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College Outside Unlocks Gen Z: The Future of the Outdoor Industry

Santa Barbara, Calif. July 11, 2018 – College Outside, formed 5 years ago to make it easy for America’s college students to discover and continually enjoy the outdoors, is the trusted connection between outdoor brands and college students.

The organization successfully connects over 25,000 college-age student leaders and 300 university outdoor groups directly with the best outdoor equipment, apparel and accessories for their outdoor endeavors. Additionally, College Outside sponsors hundreds of on-campus events, and leads major intercollegiate leadership retreats.

Today, College Outside announces the launch of a custom data and survey tool to help outdoor industry partners learn more about the needs and wants of the elusive but influential Gen Z consumer.

“We consistently hear from all of our partner brands that the college and university student demographic is one of the most important customer bases, and that the leaders of their outdoor programs are one of their most important groups of influencers,” said Sarah Lockwood, Founder and CEO of College Outside.

By 2020, Gen Z will account for 40% of all consumers and influence up to \$600 billion of spending on others. They are technology-driven and self-educating consumers, which requires brands to meet them where they live.

“It’s our mission to get as many students outside and falling in love with the outdoors as possible,” said Lockwood. “Meaningful outdoor experiences not only have a positive impact on an individual’s well-being, but they tie individuals to the brands that helped make that experience possible.”

And to help outdoor brands continue to further their relationship with Gen Z, College Outside’s new three-pronged data capture approach debuts at Outdoor Retailer Summer Market 2018. The data solution is tethered to the engagement and nurturing of its vast student-leader network, making the offering completely unique.

“We deploy a before, during and after experience approach to our data capture,” Lockwood explained. “This ensures we gain maximum behavior insights through the research, usage and post-usage of the gear through an activity.”

First, College Outside works on sourcing a brand’s gear into a university’s rental program. From there, the organization brokers a brand’s higher-end equipment specifically to authorized student leaders. And lastly, graduates of college outdoor programs who obtained gear through College Outside receive entry level product purchase offers to novice outdoorsmen and women who are ready to move on from rental gear.

The result, Lockwood says, are insights that are important yet easy to overlook.

Some examples:

- “When it comes to making purchasing decisions, our students trust consumer reviews and review websites (like Outdoor Gear Lab) far more than retail employee recommendations or magazines and publications,” she said.
- A positive first outdoor experience with a brand, whether through a rental program or peer recommendation, correlates strongly to brand loyalty in future purchases
- Environmental and sustainability practices are starting to overtake brand, and even price point, as a critical purchasing factor.

The College Outside team will be attending Outdoor Retailer Summer market to meet with new and current partners to continue growing the scope of their reach. If you would like to schedule a meeting or interview, please reach out to the press team at press@collegeoutside.com