



## Marketing Messages

### MARY CHARLESON

#### *The power of baby boomer women*

Since baby boomers first burst on the scene in the early 60's as young adults, they have been the darling of the business and the advertising industry, based on the sheer economic opportunity of meeting the needs of such a huge group. Baby boomers, born 1946 -1964 will be aged 43 - 61 years old this year. Every seven seconds in Canada, someone turns 50. But something curious seems to be happening. Just when this powerhouse group has reached the peak of their earning years, with elevated disposable income and the health to enjoy it for many years to come, they are being dropped for a more youthful model. Call it the ultimate middle-aged affair, and nowhere is this more apparent than in marketers approach to female baby boomers.

Today's woman over 50 is an empowered and self-sufficient economic powerhouse. She has become more assertive with age, is increasingly free from old responsibilities, and is eager to embrace new adventures. She belongs to the first generation of working women. Those over 50 make up 27% of the population, yet control 70% of the wealth. She stands to inherit even more wealth from her parents, and is highly likely to outlive her spouse. Couple this with the fact that women buy or influence 85% or more of what is sold, and she should definitely be on a marketer's radar screen.

Yet in a world of size 2's, celebrity endorsements and super sized cheap food, it appears it just isn't so. Whether it's failure to understand the sheer enormity of the opportunity or an infatuation with all things new and youthful, many businesses don't get women over 50.

Oh sure, there's the easy stuff, which we're starting to see, like readable type sizes, better lighting, smaller healthy portions and consideration to product design and service options for this group. These apply to both men and women. To really connect with boomer women business have to harness the nuances to understand what is important.

**1. Authenticity and honesty are critical:** Women portrayed in ads need to be realistic, not ideal. That's why celebrity endorsements fall flat with this group. Boomer women are drawn to people they feel are like them. Authentic, by all means attractive, but some flaws are just fine. This is why the **Dove Campaign for Real Beauty** has struck such a chord with this group. It used real women, flaws and all, in an industry rife with impossible to achieve ideals.

**2. Social strategy is very important:** Good corporate citizenship matters. But this social strategy needs to be at the heart and soul of a business, not applied like philanthropic lipstick at the end. There is a shift from focus on oneself to a focus on others at this age. This is particularly evident with women. According to a recent **Pollara** poll of 1,200 Canadians, 84% of 50 year old women felt it was important to deal with businesses that make the world a better place through their actions, while 73% of men of this age felt the same. Additionally, 62% of 50 year old women said an ad that demonstrates social responsibility resonates with them, while 48% of men of this age felt the same. 81% of women over 50 agree that the time has come to deal with environmental sustainability, while 69% of men the same age agreed. "Women tend to be more passionate about social strategy and become more so as they get older, were as men tend to stay the same as they age," notes **Michael Antecol, VP Pollara**. There is a social movement building, and boomer women are at the forefront.

**3. Relationship building and storytelling matter.** Women value relationships, and boomer women in particular enjoy the camaraderie and company of those like them. This network has powerful word of mouth ability. The surging popularity of book clubs is a great illustration of relationship building. "Sociologically speaking, this is part of how we root ourselves in a community- by creating interconnected webs of relationship and by making alliance with others of like mind, something women tend to be particularly adept at," notes Elinor Morris, Manager and book club founder for the Book Warehouse Lonsdale. Recently, the **North Vancouver Recreation Commission** published a recreation guide targeted at baby boomer adults. Titled "Live Your Best Life", it is an attractive adult guide to active healthy living. Beyond the fitness schedules and programming information, it is the "stories of people just like you" interwoven throughout which make it effective at reaching boomer women.

Baby boomer women are vibrantly independent and part of a vibrant set of peers. Think ageless, healthy and authentic. Think relationships and social responsibility. Think of the opportunity.

*Mary Charleson, MBA is president of Charleson Communications, a company specializing in market research, strategy and advertising development. She writes monthly and can be reached at [mary@charleson.ca](mailto:mary@charleson.ca)*