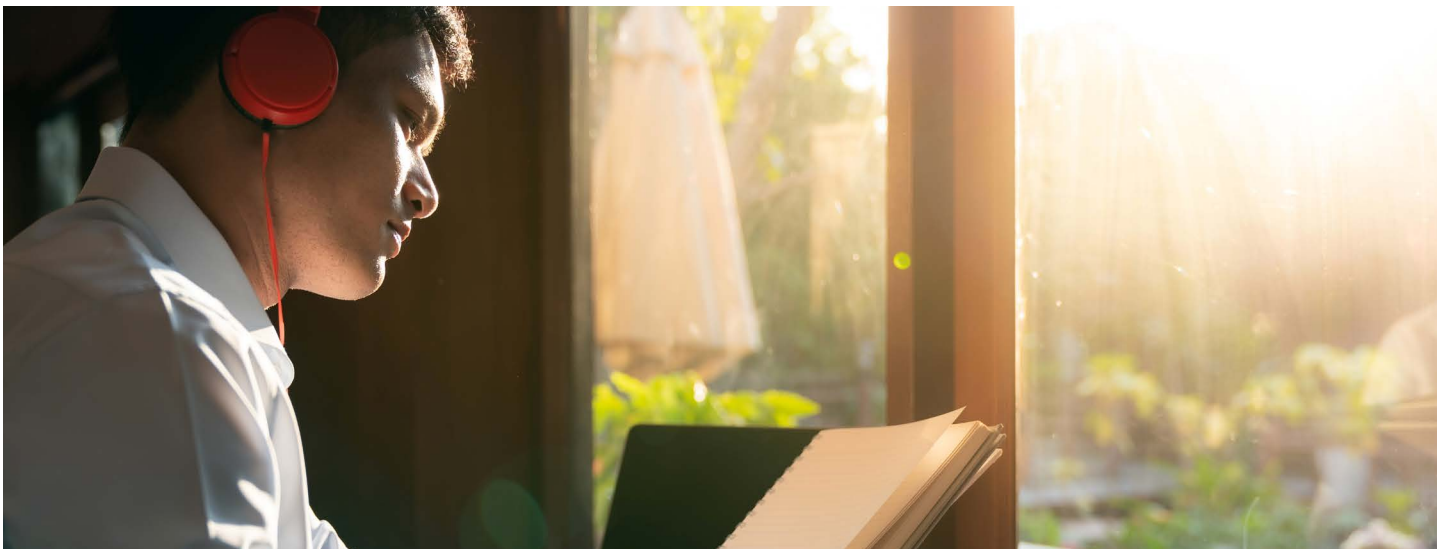
**They expect services on demand.** Waiting in line for services is not something Gen Z is accustomed to. They expect all services to be available remotely via a mobile phone. In fact, about a third (32 percent) of Gen Z transactions occur through a mobile device.<sup>11</sup>

### Implications for colleges and universities

Colleges and universities need to deliver a highly customized, mobile-driven experience for students, powered by smart campus technology, in which students can get real-time information and complete transactions from the palm of their hand with a smart campus app.

More than simply a version of the college or university website that's reformatted for a smaller screen, a smart campus app should provide a truly mobilized experience that allows students to see where the campus shuttle is in real time, order food delivered to their dorm room, request a resource from the library, register for classes, complete and submit financial aid forms and more.

Campus leaders must understand the requirements this kind of smart campus infrastructure will place on their networks and plan accordingly. For example, wireless beacons and smart networked sensors can help deliver customized, location-sensitive information to students in real time, empowering students to make more informed choices.



Thinking about starting an esports program? [Read our article to learn more about the IT you need.](#)

## Entertainment

Even the way Gen Z likes to be entertained differs from prior generations. Here are two key insights with important repercussions for campus leaders.

**They prefer streaming video to live TV.** Gen Z primarily watches programming through online streaming, which is a big difference from older generations. In fact, 73 percent of teens say they watch programming on their smart phones and only a third say they watch on a TV set.<sup>12</sup> As with other services, Gen Z expects to be entertained on demand anytime, anywhere through their mobile phone.

**They are heavily into gaming.** In 2000, Sony introduced the PlayStation 2. For many Millennials, this was a huge paradigm shift, allowing them to play games against thousands of players worldwide instead of just two or three others using the same console. However, this major innovation roughly coincided with the births of many members of Gen Z. They've grown up with massive multiplayer online games. As a result, about nine in 10 teenage boys and three-quarters of teenage girls own or have access to a gaming console, eMarketer reports.<sup>13</sup> A survey from media company, Whistle, reveals that 68 percent of Gen Z males agree gaming is an important part of their identity.<sup>14</sup>

For this generation, gaming is more than a hobby, it's integral to their social lives. More than three in four Gen Z males say they regularly watch video games, a 25-percent increase over Millennials and a key driver of the esports phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> Twitch has become not just a platform to chat about games, but a thriving online community of gaming enthusiasts.

### Implications for colleges and universities

To attract and retain this generation of students, colleges and universities should consider providing a streaming service that can stream live TV — as well as on-demand movies and other video content — directly to students' devices of choice. And if they haven't already, institutions should consider offering varsity or club esports and other services aimed at gamers.

To launch an esports program, institutions should have an esports facility with gaming computers, peripherals and furniture, as well as a dedicated Internet connection for gaming that isn't used by the rest of the campus. The computers should be plugged into a separate, secure Internet connection of at least 1 Gbps, with a ping rate of 20 milliseconds or less.<sup>16</sup>

### A partner who can help

Spectrum Enterprise can help campus leaders design and deliver IT services that satisfy Gen Z expectations. A trusted provider of Internet, network, voice, TV and security services to hundreds of colleges and universities nationwide, Spectrum Enterprise has dedicated education IT experts who can help campus IT leaders meet these key challenges and more.

To learn how, visit [enterprise.spectrum.com/highered](https://enterprise.spectrum.com/highered).

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#### About Spectrum Enterprise

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