



To Increase Sales to Boomer+ Customers – Tell Them A Story

By **James J. Gilmartin**

Introduction

Boomer+ customers (38+) are the wealthiest, best educated and most sophisticated of purchasers. Marketing and sales communications must create motivating communications, effective sales presentations and service improvement programs to better capture and keep these consumers. Other business costs are falling while marketing costs are rising. Yet, response rates to many traditional marketing and sales techniques are off. There is growing impatience with a function of business that is costing more, delivering less and resists accountability.

A Coopers and Lybrand study found in a study of 100 leading companies marketing departments to be "ill-focused and over-indulged" with department heads who "overstated their contribution to the corporation, but could not specify what the nature of the contribution was."

A 1995 McKinsey report somberly warned, "Doubts are surfacing about the very basis of contemporary marketing." The report charged marketing departments with generating "few new ideas," being "unimaginative," and failing to "pick up the right signals."

Finally, Kevin Clancy and Robert Shulman, both formerly with consumer researcher Yankelovich Clancy Shulman predict a marketing revolution "because failure is self-evident and everybody -- stockholders, directors, CEOs, customers, the government -- is angry because marketing, which should be driving business, doesn't work."

Your Markets Are Changing

Now that the adult median age is in the mid-40s and continuing to rise, pressure is building on marketing and sales to learn how to better market to a dominantly older consumer population. Progress in this direction must be founded in the recognition that young, middle-aged and old brains and minds all work differently.

Though we don't notice it happening -- any more than a child notices that he has grown an inch taller during the summer -- changes take place across our full life span in how information is processed by our brains (which process information sent to it by the five senses) and the mind (where thinking takes place). How a 30-year-old mind processes the contents of a commercial, print ad or direct mail piece will be markedly different from how a 50- or 60-year-old mind processes the same information.

David B. Wolfe, noted author, lecturer and expert in marketing to older consumers has developed an approach to marketing he calls "Developmental Relationship Marketing." His approach to communicating with older consumers has as its foundation writings of behaviorists Abraham Maslow, Eric Erickson and other noted authors. The following concepts developed in this article are taken from several of David's unpublished papers.

Eight Progressive Changes in How Older Minds Process Information

1. Less reliance on reason to determine what is of interest, and more on intuition (which is cued by emotional responses). Implications: identify and employ images that promote strong positive emotional responses; relationship building must precede presentation of company and product; relationship potentialities are primarily emotionally inferred ("gut feelings") -- rather than rationally deduced.
2. First impressions (which are always emotionally based) are more durable and more difficult to reverse than for younger adults. Implications: be sensitive to images that can stimulate negative first impressions. It is probable that the strongest sources of negative impressions are images that conflict with idealized image of self, especially with respect to autonomy and sense of personal validity.
3. After a matter qualifies for interest and further attention, older consumers tend to want more information than do younger consumers. Implications: manage the transaction continuum so that emotional cues are present when most advantageous, then shift to "hard" or objective information when most advantageous; information content must be no greater than what the older person wants at a given point in time.
4. Decreasing speed in rational processing of objective information. Implications: Deliver objective information (e.g., product benefits and features, technical information, etc.) at a slow to moderate pace. Avoid "jump cuts" and incomplete sentences.
5. More resistant to absolute propositions. Implications: present information on company and products in a qualified, even deferential manner.
6. More sensitive to metaphorical meanings, nuances and subtleties. Implications: take advantage of greater sensitivity to subtlety to expand the content of the message, especially in terms of metavalues - values that transcend the generic value of the product and expand its perceived attractiveness. Nonverbal symbols are effective in accomplishing this.
7. More receptive to narrative-styled presentations of information, less responsive to information presented in expository style. Implications: Make greater use of story-telling techniques to get information across.
8. Perceptions are more holistic. Implications: Project an interest in the "whole"

person, not just the facet that might need a particular product; also, avoid depicting representatives of target market in flat, single dimension contexts (e.g., simply showing consumers using or talking about the facility without reference to a larger context).

In Marketing & Sales - It's Not What Boomer+ Customers Think That's Important - It's How They Think That's Important

The whole business of marketing, sales and public relations is about getting information into people's brains and persuading their minds to buy or do something. The older we become the more emotional reactions determine if we should think about a matter. Emotional triggers in the brain activate memories and the stronger the memory - the stronger the emotional response. Marketing and sales must integrate both empathy and vulnerability into marketing messages. These two attributes are necessary to build trust, and are essential to optimal results in marketing and sales communications.

Understanding how consumer's brains and mind processes information is key to effective communications. If an ad or sales presentation fails to connect with a Boomer+ customer's idealized image of self, it is more likely to be ignored.

Biographical note: Jim Gilmartin is president of Lombard, IL based *Coming of Age, Incorporated*. Established in 1991, the full service integrated marketing communications firm specializes in helping clients to increase market share and profit in Boomer+ customer markets. The firm provides clients' marketing communications, full advertising agency services, public & media relations' services, and sales communications planning and execution. The firm also provides clients sales and service improvement training and turnkey Customer Loyalty/Affinity Clubs.

Jim is a frequent speaker at sales and marketing conferences, leadership/management retreats and association meetings. He currently teaches marketing and management seminars at the *University of Chicago* and the *Bank Administration Institute's* Graduate School. He can be reached at 630-627-9600, or e-mail him at jimgilmartin@comingofage.com. You can also visit www.comingofage.com for more information on their products, services and presentations.

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