

# Generational Marketing in Health Care

## A CASSLING WHITE PAPER

When creating effective marketing campaigns, standard demographics usually include the age, income level and geographic location of the target audience. But to make your health-care marketing strategies even more effective, drill down further into generational age brackets and find out what makes them tick. Crafting messages that appeal to each generation will demonstrate that you understand the needs of each life stage.

Age groups can be as general as 18-24, 25-34, 35-49 and on, but how are *generations* formed? According to generational expert Chuck Underwood, what we are taught, witness and experience between birth and age 20 will shape most of the core values and beliefs that we will embrace our entire lives. People who share the same experiences during these same formative years possess common ideals and attitudes.

There are no formal rules or definitions as to what birth years form each generation. According to David Rowlee, Vice President of Research at Morehead Associates, members of each generation have the following in common:

- Each generation reacts to the generation before them in a negative way.
- Each generation is skeptical about the generations that follow them.
- Each generation thinks they are the best generation - the benchmark against which all other generations should be measured.

### Meet the Generations

#### Matures (1925 – 1946)

Also called the “Silent” or “Greatest” generation, the 68 million people in the Mature generation lived through defining events such as World War II, the Cold War and the Korean War, and helped rebuild American economy afterward. Financial and social conservatism, discipline, structure and delayed gratification are core values of the Matures - they take their time making decisions. Matures believe in job security and have a strong sense of loyalty, obedience to authority, commitment and hard work. Relationships are built upon trust and disclosure.

#### Baby Boomers (1946 - 1964)

There are 78 million boomers now between ages of 45 and 63; the peak of the boomer generation is cresting the age of 50. Arguably the largest generation in comparison to Generation Y, they were born into times of prosperity and economic expansion. Boomers were pampered by their parents, which gave them a sense of entitlement.

Boomers have been characterized as idealists and moralists who fought over war, gender inequality and race. Boomers are adventurous and active and prefer to be called “active professionals” rather than senior citizens. They possess a need to rebel and express themselves. Despite their slow acceptance of aging, boomers are retiring at a rate of about one every eight seconds.

#### Generation X (1965 - 1977)

The smallest generation with approximately 47 million people, Generation X has lived through uncertain formative years like the Matures. As their boomer parents were either working hard to keep their jobs in an era of downsizing and restructuring or divorcing, Gen X children were forced to become independent.



As employees, Xers are not afraid to speak up about pay or overtime issues, likely because they tend to move easily from one employer to another. This generation has been described as cynical, practical and economically conservative, yet flexible and hard-working. Xers strive to simplify and multi-task. A healthy lifestyle and high quality of life is important to them.

### **Millennials (1978 – 2000)**

Also called Generation Y, Millennials range in size from 72 to 81 million strong – as big if not bigger than the boomer generation. Their boomer parents sheltered them and raised them to think they could do and have anything. This resulted in a close emotional and financial connection with their parents through adulthood, combined with a strong sense of self-confidence and need for immediate gratification.

Their desire to have as much as possible as soon as possible spills over into their professional lives. Millennials want the dream job quickly - often without feeling the need to pay their dues. Without challenges and constant and immediate feedback at work, they won't hesitate to find a new job. Millennials rank family ahead of work, relationships over money, and insist on time to relax and do what they love.

Documenting their lives through the Internet, picture phones and e-mail led Millennials to become highly social and technically savvy. They see the world in a bigger sense and are more environmentally conscious, altruistic and socially aware than previous generations.

## **Talking to the Generations**

When developing age group-specific marketing strategies, consider the concerns of each generation and what makes sense to them. Millennials don't want to be targeted the same as Gen X, boomers hate to be grouped with Matures, and Matures dislike the "senior citizen" label.

### **Matures**

The Mature generation is cautious and conservative in their buying behavior. They want value, convenience, accessibility and reassurance that their health-care needs will be met. Matures are the most loyal patients of all age generations and will choose organizations that have earned their trust.

Advances in medical science have enabled Matures to live longer, but that doesn't mean they like the term "seniors." Instead, refer to them as "seasoned" people in the prime of their lives. This generation prefers face-to-face or written communication, though younger Matures are frequent Internet users.

Show how your facility or services will make things simpler for them and summarize the experience of your physicians and the value of your services. Words such as "we" and "us" used in a formal manner showing respect and honor resonates with this generation.

### **Boomers**

With a rebellious spirit and relentless pursuit of the fountain of youth and health, the boomer generation looks for services that make them feel more empowered. The women in this segment are influential consumers, accounting for 85 percent of all consumer purchases, according to Tanya Abreau of the Spirit of Women Network. If you appeal to the image of the woman she wants to be, the boomer woman will buy whatever you have to sell.

Increasing patient volumes in cardiac care and orthopedic service lines show that boomers are aging, despite their resistance. As this generation enters the health-care stream they demand greater convenience, second opinions, variety and customer service, according to The Advisory Board Company.

The Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development recommends connecting emotionally and bonding with boomers so that when they, or their aging parents, need health care, they will choose the health-care organization that they feel a connection with. Facilities can build relationships with boomers through membership programs that offer programs and activities such as:

- Life events (empty-nesting, retirement, first grandchild and downsizing)
- Advanced directive and will planning
- Physician-hosted educational lectures (attendees indicate they feel like they are receiving free medical advice)
- Lectures geared toward adult caregivers (integrative medicine in home, managing difficult behaviors)
- Lectures geared toward women (looking great with your shape, sleep and menopause, women and heart disease, women and wine)
- Exercise (mall walking, tai chi, water aerobics)

### **Generation X**

Xers are skeptical of superficial advertising but respond to humorous, creative campaigns using straightforward messages. Effective marketing is relevant, has value, and helps them research.

Gen X wants reassurance the choices they make are sound and practical, and they empower themselves through research to develop their own health-care strategies. They use the Internet to search for information about medications and doctor/hospital quality more frequently than other generations. As big readers and writers of blogs, an online profile of your health-care organization will appeal to this generation.

Gen X relies mainly on primary care, obstetric and gynecology, sports medicine and orthopedic care service lines. They are most likely to choose a physician based on cost vs. quality and are more comfortable with retail or quick-care clinics than other generations.

Despite their passion for all things online, both Gen X and Millennials rate 75 percent of the “snail” mail they receive as valuable. According to MarketingPros, online marketing in the form of targeted site advertising, keyword buys, e-mail contests or discounts supplemented with direct mail is the best way to reach younger generations.

### **Millennials**

Millennials are skeptical, tending to disbelieve any claim until they have independently verified it because they are bombarded by thousands of advertisements from multiple channels every day. Like Gen X, these young consumers are difficult to reach with traditional marketing messages.

Marketing campaigns should show a clear and beneficial connection to your facility through a high-tech campaign that is flashy, upbeat and modern, yet free of jargon. Branded events, interactive Internet campaigns and sponsorship of online blogs and discussion forums are tactics that have been successfully used to communicate with Millennials.

Millennials show a greater interest in wellness and preventative treatment, but prefer to access health information through the Internet or a fitness center rather than through hospital services, according to The Advisory Board Company. They choose health-care services that are rapidly provided and convenient. At such a young age, they have likely only used the emergency or obstetrics unit. Millennials believe doctors are the most reliable source of medical information but will turn to the Internet, ask questions about it in blogs and talk with friends and family before and after seeing a physician.

Forming and staying in touch with their network through social networking sites, interactive Web sites and text messaging is an integral part of a Millennial’s day. Health-care organizations have observed this heavy reliance on the Internet and are beginning to integrate social media tactics into their marketing plans. According to The Advisory Board Company, hospitals are using social marketing strategies as a long-term strategy to improve awareness and aid in the health system’s future growth. Social marketing strategies currently used by health-care organizations include:

- **Profiles on Facebook, MySpace and YouTube**  
Millennials participate in charitable efforts more than any other generation. Some hospitals use a philanthropy focus on their profile, urging viewers to support hospital causes. Others post videos featuring personal patient stories or integrate a live TV station that features hospital news stories. Some administrators use a blog to post updates and hospital information.
- **Web casts and videos**  
Short videos on hospital Web sites highlight physicians, service lines, innovative medical devices and cutting-edge research and surgeries. Some facilities post virtual tours, patient testimonials and current TV ads.
- **RSS feeds and daily podcasts**  
Streaming audio enables visitors to listen to physicians discuss health issues such as chemo side effects, breast MRI, heart disease, cardiology, men’s health, etc.

Communicating with every generation using multiple styles and tactics can be challenging. The key is to be a consistent, transparent source of information. Patients want to know that they can trust you, that you will make things easier for them, and that you will be there when they need you - online or off. Shape your campaign messages to fit the mold of each generation and you will be seen as a health-care resource for all ages.