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Generational marketing: When you were born affects how you buy

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Everyone alive today (yes, even you) falls into one of four generational groups. According to author-lecturer Cam Marston, founder of Generational Insights, knowing when your target customers were born can tell you how they may think and act, and can help improve your message and sales to those demographics. Each American falls into one of these groups:

- * Matures: Born before 1946 (40 million) (John Glenn, Clint Eastwood, Jack Nicholson)
- * Baby Boomers: Born 1946 - 64 (80 million) (Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, Larry Bird, Steven Spielberg)
- * Generation X: Born 1965 - 1979 (60 million) (founders of Google, Dell, Yahoo; Tiger Woods, Matt Damon)
- * Millennials: Born 1980 - 2000 (85 million) (founders/heads of Facebook, YouTube)

In his book, *Generation Selling Tactics That Work*, Marston says it's important to know if buyers and sellers are in different age groups, and "to understand how customers' backgrounds can affect their buying preferences."

Marston says whatever medium you use to attract customers, you must know how to make "the connection." He warns not to assume "all your customers prefer to buy the same way you do." After all, you may be a Baby Boomer - and the targeted buyer may be a Millennial. Knowing the approximate age range of your targeted buyers can help the marketer /seller know how to approach them so the buyer takes notice and listens -- and forms a relationship.

Research shows members of the Matures generation have a sense of sacrifice, patriotism and duty. Their lives were formed by such events as the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, WW II and the Cold War. Matures value loyalty, quality and trust, so once they find a product or service they like, they will remain loyal customers.

Baby Boomers grew up during and were influenced by the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy; by Woodstock, and the sexual revolution. They are known for optimism, self-confidence and ambition. Events of their early years make them competitive, idealistic, avid consumers who like 'face time,' custom solutions and nostalgia. (The first Baby Boomers turned 65 in 2011).

Generation X'ers, the first tech-savvy generation, were molded by Boomer pop culture, MTV /cable, inflation, AIDS, Persian Gulf War, VCR/CD players, the PC and Internet. They can be skeptical, cynical, pessimistic. They do lots of product research and prefer plain, utilitarian styles. They prefer sellers to be brief, authentic, and rely on peer referrals. They want the steak, not the sizzle.

Millennials' outlook was formed by economic prosperity of the 1990s, the technology revolution, 9/11, Iraq / Afghanistan, the Recession, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter. This group has a sense of optimism and entitlement, growing up in a structured and programmed world. They possess social and environmental responsibility. They like instant gratification. When targeting them, be upfront,

authentic; use technology, offer something free.

Author Marston notes that once you understand each group's characteristics, it's easier to "tailor the appeal of your products/services and yourself to fit each generation" you're targeting. For added success, you need to determine what generations your customers come from - and what generations do you want as your clients. Some ideas to explore with your Marketing / PR pro!

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