



IS YOUR STORE ZOOMER FRIENDLY?

By Rich Kizer &
Georganne Bender

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 store. This new generation – a combination of

We 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.

This observation led to a lengthy discussion on one of our favorite topics: are our stores and our products ready for the hordes of aging Americans, each with special needs and physical limitations to be considered, who shop in our stores, and use our products and services? It's a funny thing. We can talk about this topic all day long – it was first incorporated into our presentations in 1992 – and yet we're not seeing too many retailers making dramatic changes in their stores.

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 every retailer 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 will turn 60 in 2006!), 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.

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Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender are nationally recognized experts on customer service, customer retention strategies, “messing with the media,” and everything retail. Contact them by e-mail at info@kizerandbender.com. ©Kizer & Bender 2004 . All rights reserved.

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. Great news for crafting! The bad news: You'll have to work harder to attract them to your store 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 store, and its products and services, cater to the needs of the discretionary dollar-rich Zoomers.

A STORE THAT'S READY

Adeg Aktiv Markt is a wonderful example of a retailer who is doing just that. Adeg is a 700-unit Austrian supermarket chain that has launched four new supermarkets designed specifically for older shoppers (older shopper being defined as those aged 50 and better.) At Adeg's Aktiv Markt customers enjoy larger parking spaces, larger price labels, wider aisles, floors that are non-skid even when wet, plenty of places to sit down, even shopping carts with built-in seats so shoppers can relax whenever and wherever they like. They even have brakes to keep them steady while loading the car. Customers can reach for one of the magnifying glasses hanging from chains in the grocery aisles and dairy cases, or even borrow a pair of reading glasses to make shopping easier when they forget their own. Now, where have you heard that before?

Adeg is quick to point out that their Aktiv Markt is not a store for old people, it's a store for discerning shoppers. This makes perfect sense. Parents juggling children while trying to shop, scrapbookers pulling rolling totes, arms loaded with product, or crafters balancing project supplies in their arms, and in their carts, will appreciate these extra

conveniences as well. So one more time, here's our newly updated, How to get ready for the Zoomers checklist.

THE CHECKLIST

- **Place product at more easily reachable heights.** And if you have 84" counters, as most retailers do, instruct store associates to be on the lookout for customers trying to get at product they can't reach, and help them accordingly. Try to save the very top shelves for back-up merchandise.

- **Presbyopia, a disease that affects our ability to see clearly up close, kicks in at around age 40.** Those Zoomers wandering your aisles may be missing key product detail. We recommend that you place baskets of reading glasses in various magnifications at your service counters and in your classrooms, maybe even near shopping baskets and/or carts. We think you should also adopt Adeg's idea of tying magnifying glasses to your end features.

- **If large numbers of customers need reading glasses, then it's safe to say that large numbers also wear bifocal glasses.** When you wear bi-focals, you have to choose which part of the lenses to look through. The top part helps you see far away, and the bottom helps you see close up. This means that at any given time, merchandise displayed below eye level is invisible to these customers. Cruise your aisles to see what important product you have housed near the floor that needs to be moved to a higher location on the fixture.

- **Pump up the type size currently used on signing, brochures, newsletters, and other point-of-purchase (POP) materials.** These materials are designed to help customers make good purchasing decisions when there is no store associate around to help out. If they can't read the materials, no one wins. If you are a

vendor, take a hard look at your own packaging and POP materials – can older eyes easily read what's important about your product?

- **As we age, it gets harder to adapt to different lighting.** We've been in too many stores that are unbelievably dark. This makes it tough for anyone to see the merchandise, and tougher still for aging eyes that need 2–3 times more light to see as clearly as younger eyes. Yet, stores that are too bright can also cause problems for Zoomer customers. If you are not sure where you stand lumen-wise, consider calling in a lighting professional to help you out.

- **Merchandise your store so that product adjacencies make sense.** Items that are typically used together should be housed near one another. This saves time and makes finding everything needed to complete a project less stressful.

- **If your store has shopping carts, test them frequently to ensure that wheels all turn the way they are supposed to turn.** If you don't have shopping carts in your store, you might want to consider buying a few. They will help Zoomers shop a little easier, and they'll help moms keep the kids under control.

- **Look for spots on the sales floor to add a few benches.** Comfortable benches where customers can park their spouse or just sit and relax awhile. Younger customers will enjoy these rest stops; Zoomers will depend on them.

- **Retailers love 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.

- **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.

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RETAIL ADVENTURES IN THE REAL WORD™

• **Closet-sized restrooms might be standard on airplanes, but they are not acceptable in your store.** Restrooms should be large enough to be comfortable, and large enough to be safe. A retailer called recently to tell us about an elderly woman who slipped in her restroom and

became wedged between the wall and the toilet. There was not enough maneuvering room for the customer to easily free herself. She was lodged in there alone for 20 minutes before someone found her and helped her out.

• **Offer lots of free product testing**

and demonstrations. Sometimes Zoomers like to stick with what's tried and true, so why not introduce them to the vast assortment of new and easy-to-use items you sell in your store?

• **Zoomers are very social.** Why not make your store the senior social center of your community? Host an assortment of "Senior Class" craft classes and crops 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 22 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 store.

• **Hire Zoomers to work in your store.** 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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