

Back to the Boomers

The Baby Boomers were the first real consumer generation and show no signs of slowing down their spending any anytime soon. **Neil Osborne** explains why women aged over 50 are your most valuable clients – and how to attract them to your salon.

“DOES SHE... or doesn't she?” In the mid-1950s, this legendary Clairol campaign was a salon breakthrough. It removed the stigma of colouring your hair, bankrolled the era of big business in salon services and catapulted women into the box seat of personal spending. Women of that generation are undoubtedly still your most valuable customers as the Baby Boomer generation epitomised the word ‘consumption’ and is still driving spending.

Everything we know about mass marketing, advertising and big brands was born in the late 1950s and early 1960s – the post-war era of relative prosperity and burgeoning consumerism. Suburbia was expanding, manufacturing was in full swing and it was the birth ‘boom’ of the first real consumer market of young people, born 1946-1964, the Baby Boomers.

This generation was the first to experience a new life stage, as teenagers, that changed the shape of society, spending habits and the culture of ageing. Their post-war parents wanted more for their children and in return the Baby Boomers claimed new freedoms and spread an optimism about the future.

The advertising industry, marketers and big brands started an obsessive love affair with Boomers, one that lasted for decades, through their marriages, children, home changes and vacations. That is, until the early Boomers started turning 49. Then they were left for dead.

What changed, and why? Typically, once a group of consumers reaches the so-called ‘cut-off’ age of 49, marketers and advertisers go back to the beginning and focus on a new crop of 18-49s (the next generation) who offer lucrative, long-term spending potential, as a new group of life-time loyalists to build and mine for purchases.

However, in their blinding rush to embrace the X and Y generations, many marketers failed to see Baby Boomers continued to wield significant spending power, well past their ‘use-by’ date. They're still exploring and engaging and and, in doing that, continuing to spend.

Baby Boomers – the busy generation

Globally, Baby Boomers are renowned for having the most, spending the most, and being more marketing-friendly than any other consumer group.

But because they are so marketing savvy, their business is as winnable as it is losable, so tread carefully.

1. Understand the potential profit

The sheer size of the Boomer market is boggling – 5.5 million. By 2030, all boomers will be 65-plus and over the next 20 years, the number of Australians 70-plus will grow at a rate 3.3 times faster than the total population.

To put their buying power into context:

- All boomer are now aged over 50
- Almost 50 per cent own their home outright
- Collectively, they control more than 40 per cent of the nation's wealth
- More than 40 per cent of them have delayed retirement and become more financially secure since the 2008 global financial crisis
- As they get older, they will have more time to use their disposable income

Branding takeaway: Is this market a lucrative niche for your salon?

Many believe older people spend less of what they have. While this may have been true of the generations that preceded them, it definitely isn't true for Boomers.

Baby Boomers love looking and feeling great and think nothing of spending money to achieve that – be it a regular facial, manicure, pedicure, massage or something grander.

They have a history of defying authority, and therefore don't trust advertising and have lost faith in experts.

Instead, they respect the opinions of like-minded people, other Boomer icons and realistic customer testimonials. In a 2012 BOOMbox Baby Boomer Beauty Survey, the cosmetic model most cited by boomer women as being realistic was Diane Keaton, aged 66 (for L'Oreal). Although a celebrity, to them she appears authentic and a true depiction of how they see themselves.

2. Establish trust with the right language

In the US, the 50+ Boomer segment dominates consumption of 119 out of 123 consumer packaged goods categories. As was the case during the last six decades, Boomers are still on a buying spree.

The key thing to remember is they don't think of themselves as old, or unable to try new things, so don't market to them that way. They are also particularly sensitive to being stereotyped as retired and technophobic – again, both of which are (generally) untrue.

However, many Boomer women feel invisible in the marketplace – a likely reflection of their ‘fall from grace’ as advertisers' darlings. When they aren't being ignored, they feel insulted ... often by the very companies meant to be making them feel more beautiful.

Branding takeaway: How should you talk to Boomer women?

The secret is to keep it simple without being condescending. Don't tell them they're old, because they think: “Not only am I not old, but 50 is the new 30.”

Calling them senior citizens or golden oldies isn't going to win you business. They want to be informed, not dictated to, and as much as they

abhor being called old, they want to know what you're offering is suitable for people their age.

Be very aware of sounding preachy or condescending. Although they want to be inspired, remember to talk straight about what you're selling and what you want them to do.

Steer clear from clichés. Boomers don't appreciate being depicted as retirees because they see themselves as younger than they really are.

3. Enhance their independence

As an audience, the Boomer generation is filled with conflicting attitudes and behaviours, so it's essential to segment them by attitudes, financial and physical freedom, as well as independence – instead of just age.

As a whole, the Boomer generation is expected to live three decades longer than its predecessors, so it's critical to understand their nuances as a niche, technically comprised of two segments:

- **The first boomers:** Born between 1946 and 1955
Epitomising the cultural changes of the 60s, this group is characterised by their individualism, social cause orientation, experimentation and free spirit.
- **Generation Jones:** Born between 1956 and 1965
A term coined by Jonathan Pontell and derived from the phrase “Keeping up with the Jones's,” this group is characterised by its competitiveness and cravings. After the Vietnam War and Watergate, they are less optimistic, cynical, with a collective distrust for government.

Branding takeaway: They're a huge and demanding marketing-friendly sector – for products and experiences. Make your product an unforgettable experience and your service exceed their expectations by simply identifying what it is they value most – and win their hearts.

Primarily, Boomers care about their looks, health and fitness, because they see them as ways of staving off age.

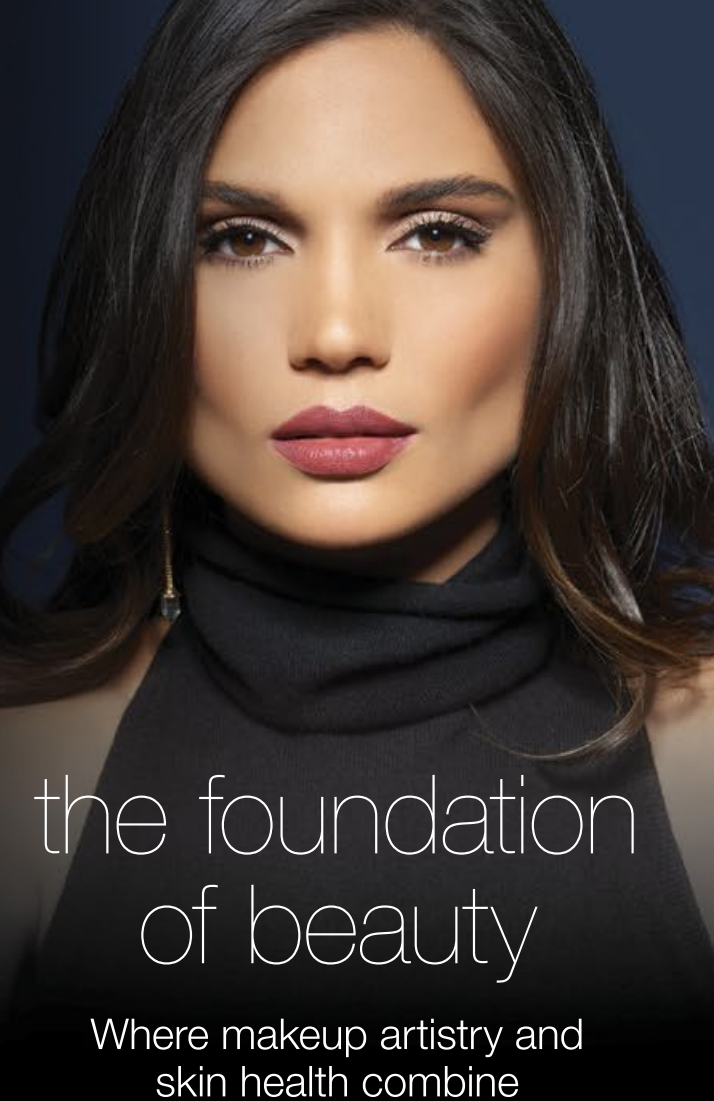
Boomer women are buying different products because they're looking to address different age-related needs. An opportunity lies in helping them navigate the 50+ stage of life, and their brand loyalty is almost completely up for grabs.

In the same BOOMbox Boomer Beauty survey, women over 50 noted that natural beauty was super important. When asked “What makes a Boomer woman feel beautiful?” a classic response was, “To me, ‘true beauty’ includes glowing skin – even if it's wrinkled!” and “I feel beautiful after spending time being ‘put together.’”

This group is redefining ageing and want enhanced lifestyle, memories, experiences and connectivity. One of their defining features is their love of reinvention. As they've grown up, anything to do with ageing was pushed into the background. But the clock has continued to tick. And they are now ready to spend! ■



Neil Osborne is an elite salon sales trainer and brand coach with more than 30 years industry experience. He has dramatically grown brands and businesses by helping them launch, develop and change their sales results. Contact The SALES CATALYST, 1300 302 859 or visit www.thesalescatalyst.com.au



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