The CMO’s Guide to the Boomer Consumer

A Conversion Alliance white paper

The CMO’s guide to the Boomer consumer

Targeting, engaging and converting the nation’s wealthiest generation
CMOs using Millennial marketers to reach Boomer consumers.

What could possibly go wrong?

Boomers control 70% of the nation’s disposable income, purchase 51% of all consumer goods, and are completely ignored by 90% of advertisers.

Despite all the hoopla around the rediscovery of America’s wealthiest generation, marketers still struggle to understand, engage and convert the Boomer consumer.

There’s a huge generation gap between marketers and consumers. The median age of an ad agency creative team is just 28 years old. Which means you probably have Millennials trying to communicate with Boomers.

When a Millennial looks at a Boomer, they see someone well past their prime. Slowing down. Increasingly sedentary and medically fragile. Even if, on an intellectual level, they get that “60 is the new 50”, they aren’t able to understand it on an emotional level. You can see “old age” creeping into a Millennial’s writing, design, tactical decisions and media selection.

Is it any surprise that the vast majority of Boomers feel that today’s advertisers don’t understand the needs, desires and motivations of their generation?

We are the most sophisticated marketers ever to walk the face of the earth. From programmatic media buying to predictive analytics, mobile apps to marketing automation, we harness cutting edge marketing tools to optimize, personalize and maximize marketing results in ways previous generations of marketers could never even dream of. And for all our skill and technology, we haven’t figured out how to effectively engage the audience responsible for 51% of all consumer goods purchased in the United States.¹

Boomers think, feel, respond and buy like no other generation. And yet, through their messaging and media tactics, it’s clear that marketers expect them to behave like Millennials.

We can fix that. Starting right now.
By 2030, Boomers will still control 45% of the nation’s wealth. Millennials, not so much.

Boomers are marketing’s most valuable generation. And will be for years to come.

With nearly 80 million members, the Millennials have overtaken Boomers as the nation’s largest living generation in the U.S. But Boomers still hold the spending power.

Boomers make up 32% of the population, but control 70% of the nation’s disposable income, according to Nielsen studies. They already spend more than $3.2 trillion annually, purchasing 51% of all consumer goods. And the spending won’t end any time soon. In fact, it’s expected to increase by a staggering 58% over the next two decades, as Boomers inherit roughly $15 trillion.2

$15 trillion. And they’ll be looking for ways to spend it.

Boomers spend the most money across all major product categories, and yet less than 10% of marketing dollars are spent trying to reach them.4 A recent AARP study revealed that 8 out of 10 Boomers feel that advertisers are ignoring them. And even the advertisers who do target Boomers are making serious mistakes in terms of message and offer.5

There is a real opportunity here for marketers who decide to aggressively target the Boomer. There is less competition for the Boomers attention, and advertising dollars spent targeting Boomers are likely to reap a higher ROI, given the Boomer’s spending habits.

The bottom line: Boomers are well worth targeting, but marketers must do a better job of talking to them.
From “never trust anyone over 30” to “never trust a brand that breaks promises.”

Brands that want to tap into the Boomers’ wealth must earn the Boomers’ trust. Again. And again. And again.

Boomers are the least likely generation to believe what advertisers and marketers say about their products and services.

Boomers have trust issues.

After all, this generation was shaped by the Vietnam War, the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King, the Cold War and Watergate.

They invented the “sit-in”, burned draft cards and coined the phrase “never trust anyone over 30”. Who would have believed back then that these same Baby Boomers would grow up to be the wealthiest generation in history?

Brands that want to tap into that wealth must first earn the Boomers’ trust. And that isn’t going to be easy.

Boomers are the least likely generation to believe what advertisers and marketers say about their products and services.\textsuperscript{21} In fact, a 2016 study revealed that only 1\% of Boomers are “very trusting” of big retail brands, compared to 5\% of Gen X consumers and 23\% of Millennials.\textsuperscript{20}

More than any other generation, Boomers want to know that the companies they do business with are companies they can trust. It is absolutely critical that your brand promise be honest, free of hype and delivered at every step of the customer journey. If you come up short, they’ll quickly turn their backs on you.

And once a brand fails to live up to the Boomer’s expectations, it’s almost impossible to get them back.

So how does a brand establish trust with the Boomer?
Keep it real.
Boomers have been exposed to more advertisements than any generation in history. By age 65, it’s estimated that an individual has read, watched and heard close to 70 million advertisements.26

Boomers have seen it all. As a result, they have little patience for gimmicks, hype and dishonesty. Your communications must be genuine. Don’t overpromise, and don’t speak in absolutes. This audience knows better.

Don’t make age an issue.
Too often, marketers portray Boomers as aged, fragile, sedentary and in need of constant care. And that couldn’t be further from the truth.

Boomers see this as the best years of their lives – old age is 20 years down the road. It’s said that 60 is the new 50. For Boomers, 60 is the new 40. They don’t want to be defined by age (and they despise being called “seniors”). Brands that understand and treat them accordingly have a good chance of earning their trust.

Don’t let automation replace conversation.
Brands are becoming increasingly impersonal, and Boomers don’t like it one bit. The more brands seek to limit human interaction, the less trustworthy the brand becomes in their eyes. That’s why Boomers overwhelmingly prefer to connect with a live person before making a major purchase, either in store or on the telephone.

Brands need to encourage rather than discourage this behavior. It’s cheaper to automate customer service and move the consumer towards online purchasing, but it’s short-sighted.

Lift them up rather than bring them down.
The Boomer processes positive messages more effectively than negative ones. Negative messages challenge their self-perceptions and results in increased resistance.

Avoid high-pressure sales tactics.
Boomers are careful, deliberate decision makers. They won’t be rushed into quick decisions, and their necks tend to get a bit stiff when pressured by brands to act quickly.
Don’t let anyone tell you that Boomers aren’t internet users. The fact is, more than 80% of Boomers go online daily – up from 39% in 2010. That’s a 105% increase in internet usage by Boomers in just 7 years.

Boomers spend more time consuming content than any other generation. The key to a successful content strategy is the level of perceived authenticity. However, what makes content authentic differs greatly from Millennials to Boomers. For Millennials, authenticity is tied to imagery: the use of real people rather than models, for example. For Boomers, authenticity of content is tied to information: they want relevant content about a product or service. And they want it in writing: while Millennials prefer information delivered in 140 characters, Boomers are avid readers. For them, 1000 words is worth far more than a picture.

So what kind of content do Boomers respond to?

It’s important to find a balance of emotional and analytical content. Brain function becomes more balanced as you age. Decision-making in Boomers tends to start in the intuitive right brain, then transfers to the analytical left brain. Emotional content (storytelling, testimonials) is most effective at establishing the need for a product or service, while analytical content (“how-to” articles and videos, side-by-side comparisons) helps create preference for a particular solution.
However, when it comes to motivating Boomers to take action, the internet comes up short. While Boomers are comfortable researching products and services online, they're less comfortable buying online, especially when it comes to giving out personal information. They overwhelmingly prefer to buy offline – either in store or by phone. They want to talk to a person before they buy, especially for major purchases. Three-fourths of all Boomers believe that a phone call is the quickest way to get a response.

To reach the Boomer, brands need to concentrate their digital strategies on top-of-funnel tactics, creating valuable content that can engage, inform and build relationships. Leave bottom-of-funnel conversion to the offline media tactics Boomers are more comfortable with.
When it’s time to convert Boomers, go old school.

Two out of three Boomers - 51 million consumers - are more likely to pay attention to television, print and direct mail than digital ads.

Boomers place their trust in the advertising media that has shaped their brand perceptions for more than half a century.

So it should come as no surprise to learn that Boomers respond better to traditional media than digital advertising. Two thirds of Boomers – 51 million consumers -- tell us they are more likely to pay attention to ads delivered in offline media than online media.14

Admittedly, there’s nothing sexy about television spots, newspaper ads and direct mail. But these remain the most effective marketing tools for converting adults 55 or older.
Direct mail delivers more conversions, higher brand recall and a better ROI than digital tactics.

Marketers aren’t in love with direct mail – but Boomers are.

The gold standard for motivating Boomers to act remains direct mail. In a recent survey of consumers age 55 and up, direct mail was named the leading influencer of purchase decisions. Boomers ranked direct mail higher than all other forms of print, broadcast and digital media, online research and even family & friends.

While many marketers have written it off as a “dying” marketing tactic, the fact is that response rates for direct mail are at their highest level since 2002.

Direct mail isn’t dying as much as “right-sizing”. Marketers are no longer flooding the mailbox with advertisements targeting anyone and everyone. Mailboxes are less cluttered, so advertisers stand out more.

The growing effectiveness of direct mail can also be tied to an increased focus on the Boomer consumer. Direct mail is a medium for readers, and Boomers are avid readers. They grew up before the era of the 140-character tweet, and they have an affinity for the written word that other generations will never share.

Neuroscience studies show that Boomers can retain information longer when presented in written form. When asked to cite the brand of an advertisement they had just seen, recall was 70% higher among participants exposed to direct mail than digital ads.

Targeting Boomers with direct mail is good for your marketing ROI, as well. According to the Data & Marketing Association, direct mail delivers $12 in revenue for every dollar spent.
Television is the signature product of the Boomer generation, just as PCs were for Gen Xers and smart phones are for Millennials. From Day One, the TV set has been an integral part of the Boomer’s life.

So it should come as no surprise that adults 55 and older continue to embrace TV as their primary source of entertainment. While TV viewership is trending downward for consumers under the age of 50, it remains steady for younger Boomers and is on the rise among older Boomers. The TV generation is watching more TV than ever, averaging nearly 174 hours of viewing every month – nearly 6 hours a day.

After decades of chasing young viewers, networks are shifting their focus to the Boomer, and are catering to their core audience in a big way. The most-watched shows on television today boast a viewership with an average age of 61. That’s in stark contrast to the early 2000s, when the average age of TV viewers was 41.

TV spots are 10x more likely to convert Boomers than online videos.

The TV generation is watching more TV than ever.
Television commercials continue to perform well with Boomers. Television has a 75% reach among Boomer consumers. And despite heavy investments in pre-roll advertising and online video content, television advertisements are still ten times more likely to convert Boomers.

**Brand response television was made for Boomers.**

Brand response television utilizes a DRTV approach to providing brand benefits. It combines strong, brand-centric emotional appeals with an expanded focus on features and benefits. Brand response television retains the strong Call-to-Action (CTA) associated with DRTV, but that CTA is less focused on limited-time offers or special discounts.

This hybrid form of TV commercial is perfectly suited for the Boomer’s unique decision-making process. Brain function becomes more balanced as you age. Consideration begins on the intuitive right brain, and transfers to the rational left brain. Brand response provides the emotional hook of a branding campaign, but go on to provide features and benefits to satisfy the Boomers’ analytical side.

Boomers tend to respond better to brand response commercials that are heartwarming rather than humorous; informative rather than splashy; steady pacing rather than high-energy.

---

### DIRECT RESPONSE
- Value-driven messaging
- Call-to-action designed for immediacy
- Pragmatic, offer-driven, sense of urgency

### BRAND RESPONSE
- Brand-centric, benefits-driven
- Call-to-action to generate further inquiry
- Emotional appeal around brand attributes, actionable but less urgent

### BRAND ADVERTISING
- Evoke an emotional connection
- No Call-to-action.
- Awareness only.
- Emotive, seeks share of mind, not intended to be actionable
Going after the Boomer consumer? Here are the five things you absolutely must do.

1) Embrace substance over flash. Give them the information they need to make a decision. Be genuine. Treat them with respect. And leave the hype at home.

2) Don’t take their trust for granted. Brand loyalty only goes so far with Boomers. Brands are expected to earn it every single day. And Boomers have long memories. Do them wrong, and they won’t be back. It’s critical that you follow through on your brand promise at every stage of the buyer journey.

3) Understand their complex decision-making process. Over time our brains become more balanced between the intuitive right and the rational left. Boomers’ tend to react to brands on an emotional level initially, but quickly shift into analytical mode as they evaluate options. To move Boomers to action, brands must combine powerful emotional drivers with informative, hype-free messages.

4) Utilize digital as a top-of-funnel strategy. Boomers use the internet to research major purchases – but they don’t buy big-ticket items online. Focus on a strong content strategy aimed at generating awareness, consideration and preference. Emphasize informative, copy-driven content over visual content.

5) Don’t leave traditional media out of your marketing mix. The overwhelming majority of Boomers are more likely to pay attention to direct mail, print and television than digital advertising. And direct mail ranks #1 in terms of purchase influencers for Boomers.
Conversion Alliance is a conversion marketing group with extensive experience converting the wealthiest generation in history, the Baby Boomer. We have unmatched expertise in the mediums that Boomers read, watch and respond to: search and social, direct mail, TV, email and print. We’ve generated millions of dollars in sales to Boomers since 1991.

Call 866-594-3298. If you prefer, you can schedule a meeting today.

conversionalliance.com