



## Healthcare Marketing

### The impact of the Baby Boomers on healthcare marketing

Baby Boomers -that 76 million-member generation that has shaped so much of American culture for the past 50 years-are a dominant force in healthcare. This is a generation, after all, that has defined consumerism, far outspending their parents or even the generations that have followed since. Boomers are modern day super-consumers who have grown up watching business change and grow to meet their every need, want and desire. They're accustomed to wanting and getting the best. And there is no reason to believe this trend will change as they get older and become more active consumers of healthcare.

#### Understanding the Baby Boomer Population

Thanks to the many advancements in healthcare, people are living better and longer than ever before. As a result, many baby boomers are choosing to work beyond the traditional retirement age. In fact, they show no real signs of wanting to slow down at all. Their idea of growing old gracefully is closer to celebrating a birthday while on an adventure cruise around the world - not while sitting in a front porch rocker like their parents and grandparents.

They are willing to put in the effort needed to be healthy. They exercise regularly, eat right and schedule regular check-ups. Boomers are active consumers of health products such as vitamins, supplements and even gadgets. They want to prevent health problems in their lives whenever possible and are willing to do, and pay, whatever it takes within their means to ensure that they don't just live longer, but live better. They refuse to believe that aches and pains are the price one must pay for growing older.

When the Boomers settle in for the evening on designer leather sofas, watching big-screen televisions, they are further reminded of the fact that age is just a number when they see Dorothy Hamil boast about how she refuses to let the aches and pains of arthritis slow her down. The Boomers believe, "If they're still going strong, so can I." As fast as you can say "BMW," you'll find the Boomers lining up to become powerful consumers of lifestyle drugs - from arthritis medication to Viagra - anything to help them further defy the aging process.

#### Marketing and Communicating with Aging Baby Boomers

The healthcare industry must study and understand the unique characteristics of the Baby Boomer generation and recognize that they are, in fact, a different type of healthcare consumer. While it's true that they are willing to pay the price for healthcare, they want to be sure they are getting value and that they are getting it "their way."

When developing and marketing products and services to this group, healthcare companies should keep in mind these characteristics:

1. Boomers will expect and even demand genuine, individual attention. Unlike their parents who passively accepted the fact that the doctor had an allotted seven minutes or less per patient, Boomers will expect to have all their questions answered and all their concerns addressed without feeling rushed. Standard office hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. will be a thing of the past. Convenient hours - evenings and weekends will become a necessity.

2. Boomers are Internet-savvy and are used to having information available at their fingertips. Information and even access to services 24 hours a day on the Internet is a must. And while they're on the Net seeking an answer to a medical question, Boomers may visit an online health community to gather and exchange information with other Boomers who have similar health issues. The Internet can also help keep them connected with their healthcare provider - who had better use e-mail. They may also use the Internet to get information on medications. They may go online to check in with a case manager or provider to verify that they have performed a test or taken a medication at home or in the office.

3. They will expect a broad choice of providers and therapeutic options. They will look for product innovations and extensions that allow them access to additional services for an additional cost - high-cost drugs, cosmetic surgery, cosmetic dental procedures, etc. And while they are willing to pay more to get more, they will absolutely draw the line at more paperwork. It's got to be easy and convenient.

4. They think for themselves and are less likely to take the word of authority figures than previous generations. They will look for information on their own, seek help from peers and find their own experts. Word-of-mouth marketing and the enlisting of expert "referral sources" may become even more important components of marketing and communication plans.

5. They expect to be active participants, at every level, in their own healthcare. They must have the information to do so and the collaborative attitude of providers to be part of the "team." The successful healthcare provider will seek to become a partner in the Boomers' healthy and active lifestyle.

6. Because of their strong self-image and the fact that they view themselves as healthy and active - even as they face the limitation of aging - advertising and communications materials should reflect this self-image of capability, actualization and direction.

Above all, the healthcare industry must remember that Boomers aren't the healthcare consumers of yesterday. Marketing and public relations strategies must be tailored to their unique demographic and psychological needs and wants. The Boomers' willingness to pay for the chance to live better and longer is a tremendous opportunity for healthcare companies. Those healthcare providers that do not adapt to the habits of the Boomers will find themselves in serious trouble. Those who do so will become the market leaders.

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