

A close-up portrait of a woman's face, looking slightly to the right. She has vibrant, multi-colored makeup on her eyes and lips, including shades of blue, yellow, and red. Her hair is also multi-colored. A white geometric frame, consisting of several overlapping shapes, is overlaid on the image. The word "For" is in a smaller font, and "GEN" is in a very large, bold font, both in white. The background is dark, making the colors of the woman's makeup stand out.

For **GEN**

**Brand  
Is What  
You Share,  
Not What  
You Sell**

**PART 2:  
PUTTING SHARING  
INTO PRACTICE**

**Ogilvy** CONSULTING



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FOREWORD

## How to share effectively

In early October 2022, we released Part 1 of our Gen Z Playbook – a guide to building lasting bonds with Gen Z. We proposed that business leaders must grow comfortable co-creating and giving up complete ownership to gain the next—and largest—generation of potential new users. We also foreshadowed that radical decentralization of brand control would change business models, marketing and brand strategy, and internal team dynamics.

In Part 2 of the Playbook, we demonstrate what brands can share and how to do it effectively with the introduction of the Co-Creation Ladder. We've uncovered 15 key areas where sharing will allow members of your community to place themselves at the center of your brand and feel ownership in its growth and development.

We show you how to execute the concept of sharing – and provide real examples of the players doing it well today.

At Ogilvy Consulting we are always looking at what's next, for consumers for businesses and brands. We work with our clients to build their brands, innovate new products and grow their business through a deep understanding of the current and future consumer. Gen Z is the future consumer, innovator and creator...and the future is now.

We're here to help - please enjoy the second of our two papers and reach out if you'd like to learn more.



**CARLA HENDRA**  
Global  
CEO Ogilvy  
Consulting





# INTRODUCTION

**In 2021, Google set up its first Gen Z working group,** dubbed the Gen Z-Council, in response to the shifting internet search and ecommerce landscapes. The small council is a cohort of young people ages 16–25 selected from around the globe that advises Google’s various research and product teams on UX and content-consumption styles, and participates in live workshops with developers, product managers, and researchers. According to Google, “youth are changing the way we search for information in a more social world, consume information visually, and discover new content—focusing more on social platforms and less on traditional search engines.” The idea is to combine savvy Gen Z thinkers from outside the company with key internal teams in a structured program delivering explicit benefits to each group.

It sounds honorable to include youth in business decisions and allow them to help shape future outcomes, but brands need to learn how to make it scalable, deciding which parts of the brand can be shared in a valuable way. Brands eager to bring Gen Z groups together in an effective way face organizational and process challenges. To

help you through them, we worked with cross-industry brand leaders from around the globe to identify the most valuable areas of your brand to share and where to start on each. We also sat down with Gen Zers in four countries to find out exactly how they would like to be included.



# WHAT TO SHARE: INTRODUCING THE CO- CREATION LADDER





Once you have considered which types of community-building structures are optimal for your user base and ambition, you can next decide which aspects of your brand to begin sharing. Knowing that Gen Zers crave fuller, deeper involvement with the brands they care about means going far beyond the traditional notion of consumer participation, which is limited to things like product votes, feedback, and satisfaction surveys. Brands should open up all levels of the business—from high-level aspirations, such as brand

purpose, all the way down to daily execution, such as customer service. While meeting with business leaders and Gen Z, we identified 15 key areas where sharing will allow members of your youth community to place themselves at the center of your brand and feel ownership in its growth and development as you move towards a mutually defined North Star. We've dubbed our list the "Co-creation Ladder," as the goal is to open up your brand from top to bottom—from purpose to customer service.

*"Looking at the Co-creation Ladder, the recruiting and employee experience rung really stands out to me as especially critical. If you have an internal company culture that looks like the consumer you want to speak with, then sharing becomes far more natural—you live it daily. On that note, one thing that [our brand] never tapped into is our retail store staff, the 16-to-20-year-olds that love our brand and see it on the store floors every day. We should be getting their insights and ideas. That is such an untapped opportunity for us."*

A SENIOR BRAND LEADER AT A LEADING LIFESTYLE FASHION COMPANY

# THE CO-CREATION LADDER





## Innovative examples of brands sharing at various levels of the Co-creation Ladder

**Organized using the Co-creation Ladder**, here are several examples of brands from all categories embracing this expanded concept of co-creation to foster deeper relationships with users—one rung at a time.

### BRAND PURPOSE



#### **KIND Bars: Looking to community to express the brand's purpose**

Now one of the fastest-growing snacking companies, KIND was established as a “not-only-for-profit®,” committed to using its business as a vehicle for social change with the guidance of its consumers. KIND’s purpose, to make the world a little kinder one snack and act at a time, is constantly evolving by letting people reward others they see displaying acts of kindness with free bars via a dedicated website and asking a group of consumers to pick which causes and individuals epitomizing this ethos receive funds from the brand. KIND was founded by Daniel Lubetzky, a social entrepreneur working to increase appreciation for our shared humanity. As the son of a Holocaust survivor, he has made it his life’s work to help prevent what happened to his father from happening again—by spreading a shared sense of kindness.

### BRAND POSITIONING

#### **GUMROAD**

#### **Gumroad: Championing creators and investors at all levels to shape the brand**

Gumroad is not only an innovative platform that allows diverse creators to sell digital assets and content such as fonts, images, podcasts, and e-books. It is also positioned as a place where “anyone can earn their first dollar online. Just start with what you know, see what sticks, and get paid. It’s that easy.” The platform has co-creation in its own DNA, welcoming individual investors down to the \$100 level. Additionally, Gumroad allows its creators to source product and business ideas from within its online communities, contribute to material for Gumroad University, and select new platform features.



## PRODUCT PORTFOLIO



### **IKEA: Going into business with users to make sure the best ideas get built**

In 2018, IKEA launched “co-creatIKEA,” a digital platform encouraging customers and fans to develop new products through building, editing, and repurposing existing IKEA furniture and parts. The co-creation platform asks customers for product idea suggestions, runs IKEA bootcamps with entrepreneurs, collaborates with university students on product solutions, and connects with cross-industry innovation labs around the world. If a suggestion for a furniture or product design is successful, IKEA may license the technology or agree to invest in future products.

## RECRUITING AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE



### **AT&T: A skill-building program by employees for employees**

AT&T is building out AT&T University to offer flexible career paths, virtual internships, tuition assistance, and more, based on individual employee preferences. Employees looking for new roles or promotions can earn fast-track “nano” degree certifications in areas of company growth such as artificial intelligence or data analytics, or enroll in online master’s degree programs with company help. Over 110,000 badges (visual indicators added to an employee’s profile within AT&T’s internal social networking platform that signify the employee has completed certain coursework) have been awarded to 50,000 employees. AT&T also uses video interviews, texts, and Snapchat to connect with potential young hires—a request that came directly from its Gen Z talent pool. On the program website, AT&T states: “We’re investing in new tools and solutions to help more young people gain the skills they need to lead the digital, global economy.”

## SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES



### **Adidas x Parley: Letting a small, passionate community make big moves**

Adidas, in partnership with Parley, has created a space “where creators, thinkers, and leaders come together to raise awareness for the beauty and fragility of our oceans and collaborate on projects that can end their destruction.” The brand partnership made history with the first high-performance products made from ocean plastic and created a global event for kids to join. In 2019 the movement grew exponentially with the creation of the Parley Ocean School and a new youth activist platform, [Ocean Uprise](#): a space for youth to stand up for, collaborate on, and receive funding for ocean-friendly initiatives.

## FUTURECASTING



### **Google: Working with Gen Z to define the future of search**

In 2021 Google created its first Gen Z-Council, stating: “Youth are changing the way we search for information, consume information visually, and discover new content—focusing more on social platforms and less on traditional search engines.” The small council is a global cohort of young people ages 16 to 25 that advises Google’s various research and product teams on UX and content consumption and participates in live workshops with developers and research experts.

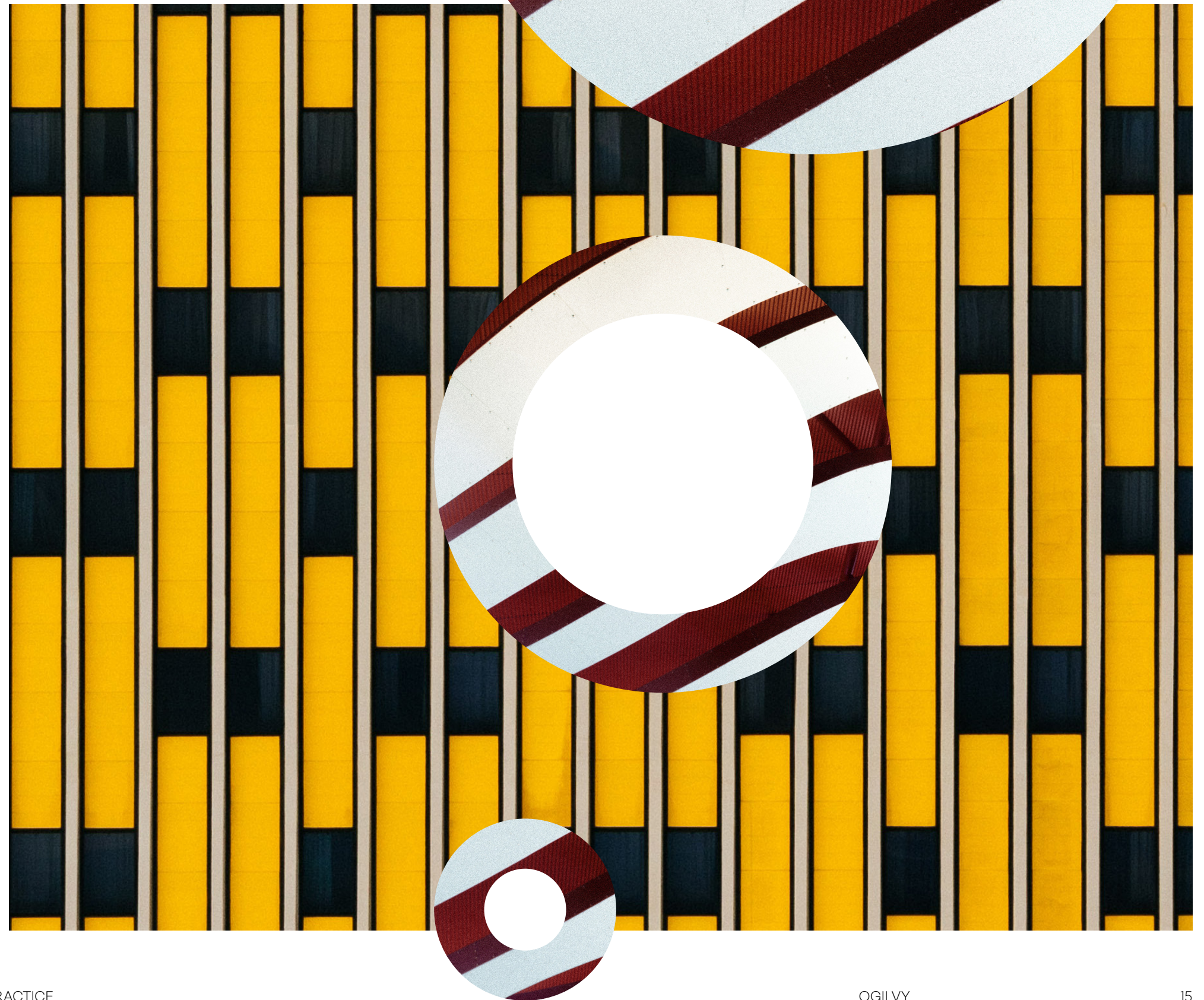


## SUPPLY CHAIN AND SOURCING

### Reformation

#### Reformation: Community-backed supply chain

Reformation, a women's clothing brand founded in 2009, releases interactive sustainability reports each quarter, allowing customers to offer suggestions and ask questions. The brand also works with local communities, consumers, and experts to identify ethical factory, design, and manufacturing partners. Reformation's website states: "Transparency and partnership are key to accountability, which is why we disclose 100% of our supply chain."





## PLATFORM VALUE AND FEATURES



### **Airbnb: Ensuring that hosts feel like heroes**

Airbnb works directly with its host and traveler communities to improve core services, test new offerings, help users achieve personal-impact goals, and introduce users to one another on its own digital forums. In the wake of COVID-19, Airbnb also launched a social-impact fund that allows hosts to support charities locally. “Through the Community Fund, Airbnb plans to distribute \$100 million over the next 10 years alongside our hosts to organizations that support communities around the world. Hosts get to decide how the money is distributed” (Airbnb.com).

## PRODUCT BUNDLES AND PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY



### **Sephora: Consumer-led microshops and collabs**

At the request of customers, Sephora recently launched a subsite called “Try Something Good,” which features Black-owned brands and personalized product bundles. The kits contain makeup, skincare, and haircare products from various Black-owned brands housed at Sephora, like Briogeo, Fenty Skin, Bread Beauty Supply, and more. According to the website, Sephora will also donate \$20 from the sale of each kit to the Fifteen Percent Pledge, which seeks economic equality and prosperity for Black future founders, Black students, and Black people in the workforce.

## INTEREST-BASED COMMUNITIES



### **FaZe Clan: Helping kids become creators**

FaZe, a gaming collective turned new-age lifestyle media empire, recently valued at over \$1.2B, shows how sharing with users can both build community and evolve a business into something entirely unexpected (and extremely valuable). FaZe Clan viewers were invited to become investors and content partners, with ample opportunity to use their imaginations and skills to help build new experiences, source new talent, and develop product offerings. From merch designers and energy drink formulators to tournament hosts and video editors, FaZe Clan’s audience was taken from passive appreciation and advocacy to active involvement and co-directed outcomes.

## MEMBERSHIP PROGRAMS



### **Nike: Membership anchored to meaningful contributions, not discounts**

Through open forums and community-built experiences, Nike has shown us that the best memberships allow for meaningful contributions. Nike coordinates connections and communities among members using core shared values. Within both the SNKRS and Run Club platforms, Nike allows users to connect based on interest points, compete based on goals, and create based on shared passions. Nike’s membership is transformational, both for the members and for the business itself, which constantly iterates offerings and launches new features based on community feedback and local requests.



## MARKETING AND BRAND BUILDING



### Starburst: From director of a commercial to co-star of a campaign

In 2021, at the request of its fans, Starburst brought back one of its most famous ads from the early 2000s in a new, collaborative way. Starburst leaned into the customers who had been remixing the old commercial's notorious jingle on YouTube for years, this time creating a digital toolkit for users to rebuild the ad at home on TikTok. According to *Business Insider*, "Berries and Cream" became a fixation of its own, with people making deliberately terrible new takes and mashups that splice lines from the jingle into well-known songs like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's 'WAP.' 'Berries and cream' has become a late contender for one of the summer's biggest TikTok hits."

## BRAND EXPERIENCES



### Snap Inc.: Finally paying creators for the attention they bring to the platform

Snap Inc. is one of the few companies that has fully embraced the creator economy. With the guidance of its most frequent users, Snap rolled out new monetization tools in the summer of 2021, letting users create original content and be paid for it. Snap stated that 5,400 creators have been paid since the launch in November, including over 250 people who have been paid more than \$100,000. Snap also created custom filters for Gen Zers to promote their own entrepreneurial ventures, like selling clothes online.

## PRODUCT FEEDBACK AND ITERATION



### Call of Duty: Inviting top streamers to closed-door feedback sessions

Call of Duty released a program called Ricochet in September 2021 in response to growing community complaints of rampant online cheating. Ricochet is an anticheating system used to punish bad actors on CoD's servers. It allows everyday gamers to chat with the team and submit ideas. The technology is being tested in public and welcomes feedback from both outside developers and everyday players. According to Call of Duty, "The pros of public testing and the trust we're building outweigh the con that is giving cheaters a little bit more time to understand the software and potentially find a workaround."

## CUSTOMER SERVICE



### Adobe XD: Certifying consumer experts to troubleshoot new solutions

Adobe XD offers community-sourced, hands-on customer support and 24/7 technical support via Twitter. Designers can ask @AdobeXD detailed questions about the software and get quick advice on the best way to accomplish their tasks, both from Adobe employees and from certified community experts. The passionate user base is able to quickly provide a level of tech support that would usually require a phone call or reading mounds of product material.



# HOW TO SHARE: BRINGING THE CO- CREATION LADDER INTO ACTION





86%

When asked if they would be willing to commit an hour a week to be part of a working group for their favorite brand, such as joining a Gen Z-Council for three months, 86% of Gen Z said “Yes,” they would be willing to commit the time.

OGILVY AND THRED MEDIA GEN Z SURVEY, MARCH 2022

The next step involves determining how to best execute sharing the areas you selected from the ladder. Below is a list of **brand-formed groups** that can be built out of your user community to address all 15 priority areas on the Co-creation Ladder. Groups can be populated with internal and/or external members. The table below connects all 15 opportunities from our Co-creation Ladder to an execution plan. These suggestions are not definitive, but they have led to successful outcomes.

Note that choosing the **best internal group structure** to fit your needs depends on factors such as project complexity, expected duration, meeting frequency, completion time scales, group size, communication methodology, budget considerations, language barriers, time zones, and necessary brand and

industry familiarization. Choosing the **best-suited community members** to take part in your collaborations will require your brand to predetermine the level of specialized knowledge needed (if any), industry expertise, and understanding of Gen Z trends needed by the participants.

Opportunities to Share	Sharing Collective Brand-Formed Groups Internal and/or External People	Position Type	Position Duration	Meeting Frequency	Cross Gen or Gen Z Only	Gen Z Specific Knowledge
Brand Purpose Sustainability Initiatives	Board of Directors	Minimum Fixed	Yearly Rolling	Minimum Quarterly	Include Gen Z	High
Brand Positioning Recruiting & Employee Experience	Company Advisory Board	Minimum Fixed	Yearly Rolling	Minimum Quarterly	Include Gen Z	High
Product Portfolio Futurecasting	Youth Advisory Board	Minimum Fixed	Yearly Rolling	Monthly to Quarterly	Gen Z Only	High
Sustainability Initiatives Marketing & Brand Building Product Bundles & Partnership Strategy	Youth Council	Fixed Term	Medium-Term or Long-Term Study	Weekly to Monthly	Gen Z Only	High
Platform Value & Features Supply Chain & Sourcing	Project Council	Fixed Term	Medium-Term or Long Term Study	Weekly to Monthly	Include Gen Z	Medium
Product Portfolio Product Bundles & Partnership Strategy	Product Council	Fixed Term	Medium-Term or Long Term Study	Weekly to Monthly	Include Gen Z	Medium
Membership Programs Interest-Based Communities	Youth Focus Group	Short Term	Short Term	Virtual, Slack/Discord Channel, Daily to Weekly, Include Ambass/Champ	Gen Z Only	Medium
Marketing & Brand Building Customer Service	Project Focus Group	Short Term	Short Term	Virtual, Slack/Discord Channel, Daily to Weekly, Include Ambass/Champ	Include Gen Z	Medium
Product Feedback & Iteration Supply Chain & Sourcing	Product Focus Group	Short Term	Short Term	Virtual, Slack/Discord Channel, Daily to Weekly, Include Ambass/Champ	Include Gen Z	Medium
Customer Service, Share Product Feedback & Iteration Customer Service	Gen Z Insights & Polling Group	One Time or Minimum Fixed Term	Short Term, Variable Length	Virtual, Slack/Discord Channel, Daily to Weekly, Include Ambass/Champ	Gen Z Only	Minimal
Marketing & Brand Building Recruiting & Employee Experience	Gen Z Analyst, Associates & Interns	Short-Term Fixed	Short Term, Variable Length	In-Person/Virtual, Daily/Weekly Meetings, Slack/Discord Channel	Gen Z Only	Minimal
Futurecasting Brand Experiences Product Bundles & Partnership Strategy	GenZ KOLs, COLs, Influencers, Celebrities	Project Based	Time or Project Based	In-Person/Virtual-Daily/Weekly Meetings, Slack/Discord Channel	Include Gen Z	High
Membership Programs Interest-Based Communities	Gen Z Ambassadors & Champions	Minimum Fixed	One-Year Minimum	Virtual – Slack/Discord Channel, Monthly Town Hall Meetings	Gen Z Only	Minimal
Product Bundles & Partnership Strategy Membership Programs	Brand/Community Platforms Membership & Loyalty Program Participants	Open Term	Open Duration	Open Schedule	Cross-Generational	None
Product Portfolio Brand Experiences	Social Media Large Public Platforms & Smaller Digital Campfires	Open Term	Open Duration	Open Schedule	Cross-Generational	None



HOW TO SHARE: BRINGING THE CO-CREATION LADDER INTO ACTION



When asked, “If paid, would you be interested in participating in: Helping to create and plan new events, defining sustainability goals, designing brand loyalty / membership programs, interacting with the brand’s community/fans, or helping come up with new product ideas/features,” less than 9% said they would NOT be interested in any activity in partnership with their favorite brands. Over a third answered “Yes” to each of the options.

OGILVY AND THRED MEDIA GEN Z SURVEY, MARCH 2022

The **sharing collective** groups are divided into five categories: boards, councils, focus groups, multipurpose groups and media platforms. The time and work commitment for participating community members is greater at the board level and progressively lessens as you work your way down the list (column 2). Some of the groups are made up entirely of Gen Z members, while other groups would be well served to include a member of Gen Z as part of a diverse, cross-generational community. For example, we have suggested using a Youth Advisory Board (all Gen Z members) for futurecasting and a Project Council (including a Gen Z member) for supply chain and sourcing projects.

The pairings between the Co-creation Ladder opportunities and the sharing collectives (brand-formed groups) are meant to be dynamic and renewed as the needs of the participants evolve over time.

Whether it’s through ambassador networks, membership programs, special events, user-generated content, or joining a brand’s Gen Z-Council, the world’s best Gen Z brands give their community a place to bring other like-minded individuals into the brand’s story, the motivation to keep them engaged, and a seat at the most important tables.



# WHERE TO START SHARING: THE FIRST STEP

**The figure on the next page is a result of conversations** with several brand leaders. It seeks to help determine where your brand should prioritize or begin sharing, based on current cultural context and business ambitions. Plotting your brand along each axis will help clarify which rungs of the ladder could drive the most impact as you first begin to share. For example, if your brand best fits into the bottom-right quadrant, which suggests co-creating a hero product, the product-centric rungs of the ladder (product portfolio and platform features) and their associated group structures from the table above will likely be optimal as you begin sharing your brand.





# The Co-creation Matrix: Where do I start?

This framework is only a starting point for inspiration. Co-creation is an ongoing journey which covers the entire business, not a single solution at one moment in time.

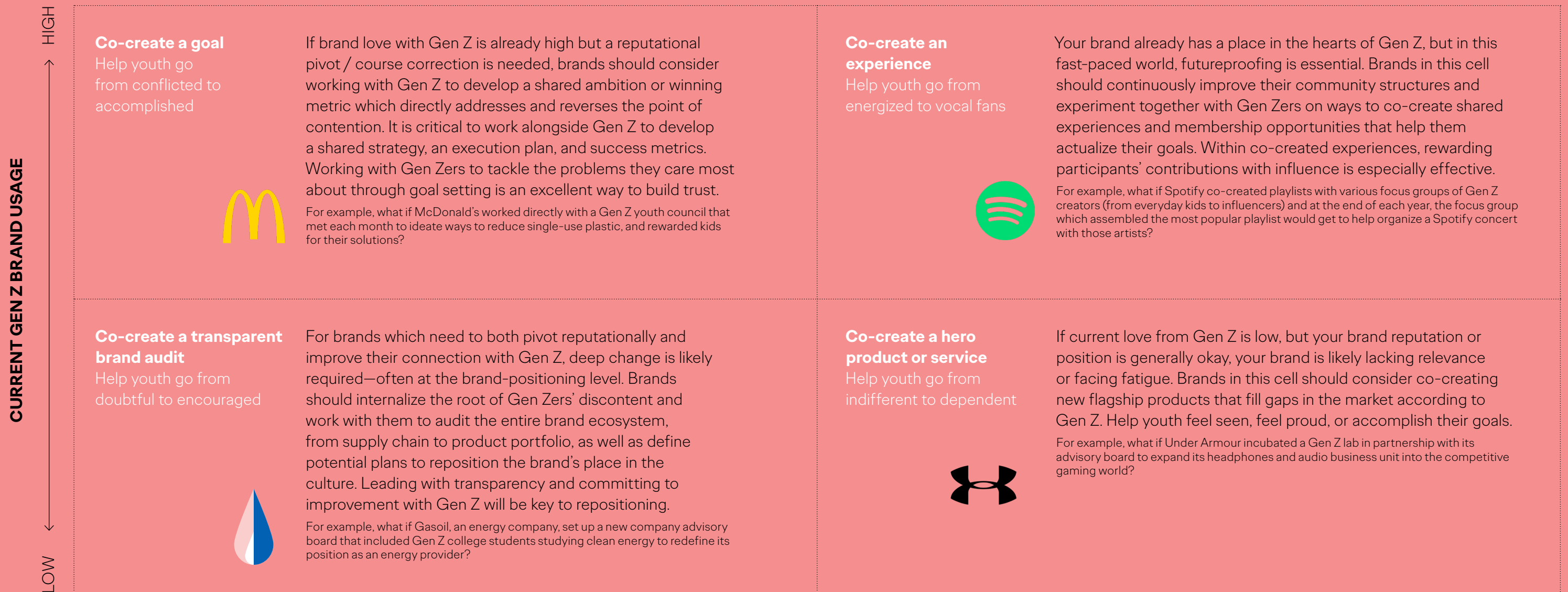
*"I think execution on co-creation really comes down to accountability. Internally, it cannot be, 'Hey, just do it with the extra 10% of time that you have'—which no one actually has. You must make a conscious choice to focus on this, as a mindset, starting with where you should begin sharing, which also means deprioritizing something else."*

SENIOR BRAND LEADER

## MOST URGENT BRAND PRIORITY

IMPROVE TRUST OR REPUTATION

GROW USER BASE





# CO-CREATION CLUSTERS ON

**Growth with Gen Z** requires developing a structure to cultivate and share with a community passionate about your purpose. The long-term impact of your brand on Gen Z will be determined by your ability to identify, bring in, and co-create with a diverse group of youth who resonate with your mission and purpose.

## Evolution, not revolution

Winning with Gen Z does not require you to give up existing relationships with older consumers, forgo your legacy or identity, or call anyone who isn't under the age of 25 a "boomer." Winning with Gen Z will, however, require you to do the following:

1. Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the issues Gen Z is interested in and the values that Gen Z holds, and then prioritize the ones which connect to your brand to drive impact.
2. Share your brand with young people who hold a mutual interest in your offering and allow them to help co-create your user community and future direction.
3. Instill shared values and purpose throughout the brand and achieve measurable impact around mutually defined goals.

The more you share with Gen Z, the greater the understanding of future market needs and cultural insights you will have over and above other brands. The idea is to think of co-creation not just as a novel tool or marketing mechanism to use when it's convenient, but as a belief that consistently sharing your brand will lead to growing your interest-based community, seeing new market opportunities, collaborating on ideation in future offerings, and solidifying your place in youth-culture-based movements. Continuously adding value to your developing Gen Z audience is key to consumer longevity. As co-creation efforts spread, new opportunities to become more transformative in the lives of Gen Z will be unearthed—as will powerful new ways to grow your business.



# FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

1

Brands must embrace a new, expanded definition of sharing in order to succeed with Gen Z.

2

A brand that shares is one which not only allows, but also encourages, Gen Z to help shape the direction of the business at all levels.

3

The precursor to sharing is community, and your community should be more egalitarian than hierarchical, with internal and external leaders empowered to contribute at all levels.

4

Large-scale cultural shifts, such as changes in the education and employment landscape, represent huge opportunities for brands to begin sharing and deepen their relationships with Gen Z.

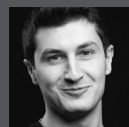
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Sharing your brand is a commitment to support a segment of youth in their own ambitions and personal purposes. Whether it's through ambassador networks, advisory boards, or a Gen Z-Council, the best youth-oriented brands give their users the resources to build new decision-making tables for all parties to use.



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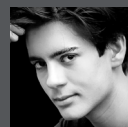
AUTHORS



**REID LITMAN**  
Global Consultant,  
Futuring  
Ogilvy Consulting

Reid builds Brand and Marketing Strategies with purpose - contributing to growth brand strategy, community building, and innovation projects for top brands, creators, & startups at Ogilvy Consulting. He is also building a Studio offering at Ogilvy to connect client brands to the pulse of youth culture, everyday kids, and the creator economy through co-creation. He's interested in the intersection of social equity, brand, and technology, believing brands can be instrumental in changing not only social forces, but concrete policy in the years to come.

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**JENK OZ**  
Founder & CEO  
Thred Media

Jenk is a 17- year-old social entrepreneur, public speaker, social change activist and the Founder & CEO of Thred Media. Thred Media is a consulting agency focused on publishing, media, consulting and production aimed at Gen Z. The central tenet is the 100% social change-focused website Thred, which is available in seventeen languages and reaches readers in 220 countries/ territories a month. Thred Media allows clients to access a Gen Z approach to research and futurecasting insights using first-hand data, co-creation strategies and game-changing content production.



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Editorial Director  
Ogilvy

**LUIS VILCHES**  
Senior Art Director  
Ogilvy

**NIKOLAJ BIRJUKOW**  
Global Managing Director  
Ogilvy

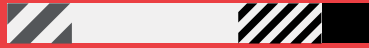
**CHRIS CELLETTI**  
Global Editor  
Ogilvy

**VANESSA PERRY**  
Global Partner, Marketing  
Ogilvy Consulting

**CODY BOEGER**  
Global Partner, Design Strategy  
Ogilvy Consulting

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## ABOUT OGILVY CONSULTING

**Ogilvy Consulting is the strategy, innovation, and business insights arm of The Ogilvy Group. An enterprise-wide offering, we provide advisory services across Business Growth & Innovation Strategy, Business Transformation, Brand & Marketing Innovation, Sustainability, Behavioral Science and Futuring.**

We are a global network and bring agile and diverse teams of analysts, strategists, and consultants together at the intersection of brand, growth, innovation, and transformation. We are positioned as the strategic advisors to the C-Suite on all aspects of brand, marketing, and business growth.

We collaborate closely with teams and businesses across Ogilvy, including Advertising, Brand and Communications, Public Relations & Influence, Experience and Health. Our global consulting team works across all sectors and categories, including healthcare, technology, financial services, manufacturing, automotive, retail, and many more.

## ABOUT OGILVY

**Ogilvy inspires brands and people to impact the world, creating iconic, culture-changing, value-driving ideas for clients since David Ogilvy founded the company in 1948.**

We continue building on that rich legacy through our borderless creativity—operating, innovating, and creating at the intersection of talent and capabilities.

Our experts in Advertising, Experience, Public Relations, Health, and Consulting work fluidly across 131 offices in 93 countries to bring forth world-class creative solutions for our clients. Ogilvy is a WPP company (NASDAQ: WPPGY). For more information, visit [Ogilvy.com](https://www.ogilvy.com), and follow us on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

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