

WHITE PAPER

Packaging and the Baby Boomer Generation

The Boomer Influence on Products and Packaging Design

Introduction

The “baby boomer” generation has been a major market driver for everything from houses to cars to entertainment to almost all consumer products for several decades. Generally defined as those born between the years 1946 and 1964, the very first of these “baby boomers” are turning 60 this year. And while traditional consumer market demographics often define the so-called “hot” markets as those 18-25 years old, or even the 18-49 years old segment, the “boomer” generation is **not** a market influence to be ignored.

Looking at Boomer Market Statistics

In the packaging industry, as the population ages, changes in packaging requirements are becoming readily apparent. Recent estimates have put the size of the “boomer” market at slightly less than 80 million people, representing more than 27% of the current US population. As the wealthiest generation ever, with a combined estimated spending power of \$1 trillion per year (Source: *Time Magazine*) this segment of the population will continue to have considerable influence over product development and packaging requirements. Those brands not taking into account the “boomer” requirements for convenience, ergonomics and visibility, among other demands, may be in danger of watching market share erode.

The Boomer Market’s Self-perception

Boomers don’t see themselves as aging. Even those classified as “leading edge” boomers, nearing 60, continue to be active and vital with a definite anti-aging mindset, and they are interested in products that will keep them that way. Consequently, the growth in the Vitamins and Personal Care markets and products is in part being driven by this generation’s expectations of remaining young.

One typical market misconception is that boomers are at a point where they are brand loyal, and reluctant to change. However, recent surveys indicate differently. A study by the AARP (2002) indicated that consumers 45 and older are as likely to change brands as younger consumers. In fact, *Business Week* states that baby boomers are more likely to try unfamiliar products than customers in the 16 to 34 age group. For added convenience and an easier opening package, assuming quality is equal, the boomer generation would have little or no issue in making a brand change. Assuming that boomers are locked into brands is a mistake. Weatherchem, a designer and manufacturer of packaging closures, found through their own consumer packaging research done in focus groups that consumers were amenable to paying more to obtain convenience, and were willing to change brands to get that convenience.

Boomers, Health, and Packaging

While boomers may not want to age, and may make the process different than ever before, they still face the same aging issues as past generations. The boomer generation's self-image is not that of an aging population, and to them 60 is the new 40. With today's longer lifespan though, boomers may find health issues even more difficult than their predecessors. Arthritis, declining eyesight, weight issues, and a host of other ailments await the aging boomer. And today's aging population may easily live 20 or more years past age 65, the typical retirement age. Thus, the interest and growth in a variety of healthcare type products will continue.

Convenience and lifestyle issues have always been important to the boomer market. As this group ages, these issues will gain even greater urgency. The difficulty with opening a screw on cap on a vitamin bottle, with even a minor arthritis condition, becomes a major issue. A brand having the convenience of a NutraFlapper® type cap, for example, has a distinct market advantage and a distinct appeal to an aging population. Ease of opening is important. The fact that a dispensing NutraFlapper cap can simply be opened with a thumb, without a twisting motion or a tight two-handed grip, adds to the attractiveness and desirability of products. This is true particularly in designing packaging for boomers - the packaging must be easy to open.

A second part of packaging design for boomers in addition to being easy to open is that a package or product must be easy to use. Access to the product, in the amounts or portion desired is critical to the convenience factor baby boomers demand. Dumping far more of a product than you need, and then trying to return it to a container, is not only difficult, messy, unhealthy and time consuming, but it is the type of inconvenience a typical boomer customer won't accept. That is why in designing the NutraFlapper closure, Weatherchem designed in controlled-access dispensing convenience right from the start. Dispensing one or two tablets, a normal dose, rather than a handful requiring them to be put back into the container, exemplifies convenience. In dispensing product, getting the amount you want the first time without excess, and making the product easy to use, can help your product be a brand success with the baby boomer market.

Making the Product Visible

Leading-edge boomers in the 50-60 age range face the usual vision problems, and although there are now more remedies than in years past (like laser eye surgery), the need for highly visible, easily identifiable packaging remains. At the same time, because of the anti-aging boomer mindset, designing packaging that meets boomer needs without being condescending or pointing out potential physical shortcomings is critical. Although many in the boomer segment may need convenience-enhanced packaging, they often do not like to admit it.

The array of colors available on the NutraFlapper closures, the unique patented one-piece closure system, and the unique look, make your products stand out. The easily discernable symbols on the top of the closure make it easy to use. Making your package attractive and highly visible from the aisle of the supermarket or drugstore with convenient opening and closing features has baby boomer appeal.

Packaging must be easy to read for boomers, but at the same time it must be attractive to other consumers as well. The Flapper-type closures appeal to a wide range of consumers, even though they are baby boomer-friendly. Many products, particularly in the pharmaceutical and nutraceutical markets will overlap, and packaging designed with the appropriate closures can help differentiate your product from the many others on store shelves. Making instructions and ingredients easy to read makes packaging user friendly. The ideal packaging solution is both consumer-friendly and boomer-friendly.

Packaging Security, Freshness, and the Boomer

Packaging security issues affect every consumer, not just the boomer or aging market. In our own Weatherchem focus groups, package security issues were mentioned as a buying influence, and the concerns were not necessarily age-related. There are concerns about tampering, about child-proofing, and any number of other issues that can give the consumer reason to lose confidence in a product or brand. The integrity of the package and the product within is an important factor. That is a key reason that Weatherchem designed the Flapper Dispensing Closures with the ability to use various liners to maintain product integrity, yet still be ergonomically friendly.

Freshness is another issue that consumers not only are concerned about, but that they demand. Knowing that baby boomers are the wealthiest generation ever, they typically expect the best in terms of freshness, visual appeal, taste, and efficacy, and they are willing to pay for it. Closing a 53-400 NutraFlapper cap and hearing an audible snap not only gives a consumer a tactile sense of security, but also the awareness that the remaining product in the package will remain fresh without any deterioration from outside elements.

While understanding that baby boomers may be affluent, they are also wise shoppers looking to get the maximum value for their investment. If boomer/senior and other consumers as well, have the slightest perception that there may be issues with security or freshness with your product, they will have no hesitation in changing to a brand where their comfort level is higher. That is why choosing a closure that meets the needs of the identified boomer segment is critical, and can contribute to the successful acceptance of your brand.

Baby Boomers: A Market Segment Well Worth Pursuing

Not many manufacturers can resist a market with almost 80 million potential customers, many of them affluent. Even when the boomer market is segmented further into leading edge, middle, and echo boomers, the market segments are huge. Sound packaging design is a factor in baby boomer product decision making. In a recent survey in *Packaging WORLD®* Magazine aging baby boomers rated “ease of opening and reclosing” as the single most important factor in packaging.

As a manufacturer providing vitamins or personal care products to this market, keep in mind that package design will play an important role. Convenience, easy to use, easy to open and close, attractive, highly visible and easy to read, not condescending, secure with the capability to maintain freshness – all of these factors are a part of total packaging appeal. Selecting a closure like a NutraFlapper offers your baby boomer targets a little extra incentive to purchase your product. And regardless of the type of closure you choose for your product, keep the baby boomers at the top of your segmented marketing targets. They make up a market that is well worth pursuing.

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