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# Is Your Business Zoomer Friendly?

by Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender

**W**e were walking through the Paris Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas when we stopped to watch a group of 50-something women try and navigate their way down the cobblestone streets. They weren't intoxicated, they were merely trying their best not to catch a heel and lose their balance on the uneven flooring. We've seen this happen on more than one occasion, and apparently so has the hotel, because posted at each entrance is a classy brass sign warning guests about the possible hazards of the uneven walkways.

## Boomers To "Zoomers"

People over 50 aren't old, they're in the prime of their lives. They are healthy and happy, and far richer than any other generation that spends money in your business. This new generation – a combination of 76 million Baby Boomers and the 64 million people of retirement age and better – have a new name, they've been coined "The Zoomers." Zoomers control more than 70 percent of the wealth in the United States, and according to a recent survey by WSL Strategic Retail, shoppers aged 55 to 70 are "heavy shoppers," making four or more shopping trips a week. These two facts alone should make anyone who sells or services anything sit up and take notice.

According to Ken Dychtwald, Ph.D, founder and president of Age Wave, as the Baby Boomers pass through their middle years, and on to maturity (the first Boomers began to turn 60 this year!), several key factors will reshape consumer supply and demand. These factors include a concern about the onset of chronic disease, their desire to postpone physical aging, and entry into new adult life stages. And there are two more factors Dr. Dychtwald says will have a direct impact on your cash register.

It's a "good news/bad news" scenario. The good news: Boomers are experiencing a psychological shift away from acquiring more material possessions toward a desire to purchase enjoyable and satisfying experiences. The bad news: You'll have to work harder to attract them to your business as the absence of "disposable time" continues to complicate their lifestyles. Here's the bottom line: You have a tremendous opportunity ahead of you if your business, and its products and services, cater to the needs of the discretionary dollar-rich Zoomers.

Here's our newly updated, How to get ready for the Zoomers checklist.

## The Checklist

- **Pump up the type size currently used on signing, brochures, newsletters, and other materials.** These materials are designed to help customers make good purchasing decisions when there is no one around to help out. If they can't read the materials, no one wins. Take a hard look at your packaging and materials – can older eyes easily read what's important about your business or your product?
- **As we age, it gets harder to adapt to different lighting.** We've been in too many places that are unbelievably dark. This makes it tough for anyone to see, and tougher still for aging eyes that need two to three times more light to see as clearly as younger eyes. Yet, places that are too bright can also cause problems for Zoomer customers as well. If you are not sure where you stand lumen-wise, consider calling in a lighting professional to help you out.
- **You may love your shiny floors, but shiny floors scream trouble for older shoppers who do not want to risk a fall on what appears to be a slippery surface.** When it comes time to replace your flooring, consider one made from non-slip material.

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- **Do you have doorknobs or handles?** A large percentage of Zoomers will have some sort of arthritis. It's much easier for them to operate a handle versus a knob. This is a quick fix; door knobs are easy to replace.
  - **Closet-sized restrooms might be standard on airplanes, but they are not acceptable in your business.** Restrooms should be large enough to be comfortable, and large enough to be safe.
  - **Zoomers are very social.** Why not make your business the senior social center of your community? Host an assortment of Zoomer only events throughout the year. In addition to your usual venues, advertise them in local senior citizens newsletters. You might even put together a Zoomer Advisory Board to make suggestions, and help keep you on the right track.
  - **Zoomers have plenty of expertise – don't let their knowledge and talent go to waste!** The Millennials (aged 24 and younger) are on track to mimic their grandparents values and beliefs. One of our favorite retailers takes advantage of the relationship between these two generations. On Saturday afternoons, a grandmotherly woman sits in a rocking chair near the store's front door, knitting. The plump cushions strewn at her feet were always filled with children (and sometimes their parents) learning to knit. Brainstorm ways you could put Zoomers' expertise to work in your own business.
  - **Hire Zoomers to work in your company.** If your customers are older, it just makes sense that some of your associates should be as well. Zoomers feel a little more comfortable working with people their own age.
- Now, about this aging thing none of us are too fond of: John, Paul, George, and Ringo put it all in perspective when they sang, "When I get older, losing my hair, Many years from now, Will you still be sending me a valentine, Birthday greetings, bottle of wine? If I'd been out 'till quarter to three, Would you lock the door? Will you still need me, will you still feed me, When I'm sixty-four?" ♦

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*Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender are nationally recognized as experts in generational diversity, "messing with the media", and everything retail. They are widely referred to as retail anthropologists because they stalk and study that most elusive of mammals: today's consumer.*

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