



## Marketing Messages

### MARY CHARLESON

## *Companies fight to keep their baby boomer base and remain relevant to young consumers.*

The only certainty in business is change. Your marketing efforts must continuously address this. Competitors change tactics. There are new entries to the market. Trends and consumer needs change. And consumers themselves age and their lifestyle evolves.

So what do you do when your core market is aging and their needs are changing with it? Do you abandon them or do you adapt your product to continue to meet their needs? If you choose to follow an aging target, how do you do it without alienating a core youth market your business was built on? And if you choose to be all things to all people, how do you remain relevant to youth and appeal to aging boomers? Aging rockers like the Stones and U2 have successfully leveraged their product appeal across generations, but what about a real business model? Can a previously skewed youth brand really gain mass appeal?

*Nandini Venkatesh, Marketing Manger for Ikea Canada* thinks they can. The 45-64 year age group is the fastest growing segment of the population, but this has not been the traditional core audience for Ikea. The company, by focusing on its strengths of self-serve product, value pricing and clean cutting edge design, by default appealed to a younger market. In addition to an aging population which is less self-serve oriented, there has been a shift from functional to aesthetic as a large segment of the population moves into the stage of their lives where home and place become more permanent. And low cost borrowing has made Ikea's value proposition less appealing. These are all challenges Ikea faced. But notes Venkatesh of the aging boomer market, "We've been part of their lives for 20 years and we're still part of their lives. We're growing with them". The current "Ikea fits" advertising campaign is aimed at capturing a broad 18-64 market. Ikea has expanded their product line to appeal to an aging population. Options such as dark wood or antique finishes, high end leather sofas and Persian carpets represent a departure from traditional Ikea fare. Their in-store room settings reflect different stages of life and accommodate different home sizes. And if you don't care to save money delivering and assembling items yourself, Ikea now offers to do it for you. Ikea's new "Space for Living TV" in partnership with HGTV, scheduled to launch in April, will feature ideas and design solutions from a variety of lifestyles around the globe. The popularity of home makeovers, world travel and home aesthetics with the boomer market has not been lost on Ikea. By emphasizing design, function, and product for a variety of lifestyles while still maintaining a value proposition, Ikea has shown a youth brand can gain mass appeal.

When *Dan McLeod, Publisher of The Georgia Straight* launched the paper in 1967 he didn't much care about anyone over 30. Now, that's his core audience. According to a recent Ipsos Reid study, the median age of a Georgia Straight reader is 37.1 years old. In the late 80's, that average was 28 years old. "The market we originally appealed to has grown older", notes McLeod. "It's not wise to abandon that market. They were our contemporaries". But McLeod says "We started the paper in our youth because we were frustrated with the established media at that time and we still are. We don't want to be guilty of abandoning youth as we were in the beginning". There in lies the broader vision. Crafting a product with the ability to speak to an aging boomer but remain relevant to youth. And just how have they done it? They expanded from an entertainment focus, with its youth appeal, in the late 80's to a broad range of editorial they felt wasn't adequately covered in the dailies. Although this was not a departure from their original vision, it helped age their readership. They redesigned their covers to broaden pick up. Their free weekly 120,000 distribution has expanded far beyond youth oriented facilities such as clubs, restaurants, and theatres to supermarkets, and street corners. And although it could be argued that their expanded political and current affairs coverage has helped age the demographic of Straight readers, McLeod says "News appeals to all ages young and old. Don't underestimate young readers". Although McLeod is focused on maintaining the readership of his boomer contemporaries, he is conscious of being relevant to youth. As the paper grows and has room for more editorial, McLeod intends to add short news items and quick reads which appeal to younger readers. With both Canwest Global and Metro International planning to hit the market with a daily transit paper catered to a younger readership than the dailies, the Straight plans to maintain its strength with readers in their 20's and 30's while growing with the aging boomers. The Georgia Straight has shown that a youth brand can grow up, but keep its edge.

So it's not just aging rockers who have figured out the financial appeal of targeting a broad audience. Being all things to all people isn't easy. But with an aging population it's a marketing challenge many companies are facing.

*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*