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Intimate Strangers...

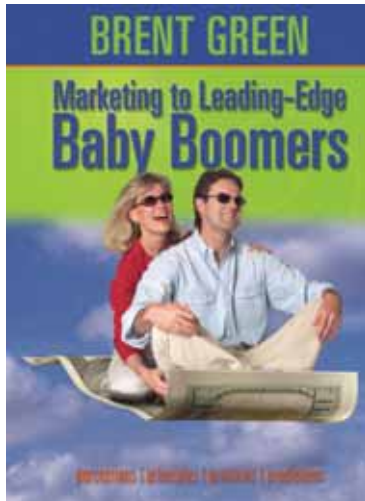
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Marketing to Leading Edge Baby Boomers
— perceptions, principles, practices,
and predictions
By Brent Green

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Americans born during the early part of the baby boom (1946-1955) — “leading edge baby boomers,” as demographers call them — have had a powerful effect on the national culture. They grew up in a world of Sputnik, political assassinations, the civil rights struggle, Vietnam, rock ‘n’ roll, the War on Poverty, women’s liberation, the drug culture and Watergate. In *Marketing to Leading Edge Baby Boomers*, Brent Green details how these experiences shaped the development of the first youth culture. All of this took place as television was bringing it all into America’s living rooms, and the largest economic expansion in the nation’s history was leading to unprecedented prosperity.

The 76 million baby boomers on the leading edge control half of the discretionary income in the United States, although the advertising industry seems not to see this: such boomers are the target of less than 10 percent of advertising. Currently, boomers make up 38 percent of the American population. By 2020, they will be 47 percent, and there will be one person turning 50 every eight seconds!

The activism and idealism of this generation have left their imprint on our institutions and mainstream culture: local grocery stores stock

organic foods; car manufacturers produce hybrid automobiles; women and minorities hold high positions in government and business. As young adults, however, boomers largely set their activism aside to focus on building careers and raising families. Now, as their children move out and they head toward retirement, many have the freedom and mental energy to focus on cherished values and their non-material-oriented life goals.

Baby boomers want to stay young, both in appearance and optimistic outlook. They desire continuous self-improvement. They feel a need to be part of a community, while also maintaining personal freedom and individuality. They accept — and expect — cultural diversity. They want to be able to integrate with nature and their own spirituality. And they seek opportunities to confront the status quo in order to create a more just society.

Green offers lots of practical advice on how to craft marketing messages and programs to appeal to boomer yearnings and values. In advertising, he advises presenting images of youthful aging, with active and engaged models slightly younger than the target audience.

Boomers seek empowerment, connection, transcendence and enlightenment through their products and services. This could lead some boomers to move to retirement communities organized around a lifelong passion (such as riding Harleys or creating art) or to homes with porches that promote friendship and opportunities to connect. Boomers may want vacation packages that provide “peak experiences,” such as an opportunity to explore new cultures or learn a foreign language.

Green believes the smartest marketers trying to reach leading-edge boomers will offer products addressing health, creative use of leisure, graceful aging, belonging, living in harmony with nature and the opportunity to realize one’s innate potential and spirituality. Forty-seven percent of the newly emerging “LOHAS” segment (lifestyle of health and sustainability), which includes 55 million Americans and spends \$350 billion a year on consumer goods, is between the ages of 47 and 64.

Life has not been all fun and games for many boomers. One third of them are not doing well economically. The security of their retirement is under threat from their own lack of savings (self-indulgence is often seen as a boomer attribute), as well as outside economic forces. These include corporate layoffs, the offshoring of white-collar work, a shift from employer-funded pensions to employee-funded


retirement and the stock-market crash of the early 2000s.

Some also see a newly emerging “genism” — generational discrimination against boomers because of their age and their reputation for arrogance and self-absorption. Only 51 percent of job seekers over age 55 are able to find re-employment. “Connect the dots, and it is easy to see that discrimination today against boomers and those slightly older may have something to do with how employers perceive them: as over-the-hill workers, too expensive, not as productive and expendable,” Green writes.

Throughout the book, Green shows how boomers have always faced overcrowding — too many people competing for limited resources within a society that lacked the infrastructure to deal with their numbers. As children, they were often educated in

portable classrooms. Boomers faced intense competition when applying for college and in finding suitable jobs once they graduated. Next, they will place an extraordinary burden on Social Security and healthcare systems as they age.

While much longer than it needed to be, this book is thought provoking and well written. It is definitely worth reading if your work involves marketing to this category of consumer. Green’s chapters on copywriting and running promotions are a bit generic, but they still provide an overview of specific strategies for reaching this audience with a message that resonates.

Marketing to Leading Edge Baby Boomers offers a comprehensive exploration of the common values and worldview shared by this massive and largely prosperous generation. 

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