Are Digital Marketers Ignoring Baby Boomers?

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Boomersâ€™ lives are going in many different directions, as empty-nesters, step-parents, grandparents and caregivers. For all of these roles, the internet and digital media are absolutely essential.

eMarketer estimates 78.2% of this cohort is online, nearly 60 million adults. Even as their numbers decline, that penetration rate will remain high through 2015. And they control more than $2 trillion in annual spending.

â€œThe baby boomers grew up being chased by marketers and advertisers that tailored products and brands to appeal to them,â€• said Lisa E. Phillips, eMarketer senior analyst and author of the new report, â€œDigital Lives of Boomers: Reaching Them Online.â€• â€œNow the median age of this cohort is 55, and many boomers feel as if they have dropped off many marketersâ€™ radar.â€•

Boomers spend more time and money online than any other demographic. Younger boomers (ages 47 to 55) spent an average of 39.3 hours online per month in 2010, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Older boomers (ages 56 to 65) averaged only slightly less, at 36.5 hours.

A lot of that time was spent shoppingâ€”and buying. Forrester Research reported that boomers spent an average of about $650 online over a three-month period in 2010, compared with $581 by Generation X internet users (ages 35 to 46) and $429 by millennials (ages 18 to 34).

Boomers also stay connected on the go. eMarketer estimates 86.9% will have a mobile phone this year, and 16.9 million boomers will access the internet from a mobile browser or installed app.

In 2015, that number will reach 25.4 million, or nearly 40% of boomer mobile users. This is a market that content providers, game publishers and brand marketers should not pass by.

Marketers who widen their messages to include boomers would be wise to make their efforts ageless, rather than targeted at an older set.

â€œBoomers are immediately turned off by association with old age, infirmity and decline,â€• said Phillips. â€œMost brands do n want to â€˜ageâ€™ their products with blatant appeals to older consumers. The win-win is to create an overarching brand message that gives a nod to boomers, but also includes younger adults and even grandchildren.â€•

This often means turning a negativeâ€”fears about failing health, for exampleâ€”into a positive, such as showing the benefits of products that contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

The full report, â€œDigital Lives of Boomers: Reaching Them Online â€• also answers these key questions:

* How do baby boomers use the internet differently from other age groups?
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* What other kinds of technology do boomers use?
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* What forms of social media appeal most to boomers?
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* How do you talk to an audience that avoids advertising?

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