

A group of young people are gathered around a dark wooden table, enjoying a meal of pizza and drinks. The scene is lit with warm, indoor lighting. In the center of the table sits a glowing disco ball on a small stand, surrounded by several other smaller disco balls. A box of cards, possibly a board game, is also visible on the table. The people are dressed in contemporary, casual clothing, including a leopard print top, a green and white checkered shirt, and a white tank top. The overall atmosphere is social and relaxed.

amp™

*Reaching
Today's
Gen Z
Drinkers*

If you only read the headlines, you'd think Gen Z was a generation of teetotalers. They're not. But they are approaching alcohol in ways the industry hasn't historically planned for.

With more than thirty years in the category, we've seen drinking culture evolve over and over again. What stands out now is how this shift is reshaping when, where, and why alcohol shows up at all.

The "default" role alcohol once played in social life has loosened. In its place are occasions that are smaller, more intentional, and built around connection first. This brings new expectations around flexibility, moderation, and what feels truly worth their dollars.

For brands, this creates a real disconnect. Much of the category still takes its cues from scale, crowded bars, high-energy nights, and the assumption that more is better. Meanwhile, this generation is curating their time, spending, and social energy more deliberately.

Alcohol often plays a different role, one that adapts to context, mood, and moment.

What's *Inside*

In the pages that follow, we explore four dynamics shaping Gen Z's relationship to alcohol. Together, they provide a guide for brands to stay effective and culturally savvy.

Curate *Occasions*

that are connections-led



Design for *Modern Moderation*

as a built-in expectation



Earn the *Spend*

by redefining value



Tell *Better Stories*

because creativity is the price of admission



REACHING TODAY'S GEN Z DRINKERS

Curate *Occasions*



The “velvet rope, brawny bouncer” night out might not be completely a thing of the past, but its allure has dimmed with a *generation of self-proclaimed homebodies*.

71% of 21–39 year-olds say they’d rather stay in on weekends, and that shift is reshaping where and how alcohol shows up. Instead, *social experiences are happening in smaller, intentional settings*, at home or in low-key venues, where people gather around shared interests.

These micro-occasions might include alcohol, or not. Think game nights, crafting (yes, the “grandma hobbies”), dinner parties, book clubs—all gatherings built around connection first, drinking second.

What stands out is how curated it all feels. Who’s there, what you’re doing, and what you’re drinking is more considered.

≡CHILL≡
NIGHTS
OVER CLUB
LIGHTS

BRAND ACTION

While the category will certainly continue to leverage culture at scale, exclusively focusing on crowded stadiums, bars, and clubs doesn't match the tone of today's interest-led night.

There's more opportunity in:

- Designing for small-group formats and shared rituals.
- Tapping into passion communities rather than just "nightlife."
- Ensuring your messaging acknowledges these behaviors.



REACHING TODAY'S GEN Z DRINKERS

Design for *Modern Moderation*



Sure, smoking might be having a weirdly ironic comeback with some Gen Zers (cue the Gen X headshake), but broadly, *this generation is committed to a level of health-consciousness* that is fundamentally changing their relationship with drinking.

You can see it in the normalization of "dry" months, the explosion of NA options, and a total lack of stigma around discussing the downsides of overconsumption. A recent Bank of America analysis of their spending habits revealed that they are allocating more dollars towards health and wellness-related expenses. For alcohol brands, that translates to a consumer who is increasingly *comfortable skipping a round*, favoring lower ABV options, or simply removing the pressure for drinking to be the center of the night. It's more often moderation as a default.

We also have to talk about the GLP-1 effect. While still an emerging influence, research suggests these drugs may be tempering the biological desire to drink, creating another driver of lower category engagement.

Simply put: a growing share of *consumers are hyper-aware of what they put in their bodies.*

MY
WHOLE LIFE
IS
MODERATION

BRAND ACTION

This isn't about chasing wellness language or overcorrecting into "health halos." Those messages tend to fall flat.

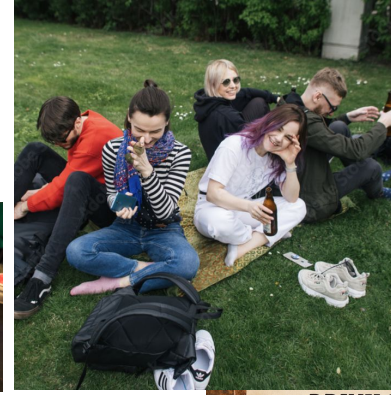
There's more traction in:

Designing for choice within the same occasion (alcoholic + non-alcoholic, high + low ABV).

Supporting pacing and moderation without making it the headline.

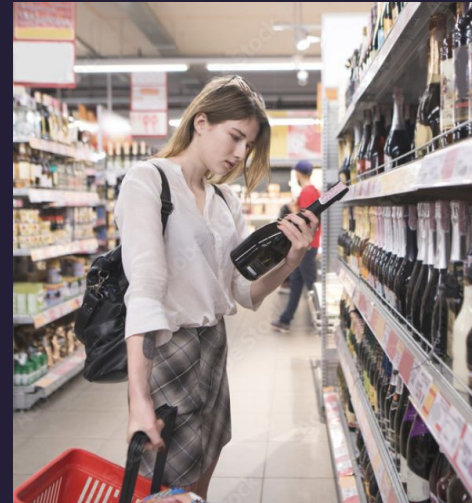
Showing drinking as part of a broader lifestyle, not separate from it.

Taking a more realistic view of how often alcohol actually shows up.



REACHING TODAY'S GEN Z DRINKERS

Earn the *Spend*



Drinking is getting more expensive for a generation facing economic headwinds. Navigating a challenging job market, escalating housing costs, and inflationary pressures, Gen Z is applying a new calculus of value that evaluates spending pragmatically, but rewards emotional payoffs. That resulting mindset carries over into alcohol.

We're seeing a blend of decreased consumption and selective premiumization—the "drinking less, but better" dynamic.

Fewer drinks, chosen more deliberately.

Calibrating the mood and the budget by mixing high-end spirits with NA rounds (known as zebra striping).

Trading up only when the experience feels "worth it."

You can see it in small decisions like opting for one well-made cocktail over a few cheaper beers. Or choosing something new or higher quality over something familiar but forgettable.

≡ WE'RE TOO ≡
BROKE
= TO BUY =
ANYTHING
DON'T MAKE IT
= WEIRD =
SERIOUSLY

BRAND ACTION

Never solely about price, value is contextually influenced by whether something feels worth it in the moment.

There's more opportunity in:

- Reinforcing on-premise value with clever bundling (loving the "adult happy meal" deals popping up on menus).
- Making quality tangible through storytelling focused on ingredients, craft, and provenance.
- Leaning into formats that deliver high-value in small quantities (think RTDs or premium singles like the wildly successful "liquid memes" that are BuzzBalls).



REACHING TODAY'S GEN Z DRINKERS

Tell *Better Stories*



A lot of alcohol advertising still woefully looks the same, year in and year out. Beautiful twenty-somethings. Perfect lighting. Big smiles that feel just a little too big.

It's polished, aspirational, and in the high-speed, low-context world of the scroll, increasingly easy to ignore.

Gen Z are experts at spotting what's staged. What's actually breaking through is work that feels distinctive. Sometimes that's irreverent and self-aware (look at what a brand like Garage Beer is doing). Sometimes it leans into the surreal or cinematic, a kind of luxury world-building that feels like an escape from everyday realities.

The tone varies, but the core truth remains: you are what you drink. Creating that connection requires a new approach to storytelling. *The glass in their hand is a signal reflecting their "vibe" for that specific moment.* When that signal feels manufactured, they tune it out and move onto something that feels more of their world.

PROUDLY
≡ NOT ≡
≡ GLOSSY ≡

BRAND ACTION

Standing out doesn't mean louder ads, but rather much more interesting ones. When marketing is everywhere, perpetuating category sameness is a surefire way to be ignored.

There's more opportunity in:

- Developing a distinctive, ownable voice and story (kill those sacred cows of the category!).
- Embracing absurdity, irrelevance, fantasy, or even weirdness where it fits.
- Letting go of "perfect" in favor of something more genuine and human.



Ready for the *Next Round*

The legendary wine expert Michael Broadbent once said that "drinking good wine with good food in good company is one of life's most civilized pleasures."

That fundamental truth is why this category remains so compelling and, quite honestly, a privilege to work in. Even as how and where drinking evolves, the human desire for that civilized moment of connection hasn't changed. For today's younger drinkers, it's just becoming more deliberate.

Our work now is to help brands move past the old tropes and show up for these new rituals. That is how we'll define the next era of the category.



GET IN TOUCH

ABOUT AMP

Curious about how AMP can unlock growth for your brand?

Let's talk.

Contact AMP to explore how we can collaborate to put these insights into action. Reach out to christopher.emery@ampagency.com and say hi.

AMP is a full-service creative agency built to connect brand love with buyer behavior. We've worked extensively in the world of beer, wine, and spirits for more than three decades. Our expertise spans creative development, scalable omnichannel execution, single and multi-brand campaigns, on-premise and off-premise programs, sell-in programs, retailer collaboration, and unifying the three-tier system. We deliver solutions that blend creativity, commerce, and data into one seamless experience. By unifying brand storytelling with shopper conversion, AMP helps clients resonate emotionally and drive measurable business growth. Follow along at ampagency.com.