



MIX IT UP WHEN MARKETING: The Use of Print and Electronic Marketing

By Patty Scotten

The sales and marketing industry in America has been transformed by the growth of technology and the introduction of multiple platforms through which we gather information. “In 2011, 75.6 percent of households reported having a computer, compared with only 8.2 percent in 1984” (US Census Bureau). The use of desktops, laptops, tablets, e-readers and smartphones is pervasive in our lives and in our economy. How does this affect marketing efforts to senior living customers?

The younger segment of the population, who were raised on computers, were the early adopters of the technology boom. They developed mosaic thinking patterns by repetitive use of a technology that encouraged multi-tasking with a task bar that heralded many topics at the same time. With extensive computer experience and uniquely-wired brains, this group embraced a technology that immediately gratified their information quests.

But where does the older population fit? How did older adults respond to this new form of information gathering? Well...they were NOT early adopters.

The 55+ and 65+ group was raised on print media: phone books, newspapers, books, magazines, encyclopedias (they still occasionally bring a set with them to our communities), etc. Many became what educators call “visual learners,” able to better integrate new material through seeing or reading. In their educational and professional pursuits, most individuals in this age segment focused on goals, one goal at a time, resulting in hardwiring their brains to be linear-thinkers. Their thought patterns and lack of experience with technology adversely affected any early acceptance of technology in their lives. They were late attendees to the technology party, but they are beginning to catch up with their younger counterparts.

Here is a recent summary of technology adoption by older adults, demonstrating a rapid increase of use (a 100% increase) in just the past five years. Older adults are jumping on board.

- 2011: Over the past five years the number of people online, aged 65 and over, has remained relatively static, with between 25% and 35% using the internet (Oxford Internet Institute Survey 2011).
- 2012: The US Census reports that a little over half of 65+ adults use the internet.
- 2015: 58% of 65+ adults use the internet.

Does this mean we should abandon our print ads and direct mail pieces in order to reallocate all marketing dollars to the website, eblasts, banner ads and pay-per-click? Let’s dig a little deeper.



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As marketing professionals, we understand that our consumer resides amongst a diverse group. Our appeals must be fashioned as such to attract different segments of our audience. This remains even truer with modern-day Silver Surfers whose age group, education level, and socioeconomics affect their eventual adoption of technology.

Let us observe our audience through two specific groups of older Americans. Group I is the younger, well-educated and more affluent senior and Group II is the older and less affluent senior. Group I tended to have more technology assets and embraced technology more keenly than Group II, which remained somewhat technologically disconnected (Pew Research Center). So, if we generally are attempting to attract Group I, why would we not drastically adapt our marketing efforts to electronic messaging?

Again, a little deeper digging...The primary uses for technology among all age groups are: text, email, apps, directions, music, video or check-in location. Major purchases (with the exception of travel) are not accomplished online. However, technology is being widely used for gathering information about products.

Therefore, we seem to be on the cusp of a paradigm shift. Our audience is in the midst of a major change in how they make their buying decisions. They are increasing their use of technology and presently use it to gather information before a buying decision. However, because of their experience and thinking patterns, they still respond to visual printed materials as well. Therefore, we need to mix our use of both types of media. Use electronic media to get the word out and allow the prospect to research information and facts. Concurrently, use direct mail pieces to reinforce your message with visual and emotional appeals that relate to the benefits of living within your community. NOTE: These assumptions change when appealing to an adult child who is searching for a parent.

At this time, do NOT throw the baby out with the bath water. Do NOT abandon all print materials for electronics. Mix it up. Attract future residents with your creative, concurrent use of both print and electronic media.



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