

How to Target 55 Plus Consumers

Remember That Not Every 55-Plus Consumer Thinks the Same Way

To get a better idea of the sensibilities of the 55-plus crowd, Bob Fell spent time with the residents of a retirement community. The director-strategy and planning for Philadelphia marketing company Varsity just completed Project Looking Glass, a multistage examination of consumers aged 55-plus. In order to gather results, Mr. Fell and colleague Lori Aulenbach spent a month at a retirement community.

Their survey divides the demographic into two segments, age 55-65 and 65-plus. And the big takeaway is this: The over-55 age group is diverse and should be marketed to as such. "One of the biggest things you have to realize is that they aren't one group and that there are segments in it," said Mr. Fell. "Each of these segments is ripe for products that are produced for them."

IF YOU ARE MARKETING TO 55-PLUS:

Think stages instead of ages, factoring in mobility, marital status and faith. Consider physiology. For example, as more older women begin to suffer from arthritis, men are taking over household duties, so target them.

Make it easy. Think easy-to-use containers (pull tabs, for example, are hard to open). Keep technology products simple to understand and use.

TIPS FOR ADVERTISING

- Choose appropriate easy-to-see colors, such as reds and oranges.
- Feature young-looking people (the 55+ market does not view itself as old).
- Employ clever copywriting that does not insult age or intelligence.
- Create simple layouts for websites.
- Slow down voice prompts.

TIPS FOR MEDIA

- Use 60-second spots to allow for more time to process the message.
- **Try print:** The 55+ group spends time each week reading newspapers and magazines.
- Direct mail is likely to be opened by seniors, but they prefer thicker, easy-to-open packages.
- Catch them on the web. Adults over 50 online spend 47% more time there than the younger demographic, reading e-mail, planning trips, shopping and researching health issues.

BREAKING DOWN THE SENIOR SCENE

A look at key differences between the two segments of older consumers:

SENIORS AGE 55-65

WHO THEY ARE: They share a common past of the Vietnam War and as a result tend toward cynicism. Having lived through a mainly booming economy, they have a lot of disposable income.

HOW THEY LIVE: Though they maintain a healthful lifestyle, they still have overweight issues and problems with diabetes and high cholesterol.

HOW THEY THINK: Members of this group view themselves as 15 years younger than they are. They feel their lifestyle defines them as people. They are interested in improving the process of aging but concerned about loss of youth.

SENIORS 65+

WHO THEY ARE: They share a Depression-era frugality and World War II influenced tendency toward sacrifice.

HOW THEY LIVE: Many have reduced hearing ability, vision, strength, reaction time, stamina and sense of touch. Problems with everyday activities are increased, such as bending down and stooping or opening a package.

HOW THEY THINK: Instead of fearing death, there is an embrace of loss. Community and freedom are important concepts. The body is old, but the mind is not.

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