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ADVERTISING

## Tailoring Messages to a New Audience: Wrinkled Baby Boomers

By [STUART ELLIOTT](#)

YOUNG LOVE,” the longtime siren song of Madison Avenue, is being remixed as marketers increasingly turn their attention to consumers born when “45” meant music rather than the number after 44 and “Apple” meant fruit.

The ardor for younger consumers has lasted for decades, fueled by perceptions of them as being more likely to try new products and change brands and to spend almost every penny they make. Older consumers, by contrast, were less desirable because they were deemed to be shoppers with entrenched habits who lived sedentary, frugal lives.

The arrival of the baby boomers — the 76 million Americans born from 1946 to 1964 — into the upper age brackets is the leading reason for the shift in opinions about older consumers. Free-spending boomers think young, to quote from a [Pepsi](#)-Cola slogan of their era, regardless of how old they actually are.

“It’s a demographic group that’s too big and too rich to ignore,” said Jerry Shereshevsky, chief executive at [Grandparents.com](#) in New York, which publishes an e-mail newsletter and a Web site.

“There’s still a lot of missionary work, but little by little, advertisers are getting it,” said Mr. Shereshevsky, who has hired the New York office of Taxi to create a campaign planned for the end of the year.

Another reason for the change is that consumers in their 60s, 70s and 80s are behaving differently from their counterparts in previous decades, particularly in their willingness to travel, dine out and adopt new technologies.

“They see life as something to grab and want to look great, feel great,” said Mary Lou Quinlan, who runs Just Ask a Woman, a marketing company in New York that works for clients like Clairol and [GlaxoSmithKline](#).

“They won’t settle for the meager choices marketers might have offered in the past,” she added.

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A sign of the shifting attitudes toward older consumers is the title of a conference on Tuesday aimed at women 40 and older: the Reinvention Convention. The host of the conference, at Chelsea Piers in Manhattan, is More magazine, published by the [Meredith Corporation](#), and the sponsors include [Wachovia](#) and [Harley-Davidson](#).

“These are people who are changing their lives, doing things they’re passionate about,” said Laurie Clemens,

rider services marketing lead at Harley-Davidson in Milwaukee. “We want to connect with them.”

Other efforts to reach those consumers include garage party events at local dealerships, she added, along with courses for new riders at Rider’s Edge, the Harley-Davidson motorcycle school, and advertisements in magazines like *More*, *Shape* and *Women’s Health*.

*More*, introduced by Meredith in 1998, seeks a readership of older women. Although ad pages have been making percentage gains in double digits, “there are certain categories that still have this obsession with youth,” said Brenda Saget Darling, vice president and publisher, among them fashion.

“It’s a challenge that we’ll probably always face,” she added.

Offsetting that is business from marketers in categories like automobiles, including Lexus and Volvo, and financial services, including Wachovia, which concentrates its pitches on retirement planning ([wachovia.com/womenandretirement](http://wachovia.com/womenandretirement)).

“For a 20-something, retirement should be on your radar,” said Lynne [Ford](#), senior vice president and director for the retail retirement group at Wachovia in Charlotte, N.C., but “around age 40, retirement comes onto the scope.”

“Financial services companies have historically woefully underperformed in reaching out to women,” she added. “We want to change the model.”

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Another marketer rethinking its approach is [Biomet](#), which sells artificial hips and knees. A campaign that began this week, by Boyden & Youngblutt in Fort Wayne, Ind., features Mary Lou Retton, the former Olympic gymnast, who is 39.

“She definitely trends in with our new group of demographics, boomers who want to be more active and don’t want to live with pain,” said Stacey Jones, director for consumer marketing at Biomet Orthopedics in Warsaw, Ind.

Ms. Retton not only endorses Biomet, Ms. Jones said, she is a customer, too, having received a Magnum hip when she was 37.

(Yes, Biomet’s joints bear brand names. Another popular product is the Oxford Partial Knee.)

Not every marketing maneuver aimed at older consumers is wildly successful. For example, the trade publication *Advertising Age* reported last week that a new line of anti-aging products sold by [Unilever](#) under the Dove Pro-Age name is being outsold by a similar line of products sold by [Procter & Gamble](#) under the Olay Definity brand.

The Pro-Age line drew widespread attention for ads of nude grandmothers, tastefully photographed by Annie Leibovitz. The article in *Advertising Age* wondered whether the Dove ads “went a step too far in embracing aging in all its naked, wrinkled and sagging glory”; the ads for Olay Definity are more conventional.

An older woman “doesn’t wake up and say, ‘I’m glad I look older today,’” said Ms. Quinlan of Just Ask a Woman, who is also a columnist for More and is to speak at the conference.

“As marketers try to come up with a new set of role models and icons,” she added, “there will be missteps.”

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