

Group **Mentality**

EXPLORING GENERATIONAL MARKETING FOR SPAS BY JUDY RANDALL |

As the industry continues to experience tremendous growth, spas will be welcoming guests from all generations as they learn the benefits of a spa experience. However, to take maximum advantage of this, today's spa owners and directors must learn how to *listen* and *talk* to these different age groups in order to encourage them to become frequent spa-goers.

How can the spa director motivate these very different generation segments? How can the spa grow current market segments and expand into new ones? How can the different expectations of customers from all the generation groups be met by the spa staff?

Today's spa director must realize that a "one size fits all" message will not motivate such very different customer segments. Each one needs to be targeted with messages that cater to their specific personalities.

For each of the five primary age groups it is important to look at the major events that occurred in their early lives. That is what created the differences in each group. Their lives and their thinking were shaped by these events.

WAR GENERATION (ages 80+)

LIFE-SHAPING EVENTS FOR THE WAR GENERATION:

- The Great Depression
- WWII

This is the age group that Tom Brokaw wrote about in his book "The Greatest Generation." They have spent their entire lives saving money, sacrificing and giving to others. They are embarrassed to even *think* about spending money on themselves in something as indulgent as spa treatments. However, their children and grandchildren make excellent targets for purchasing facials, pedicures, manicures and other "special treatments" for these senior customers for holidays and birthdays.

GENERAL TRAITS OF THE WAR GENERATION:

- Giving, sacrificing for others (i.e. - Leave the world a better place).
- Feelings of guilt if they are wasteful.
- Do not expect anything fancy (i.e. - "That's good enough for me.").
- Will give to their children and grandchildren without hesitation; strong believers in making life better for their children.

BOTTOM LINE ON THE WAR GENERATION:

- Their children will buy treatment packages to give them something they have probably never had before.

- Make your war generation customer comfortable with having this much money spent on them by reinforcing how much their children must love them to give them this gift, how their children want to see them enjoying themselves.
- Explain to this generation that their patronage is helping the spa maintain a successful business.
- Remember, spending this kind of money is typically very rare for this generation. Make sure they feel it was a special occasion.

SILENT GENERATION (ages 62-79)

LIFE-SHAPING EVENTS OF THE SILENT GENERATION:

- WWII
- Rebuilding of the economy following WWII
- Taking care of their younger baby boomer siblings
- Having to "make do" as children - then watching their younger baby boomer siblings get to have all the fun

This is the age group that was too young to serve in WWII but too old to serve in Vietnam. They were raised prior to the fast-paced growth of the 1950s in a world that still clearly remembered the Great Depression of 1929. Fear of going without, and the need to "work hard and save for later," was instilled in these folks at an early age.

They were also primarily the older siblings of the baby boomers. They watched their younger siblings being spoiled with attention,

merchandise, etc., during the booming 1950s while they had to be responsible and “do the right thing.” After working hard all their lives and saving money, they are near or in retirement age and believe it is their turn to spend a little money on themselves. This can be a good market segment for the spa industry, but the right messages need to be incorporated.

GENERAL TRAITS OF THE SILENT GENERATION:

- Argumentative – they have strong feelings about what is right and wrong.
- Feel they have saved money and now “it is my turn” to enjoy life.
- Subtle and not boisterous – do not like to have too much attention paid to them personally.
- See everything in black and white without any gray areas.

BOTTOM LINE ON THE SILENT GENERATION:

- This is a great market for the spa industry because they believe they have earned the right to indulge themselves.
- However, they are still a little cost conscious, so offer them fundamental spa packages.
- Tell them all expectations and rules up front; this group does not want surprises.
- If they confront you with a problem, the best thing to do is agree with them and explain how you will correct it; this group will not lose an argument.
- Messages such as “You Deserve a Little Pleasure” or “You’ve Earned It” work very well with this age group.

BABY BOOMERS (ages 44-61)

LIFE-SHAPING EVENTS FOR BABY BOOMERS:

- Fierce competitors as so many were born at the same time
- The booming economy of the ‘50s and ‘60s = the birth of fast-paced consumerism
- The space race and the moon landing
- The United States as the invincible superpower
- The wild, free ‘60s – rebelling against (or serving in) the Vietnam War
- The end of segregation
- The women’s liberation movement
- Amazing leaders such as John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King

Much has been written about how the baby boomers are the “spoiled” generation that is overly indulgent, demanding and willing to spend freely as long as it is all about them. And ...

it is all true! Born at the beginning of the strongest U.S. economic surge, the boomers were trained to be high consumers at an early age when manufacturers realized that their war generation parents were committed to making their children’s lives better than their own. Boomers will always be indulgent consumers, so this is a perfect market for spas to target. Boomers were the most mothered generation in history. They had the first ever stay-at-home mothers who spent a great deal of time with their children to make their lives comfortable.

Because so many were born at the same time, boomers learned to compete at an early age for time and attention. They grew up to be demanding and impatient. They had the luxury of focusing on their needs and desires and feel those needs are important and worth expenditure. They even compete with other baby boomers over who spent the most on themselves!

Even more important to spa managers, baby boomers never thought about getting older. They are actually surprised that they are aging and will do anything to keep themselves young and vital. (There is a reason why products such as diet books, plastic surgery and Viagra are doing so well!)

For spas, this is the market segment that represents the most potential financial gain. They are happy to spend on themselves. But beware – they constantly want the latest and greatest.

GENERAL TRAITS OF BABY BOOMERS:

- Self-focused
- Optimistic
- Impatient with short attention spans
- Indulgent – enjoy being pampered
- Wants multiple choices and to feel in control
- Expect to be treated special and to get what they want

BOTTOM LINE ON BABY BOOMERS:

- They do not deal with details or frustration – make it effortless and easy for them to buy spa treatments.
- Focus product descriptions on how it will make them feel.
- Price is not as important to boomers as luxury and feeling good.
- They are competitive – give them “bragging rights.”
- Baby boomer grandparents are very likely to buy treatments for their children and grandchildren – make it a special family package and make the boomer the hero!
- They will never see themselves as old – make sure you keep the focus on retaining their youth.
- Give them choices and instant gratification.

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Generational Marketing

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GENERATION X (ages 23-43)

LIFE SHAPING EVENTS FOR GENERATION X:

- Watergate
- Energy crisis, environmentalism and recycling
- High rate of divorced parents
- Latch-key children who had two working parents

Generation X grew up in a totally different environment than the boomers. While the boomers grew up in a growing economy with limitless resources, Generation X experienced fuel shortages, recessions, etc. Boomers had Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy urging them to expand their horizons; Generation X watched months of "Watergate" and other scandals and crime on TV. They grew up suspicious and disenfranchised, all the while watching the wasteful boomers. They endured parents who were quick to divorce and mothers who worked outside of the home. They grew up knowing that money does not necessarily buy happiness.

Today, while Generation Xers enjoy spa treatments, they want to know all the details up front. They are also natural bargain shoppers. Give them access to your Web site, covering all the details about various treatments, and show them how to create extra value with their spa experience.

GENERAL TRAITS OF GENERATION XERS:

- Suspicious
- Prefer a holistic approach that is earth-friendly
- Careful shoppers – always looking for bargains
- Like to feel they are cared for by spa employees and managers

BOTTOM LINE ON GENERATION X:

- They are naturally suspicious and careful shoppers. Give them reassurances and tell them the facts and details. Make sure they see the value in your packages.
- They love a bargain. Coupons and specially priced treatment packages are great with this group. However, they dig into the details so make sure it truly is a deal.
- Do not attempt to manipulate Generation X. They are careful that they receive good treatment.
- They pay attention to the details: design, amenities, etc.
- Remember their names – they really appreciate special treatment.
- They hate confrontation. If any problems arise, handle them calmly and without problems. They will not complain about poor treatment ... they will just never return.

MILLENNIALS/GENERATION Y

(ages 23 and younger)

LIFE-SHAPING EVENTS FOR MILLENNIALS:

- The technology and stock market boom (and bust)
- Women and minorities overcoming barriers
- Strong economy (until 2001)
- 9/11 and other terrorism

This age group is an excellent target market for spas. Today's average teenager spends approximately \$100 per week. One-third of all teenagers today have cell phones and credit cards. They love luxury, fashion and spoiling themselves. They enjoy group trips to the spa so they can share their experiences with their friends.

This is a very interesting age group. Realize that they are very knowledgeable and have never known a time when they did not have access to a computer. They are empowered, optimistic, fashion conscious and enjoy spending. But remember that they have no loyalty to any business. They are the consummate shoppers, and they yield a good deal of influence over their parents.

GENERAL TRAITS OF MILLENNIALS:

- Optimistic
- Physically strong and aware of their body
- Fashion and style are important to them
- Believe in spending on themselves – and have the money to do so

BOTTOM LINE ON MILLENNIALS:

- They are an excellent market for spas.
- They love to spend time with their friends doing spa treatments, so sell them "girlfriend" packages.

Addressing the different needs of each generation will ensure satisfied – and repeat – clients for your spa. Taking the time to develop your messages will provide a large pay-off for your bottom line. ■

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RESOURCE FINDER

Learn more about this marketing technique by attending Randall's session, "The Buying Habits of Generation X and Y," on Tuesday, Nov. 9, from 8:30 - 10 a.m. and again on Wednesday, Nov. 10, from 2 - 3:30 p.m.