Companies work hard and invest heavily to find new products that they hope will take the market by storm. But the market moves fast and keeping track of customers' changing needs is another important element of success. Customer relations expert Anne Obarski explains in this article why it's important for companies to understand the demands of the affluent young adults of today.

How to catch the eye of Generation Y

Echo-boomers, digital millennials and kidemployees, are just a few names for Generation Y, the young adults born between 1980 and 2000. Theirs is now the most influential generation, with big spending power and strong opinions at an ever earlier age. The economic opportunity they offer is enormous and one every retailer and product manufacturer needs to embrace.

The requests that Generation Y customers make of the companies they buy from are interesting.

Don't fake it: This is not a customer to try to impress. They are smart and savvy as well as media bombarded, and are probably more knowledgeable about your product than you are. Be straightforward and concise in how you communicate with them and they will appreciate your style.

Listen: This customer is the epitome of multi-tasking; they are able to do far more things at one time and do them well. Listen to your Generation Y customer and don't just give them 'ear service' assuming they really don't care, because they do.

Be original: This generation grew up being told they are special and that they can do anything they want. They have a solid sense of identity and you can see that in how they personalise much of what they own, it is all about originality. Look for unique things to offer this generation.

Communicate well: Research has found that 18–26 year-olds spend 28% more time online than 27–40 year-olds, they read blogs twice as often and are 50% more likely to send instant messages. They will wait just three seconds for a web page to download before they click away. They also process website information five times faster than older generations. No other group is more adept at leveraging technologies than Generation Y. Look out for video email to be the next powerhouse to market to this group. If they



No other group is more adept at leveraging technologies than Generation Y.
Nokia

like your product, they don't just tell a few friends at lunch; they can send a mass message in seconds. The challenge in marketing to them means giving them what they want, when they want it, in a quick, easy format and they'll share it with the world, literally.

At the National Retail Federation convention in New York in January, a 'magic mirror' was unveiled. The technology featured in the 'Store of the Future' exhibit but it may make it into stores before the end of 2007. The interactive mirror is placed in the fitting room and a friend or family member can see the customer over the internet and send comments that will appear on the mirror: "I love that on you," or "Try the red one on again". This device is geared to the 17–24-year-old group. The mirror can also offer viewers other apparel pieces to try on.

New research shows that 67% of the Generation Y group says peers and friends play the biggest role in their decisions about what to buy. Nearly 30% of teens say they use 'e-mail a friend' links on websites to ask for advice before buying.

This generation has raised the bar on how we communicate and relate on a global basis. There is so much more we can learn from them and so much more business we can generate if we just choose to see things the way they do.

Wearable technology

The passion of Generation Y for new communications and entertainment devices will be of particular interest to the companies in the activewear space that are focusing on wearable technology. Our article on this subject in the January/February 2007 issue of *WSA* featured ideas such as a 'Know Where Jacket' with integrated global positioning system technology built in from Interactive Wear and the iBlaze rucksack from Simpak, which has a built-in iPod. It is also worth noting that the organisers of ispo in Munich in February 2007 identified wearable technology as a particularly popular feature of their new specialist innovation area.



"Know Where Jacket" with integrated GPS from Interactive Wear.

Interactive Wear

HALF PAGE HORIZONTAL
ADVANSA or MAPP??