
New needs for campus housing

This disparity has been further amplified by protests against racial injustice. After Gen Z took the helm in protesting the death of George Floyd while in police custody, a [Business Insider](#) survey found that 78% of the “Action Generation” has used social media to express support for equality for Black Americans and 90% support Black Lives Matter. These protests helped motivate a generation eager to speak up at the polls as the older Gen Z members voted for the first time during a highly contentious presidential election.

The way online connection and messaging has shaped Gen Z will also shape their expectations of the college experience. In some ways, these expectations are matter-of-fact. Strictly from the standpoint of facilities services, it is clear that if Wi-Fi was important before the pandemic, it has become more crucial now. Whereas previously the Internet was largely used by Gen Z to support online social interaction, it is now a greater part of accessing educational content. Strong and reliable bandwidth will be critical differentiators for student housing.

Given their social and global awareness, Gen Z will also look closely at how institutions position their messaging. After a summer of protests, with every brand jumping to make a statement of corporate social responsibility, young people have become more skeptical and jaded of corporate messaging. Gen Z has a good radar for what is lip-service versus what is genuine. They want authenticity—and can tell when they are not getting it.

This does not mean that housing officers should avoid engaging on relevant topics. Whether a college, university, or off-campus community, Gen Z wants to associate with organizations that share their values. Brands and institutions must become more intentional about the topics they speak up about and identify causes that best align with their mission and purpose. Housing officers may be particularly adept at identifying these movements as they are often the individuals closest to residents and attuned to cultural shifts.

While institutional policies and positions often evolve with changing societal values, it is important to acknowledge these changes. Technology makes it easier than ever to uncover a company’s track record, and Gen Z is ready and eager to dig deep to ensure past messaging aligns with today’s core values. Brands must be clear about where they stood on issues in the past, why they have changed, and what that change looks like today. It is also important to respond to concerns raised about past statements or positions.

When students ask questions, consider it an opportunity to engage more deeply with your target clientele. Do not shy away from engaging students in problem-solving. Try to develop authentic and meaningful solutions. This is an opportunity to build greater respect for the institutional brand while better serving students.

Gen Z is a generation that has seen how regular people with a cause can drive change using nothing more than a smartphone.