

Advertising to Baby Boomers

Chuck Nyren

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Advertising to Baby Boomers is an easy, informative read that will resonate well with Boomers and will give non-Boomers some useful insights when advertising to this important market. As a member of the generation, myself, I now know why so many advertisements leave me cold (e.g. either I do not understand the humor or I don't care enough to work at deciphering the advertisement). I thought it was just me, but after reading *Advertising to Baby Boomers*, I now put the blame squarely where it belongs – on the copywriters. Most are Gen-Xers or members of Gen Y, who understand very well how to communicate with their own cohorts, but often fail to resonate with Baby Boomers. This problem is not unique to young copywriters, for Boomers have the same difficulty writing advertisements for the youth market. Consequently, author Chuck Nyren, a Baby Boomer himself, who is also a copywriter and advertising/marketing video producer, argues that when reaching 50-somethings, some members of the creative team must be Boomers because “the best advertising creatives advertise to themselves” (p. 49).

Nyren has the credibility to argue that Boomers process information differently from other generations. They live at a faster pace than their parents' generation, but they are willing to pay attention longer than their children's generation. They also want to maintain control of their lives and won't necessarily buy into preconceived notions about their lifestyle. Marketers who make assumptions about what types of vacations should appeal to them or how they should spend their

retirement years are likely to be burned in the process. More importantly, Boomers like facts delivered in a direct, straightforward manner. Nyren advises marketers against overselling to Boomers with “blatant hucksterism and ballyhoo. Don't introduce an innovative safety pin as if it were a cure for cancer. . . and if you tell me the fastening features exceed the safety requirements for all NASA moon-walking spacesuits, my eyes will glaze over and I'll turn the page. I'll probably never know it's a pretty good safety pin” (p. 88).

Advertising to Baby Boomers is divided into three sections. The first section lays the groundwork and provides guidelines for reaching Baby Boomers. It cautions marketers against using stereotypes and quirky, uninformative, slick advertisements. But most importantly, Nyren establishes their economic clout:

By 2005, 38 million Boomers will be 50 or older. While mature Americans make up 35 percent of the population, they have more than 75 percent of the financial assets and nearly 60 percent of the discretionary income. In the marketplace, that makes them the 800-pound gorilla (p. 7, quoting *The Hartford Courant*).

The second section addresses the process of finding the best marketing or advertising agency. It identifies the myths that traditional ad agencies hold regarding Boomers and advises business owners who want to sell to this group to walk away from agencies that think this way. A favorite myth is: “*We reach them anyhow. They watch TV and see the commercials, buy magazines and see the ads. And they have to buy products anyway*” (p. 52, italics in the original). Nyren humorously considers the Boomer making a consumer decision:

So what toothpaste should I buy? Anybody have any ideas? I have a trillion dollars in the bank, and 300 billion to spend as I please. And I'm sauntering around the dental care aisle, hands in my pockets, jingling a few million in loose change, looking up and down, side to side, and I'm not sure what I'm going to buy (p. 54).

Nyren points out persuasively that, yes, Boomers are going to buy something, but they may not buy “your” product. Thinking that it doesn't matter whether Boomers buy your product or not just because they'll buy something is frankly not good enough.

A second favorite excuse of agencies is: “*Baby Boomers don't change brands*”

(p. 52, italics in original). Nyren dismantles this excuse nicely with examples of brand switching, and he further acknowledges that in cases where loyalty to a brand does exist, marketers who do not target Boomers give them no reason to change.

His final favorite is perhaps the best: “*Baby Boomers have never grown up. They have created and sustained the illusion that they are much younger than they are. So when you target 19-to-35-year-olds, you likewise reach Baby Boomers because they think they are still in their teens and twenties*” (p. 56, italics in original).

Nyren concurs that many Boomers think of themselves as a bit younger than they are – people in their 50s might think of themselves as in their 40s, but not their 30s and certainly not their 20s or teenage years. He admits Boomers are redefining what it means to be adults in their middle age, but they are not redefining what it means to be teenagers, young adults, or 30-somethings because they already did that.

The third and last section offers resources, a case study, and final thoughts. He sharpens some of his earlier points and cautions readers that some of the recent buzzwords in advertising, such as branding, are not all that they are cracked up to be. He maintains that if Boomers like a product they will buy it, endorse it among their friends, and if it is important enough, they will make it part of their lives. But it is not going to happen because of a branding campaign for a product they do not know and use. “Baby Boomers are especially immune to such shenanigans, and have been for some time” (p. 99).

Nyren's last chapters offer lists of useful books and web sites along with a case study that shows how a Boomer company successfully connected with the Boomer market. His final wisdom is aimed at managerial decision-makers, but they are four simple words that all readers who want to market to Baby Boomers can take away with them: “HIRE BABY BOOMER CREATIVES” (p. 124, all caps in original).

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