



MARKETING TO THE BABY BOOMER AUDIENCE

Session II: Cohort Marketing-- Boomers: the early years.

The underlying theory here is that we retain the values and passions of our youth throughout our lives. The enduring characteristics of the boomer generation, then, are not just any standard demographics based on age, wealth or ethnic group. The goal is to evoke the shared experiences of those people (the cohorts) who came of age together. If you are going to market to this group successfully, you have to learn to push the right buttons as they relate to music, images, humor, values and other references.

For example, a photo of Eisenhower and soldiers in uniform might appeal to the patriotism of the World War II generation, but war photos would not be a great hook for the peace and love generation of boomers, and might even have a negative effect. Humor, too, needs to be right on the money, or you run the risk of offending your target--a definite no-no.

Some current examples of cohort marketing at work:

-Jaguar is targeting boomers with its new XK8 sports car. The grille and the name evoke the XKE of the sixties and early seventies.

-Chrysler's Plymouth Prowler, due out next year, is a purple hot rod that recalls the cruisers of the fifties and sixties.

-Levi Strauss is an expert cohort marketer. The company has followed its core customers--the jeans wearers of the sixties and seventies--all along the way. Now they've introduced Slates, a new dress pant for male boomers looking for work clothes less formal than suits.

-VH1 just did a 7-day tribute to the seventies aimed at late boomers.

-Nostalgia Television provides cohort marketing seminars to other cable system operators eager to attract the "new older" viewer.

-The California Prune Board has hired a cohort marketing firm to promote their product to the approaching wave of fifty-somethings.

So now that we know what cohort marketing is, let's look at the some of the events that occurred as boomers were coming of age that have affected, and will continue to affect, their behavior, attitudes and preferences.

The main thing that separated baby boomers from any generation before them was TV. Television sets made their debut in 1949, and in the fifties they (okay, "we") spent, on average, five hours a day in front of this little box. The programs we watched were aimed directly at us; in effect, we were watching ourselves.

It was an amazing and turbulent time in America. The times were sure a-changing. We lived life, then we watched ourselves living it on TV. If we weren't there physically for an event, for the first time in history we saw it up close and "personal" in our living rooms.

And what a time it was! Elvis. Hula hoops. The bomb. The Cold War. Duck-and-cover drills. TV dinners. The polio vaccine. Disneyland. Ed Sullivan. Cassius Clay. The assassinations of JFK, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy. Man walks on the moon. Economic prosperity. The American Express Card. The Pill. The Twist. The Vietnam War. The anti-war movement. Kent State. The peace movement. Civil rights. Woodstock. Earth Day. Power to the people. Power to the media. Watergate. Nixon's resignation.

The distrust for authority--governmental, corporate and parental--that developed in earlier years made boomers independent types who saw and still see themselves stretching the bounds of society. For a while, they really did think that, collectively, they could change the world. But disillusionment set in after the whole Nixon/Watergate/Pentagon Papers thing, and collective idealism turned into a search for personal fulfillment.

What followed was disco-mania, self-help books and retreats, yoga, jogging, credit cards--there was a lot of anger to work off. And all the while the clock was ticking away, at an ever-increasing pace.

As the "don't trust anyone over 30" generation started to approach that ripe old age, they began to develop some capitalistic tendencies and to settle down, get establishment-type jobs, get married and start to raise families.

But make no mistake about it--they didn't become their parents! Remember the theory behind cohort marketing? The attitudes, values and passions from our coming-of-age years stay with us for a lifetime.

Session III: Cohort Marketing--Boomers today