



The Featured Article

Healthcare Marketing Techniques for the Generations

ANFSCD

(And now for something completely different)

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Objective: In many healthcare circles, the marketing focus is on Baby Boomers—and for many good reasons. However, what about later generations, like Gen X, Y and Millennials? They are already making healthcare decisions for themselves, and, soon, they will be making decisions for their boomer parents. How does one speak to them? This article will show how to communicate with them providing clear explanations of each group and marketing techniques that work. What a difference a generation can make!

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My niece shocked me this past summer. I got a new cell phone, and I was struggling with trying to put in names in my speed-dial using the phone pad. I growled openly.

“I hate this. I just want to type in “work.” Let’s see... W...”

“That’s 9-6-7-5,” my niece said, grinning.

I soon realized that she could translate just about any name or message into telephone key pad numbers. She learned this, apparently, from massive doses of text messaging to her friends.

Want to ask, “*What are you doing?*” (WAYD)—dial in 9-2-9-3. The complete loss of the English language aside, this is an interesting phenomenon--especially when one considers that all my niece’s 18-year-old friends use these translations for communicating.

A Bigger Generation Gap Than Ever

Currently, everyone in healthcare is thinking about baby boomers—those born between 1946 and 1964. This is understandable since these are the folks beginning to hit retirement now. Many have pretty good incomes. They are aging and will need healthcare and the boomers are plentiful. This is certainly a great customer base.

People, though, are coming up *behind* the Boomers... a.k.a. Generation X, Generation Y, and the category my niece falls into, Millennials. Over the next few years and beyond, these are the people who will be making the healthcare decisions for their aging moms, dads, grandparents, uncles and aunts. Their view of the world and what’s important to them, is radically different from Boomers.

Gen X

Born between 1965 and 1976, Gen X makes up roughly 17 percent of the population. At first stereotyped as middle-class, white suburbanites, this group is actually much more diverse, very

media savvy and the first group of Americans that grew up with television as a regular babysitter. They were also the first generation to experience a much wider range of media choices, ranging from *MTV* to *Fox*. This and a recession-driven workplace radically changed the American economic landscape. Suddenly, cradle to grave jobs—commonplace with their parents—faded to obscurity. As a result, Gen Xers hold another, more unfortunate first. They are the first post-war generation to be financially worse off than their parents. Consequently, they are more skeptical, cynical and independent. Currently in their 30s and 40s, they are working on their careers, establishing households and having kids, juggling the demands of work and home life, and caring for children and aging parents. Although they do not have the big-number buying power of Boomers, Gen Xers are keenly aware of advertising and in many cases have nostalgic feelings for the television shows, products and jingles of their childhood.

Gen Y and Millennials

Many marketers are combining these two groups into one massive buying force. They are the biggest group to hit the American market place since the Boomers—who happen to be Gen Y and Millennials' parents. When it comes to sheer numbers, Gen Y and Millennials are a force to be reckoned with, topping the scales at more than 40 million Americans. Collectively called the *Echo Generation*, this group was born between the late 1970s and the mid 1990s. Unlike the much smaller Generation X before them, Echoes tend to be idealistic, conservative, optimistic and patriotic. Their media choices are fragmented ranging from Web banners to kiosks at the mall; reaching a lot of them can be expensive. They are also more diverse than Xers with only one in three being Caucasian. Having been saturated with marketing messages since they were babies, the Echo generation is much more prone—and adept—at tuning out messages they do not want to hear. They are a tough sell. Seeking less independence than previous generations, they rely heavily on their parents and peers to help them make buying decisions. They do this by being completely connected via cell phone, instant messaging, the Internet, e-mail and more. They create their own experiences with custom phone rings, iPod playlists, *MySpace.com* personal Web pages and instant messaging for hours with cyberspace friends in the infinite blogosphere.

For now, the game's a little easier

Boomers are aging. They need health services. And they're still relatively young and capable of taking care of themselves... for now.

Soon, Boomers' sons and daughters—the Echoes—will be participating in the process. Remember, this is a group that is technically savvy who look up organizations on the Internet and consult in detail with friends, co-workers and family about healthcare. They will also publish their findings on blogs. They are open to change and do not necessarily have an allegiance to a healthcare facility.

Generation X is the one having babies, carting kids off to soccer games and caring for elderly parents. Messages should resonate with this generation of overwhelmed, media-savvy skeptics.

Three ways to reach Gen X

1. **They're skeptical**, so give them a solid reason to buy—a clear benefit that brings an advantage to their lives.
2. **Address their more-than-likely “buyer's remorse”** and give them comfort in moving forward (i.e., if you can offer a minor procedure or seminar to test the waters before suggesting more advanced treatments, this may be the way to go.)

3. **Consider direct mail** in your marketing mix—research indicates that Gen Xers spends a good deal of time with their mail. It should be used in conjunction with online marketing initiatives.

How to resonate with Echoes

1. **Whatever your message is, it must be interactive!** Echoes want to actively participate in the communication process.
2. **Use the media they use.** The Internet is their communications and entertainment hub. It is not the only channel for them, but its importance is dominant.
3. **Do not use interruption marketing.** Echoes are adept at removing marketing messages from their media environment if they have not intentionally sought the message. Do not annoy them. Be where they seek information and do not chase them, because they will tune you out.
4. **They care what their parents and friends think, a lot...** so get this “community” angle into your messaging.
5. **Educate with information.** Do not try to dazzle them. Think “pull marketing” rather than “push.”

And one, final tip: Check out www.netlingo.com for a lot more on this subject.

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