

over the hill?

Don't write off the Boomers just yet

The first of the Baby Boomers will turn 60 this year. Yet this generation remains one of the most vital for marketers, with substantial wealth and influence. Here's more on what makes the Boomers tick.

BY THE NUMBERS

Boomers are the largest segment of the U.S. population at 75 million strong. The generation born during the years 1946-64 comprises 26 percent of the populace, 45.8 million households, with an annual purchase power of \$2.1 trillion. Boomers' median household income of \$60,000 is significantly higher than the national median of \$44,500, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Health Statistics. Meanwhile, 40 percent of boomers reported a household income above \$75,000, significantly more than younger (29 percent) or older (17 percent) adults, according to a study by the Pew Research Center.

ONE GROUP, DIFFERENT ATTITUDES

Boomers are not a homogenous group. In fact, a 2005 Yankelovich MONITOR® report titled "Leading Edge Baby Boomers" showed that Leading Boomers born in the 1940s differ from Core Boomers born in the 1950s on everything from politics to buying habits and marketing opinions. For example, only 38 percent of Leading Boomers thought it would be risky to try an unfamiliar brand, but 45 percent of their younger counterpart Core Boomers were nervous about making such a decision.

HOW TO REACH THEM

Twenty-eight percent of Boomers reported purchasing products from a catalog over the previous two months in a 2005 Yankelovich MONITOR survey. And Boomers are not too set in their ways to develop new consumption patterns in response to direct mail. In fact, the same survey indicated that 7 percent of Boomers made a purchase in the same two-month period after receiving mail from a company with which they had not previously done business.

... OR NOT

Both Leading and Core Boomers expressed negative sentiments about marketing in the 2005 Yankelovich survey. For example, both groups were extremely concerned about practices and motives of marketers, but Leading Boomers were more concerned (75 percent to 69 percent).

BIG ON VALUE

One secret to successfully communicating with Boomers is to make sure you have a very strong value proposition to your offer, says Laurel Kennedy, president of Age Lessons, a consulting firm and think tank that focuses on issues affecting Boomers. "We see Boomers as meticulous consumers, not conspicuous consumers," notes Kennedy. "Whatever you offer had better deliver what Boomers perceive to be valuable."

Sales of one brand of cereal took off among Boomers once the brand changed its approach from medicinal (vitamins) to healthy living, says Kennedy. "The brand encourages consumers to act as amateur nutritionists, focusing on positive attributes like anti-oxidants and soy," she says. "It has more of a heart-healthy focus than a creaky-bones focus."

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

"The defining characteristic of Baby Boomers is their enduring sense of youthfulness," says Walker Smith, president of marketing consultancy Yankelovich, Inc.

"Boomers always want to approach every life stage with an active sense of engagement. They want to be vigorous and energetic and involved. It's important to strike a youthful chord in your messages to Boomers. Try to bring a new sense of originality to the situation." ☒

To receive a copy of a United States Postal Service® white paper "Reaching Boomers with the Mail," visit the Deliver Web site at usps.com/deliver.