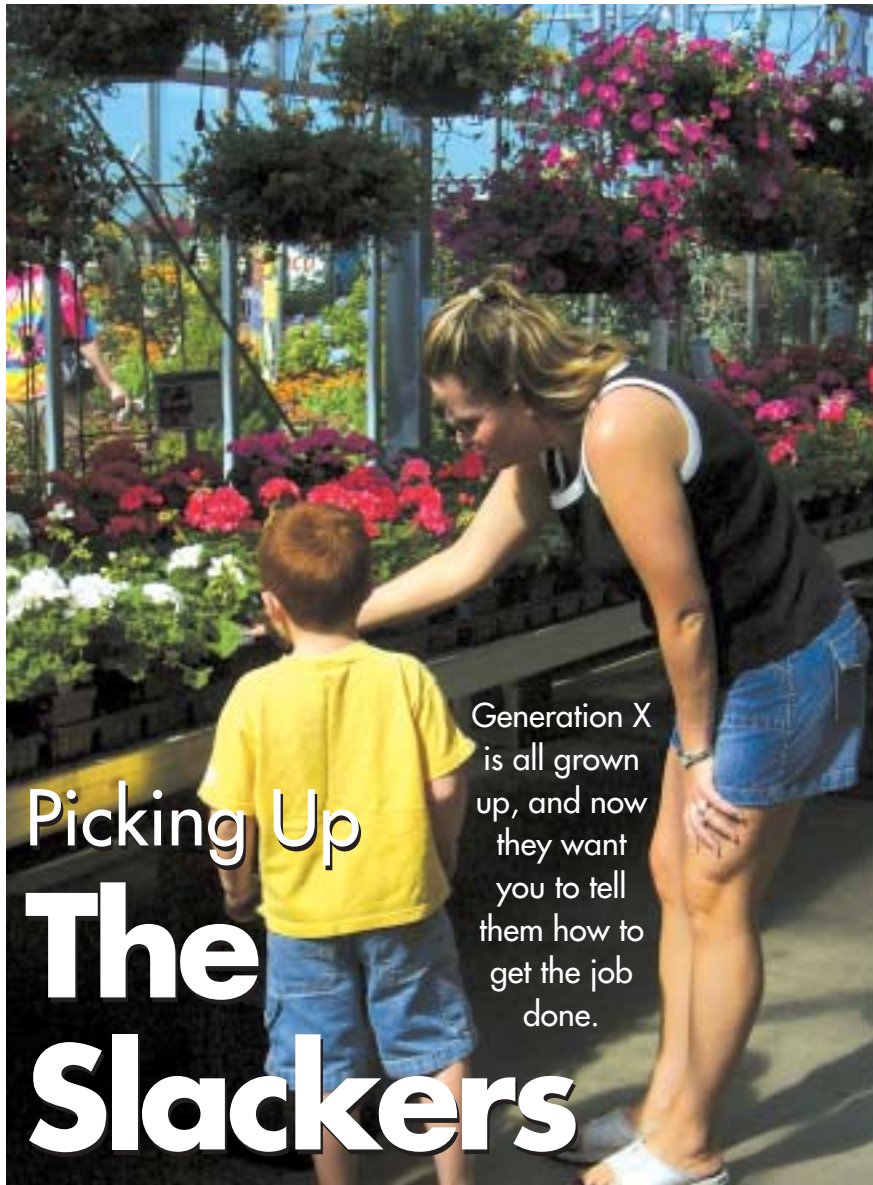


by Ellen C. Wells
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The grunge music, nose rings and pessimistic attitudes toward life that characterized Generation X in the 1990s have been put aside as this enigmatic generation hits the real adulthood of their mid-30s. While a flannel-clad Eddie Vedder may bring back fond memories of younger, more rebellious days, Gen Xers are finding the cast of “Friends” had it right – it’s time to move on to see what the rest of life has to offer.

Pinpointing a Generation

Generation X is a loose categorization for people born roughly between 1967 and 1979. This age group is recognized as being the first to be heavily influenced during their formative years by a high divorce rate, both the women’s and ecology movements and, of course, the beginnings of technology. The term Generation X hit mainstream culture in 1991 with the publication of Douglas Coupland’s novel “Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture.” The story follows three twentysomething friends who are trying to remove themselves from an overly commercialized world and “rediscover themselves.”



Picking Up The Slackers

Generation X is all grown up, and now they want you to tell them how to get the job done.

Coupland’s “X” was inspired by a “class X” used by another author, Paul Fussell, in a 1983 book about America’s social hierarchy. In the book “Class,” Fussell used “X” to designate a class that didn’t want to participate in the cycles of status, money and social climbing that more and more Americans were becoming involved in after World War II.

Untrusting of the motives of previous generations, Gen Xers as a group were committed to finding their own way. What resulted was a demographic that entered adulthood overeducated, underemployed and underpaid, many living

with parents through their mid- to late 20s. With this generalization, the term “Slacker” became an appropriate nickname for some Gen Xers.

Today’s Generation X

Now 26-38 years old and representing 21 percent of the American population, Generation X has started on the path toward career, home and family. The start is late, compared to Baby Boomers and previous generations. According to a 2005 *Boston Globe* article, the average age for first marriages in 2000 was 28 and 25 for men and women, respectively, up from 23

Gen X – By The Numbers

21%
Amount of the
population in
Generation X

28/25
Average age for
first marriages for
Gen Xers (men and
women, respectively),
up from 23
and 20

52%
Number of
married Gen Xers

55%
Number with at
least one child
under 18

and 20 (men and women) in 1960. As a result, Gen Xers are starting families later, as well. According to 2000 U.S. Census data, 52 percent of Generation X are married, and just 55 percent of them have at least one child under the age of

though they are quick with the card, a 2004 Vertis study finds that price is the leading motivator for Gen X women when shopping for fashion, with 34 percent shopping at discount stores such as Wal-Mart and Target.

X-aged owner and operator of Eagle Creek Garden Center in Bainbridge, Ohio, sees few Gen Xers in her store, with most of her customers about 45 years old or older. "Women my age are having kids," Bonner says. "Most

Gen X – By The Numbers

\$45,000

Average annual
wage after taxes

43.5%

According to a 2003
American Demographics
report, amount of Gen Xers
who said they planned on
making landscape and
garden purchases
within the year

34%

Amount who said
they shop at discount
stores like Wal-Mart
and Target

**\$736
million**

Generation X's
estimated
spending power

18. In fact, a 2004 report from the U.S. Census Bureau says the average number of residents for Generation X households is just 2.9, which indicates their number of children is still quite low.

Along the same lines, Generation Xers are buying homes later on, as well. An MMR Research study reports that Generation X is the largest segment of today's residential rental market (48 percent). High home prices go a long way in explaining this statistic. Still, Xers are biting the bullet at this stage in life and purchasing homes. According to a 2005 report from Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, home purchases tripled among Gen Xers between 1995 and 2003. And landscape/garden purchases are high among Xers, too. A 2003 American Demographics report shows that 43.5 percent of Gen Xers planned on making such purchases within a year.

Xers have gotten off their parents' couch and entered the work world. They make up 22 percent of the U.S. labor force, according to a New Strategist Publications report. A 2002 Brandweek study shows that 51 percent consider themselves to be white-collar professionals. On average, Gen Xers bring home nearly \$45,000 each year after taxes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Gen Xers also aren't afraid to rack up credit card debt. An Oppenheimer Funds study cites that 50 percent of single women and 35 percent of single men in this group have credit card debt. Even

Get Them in the Garden

What all of these numbers say about Generation X is that this is a demographic emerging on the retail scene with a spending power of an estimated \$736 million, according to *Entrepreneur* magazine. Like other demographics, time is precious, filled with work and child rearing. Jill Bonner, a Generation

women my age always have a child in tow. When they are here, they have a mission – get in and get out." As for Gen X men, Bonner sees very few shopping garden retail. Those who do, she says, are typically in search of gifts.

Bonner sees that Gen Xers are at the age where they are beginning to buy homes. She says this is one way in which

You Might Be From Generation X If:

A Web site for Gen Xers put it pretty succinctly – Generation X is rapidly moving up the corporate ladder and is about a decade away from controlling much of the wealth in the country.

So here's a few blasts from the past to remind Gen Xers where they came from.

You Might Be From Generation X if ...



You bought a
bag of Reese's
Pieces for the
first time after
watching "E.T."

- The only thing the Atlanta Braves had going for them was Dale Murphy.
- Until you hit middle school, you thought the General Lee was simply the name of a car.
- You actually remember turning MTV on and music videos appearing – day or night.
- Rappers always wore untied Adidas shoes.
- Nobody in their right mind would pay money for bottled water.
- People still watched the evening news and most towns had two daily newspapers.
- Reaganomics, baby!
- You tried clear beer, clear Coca-Cola and the McDLT.

Source: www.laststory.com/YouMightbeFromGenerationXIf.htm

the green industry can appeal to Gen X customers. "When appealing to them, we might want to stress how landscaping the home increases the value of their property," Bonner says.

Scott Engh of Sun River Gardens in Orem, Utah, is disappointed in the low numbers of his peer group (early 30s) shopping in garden center retail. He believes the younger generations like Generation X have grown up being much more accustomed to the big boxes selling items they need to complete their projects and at a perceived price that they are willing to spend.

Engh believes that if Gen Xers have the expendable income to landscape a home, they would want to have someone – perhaps a professional – do it for them. "I believe Generation Xers are relying more on the expertise of a hired landscaper to design and install yards and gardens, if they are in a position to afford it," Engh says. Part of this is time, he says. Also, "they just want to know what they

should be purchasing by listening to suggestions from staff rather than learning what it is they want," he continues. Engh adds that he's noticed Gen Xers shopping with their parents, who give them suggestions on what to purchase.

Competing For Time

As the owner of her own business, Bonner says time is precious. Online shopping frees her – and many of her peers – to shop at her convenience. "I do a lot of online shopping – clothes, CDs, and items like that," Bonner says. "It's really convenient for me. If it's a special purchase like a dress, I'll go to the store, and get in and get out quickly."

What appeals to Engh when shopping is good customer service, which for him means steering clear of big box retailers. "There's no appeal there for me," Engh says. "I would rather drive further or pay more for a retailer that puts forth some creative effort."

And quality is just as important to

Engh, who will pay for a product that will hold up or fit his need better. Engh says on a recent trip for trail running shoes he experienced great customer service from a shoe store that had a display simulating a rocky hillside in which he could test different shoes. "That's customer service!" Engh says. "When I walk out of a store excited about what I just purchased and the way I purchased it, that's what appeals to me."

Retail marketing consultants talk about appealing to Gen Xers' desire for "the experience," even as it relates to shopping. Engh knows how important this is but realizes how expensive it is to achieve, especially in garden center retail. "There are literally hundreds of places for our customers to spend their time and money," Engh says. "If you want some of it, you better have a reason and an offer for them to keep choosing you. I think one of the major challenges of marketing to Generation X is competing for their time." TGC

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