

Advertising Age®

Media Players Go After Free-Spending Boomers

TV Land, Host of Websites Try to Cash Out by Building Content for Over-50 Demo

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Seventy-five percent of U.S. wealth is in the hands of people aged 50-plus, boomers are the highest earners, there's a grandchild born every 20 seconds. Jerry Shereshevsky sits in a cramped Manhattan office and rattles off the statistics that drove this week's launch of [Grandparents.com](#).



Jerry Shereshevsky

The site, a sort of how-to, what-to-do guide for people who find themselves grandparents joins [Eons.com](#), the social network for the 50-plus set from Monster.com founder Jeffrey Taylor, and [BoomerGirl.com](#), a tiny Kansas-based startup, as the latest example of a media company chasing baby boomers. The trend isn't limited to web-based startups: Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia is exploring the launch of its own boomer-targeted title and Viacom's TV Land has for the past couple upfront selling seasons made its boomer audience the center of its upfront pitch. And then, of course, there's standbys Parade, Reader's Digest and AARP magazine.

Media companies have targeted boomers all their lives, but interest in the demo seemed to wane a bit as the majority of them approached their golden years. Traditionally, marketers have considered those in retirement mode to be unworthy of courting, mostly because of the long-held marketing belief that once a person is nearing the end of his life, he is set in his ways and unlikely to try new brands or products.

Disproportionate spending

But boomers, as they have most of their adult lives, have cash -- more cash now than ever. And they've always been willing to spend it. According to Information Resources Inc., boomers spend \$46 billion annually on package goods. And recently Unilever research found they account for 60% of spending on package goods even though they represent only 45% of households.

For many media companies, people over 50 have always been part of their properties' audiences. It's just that now it seems like good business to sell those folks, rather than try to downplay their presence. That's exactly what TV Land decided to do. Two years ago the network was taking a look at its audience and saw most of its viewers were in their 40s and 50s. It started to create original programming that would appeal to them knowing it couldn't only rely on classic TV shows. It also started touting the audience to advertisers.



Larry W. Jones, president of TV Land

"We've definitely seen changes in the last two years," Larry W. Jones, president of TV Land, said. "Three years ago the preponderance of advertisers out there were targeting 18-to-49. Today more and more have started buying into 25-to-54 demo because [that demo] has the biggest pile of money and it is growing faster than the 18-to-49 money."

Parade's Exec VP-Advertising Mike DeBartolo attributes much of its 9% year-to-date ad gains to that fact. "If you needed evidence that some marketers and media are thriving in the sweet spot, our performance is partly related to marketers needing places like Parade that appeal to over-35s," he said.

Adding it up

How much money and attention marketers are putting against the group is something still up for debate. It varies by category and media sellers say that outside the endemic areas such as pharma and financial services, package-goods companies, retailers and domestic automakers have bolstered their boomer-marketing plans.

"There is still a great deal of discrimination against women in this age group in the fashion and technology areas," said Brenda Saget Darling, VP-publisher of More magazine, which has been arguably the poster child for how a media company can successfully target boomers. "They look at 18 to 34, and that's their cutoff point."

That couldn't be a bigger mistake, said Laurel Kennedy, who heads strategy at Age Lessons, a consultancy focused on the boomer market, citing research that a typical baby boomer owns six high-tech devices, such as a blackberry, DVR or iPod.

"Forty-five percent of boomers feel overlooked by marketers," she said. "It also happens that 45% of them also say brand purchases are influenced by advertising."



Brenda Saget Darling, VP-publisher of More magazine

No matter how much marketers may be warming to the idea of targeting boomers, any media company shilling a boomer audience is careful about how they position their messages -- TV Land notes that it's targeting the younger end of the boomer lifespan; More explains that Gen Xers read the magazine, too; and Grandparents.com's Mr. Shereshevsky cautions 20- and 30-something ad execs that his site isn't targeted to their grandparents, but more often, their parents.

Big group

TV Land's Mr. Jones believes there are a lot of misconceptions about who this baby-boom generation is. Technically, it is everyone born between 1946 -- nine months after World War II ended -- and 1965, making the age range 42 to 61. "There's this preconceived notion that the so-called baby boomers are older than they really are," he said. "Baby boomers don't even identify with the term."

And perhaps that's the recipe for media companies looking to expand -- don't say you're targeting boomers and don't try to play the nostalgia card.

"They're not interested in media that panders, or trips down memory lane. They're over that," said Ms. Kennedy, who is a founding member of a new trade association for boomer marketers -- the International Mature Marketing Network. "They