

Connecting Emotionally to Boomers Using Search Marketing

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What Boomers Want

Though it may seem obvious, it is very easy to forget that consumer minds operate in different ways.

This is especially true when it comes to differences among age demographic, as it's been found that emotions play a much more active role in decision-making after reaching mid-adulthood. Research from Abraham Maslow and other behaviorists suggest that "age is associated with positive emotional development"¹, which underlies the reason why older adults are able to extract more from emotional processes than their younger counterparts.

As a result, it is vital for marketers to develop a relationship with Boomer consumers and to bond with these individuals emotionally rather than attempting to dazzle them with facts, figures and promises. Telling a story, showing pictures and providing a true brand experience are all ways to connect with Boomers, ultimately gaining their trust and commitment. Once the positive relationship is established, a Boomer will likely become a very loyal customer.

For many marketers, U.S. Boomers are an extremely important target. As this group of 78 million remains consistent and reliable in their consumption of traditional media (television, print and radio), they are also consuming and embracing digital media with great interest and an open mind. No longer do we hear recommendations for targeting this audience through television *alone* or *only* via direct mail. Today, marketers are learning to build trusting, emotionally-enriched relationships with Boomers and communicate with them through all available media, including digital marketing.

The Role of Digital Media

Digital media is becoming an increasingly important way to connect with Boomers. The need and relevance of including digital media as part of a marketing plan developed to target this demographic are apparent when examining recent statistics regarding internet usage and online activities of Americans age 50-64 (see graph below).

¹ Coming of Age Incorporated, 2007

<p>INTERNET USAGE: 58% use the Internet^a 57% have Internet access at work^b 43% used the Internet between 11-30 hours per week^c 44% have broadband access at home^d</p>
<p>ONLINE ACTIVITIES: 71% will buy a product online^e 68% will buy or make a reservation for travel service online^f 52% watch a video clip or listen to an audio clip^g 24% read a blog^h 13% download music filesⁱ</p>

^{a, e, i} Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2005

^b American Demographics, 2003

^c Third Age, January 2003

^d Kaiser Foundation, January 2005

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, people in the 50-64 age group are much more engaged with the Internet overall. They are more likely to pursue a broader range of activities, and they are more willing to experiment with newer online pursuits such as blogs. In many respects they are more like younger age groups than like seniors. Additionally, 69% believe that the Internet is the best place to get information about products and services².

Since 80%³ of all website traffic begins with a search engine query, it is extremely important that search marketing (paid search as well as search engine optimization or “SEO”) be part of any digital marketing plan. Marketers also recognize search marketing as a very effective strategy as indicated by return on investment (ROI) versus other online media. As a result, this tool is recommended as an integral component of brand awareness strategy.

Targeting Boomers through Search Marketing

Search marketing is an umbrella term that includes both paid search (sometimes referred to as PPC) and SEO. Brief definitions of both are as follows:

Paid Search: Purchasing text-based ads for products or services on search engines and on content sites across the Internet. Ads appear when a user searches on a specific keyword (or keyword phrase) and an advertiser is only charged when an ad is clicked.

SEO: The technical and strategic process of making changes to Web content and the website itself for enhanced relevancy and visibility on search engines like Google, Yahoo, MSN among others. The goal is to improve the content’s rank in the search results, which means it appears closer to the top of the search results page.

Though paid search and SEO differ greatly in their setup, implementation and maintenance, they share a common goal: to drive users to a website where they will take further action, such as learning more about a product or service and/or making a purchase.

² American Demographics, 2003

³ Harris Interactive, 2007

Effective Strategies for Paid Search

When using paid search to connect with Boomer users, it is important to develop a key word list that includes terms of an *emotional* nature, along with typical brand, product/service description and product/service attribute terms. For example, the Boomer key word search spectrum as pertaining to an active-adult housing community might include terms such as “dream retirement house”, “elegant housing community” and “beautiful home”.

Also, when writing advertising text intended to target a Boomer audience, it is again important to communicate on an emotional level. Including the phrase “Official Site” in the search terms associated with your web content is recommended to establish trust and credibility for your site, both very important to Boomers. Including this phrase in creative messaging has also proven to increase click-through-rates and conversions on websites. Messaging should also convey how the brand will benefit the Boomer consumer, especially on a personal level. Two good examples are:

Hearing-aid manufacturer: [Company Name] Official Site Get information and learn how to be part of the conversation again. www.yourcompany.com	Web-based photo sharing software: Easy Photo Sharing See your grandchildren grow every day with one-touch! Official Site. www.yourcompany.com
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Best Practices for SEO

Another cost-effective way to drive Boomers to a website to learn more or take an action is to implement effective SEO practices on your site, both through technical and strategic optimizations.

As indicated above, search engine optimization ensures that Web content and the website itself are marked for relevancy and visibility on search engines such as Google. Technical optimizations are those markers built directly into the website’s HTML code. Examples include code organization, tagging, Flash/Java/JavaScript usage optimization and dynamic site optimization.

Another type of technical SEO is called “user experience optimization.” These strategies include keyword research and analysis (to determine which keywords should be targeted), content refinement (making content more relevant), site map creation (a visual model of a website’s organization) and internal linking (linking pages together within a website). All of these optimizations enable search engines to more easily index pages and, as a result, move the website’s listings higher in the natural search results thus increasing the amount of users visiting the site.

Strategic optimizations, also called off-site optimizations, are also an important part of SEO. These strategies should be executed soon after the technical optimizations described above have been completed. These strategies include outbound marketing recommendations (how to bring users to a site), media consumption analysis (media the target market is consuming), content recommendations and link-building strategies (linking outside websites to the site being

optimized). Additional Web 2.0 opportunities can be recommended and employed as they are identified, all with the purpose to drive traffic to the site.

Through higher positioning in the natural search results, both technical and strategic optimizations can garner longer-term consumer engagement, both information gathering and purchases, than other forms of digital marketing. As stated earlier, this key positioning can increase the credibility of a brand which is an important brand attribute for the Boomer audience. Considering that 85% of users click on natural search results⁴ delivered by search engines, SEO should be an essential part of any digital media plan targeting the Boomer audience.

In the end, paid search and SEO are vital components of a digital media plan targeting Boomers. These tools allow for emotional communication through advertising messaging (paid search) or through higher positioning in the natural search results (SEO) and these opportunities should not be overlooked. As long as careful attention is paid to the evolution and maintenance these online tools, search marketing can prove to be a very cost-effective way to reach the Boomer audience.

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For more information, visit www.gearyi.com or call (619) 239-5953.

⁴ Kelsey Group/BizRate Study, 2007