

Marketing to Senior Citizens

How to Reach This Largely Untapped Market



A lot of marketing seems to be targeted at people younger than 50. Sadly, this is a huge mistake. Baby boomers and seniors make up a huge market today. Baby boomers were born between 1946 and 1965, and those who are older and who are senior citizens, own over 70 percent of all disposal income. When you consider that fact, it's a huge untapped market.

Compared to younger populations, seniors have a much higher net worth than their younger counterparts. Mostly, this is due to investing and saving and having a long work life. This makes them a ripe market for smart business owners who have products and services of interest to senior markets.

What Is a Senior?

The term "senior citizen" is used often to refer to people who have reached the age at which they can collect social security or traditionally retire - in other words, age 65. Most dictionaries also define a senior citizen as age 65.

But, if you ask them, they will deny the term "senior citizen" unless it's to get a movie ticket discount, sign up for Medicare, or to collect social security. Therefore, for marketing purposes, you may want to define your group of "seniors" based on their demographics, interests, and needs rather than only on their age.

For example, if you want to market to grandparents, people can be grandparents long before they're considered seniors. Therefore, for marketing purposes you may want to consider seniors anyone who is a grandparent who is over 50 years of age instead of 65. But of course, this depends on your product, service, and other factors.

The idea behind being a senior citizen isn't as important as discovering the makeup of your audience, which is based on the solution you've created for them. For example, if you have a house cleaning service, you can market to all levels of seniors, but you should focus on one to make your marketing more customer centered.

Remember, the general rules of marketing still apply - no matter what market you're going after. Find out what they need and want, and where they hang out, and provide it to them where they are in formats that they can navigate and understand. It's really that simple, with minor adjustments that will allow you to create laser-targeted information for your audience.

What Products and Services Are Seniors Looking For?

Seniors typically like to buy for themselves, their children, their grandchildren and other loved ones. At times, they need to buy specialty products such as home health products, burial insurance, funeral plots and other things that people don't like thinking about until they reach a certain age – usually directly after they themselves lose a parent.

To answer the question what products and services are seniors looking for really requires more insight into the audience in question, because "the senior market" is so broad and inclusive. Niche it down to a subgroup such as grandparents. Then you can niche it down even more - to grandparents who like to knit, for example.

The truth is, seniors are looking for the same products and services that other people are looking for based on the stage of life they're in. If they're empty nesters, they may be looking for exciting vacations; if they're newly retired, they might be looking to sell a home and move into an active senior community.

You simply need to segment your market to determine what they want and need. If you already have a product, then you need to find a way to fit your product into the niche of people that need your product. For example, if you offer senior home care services, ask yourself who exactly needs these services. It's not all seniors; it's only a subset of seniors that need your services. Who are they? Where are they? How can you reach them?

Grandparents

A grandparent can be as young as even 40 years old and will need to be marketed to differently than someone who is much older. The things a 40-year-old grandparent does with their grandkids isn't all that different other than it's likely the 40-year-old grandparent still works at a normal job and can't spend as much time taking children to Disney as an older retired grandparent. Here are some markets that are likely to interest grandparents:

- Disney / family vacation trips
- Toys
- Puzzles
- Books
- College investing
- Cameras
- Photo clubs
- Photography clubs
- Activity sheets
- Kids cookbooks
- Insurance
- Ballet lessons
- Karate lessons
- Party planning
- Clothing for kids
- Memory blankets
- Arts and crafts

Boomers

This is the age group born between 1946 and 1965. This makes the youngest of them around 50 years of age. What type of things are 50-year-olds looking for? Perhaps they want to downsize their home due to having grown children who have moved out, or they're tired of taking care of a large home. Maybe they want to start taking more vacations due to having longer vacation time at work.

- 55+ living communities
- Senior clubs / centers
- Large comfortable vehicles
- Comfortable clothing and shoes

- Safe investments
- Insurance
- College for their kids
- Travel and experiences
- Gym membership
- Yoga paraphernalia
- Hobby products
- Health-related products
- Lawn care
- Personal cooking services
- House cleaning
- Eye care
- Books
- Culture

Social Security Recipients

You can start getting social security as young as 62 or 63 depending upon the date of your birth, so go with anyone older than 62 and collecting social security. Some of these people may be on fixed incomes. For others, the money they get from social security is simply extra. So you'd have two different segments of this market - fixed income seniors and extra income seniors. These products are likely to be of interest to these groups:

- Discount clubs
- Diet and exercise advice
- Phone service
- Insurance
- Travel
- Movies
- Home security
- Magazines
- Books
- Tax services
- Home services
- Health services
- Lawn care
- Personal cooking services
- House cleaning
- Eye care
- Dental care
- Car rental

Seniors aren't a homogenous group. They can be anyone from grandparents of 40 and on up the ladder through 95 years of age. Break down your audience to determine which seniors fit in with your goals, need what you offer, and can afford to buy what you are offering.

Senior Marketing Do's and Don'ts

You've likely gathered that it's easy to make a mistake with this audience. The audience is so diverse that it's imperative that you understand that all seniors aren't the same - just as all women aren't the same. Follow these tips to avoid making too many mistakes.

- **Segment Your Market** – Market segmentation is vitally important no matter who you're marketing to, but it's even starker in the senior community. Once you decide to market to individuals over 50, you need to segment them down to interests, spending power, and other demographics to ensure that your marketing will be spot on for these groups.
- **Focus on Lifestyle Not Price** – While seniors do like a good discount, they're not usually overly focused on price. They like to focus on things that add joy to their lives and the quality of things that last a long time over cheap things.
- **Provide Easy Solutions** – Seniors are also interested in solutions to their problems. Do they need to pick up trash easily without bending? Maybe they need a tool to do that? Do they need to be able to entertain their grandchildren? Perhaps a tip sheet on activities for kids based on ages will work for them.
- **Give Them Information** – Seniors also like to read and learn about things before they buy. They want to know the ins and outs of many similar solutions before they choose a particular one. And remember, they're not going to choose only on price. Quality will matter a great deal too.
- **Use the Right Images** – Don't use stereotypical images. Remember, in the research seniors don't consider themselves seniors because that means "old" to them. Even 80-year-old people don't want to think of themselves as old. Use vibrant images with lots of color of real people who represent your audience.
- **Use Larger Fonts** – One thing that is inescapable is that as people age, their vision gets worse. Therefore, if you want to market to them online or offline, use larger fonts for your text. For websites, use about 16-point font; for print use about 14-point font for the smallest fonts on the page.
- **Use High Color Contrast** – For much the same reason as you need to use larger fonts for seniors, it's better to use high contrast colors too. Black and white are fine for print; for websites use blues, whites, blacks, reds, greens but stick to one or two strong colors with black text and plenty of white space.
- **Reassure Them about Security** – One thing seniors are concerned about in a big way these days is security, both online and offline. Therefore, you must do all you can to reassure them that their information and data is secure when they work with you.
- **No One-Size-Fits-All Solutions** – Remember, this demographic is huge with approximately 100 million members. Therefore, avoid trying to use any type of one-size-fits-all solutions for your audience. Niche it down and segment as much as possible.
- **Focus on Benefits** – This is a marketing practice that is true no matter who your market consists of. Always focus on benefits over features. Providing "yard care" is what you

may do, but it's not the benefit you provide. Instead of lawn care, you provide freedom, or more golfing time, to your customer.

- **Expand on Longevity** – Seniors like buying things that are quality and that last a long time. They still like to think that the things they buy will be things that their children can also get use from. So, if you can sell your item to them with the idea that their kids will get to use it too, so much the better.
- **Tell Stories That Matter to Them** – It will really work if you can incorporate stories into your marketing that resonate with them, such as spending time with grandchildren, experiencing new freedom due to being empty nesters, traveling during retirement and so forth.
- **Don't Downplay Word-of-Mouth Marketing** – The type of marketing experienced buyers like best is good old-fashioned word-of-mouth marketing. They like knowing their friends use the same products that they use, or which a famous person they see as an authority on the topic uses. For seniors using social media, this can take on new meaning for them.
- **Be Positive** – Frame all your marketing in a positive light. A lot of seniors do have some issue or another that isn't so positive, but they don't like focusing on that. Instead, they like focusing on each new day being a gift. Approach your marketing with that in mind for seniors.

Using these do's and don'ts will go far in helping you market to seniors and get real results. Remember that it's important to segment your audience. Find out what they want and need. Identify their fears, and then supply a product that solves their problems and find a way to let them know about it.

Where to Reach Your Senior Audience

While about 12 percent of seniors aren't using computers, most are using some form of a computer such as a smartphone, tablet, laptop or PC. Therefore, once you segment your audience, you can identify where to reach them. Here are some ideas based on some of the audiences we've already identified.

- **Senior Magazines** – There are numerous magazines devoted to seniors and their issues. The first one that may come to mind is AARP, but there are others that are both online and offline. Locate these magazines and then you can market through them by placing an advertisement or strategically publishing articles in the magazine about your niche subject.
- **Church** – You may feel funny about marketing to your audience via church, but it's nothing new. Business cards are handed out, people share via word-of-mouth about the great hairdresser or the plumber who fixed their septic tank, and more. Be creative about how you approach people at church, by getting involved by sponsoring events and making yourself known in the church outside of your business.

- Senior Center – Most towns have a senior center of some sort that offers activities for seniors such as computer lessons, painting lessons, group exercise classes and things like that. Yours probably does too. This is a great place to find seniors. Try volunteering to help with taxes or something that has to do with your business, to help spread the word about your offerings.
- The Library – Many seniors still love paper books and show it by participating in their local "Friends of the Library Club" by volunteering at the library. Those that don't participate in that part still use the library as their main source of information and books. Most libraries allow you to rent out space for small events. You can do demonstrations, offer a class, do a book signing if you're an author, and more.
- Hobby Clubs – Many seniors have more time to participate in hobby clubs like the garden club, golfing club, or the local model airplane club. This is a great way to reach them. Subscribe to the publications that they create for these groups; you can usually pay for advertising via these, because these clubs need money.
- Social Media – Yes, seniors are using social media. They like Pinterest, Twitter, and Facebook the most. Facebook is very highly frequented by seniors because they like seeing pictures of their grandchildren and it's a great place to play games. According to the Pew Research, seniors on social media is growing faster than any other segment.
- Direct Mail – Many seniors love getting the monthly coupon book in the mail, as well as other forms of advertising. They're more likely to read this mail than their younger counterparts. They like to get mail because it's familiar to them and they were alive when people still wrote letters. A nicely written sales letter personalized for your senior market can do wonders for your bottom line.
- The Radio – Seniors like listening to certain radio shows. You can get the demographic breakdown from the advertising sales department of your local radio stations, as well as national radio stations.
- Public TV – Technically, public TV doesn't have advertisements. However, they do have donors. Depending upon your service or product, you may be able to get your product on one of their fund-raising shows. Or you can have your name mentioned as a big donor, which will bring name recognition to your business.
- TV Ads – You can place local TV ads as well. Your local TV stations will also be able to help you with demographic information, so that you know when and during what shows to place your ads. When you place ads with local TV, it's not as expensive as you may think, and creating a TV spot can be done today with cameras you can buy from Wal-Mart.
- Retargeting Ads – One way to reach seniors via social media is to use retargeting ads. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as by using custom audiences if you have their email address already, or via using a pixel on your website to remarket to them on Facebook.
- Combine Everything – You want to use an integrated approach with seniors, because sometimes it takes them a little longer to bite than your average customer. They like to

gather a lot of information. Send emails, direct mail, and do Facebook ads too - all about the same thing to ensure they're saturated with your information.

Study your audience to find out exactly where they go, who they trust, and what's on their mind. In this way, you'll be able to market to your audience where they are, which is a lot simpler than trying to market to thin air without a plan.

How to Engage the Senior Audience

One of the most important parts of marketing, regardless of where you find your audience or which audience you're marketing to, is engagement. Engagement means to communicate directly with your audience in two-way communication. Depending upon the subset of the senior audience, you may have to work harder to ensure that this happens.

Email

Seniors do use email marketing. In fact, 38 percent of seniors are online and most of them are using email to communicate with their family and friends. They also will sign up for email lists and groups using their email address.

When you email a senior, it's important that you keep it simple and personal. You don't want the email to be too long and cover too much information. Provide links to other types of media such as video about the topic, and give them permission to email you directly back if they have questions.

Do not use "no reply" email addresses. You want them to engage with you in a personal way so that they develop and grow trust in you and your offerings. Use a personal name for your return email, and first names will go far in establishing that trust.

Social Media

Seniors that use email are also savvy about using social media. They really like Facebook because they can use it to communicate with friends, play games, join support groups, and see pictures of their grandchildren.

To engage on social media, create a special group for your demographic that is very narrow. For example, if your market is grandparents of school-age children, create a group such as Grandparent Activity Ideas. This will enable them to communicate with you and other grandparents about ideas of what to do with grandkids when they visit.

If you can relate it to your products or services, create an app that is a game that they can play with ads inside the app. Many seniors love playing all sorts of games on Facebook and on their tablets.

Telephone

Many seniors still like the good old-fashioned phone for communication. When seniors buy something from you or sign up for your email list and download your 100 activities to do with grandkids, give them a call to thank them.

Have a few ideas of questions to ask them to get to know them better and let them ask you questions. It's amazing how much more interaction you'll get from them online when you call them to invite them to your online group.

In addition, if you market to seniors you must have telephonic customer service. You don't need to offer it 24/7. But, if you don't have a number for them to call, it's unlikely they're going to trust you, because they like getting personal service when they spend money.

In-Person Events

Another way to engage with your senior audience is via in-person events. Seniors are more hands-on than the younger generation and like being around people in person. Try smaller, more exclusive events that offer information and culture to your audience for the best results.

For example, if you want to teach yoga to older students, do small local classes at 55+ senior living communities. From there you can tell them about your website, your online classes, and your offline classes.

Another example: if you own a bricks-and-mortar business, you can have an event at your place of business. Local senior centers often host talent contests, car shows, cooking events, art shows, and more right at their business location. The idea is to get more people in to see your community and to give the residents something fun to look forward to.

In-person events are a win-win for any bricks-and-mortar or personal service-based business. They also work for training programs such as teaching computer skills to seniors in person in your local area.

Influencers

Seniors have certain people that they like and trust too. If you can locate those influencers and get them to drop your name, you can build engagement and rapport faster than if you had to do it all on your own. You can find influencers by looking at senior publications such as large print Reader's Digest, AARP magazine and website and others.

Look for popular senior and baby boomer blogs and take a page out of their book. If they have a large audience, then that's where you want to be - right? If there is a blogger who is popular among your audience, send them a sample of your product or offer them a coupon for your services, and create a plan to work with them to market your products and services to your shared audience.

When an influencer mentions your product or service to their audience, you automatically become part of the "in-crowd" when it comes to online marketing. You'll be surprised at how well such a thing works. The reason is because it's very much like word-of-mouth marketing except that the influencer is likely a stranger. But, because they're so popular, your market feels as if they know them. Due to the trust they've already developed, you get to walk away with that same trust.

Respond Fast

When a senior sends an email, or calls customer service, or reaches out in some way (including on social media), they are expecting an answer. They want to get answers fast and can be impatient to wait too long. Ensure that you have systems set up that let the customer know approximately when you'll get back to them so that they don't get angry or worried as they wait.

In addition, all the marketing engagement activities that you'd do for any other audience work too. If they comment on a blog post, comment back to them. If they share and speak in the group, be sure to respond personally. The more you can interact with the outspoken few, the more the others who are quiet will also trust you.

Engagement requires you to understand who you're talking to and how to explain things to them based on their level of understanding. You may need patience sometimes to teach a senior something about technology to get them to where you want them to be. But, seniors today are a lot savvier than they're often given credit for.

Focus on Lifestyle

One thing to do when marketing to seniors is to place the focus more on lifestyle issues than almost anything else. Seniors like to belong to exclusive clubs and socialize with special people. They like feeling like VIPs and they like enjoying a rewarding lifestyle after all their hard work all their life.

When you can make them feel special, included, and give them the information they need to get the help that you offer, you'll create customers who truly appreciate what you bring to the table because you appreciate them. When you focus on price, you just become cheap in their eyes.

Many seniors like taking cruises and doing other things that they consider to be a luxury. In their minds, they're at the culmination of their lives and deserve the finer things. If you can provide them the feeling of richness and being cared for and taken care of, while also helping them save money, you'll find yourself on the winning side. It's one reason time shares and travel clubs go over so well with this demographic. It makes them feel special and like a VIP.

Make Marketing More Seasonal

Seniors like their holidays and take the seasons seriously. After all, they've been through a lot of them and may not have as many in front of them as behind them. That makes every holiday even more special to them.

If you can tie your offerings into holiday exclusive specials for your audience, they'll respond in record numbers. For example, if you are an author of a cookbook about teaching kids to cook that you want to market to grandparents, you can tie this to summer break for kids because that is the time frame that grandparents will likely be with their grandkids for a longer period.

Tie travel to warm places to the winter season in the area the senior lives. For example, if you have a beach house in Florida, you can market it to seniors who live in Michigan as a winter getaway retreat, helping you earn more money in the off season.

The trick is to tie your product or service to important times in their life based on what is important to the subset of seniors you want to market to. If your market consists of seniors who like to knit because you sell knitting supplies, tie your patterns to the holidays and to special occasions. This can work even for a cleaning service - if you offer to spruce up the house extra special during holidays by offering a decorating service, for example.

Seasonal solutions for your ideal audience will go far in helping your senior market feel cared for by you.

Include Online and Offline Marketing

We've already discussed some of this, but it's important to stress that you should market both online and offline for your senior audience - unless your research shows your audience to be part of the 12 percent that doesn't use computers and get online. But for the most part, seniors are online and growing with every passing day.

In fact, many senior living centers and even assisted living places are becoming wired so that their customers can use their devices. By using an integrated marketing approach for your senior market, you'll be sure to reach the exact audience you need to reach to make the offers you want to make to them.

When your audience views your information in a variety of places online and offline, they'll grow to trust you more. Establishing that trust will be essential to getting this audience to spend money with you, whether it's online or offline.

Provide the Information They Need

Finally, it all boils down to information. Seniors are savvy, experienced shoppers. They have no problem spending hours asking questions and kicking the tires before deciding to make a purchase - if they make one at all. They like to read product reviews; online review sites are often frequented by seniors, and membership at sites like Care.com, and HomeAdvisor.com has a high rate of seniors aboard.

The reason is simple. They like to check out all aspects of a product before buying. If they want to buy a car, for example, they're going to turn to consumer reports to find out the information about the different models of cars and recommendations first. Then they're going to talk to their family and friends, and then lastly, they're going to search the internet for information.

When they find that information, they're going to look at the website to determine if it's trustworthy. If you don't have a telephone number where you can be reached, and an easy-to-use contact form, help desk, or ticketing system, it's unlikely they're going to want to buy from you at all.

Therefore, using a process to provide the information will work well with seniors. For example, to use a truly integrated marketing approach that we keep talking about, you'll need to know where your audience "hangs out" - both online and offline.

Then you use direct mail that offers information about your dot com with an offer for a free download, such as three recipes kids love to make with grandma. Now you have their email address and their mailing address.

Send them an email before you send them something in the mail. Tell them what's coming and what to do about it. Then after you've sent the snail mail, and they've had time to view the information, send them another email message asking them what they thought about the information they received.

Next, use technology to remarket to them on social media about the same information you sent to them via email and snail mail. Invite them to a webinar, or a teleseminar so that they can learn even more.

As you can tell, this approach is very powerful because it repeats the information to them in different formats so that it's easier to remember. Plus, it establishes credibility because they're smart enough to know that you're putting a lot of work into getting their attention.

Marketing to seniors isn't much different from marketing to any other audience. It's just that often seniors feel left out in the marketing spectrum because so many things seem to use young people to market even to older people. Look at all the makeup commercials and even age creams that use overly photoshopped images, or women younger than 30 to try to sell their lotions and potions.

Therefore, if you have a good product for seniors and you can perfect your marketing to be more targeted using accurate depictions of seniors in your advertising, along with the words that help them relate to you, you'll be far ahead of your competition.

Final Thoughts

The fact is, within a short time people over 50 years old will be about half of the entire population. They already control over 70 percent of all disposal income and while they're slower to spend their money, they will do so when they're ready to buy after having done their due diligence.

As we all age, and technology becomes ubiquitous, more seniors will be active online. Not because seniors are rushing out to learn technology, but because it won't be long until seniors always knew technology just like the millennials of today. They know no life without it, much like older people of today don't remember a life without automobiles, television, or radio.

As it is today, only 12 percent of people over 50 aren't using computers. That's such a small portion that it is clear that marketing to seniors both online and offline is an important and effective way to connect with your senior audience.

Seniors like to share pictures, movies, music and knowledge online. They like to search for information about health issues, politics, travel, and finances. They like to socialize on social media by playing games like "Words with Friends" and others. Other than the physical realities of aging, such as poorer eyesight and a thickening middle, most seniors today are active online at some point each day.