



A Quantitative Study To Determine Optimal Content Formats

A Scientific Approach to Help You Match Audience Goals With Content Formats



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Infographics. Quizzes. Magazines. Videos. More than ever, consumers depend on these resources to do their due diligence before taking decisive action. But with so many formats and so little time, they're faced with cognitive overload. In self defense, they've learned to be selective.

For marketers and brands, that **begs a big question**: What kinds of content do people reliably turn to for information when preparing to make a move?





WHITE SPACE IN THE RESEARCH

Until now, answers have been hard to come by. Great custom content has always been the product of science as well as art—and we’ll get to the art in a moment. But on the science side of the equation, **Foundry 360 discovered a gap.** There are lots of analytics out there covering funnel behavior, purchasing intent and so on. Yet virtually no research existed on the content format preferences designed to prod consumers to act. Nor was there anything on the interplay between formats.

As a premier custom content marketing agency working with household brands in many different industries, we found this gap vexing—and that gave us a premise. Could we assess the unique powers of each format to help brands create a winning content package—an all-star team, if you will—that was greater than the sum of its parts?

To explore that premise, Foundry 360 conducted a survey in February 2024 of 2,700 Gen Xers, Millennials and Gen Zers—900 from each cohort. [Together these generations constitute about 62 percent of the U.S. population](#) and have tremendous spending power. A [2021 Statista survey](#) determined that Millennials will account for around one-third of the global social media shopping spend in 2025. Gen Z shoppers are the next biggest group, expected to be responsible for 29 percent of social commerce spending in the same time frame. [As for Gen X, this generation’s expenditures average over \\$80,000 yearly.](#)

We gave respondents six different formats to consider: short-form explainer videos (less than 5 min); infographics; online quizzes; articles; listicles and custom magazines.

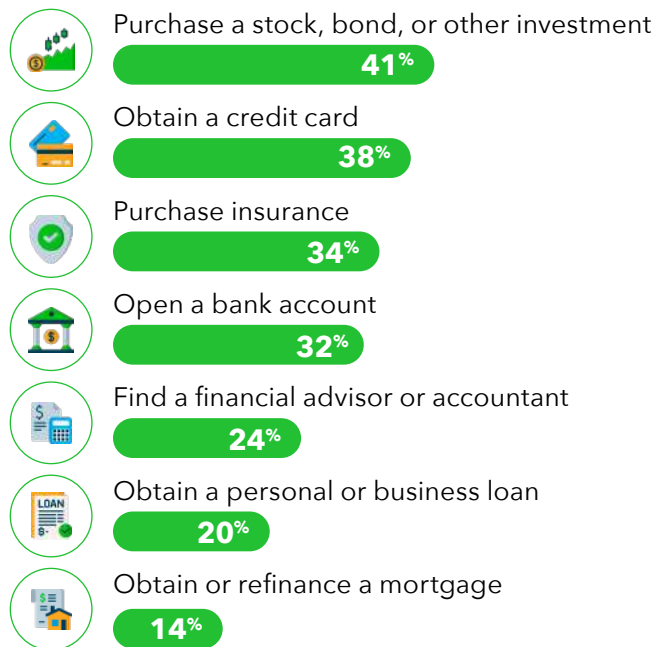
We then asked them to judge the effectiveness of the formats as applied to three content categories intended to be representative of others: finance; health and wellness; and home/shopping. To qualify for the survey, respondents had to indicate that they were likely to take some kind of action in these market segments within a year. Across all three categories, we identified a number of different actions ranging in complexity that respondents could take. Some examples: Acquiring a loan in the finance category, finding a new doctor in the health and wellness category and making home repairs in the home/shopping category.

“
The strength of
the team is each
individual member.
The strength of
each member is
the team.

Phil Jackson,
legendary head coach
of the Chicago Bulls
from 1989 to 1998

Which of the following actions, if any, are you likely to take in the next year?¹

Finance



Which of the following actions, if any, are you likely to take in the next year?¹

Health/Wellness



We directed the respondents to rate each content format on the following key attributes:

1

Actionable:

It would provide me with information that I could use immediately

2

Educational:

I would learn a lot from it

3

Appropriate Detail:

Its information has the right level of detail for this subject

4

Liked:

I liked learning about things using this information format

5

Inspirational:

It would inspire me

6

Attractive:

It is visually appealing

7

Brand Impact:

It makes me more favorable to the brand that created it

Which of the following actions, if any, are you likely to take in the next year?¹

Home/Shopping



Buy gifts for friends, family or yourself

91%



Buy vitamins/supplements

79%



Decorate your home for the holidays

78%



Update the appearance of your home

67%



Paint or make minor repairs to a room

65%



Find information or inspiration for a holiday/ special occasion

62%



Renovate your home or property

39%

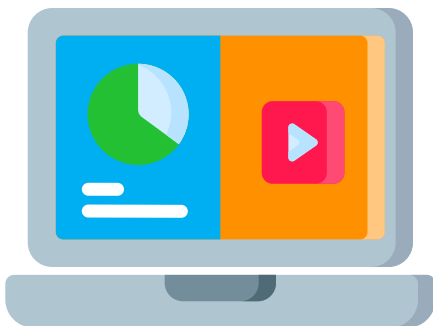


Research baby/child products

24%

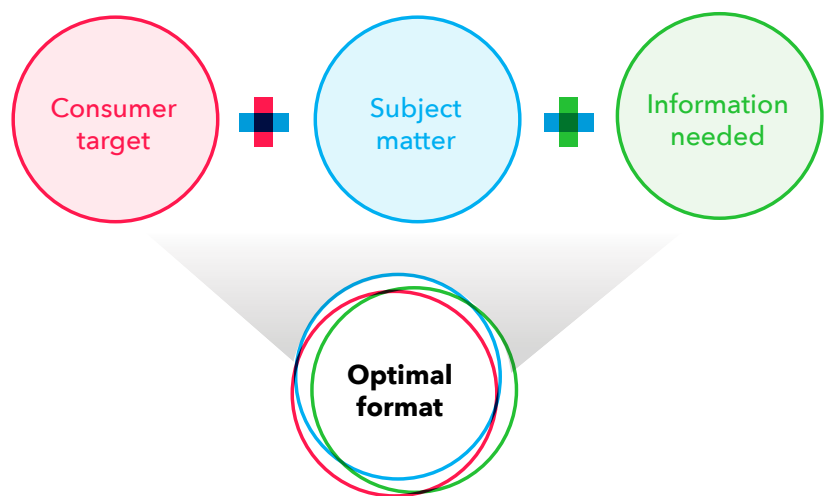
The point of the exercise was to identify the **formats most likely to connect with each of these consumer groups** for different subjects and use cases. We also wanted to see **whether the formats interacted** and if so, in what way. The idea was to give brands and marketers a comprehensive tool they could use—a **coach's playbook of guidelines, strategies and tactics for devising effective, fully rounded custom content campaigns.**

“
every group
markedly preferred
infographics and
short-form videos



THE BIG PICTURE

The results were instructive. We learned that **variety and context are key when designing a custom content campaign**. The target consumers in all three cohorts sought inspirational, informative material from a range of formats that encouraged them to act. What stood out: To meet business goals, a one-size-fits-all approach to Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z doesn't cut it. There are not only differences between the cohorts, but within them as well. Study results suggested the following theoretical framework for identifying optimal content formats:



Importantly, the study's quantitative format metrics and qualitative consumer feedback have given Foundry 360 unique information for creating customized, impactful content programs across a broad range of categories. Armed with this knowledge, Foundry 360 can fine tune its custom content programs for clients more precisely than ever before. George Baer, SVP Foundry 360, elaborates "Foundry 360's approach combines science and art. We are at the forefront of using data to recommend our content strategies and this data furthers our arsenal."

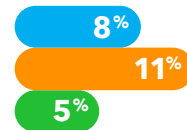
Digging a little deeper into the research, we learned that every group markedly preferred infographics and short-form videos (less than 5 min) in all three categories, suggesting that these formats provided them with actionable information at the appropriate level of detail. Respondents found these resources visually appealing, accessible, inspirational and said they can help form in a brand's identity.

Which of the following actions, if any, are you likely to take in the next year?²

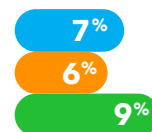
● Finance ● Health & Wellness ● Home & Shopping

Gen Z

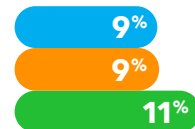
Article



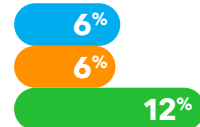
Quiz



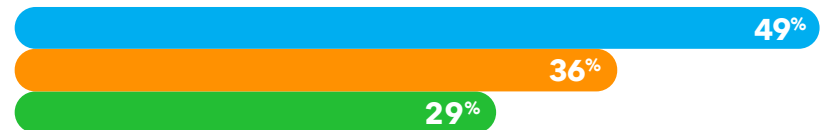
Article in List Form



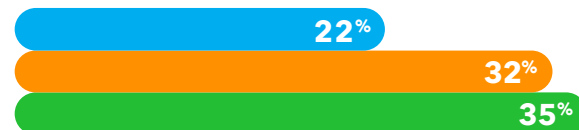
Custom Magazine



Short Explainer Video (less than 5 min)

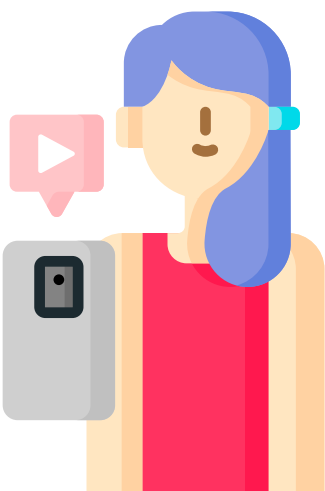


Infographic



Gen Z most prefers **Infographics** and **Short Explainer Videos** across all categories

Short Explainer Videos are especially preferred for home and shopping content

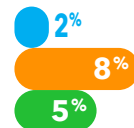


Which of the following actions, if any, are you likely to take in the next year?³

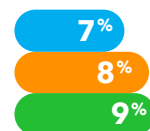
● Finance ● Health & Wellness ● Home & Shopping

Millennials

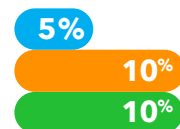
Article



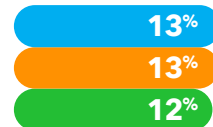
Quiz



Article in List Form



Custom Magazine



Short Explainer Video (less than 5 min)



Infographic



Millennials most prefer **Infographics** and **Short Explainer Videos** across all categories

Infographics are especially preferred for home and shopping content

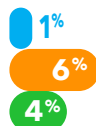


Which of the following actions, if any, are you likely to take in the next year?⁴

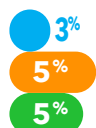
● Finance ● Health & Wellness ● Home & Shopping

Gen X

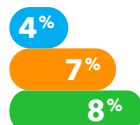
Article



Quiz



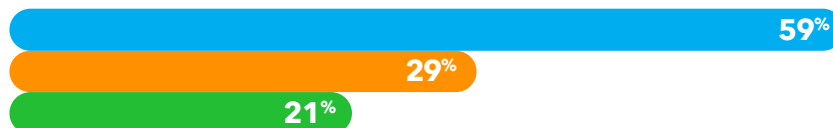
Article in List Form



Custom Magazine



Short Explainer Video (less than 5 min)



Infographic



Gen X most prefers **Infographics**, but also values **Custom Magazines** and **Short Explainer Videos** for particular categories

1 in 4 most prefer Custom Magazines for financial content

Over half most prefer Short Explainer Videos for home/shopping information





when it came to learning about difficult renovations or other complex topics, all cohorts prefer a combination of digital and print.

There are a few minor differences among the generations. In the finance category, for instance, all three cohorts favor infographics and short explainer videos, but Gen X also relies on print. In health and wellness, Gen X prefers infographics, while Millennials and Gen Z lean to both videos and infographics. As for home/shopping, Gen X and Z preferred videos while Millennials put more stock in infographics.

What became apparent, however, is that consumers in all three generations depend on more than one resource before making a move. Dan Rubin, SVP Strategy & Marketing at Foundry 360, continues "In a majority of actions and outcomes, marrying a digital engagement with a print vehicle yielded the highest levels of preference. Basically the more complex the audience objective is, the more formats to assist their need the better. And, print and digital form an unbeatable tandem." With many financial decisions, consumers in every cohort say they value print *and* digital formats before taking an action. When doing health and wellness research, the three cohorts favor digital formats but also place their faith in print when preparing for doctor visits or researching diagnoses. Similarly, for home/shopping, digital came out on top. But when it came to learning about difficult renovations or other complex topics, all cohorts prefer a combination of digital and print.

Which type of information format would you most prefer to use to help you take [financial action]?

Consumers highly value print and digital formats for most financial actions

Digital formats are most preferred for purchasing an investment and finding a mortgage (where relevant information is frequently updated)

Most Prefer	Digital formats	Both print and digital formats	Print formats
Open a bank account	32%	58%	10%
Obtain a credit card	46%	48%	6%
Obtain a loan	42%	48%	10%
Purchase insurance	41%	50%	9%
Purchase a stock/bond	51%	38%	11%
Find a financial advisor	45%	50%	6%
Mortgage	40%	32%	▲ 28%

Consumers generally prefer digital formats for most health/wellness actions

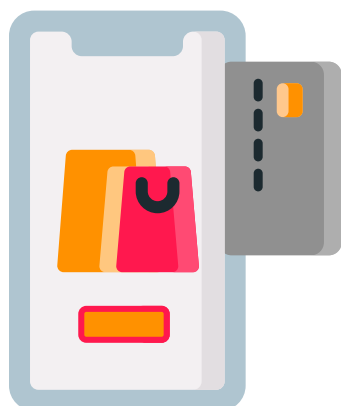
However, they value digital and print formats when preparing for doctor visits and researching recent diagnoses (possibly due to the amount and complexity of information)

Most Prefer	Digital formats	Both print and digital formats	Print formats
Find a new doctor	51%	34%	15%
Find a new dentist	54%	31%	16%
Get new health insurance	44%	36%	21%
Prepare for doctor's visit	36%	38%	26%
Research a recent diagnosis	40%	47%	13%
Find ways to eat and live healthy	50%	40%	10%
Find a healthy activity	50%	47%	3%

Consumers generally prefer digital formats for home and shopping activities

However, digital and print formats are preferred when renovating homes and painting/repairing rooms (more complex and expensive tasks)

Most Prefer	Digital formats	Both print and digital formats	Print formats
Renovate home/property	32%	48%	21%
Research baby products	58%	27%	16%
Buy vitamins	49%	42%	9%
Paint/repair a room	34%	50%	16%
Update appearance of home	44%	41%	15%
Decorate home for holidays	54%	33%	14%
Find inspiration for holiday	59%	39%	3%
Buy gifts	54%	34%	13%



A digital native, he nonetheless said he liked the authoritative quality of custom magazines...



THE NITTY GRITTY

That information was a starting point. But the real discoveries were in the subtleties that the study teased out. It's well recognized, for instance, that people typically have one of four distinct learning styles. Visual learners gravitate toward diagrams and other charts, so infographics typically appeal to them. Auditory learners respond best to the spoken word, so videos draw them in. Kinesthetic learners like a hands-on approach—problem-solving by doing. Again, video is often an ideal medium for them because of its show-and-tell nature. Finally, reading/writing learners do best with text. For these learners, print works well. Robin Riddle, Chief Strategy Officer at Foundry 360 explains "Savvy content marketers start with an in-depth understanding of the audience that goes beyond traditional segmentation and psychographic data. Digging deep into our audiences, including how they prefer to digest the content we create, are key components of our strategies"

While the survey didn't ask respondents how they preferred to absorb information, their answers to other questions revealed a lot. We found much to support the existing evidence defining the different styles of learners in the research we amassed and from the comments we collected.

Notably, consumers displayed personalized ways of taking in content that cut across generations in sometimes unexpected ways. As well, their format preferences were often category- and topic-dependent. In that sense, while all groups showed an inclination towards digital resources, they also regarded print very favorably for subjects and categories that were more intricate in nature.

A 24-year-old Gen Zer was a case in point. **A digital native, he nonetheless said he liked the authoritative quality of custom magazines** when exploring the mortgage information he wanted. "A reliable source," he commented, "and the information they provide is very valid."

Some also turn to a custom magazine because it functions as a compendium of ideas. A 26-year-old woman looking to update her living room remarked "Having a magazine with a bunch of examples and [information on the] places to get each item would be the best format for seeking design inspiration."

Meanwhile, quizzes or listicles appear to resonate with some respondents, if only to provoke further research in a different format. As one 19-year-old woman said about using a quiz to help choose a doctor: "While [it] won't necessarily provide you with information, this format might ... help narrow down choices and you [could] make a more informed decision (with more research)."



THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

One respondent remark was particularly telling, because she wasn't alone in using one resource as a springboard to others. To be sure, sometimes it only takes a single content format to generate action. To continue with the sports analogy, such content works as a solo long-distance runner rather than a team player. A Millennial seeking insurance advice, for instance, might find everything she needs in a custom magazine feature. As one commented: "Magazines typically have articles written by informed writers. The articles are reviewed [by an editor] prior to publication."

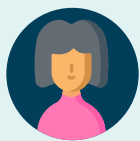
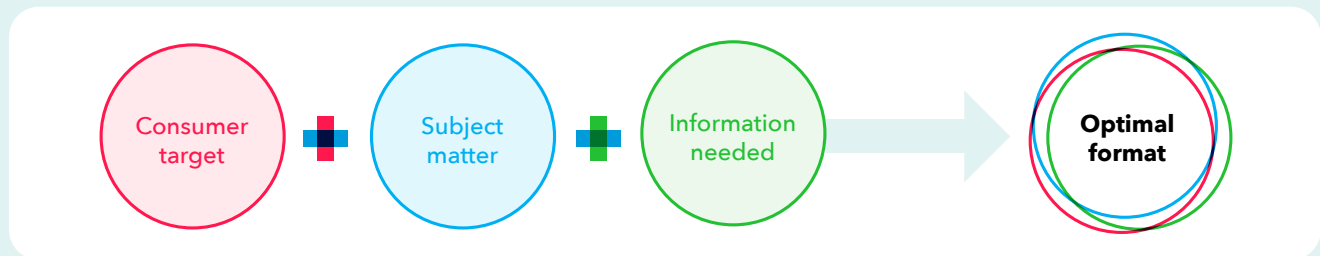
But respondents often turn to a combination of formats to flesh out their understanding of a topic. In all three market segments, as we've pointed out, a significant number in every cohort said that they favor a mix of digital and print resources.

The survey results revealed the role that each format plays and how some can work together for exponential impact. Complexity changes the balance. **The more elaborate the topic—medical diagnoses, applying for business loans, and so on—the more value all cohorts tend to place on using several different formats when doing their research.**

For example, in the finance category, the following table shows that respondents most prefer getting information in both digital and print formats for most actions they are likely to take in the next year. Relevant information for these actions can be detailed, complex, and real money is at stake. Similar respondent preference data for taking health/wellness and home/shopping actions are in the Appendix.

UNPACKING THE FORMULA

Let's return to the framework that survey results suggested, putting the formula to work with some practical and specific examples.

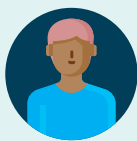


Tracy

57-years old

Interested in Finance

Consumer Target A is a **Gen Xer** we'll call Tracy. She's a 57-year-old real estate broker interested in **finance** because she wants to boost her savings and needs **information** on investment strategies. This is a complex topic that she finds daunting, so she'll ease into it. She's a visual learner and like nearly one-third of her contemporaries, she'll probably check out a video or infographic first for top-line research. For brands and marketers, these are key formats for reaching her, a good start. But 38 percent of her peers need more and so does she. She still relies on custom magazines for in-depth analyses and would value a long-form article with the granular detail she is seeking. In her case, the **optimal format** would be a video/infographic/custom magazine combination.



Martin

37-years old

Health and Wellness Question

Consumer Target B is Martin, 37, a **Millennial** with a **health and wellness** question: He wants **information** on carpal tunnel syndrome. Nearly half of those surveyed in his cohort say they prefer digital resources when researching such issues. But 34 percent favor a combination of digital and print—and with a diagnosis in the balance, he's among the latter. After studying an **infographic** that outlines the causes of this condition—a format he likes because he can digest and review the data quickly—he hunts for an online **listicle** of symptoms and follows up with a detailed **online article** about treatments. His **optimal format** combo: infographic/listicle/online article.



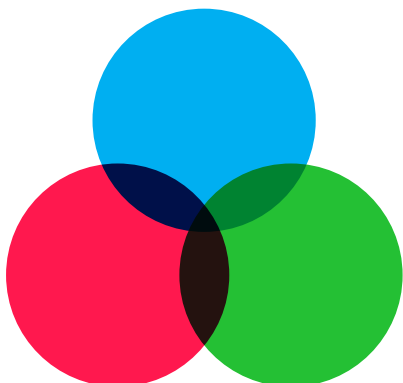
Jenny

22-years old

Just moved into first apartment

Consumer C is Jenny, a 22-year-old **Gen Zer**. She's just moved into her first apartment and she needs home/shopping guidance about decorating. But first, she wants to learn more about her personal taste and style. The initial information she finds is an online **quiz**. She likes the quiz format because the questions seem tailored to her. Next, she reads an **online article** about trends in wallpaper. Her preferred method of learning is reading and her generation likes **custom magazines** so she picks one up for inspiration. She then turns to an **explanatory video** for DIY advice. Her **optimal format** package: quiz/online article/custom magazine/video.

Foundry 360 knows how to mix the right amount of art and science to create customized content programs that meet business objectives across a variety of consumers, subjects and use cases.



THE ART PART OF CREATING WINNING CONTENT

Putting the research knowledge to work is where art and creativity comes in. The study showed us that it often takes real teamwork—the right combination of formats—to reach, inspire, encourage and score with consumers. One format’s strength can often complement and fill in gaps left by another format, and both formats together can be a powerful combination. Content designers can’t predict the learning styles of each individual in a particular generation, so the packages they create have to work for everyone in the cohort.

But the rich data coming out of this survey can help brands hone both their tactics and their strategies. On the tactical side, it arms them with a powerful weapon to add to their arsenal—a weapon that can give them a competitive edge. It provides the knowledge needed to plan ways that prompt content formats to play off one another, forming a comprehensive package with a cumulative effect. Consumers get a complete, bespoke experience in a way that drives loyalty, and brands get the measurable business results they expect.

Equally important is how this data can help marketers refine the conventions governing their overall content strategy. By now, most have learned that a scorched earth approach to custom content is rarely successful. This research provides hard evidence pinpointing the behaviors, preferences and attitudes among the three targeted cohorts to inform the content design process in a truly meaningful and measurable way. It gives direction on what levers to pull—and how to pull them—to best engage these consumers.

One concluding observation: Teams can have the best playbook in the field, but metrics only get them so far. Guidelines are great, but to make a difference, they must be applied alongside the skills, experience and artistry that talented brands and marketers bring to bear. To quote the French poet and playwright Jean Cocteau, art is science made clear. Foundry 360 knows how to mix the right amount of art and science to create customized content programs that meet business objectives across a variety of consumers, subjects and use cases.



To learn more about the survey and its implications, please [contact Foundry 360](#). We'll be happy to walk you through the study in greater detail.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The survey was detailed and comprehensive, but here's a quick snapshot of some of the most significant findings.

- Each information format has its own strengths and weaknesses. This study provides quantitative metrics and qualitative consumer feedback for characterizing them and for developing content strategies.
- All cohorts rate infographics and short explainer videos as the most impactful formats for providing actionable information at the appropriate level of detail. These resources make a favorable brand impact on consumers, who find them visually appealing, generally likable and inspirational.
- Broadly speaking, the three generations show less of a preference for listicles and online quizzes. At the same time, they note that these formats can deliver actionable information at the appropriate level of detail. They may serve as an entry point before consumers take a deeper dive into a subject.
- Digital formats trump print formats for all three cohorts. But print can play a valuable role, especially with finances or other complex subjects where more detailed information is needed.

The bottom line here: The information consumers need should guide content format decisions. When inspiration or visual story telling is called for, it may make sense to lean into short-form videos. When text-based communication is appropriate, marketers may want to consider formats that resonate with target consumers and that fit business objectives.

Not every format will have the desired effect. Combinations can boost the preferred business outcomes, but selecting the right mix is key. In some cases, just one format will do the trick, but when more than one is called for, this research serves to highlight the choices that will likely work most effectively.

Sources

1. Base: Total respondents (Base: 2700)
2. Base: Gen Z consumers likely to take any action for respective categories (finance, health and wellness, and home and shopping) in the next year
3. Base: Millennial consumers likely to take any action for respective categories (finance, health and wellness, and home and shopping) in the next year
4. Base: Gen X consumers likely to take any action for respective categories (finance, health and wellness, and home and shopping) in the next year
5. Base: Those likely to take any financial action in the next year (all generations)Text highlighted in blue represents the highest column value ▲ represents a significantly higher value compared to the other subgroup(s) at 90% C.I.
6. Base: Those likely to take any health and wellness action in the next year (all generations)Text highlighted in blue represents the highest column value
7. Base: Those likely to take any home and shopping action in the next year (all generations)Text highlighted in blue represents the highest column value

Who We Are

Think of Foundry 360 as a way to leverage both our award winning [custom content](#) expertise and Dotdash Meredith's publishing resources, data and acumen—all in the service of your brand. Unlike conventional content shops, Foundry 360 has access to real-time intel about where and how our 190+ million users are consuming our content across all of Dotdash Meredith's channels. Now let's combine that with decades of experience as a [content marketing company](#), which means we know how to use content to meet or exceed your business goals, whatever they are—from [driving awareness](#), [retaining existing consumers](#), acquiring new ones, increasing sales, [changing perceptions](#) and so much more. Oh, and we've done all that for [Fortune 500 companies](#), scrappy start-ups and every sized company in between, across all industry sectors.

Combined, [our leadership team](#) has more than 150 years of [content marketing](#) experience. And our extended team of specialists brings immeasurable magic, professionalism and results to our clients every single day.

What can we do for you?

For more information please visit foundry360.com.

