





Lindsey + Asp, OU's student-run advertising and PR agency, represents clients as diverse as the U.S. Navy and Spotify.

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## THE KEY TO GENERATION

Now in its second decade, OU's Lindsey + Asp student agency is using research to unlock youth culture for national marketers.

BY DANA BRANHAM

**I**NSIDE GAYLORD HALL, STEPS away from the University of Oklahoma's south oval, there's a bustling advertising and public relations agency run by students. As the next generation of marketing professionals, students at Lindsey + Asp are poised to become some of the nation's leading experts on youth culture.

Lindsey + Asp has developed marketing campaigns, social media content, media relations strategies and other materials for clients including Spotify, Carnival Corp., the U.S. Navy and OU Athletics since 2009.

The agency's youth-culture focus plays to its strengths.

Most of the roughly 65 young professionals fit squarely into Generation Z. And just outside the agency's walls, Lindsey + Asp has a thousands-strong "focus group in our backyard," says Debbie Yount, the Paul D. Massad Endowed Chair in Strategic Planning at OU's Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication.

But students at Lindsey + Asp have more than personal anecdotes to offer. After a three-year research project and survey, they are leveraging a treasure trove of data about Gen Z's thoughts and behaviors on topics from mealtimes to mental health and helping brands communicate with young people.

"Gen Z will be even larger than Baby Boomers," Yount says. "It's a huge opportunity, and advertisers and marketers struggle a little bit understanding how to market their brand, their products and services."



Students consult with OU-based NPR affiliate radio station KGOU.

The survey's findings build on existing research about Gen Z, the group of young Americans born between the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2010s, who have increasing spending and political power. Gen Zers are a more racially and ethnically diverse generation than any previous one, their formative years were shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, and they are on track to be the best-educated generation, according to the Pew Research Center.

But Lindsey + Asp research delved beneath the surface into Gen Zers' worldview. Yount and Armand McCoy, the agency's executive director and faculty adviser, believe their data will be crucial for companies that want to connect with this increasingly influential generation.

The OU researchers conducted a survey of more than 1,400 people—about 52% of whom were Gen Zers—across the U.S. in 2022.

The survey asked respondents to weigh in on attitudes around work, family, entertainment, politics, education, food, fashion, trust, mental health and spending.

The findings revealed areas where Gen

Zers differ from older counterparts. For one, Gen Z is more likely to eat as many meals and portions as they deem appropriate on their own schedule, rather than three meals a day at specific times.

"What does that mean for restaurants that normally live in a world where you had a breakfast menu, a lunch menu and a dinner menu?" McCoy wonders.

Another difference may stem from Gen Z having grown up in a digital space, where the internet and smartphones have been inescapable. One in three Gen Z members believes technology has harmed their mental health. Gen Z is also significantly more open to therapy than previous generations: Over 40% of Gen Z survey respondents were either in therapy or had received therapy, and another 21% believe they're a good candidate for therapy.

By contrast, about 25% of non-Gen Z respondents said they haven't received therapy and don't plan to. Understanding that distinction could be important for mental health treatment providers or even app developers looking to reach their target audience.

Gen Z also trusts friends more than their families and other institutions, which can be crucial information for marketers and advertisers, McCoy says.

"I see an opportunity for brands to understand and lean into the power of peer-to-peer communication," he says. "Business moves at the speed of relationships for this generation."

Given these differences, perhaps what's more surprising is how similar Gen Z is to older generations.

Of the 10 topics respondents were surveyed about, seven showed minimal differences based on age, says Yount.

"That was a surprise for all of us," she says. The former chair and CEO of worldwide creative agency Publicis Dialog USA, Yount helped launch Lindsey + Asp and previously served as its adviser.

Yount led the charge in framing survey topics, employing students to gather focus groups and one-on-one interviews for her brand strategy class, "Account Planning," over two years.

"These similarities are important for advertisers because they are intimidated

by this huge group of people that will have buying power,” Yount says. “What we found was that Gen Z are ‘the devil you know’; they’re not really all that different from other generations.”

For example, even though Gen Z sometimes gets blamed for a culture of “quiet quitting”—in which employees don’t strive to go above and beyond responsibilities outlined in their job descriptions—Lindsey + Asp’s study shows that Gen Z holds similar views to older generations about work and success.

The survey asked how much respondents identified with the idea that they prioritize flexibility and happiness in their work. Some 73% of Gen Z agreed, as did 71% of non-Gen Z respondents—only a marginal difference.

“Generation Z in many ways is similar to other generations, but they do things differently,” McCoy says. “It’s important for brands to understand the nuances to activate this generation. We know that Generation Z is driven and focused when they’re lined up in the right direction.”

That’s where Lindsey + Asp can help

brands tap into youth culture. In addition to amassed survey data, they have another advantage: Its experts stay the same age year after year as students cycle in and out.

“We feel it’s something we uniquely bring to the table that most agencies can’t,” McCoy says. “They will always be the youth of today.”

Already, Lindsey + Asp has been tapped to deliver Gen Z-focused expertise using their data.

OU students recently worked with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to support the department’s “Own Your Power” campaign, encouraging teens to manage mental health and well-being without vaping or using marijuana.

OU Admissions and Recruitment is partnering with the agency to strategize communicating with a new generation of students. Since Lindsey + Asp started developing social media content for the department, @GO2OU’s Instagram reels have seen a 450% uptick in viewership. And, Lindsey + Asp leaders have shared their Gen Z research with local marketing professionals at Oklahoma City’s chapter of

the American Marketing Association.

Looking toward the future, Lindsey + Asp will soon put their data on food and snacking to work for a Donatos franchise partnership group, which was set to open its first pizza restaurant location in Oklahoma in August. Lindsey + Asp will provide social media and media relations strategies and support the company as it adds more Oklahoma franchise locations.

McCoy says the agency also hopes to attract a financial services client, which would draw upon survey data about the qualities Gen Z want to see in their ideal bank, including availability of credit cards and debit cards with no fees, low interest rates, and transparency around fees and transactions.

“A big plan for us is to get this information out into the world and grow who we serve and who our students interact with,” McCoy says. “Hopefully, the work that they do now will make them even more attractive to employers when they leave OU.”

*Dana Branham is a former reporter for The Oklahoman and a freelance writer who lives in The Village, Okla.*



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Armand McCoy, right, advises young Lindsey + Asp professionals.

OU students roll out a campaign for the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.