

Attracting Families and Crossing Generations

This Chapter . . .

- Explains why, despite its changing structure, the family is still the center of many decisions;
- Present a marketing model to better target families and offers some insight about the type of performances a family audience requires;
- Explains the differences among the five living generations; and
- Offers ways to tap into increased arts behavior among the generations.

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Families are changing

What Families?

The massive economic changes of the 20th century account for the family diversity we see today. Older family forms persist, while new forms have risen alongside them.

Because it seemed that the disappearance of traditional roles meant the disappearance of family bonds, more and more marketing strategies targeted individuals, and forgot families. This is a mistake.

True, families are changing. But they are no less important to their members. The emotional bonds within a family are as strong as ever. True again, variations in family structure shake the ways families used to influence buying decisions. But this influence is as strong as ever. And ignoring – or not understanding – this intricate web of influence can be a gross mistake.

What Marketing?

Family marketing does not pretend to reinvent existing marketing practice. But by providing a new way of looking at problems, it offers a new perspective on marketing challenges and leads to new ways of applying marketing techniques, for better results.

Family marketing ideally does everything that individual marketing does, and more. In family marketing – and that is the major distinction with individual marketing – the purchase decision maker and the consumer may be two different people.

Actually, the decision maker may not be an individual, but a group. In fact, “influencers” may be as important to purchases as decision makers.

Family marketing is directed not only “to” families, but “through.”

- Marketing “to” families refers to buying decisions made by all family members for their shared consumption, such as vacations, pizzas, or brands of toothpaste. The family makes the decision and collectively functions as the buying unit.
- Marketing “through” the family describes messages directed to family members, or even relatives living in other households who affect the purchasing decision of a product that will not, or not principally, consume.

The group as decision maker

A family marketing plan must systematically answer the following set of questions:

- **Who is buying for whom?** Which family members will consume the product and
- **which will participate in the purchase decision?** In individual marketing, the same person is both the decision-maker and the consumer. In family marketing, there can be more than one decision-maker, more than one consumer, and they can be different people.

Who are the main characters?

The INITIATOR Initiates purchase, but may, or may not, be the actual consumer

The INFLUENCER may commend, reject or influence the purchase, but has nothing to do with it.

The PURCHASER may be either the decision maker, the consumer, or both, or neither.

- **What is the plot of the purchase?** What are the steps in a typical purchase? **What initiates it?** Do different people have different roles in the sequence? In other words, what script does the family typically follow to make a decision?

- **Who wants what, and when?** What benefits does each of the players seek at each stage of the process? What do the “influencers” want from the purchasing process?

What performance?

The challenge of any family product is to appeal to different segments. There is an easy fix that the tourism industry has used time and time again: to actually allow the parents to have some time alone during their holidays. Club Med, among other companies, has developed a host of resorts with children clubs and babysitting. These services allow the family to be a family when it feels like it, and to separate at other time of the day.

The marketing plan must answer the following questions:

- Who is buying for whom?
- Who are the main characters ?
- What is the plot of the purchase?
- Who wants what, and when?

The Challenge:

To satisfy every member of the family together, at the same time, while staying true to the artistic mission.

“layering” the meaning

Any venue could develop some kind of “children’s club” where kids could stay when parents are enjoying the show or the exhibit. It would be very effective for very young children.

But it is somehow missing the point of a family experience. This experience has to be richer than the addition of the experiences of each of its members if they had come separately. Complicated. The challenge of a family oriented performance is to satisfy every member of the family together, at the same time, while staying true to your artistic mission. Too many “peace making” products, too many “Nutcrackers” try to find a compromise among the different tastes of family members, but end up being bland, insignificant and boring for everybody. Average is awful, in any form of expression.

So what is the solution?

Let me share with you my personal point of view. I just read an essay about Charles Perrault, the author of Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, the Little Red Ridding Hood, Tom Thumb and many other novels that we would rapidly classify as children literature. He actually was describing the power games of the court of Louis the XV. Since he obviously could not launch a frontal attack against him, he disguised his real message under the innocent appearance of children novels.

La Fontaine had done exactly the same almost a century ago, under Louis the XIV, the Sun King, not particularly known for his sense of “constructive criticism”. James Barry with Peter Pan, Lewis Carol with Alice in Wonderland, Victor Hugo with the Hunchback of Notre Dame or Les Miserables: each time the intentions of the author were going way beyond story-telling.

Often, children were not even their primary target. Instead, they were trying to go around censorship or social pressure by burying the true meaning of their art .

They probably did not have the intention to create “family oriented” stories, but they did.

This “layering” is the key to the family appeal of any given performance. A true family performance should allow parents and children to “read” the show at different levels, while enjoying the experience at the same time.

It is sometime necessary to give to each member of the family the right keys to depict each level of the story. Impossible to understand the full meaning of Peter Pan if you don’t know the personal tragedy of James Barry, the real meaning of the Alice in Wonderland if you don’t know the impossible love of Lewis Carroll for the young Alice, the real meaning of the Hunchback if you forget the social climate of the time in which it was written.

I only gave you examples of stories perceived as childish that can also address the parents, but I believe that the reverse also works. With the right amount of explanation or preparation, the first layers of a difficult work can become more accessible to children.

Giving the key is the key.

Recommended Reading
“Marketing to Families”
by Robert Boutiller

Recommended Reading

“Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generational Marketing”
by J. Walker Smith and Ann Clurman.

Generational Marketing: The Basics

Crossing Generations

Whether you are trying to get younger audiences or older audiences, understanding the concepts behind generational marketing can help you construct a more effective marketing strategy. What is generational marketing, you may ask. Well, it’s one way to further define a target market.

We can all remember certain events from our formative years - middle school through college - that will always stay with us. For someone born prior to 1930, that moment may have been Charles Lindbergh making the first trans-Atlantic flight. For another person born around 1950, it was probably when John F. Kennedy was shot. For yet another person born in the early 1970s, it was seeing the space shuttle Challenger explode on live television. Each of these events is one of a string of occurrences that come to define a generation. And, those events together help shape the values of a generation, and later become the filter through which members of the generation judge future events and behavior. These same events are what generational marketers call cohort experiences. Generational marketing is targeting a generational cohort through their shared values and experiences.

Now, clearly, all members of a generation do not always act the same way or make the same decisions. And any marketer who thinks that generational targeting is the only step required in strategic marketing would be wrong. But there is a lot that can be learned through looking at the generations and their respective cohort experiences. When combined with lifestage and current conditions (economic, political, technological), consumer behavior can be better understood.

The Five Generations

Now that we know how generational marketing works, let’s look at the current landscape in the U.S. Today there are five distinct generations in the marketplace, more than at any other time in history. This is partially because we are living longer, and also because we are becoming consumers at an increasingly earlier age.

The five generations can be described as the following:

Mature – born 1909 – 1945

Baby Boom – born 1946 – 1964

Gen X – born 1965 – 1978

Gen Y – born 1979 – 1997

IGeneration (or Gen Z) – born 1998 – current

Note: Not all demographers agree on the beginning and end dates of generations, but they generally agree on the ranges stated above.

As stated earlier, generational marketing is based on the shared experiences of the generation. It's those experiences that define the values for each cohort, and ultimately the way they act as consumers and arts participants.

The Matures

The Mature generation is not called that simply because they are currently the oldest generation. Instead, it is because they were forced to mature at a much earlier age due to societal conditions during their formative years. This is the generation of the Great Depression and of World War II. They lived, together, through times of great trial. And they saw the fruits of their labor in post-war America.

The Matures came of age during the New Deal, a time when the federal government came to the aid of many and pulled the country out of great despair. They were the beneficiaries of the GI Bill, which made getting a college education a reality for many who never previously thought it possible. They came of age at a time when the playing field was greatly leveled – through depression, war, and acts of government. Viewing these experiences as a group, it is easy to see how their values were shaped.

Hard work, self-sacrifice, teamwork - these are the calling cards of the Mature generation. "If we all just pull together, we can accomplish good." With these values putting the needs of the group ahead of those of the individual, also come a tremendous respect for authority and a predilection toward conformity. This generation believed, and believes, in its leaders. They also believe in subordinating individual differences in order to be a part of the group, the larger whole.

Matures' Stats:

- Born 1909 - 1945
- 68.3 million individuals
- \$24,000 median annual household income
- 64% married
- 36% employed
- 65% own their home

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Baby Boom's Stats:

- Born 1946 - 1964
- 77.6 million individuals
- \$43,000 median annual household income
- 72% married
- 83% employed
- 63% own their home

In their minds, there is no room or reason to change those beliefs that are core to how one lives his life.

Baby Boom

The Baby Boom is the generation that you can't help but notice. They've been the big news in demography since they were born. And they were born into a time of tremendous affluence, one without precedence in American history. They came of age in a time when suburbia was being created, when color television became the center of family entertainment. Yet at the same time, they were surrounded by images of struggle and tremendous change – the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam conflict, Nixon and Watergate. Lastly, we can't forget that this was the era of sex, drugs and rock & roll – personal freedoms, escape from the structures of society.

All of these experiences shaped a generation with significantly different values than the Matures. The Boomers' entire formative years were marked by unprecedented prosperity, giving them the belief that they will always find success and prosperity. College became an expectation, not something for only the wealthy few, following the doors opened by the GI Bill of the previous generation. Boomers also developed a strong belief in good vs. evil – every situation is black or white, good or evil, with few to no gray areas.

This is also the generation that craves control, seeking individual means to serve their desired individual ends. Boomers are known for being rule breakers, sometimes toward the greater societal good, but sometimes only for personal gain. And now they are marked by their considerable nostalgia for those things reminiscent of their formative years, and their desire to be forever young. Hence, Beatles songs being used to sell all kinds of consumer products, and the continued success of anti-wrinkle creams and hair replacement therapy.

This generation will continue to be a venerable force in the marketplace for many years to come. And as they have always done, they will continue to change the way we think about traditional societal roles, especially the way we think of aging.

Gen X

The media has portrayed them as slackers, over-educated bar tenders, still living at home with mom and dad until well into their adult years. Accurate? Not!

GenX is small enough to be easily overlooked, and easily misunderstood, especially by older generations judging them through their own values. While this generation did not know the trials of war or significant social conflict, their generational experiences tended to fall closer to home. This is the first generation to experience divorce - as children - on a large scale. If you are a Gen Xer, even if your parents didn't divorce, your friends' parents did. Xers were often shuttled from one house to another, depending on the day of the week or season of the year. Blended families became the norm, with step-siblings and step-grandparents often being more present than direct blood relations.

This is also the generation who saw sex change from being an expression of love and personal freedom (i.e. free love) to a matter of life and death. AIDS reached epidemic proportions during their formative years, changing sex education from a study of reproductive organs to lessons in sexually transmitted diseases and ways to prevent them. Pregnancy became the least of a teenager's worries about being sexually active. In the area of drugs, no longer was society getting psychedelic with marijuana or LSD. During Xers' formative years, drug use, as portrayed by the media, had escalated to crack cocaine. Drugs now offered serious addiction and the crimes that went along with supporting the habit.

Speaking of media, this is the generation of both Sesame Street and MTV. Television was part of their life from an early age. The lovable muppet characters on Sesame Street taught an entire generation to count to ten in Spanish. Later, MTV changed the face of television combining music with visual presentation, cutting between scenes at a rapid-fire pace.

So if Gen Xers aren't the slackers described above, what effect did these events have on the generation? Well, they are surrounded by a sense of uncertainty, risk, and ultimately, pragmatism. Nothing in their lifetime has ever been a certainty, from the state of their family to the state of the economy. Thus, everything has an element of risk to it. Xers have responded in two distinct ways - immersion and hibernation. Some Xers choose to overcome risk by immersing themselves in it - thus the explosion of extreme sports like bungee jumping and white water rafting. Others have chosen to avoid risk

Gen X 's Stats:

- Born 1965 - 1978
- 44.6 million individuals
- \$38,000 median annual household income
- 47% married
- 87% employed
- 53% own their home

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Gen Y 's Stats:

- Born 1979 - 1997
- 81 million individuals still in their formative years
- weekly spending of \$84 on average
- 31% employed part-time

altogether, hibernating at home, whether their own or their parents'. In every choice Xers see both good and bad. All decisions come down to picking the lesser of two evils.

Diversity, in all its forms, is a hallmark of Gen X. The battles of the Civil Rights Movement, the Feminist Movement, and the Gay Movement are history to this generation. They are living the new realities achieved by these battles. Gen Xers accept that all others are not exactly like them, and that's okay, even preferable. Diversity is much more interesting than homogeneity.

In a twisted version of the Boomer nostalgia, Xers enjoy retro-eclectic chic. Retro - eclectic what? The phenomenon can be described as "everything old is new again, with a twist". The return of bell-bottoms, sampling of old soul hits in new hip-hop creations - all easily re-styled at the click of computer mouse.

Lastly, there is the attitude that Xers are famous for - been there, done that. If it's not new, they have no time for it. If there is any aspect of this generation that has infiltrated the mainstream consciousness, it is this attitude.

Gen Y

Gen Y, Echo Boom, the Millenials - whatever you call them, they are the next big force in America. Bigger than the original Baby Boom, Gen Y finds their parents both in the Boom generation, as well as Gen X. And they are already proving their might in the marketplace as they enter the workforce.

Technology is the key marker of this generation. Whether it is the unlimited choice of over 800 channels on Direct TV, or the immediate availability of the World Wide Web, technology has shaped this generation in a way not seen previously. Whole sites exist on the internet to enable this generation of under-25 consumers to shop via e-commerce sites, an activity that usually requires a credit card.

While many are still in their formative years, Gen Y is already exhibiting some clear generational values. They are both idealistic and neo-traditionalists. An article in American Demographics said, "Picture Eisenhower with a pierced eyebrow." They believe the future is good, and that it will take a more traditional shape than their Boomer or Xer predecessors ever imagined.

Gen Y is incredibly savvy, smart to the ways of the consumer world. Having been sold to since they learned to talk, this generation views advertising more as a form

of entertainment than sales pitch. Everything is a sales pitch, so it might as well be entertaining. Yet, this generation values function over form. They are much more likely to research a product before buying it, and go for the solidly functional over the solely flashy.

Technology has been a part of their lives from a very young age, and as a result, Gen Yers are not simply tech-savvy, but techno-fierce. They know how technology works, and they will use it to their advantage. Most households with only one computer have it housed in the bedroom of a Gen Yer. iPhones, cell phones, instant messaging - these are all part of the daily life of the average Gen Yer.

iGeneration

The iGeneration or Generation Z is closely following on the heels of Generation Y. The iGeneration has had an outsized influence on the marketplace through the rise of the “tween.” These Hannah Montana, Jonas Brothers loving kids have never lived without the Internet. These “digital natives” are highly connected multitaskers. Members of this generation are used to gender equality inside and outside the home; many have been raised with same-sex parents. They are also growing up in the shadow of 9/11 - a world where terrorism and homeland security are constant concerns.

Generational Influences and the Arts

So what does all of this mean for the arts? Well, there are a number of implications, mostly to how we package and present our offerings to the different target groups.

First, an explanation. For many years, the arts were able to rely on a few tried and true promotional techniques to pull in audiences. Then, these tried and true techniques started to have diminishing returns. Part of the explanation lies in generational marketing. The tried and true techniques worked for so long because they were directed at a single generation all at a single lifestage. The landscape changed, however, with many more generations entering the marketplace for the arts, and all at divergent lifestages.

The downturn in subscriptions can also be accounted for through generational values. The Mature generation were the last planners, Boomers and Xers are much less likely to plan ahead, especially in the long-term fashion required by traditional subscriptions. Also, the sense of duty to support cultural organizations that could be found among Matures has not been passed on to younger generations.

So what can generational marketing tell us for the future? Plenty.

Matures and the Arts

Matures are now senior citizens, and with aging comes changing needs.

- Many Matures are grandparents and are actively seeking products that promote time with their grandchildren.
- Timing is also important. Weekday afternoons are preferable to other participation options.
- Travel can be difficult. Therefore, arts organizations could look for new ways to get Matures to their venues.
- Emphasize the safety of your venue. Plenty of well-lit parking, clean bathrooms, easy access – these are important qualities to Mature patrons.
- They expect senior discounts, even if they don't need them. To this generation, they have earned the right to those discounts, even if their retirement fund gives them generous returns.
- Give them time and attention. Good customer service to matures means taking the time to service their specific needs, not giving them a quick answer to get them off of the phone or out the door.

In the area of promotion, two things are key with the Mature generation. First, they generally trust the mainstream, established media as an authority. This generation still watches the nightly national news and believes the anchormen. Second, multi-generational messages will have the greatest appeal. Remember, this is the generation that

sublimated individual desire to the larger needs of the group. They feel more at home thinking of themselves as part of something larger.

Boomers and the Arts

The Baby Boom generation's consistent re-defining of the rules has a definite impact on their participation in the arts, and the kinds of messages that will appeal to them.

- Individuality is the name of game. Therefore, the traditional “rules” of customer service surrounding ticket subscriptions, pre-set subscriptions, and membership, don't apply or appeal to them.
- This generation is consistently seeking spiritual enlightenment. Since they have not sought this through traditional religious outlets, the arts can provide this.
- Messages should communicate simplicity and escape. Boomers don't want to work for their arts participation, thus words like “challenging” will not yield results.
- Products and messages with nostalgia will have great appeal. Nearly anything with a 60's theme will find great success among Boomers.

Promotion is one of the biggest hurdles to increasing Boomer audiences. First, television is still the overwhelming media of choice for this generation. And the reality is that most arts organizations cannot afford this medium. Second, the more cost effective internet media does not have the expected impact with this generation. While they can be found on-line, Boomers associate technology more with work than leisure. Thus, the internet is not the first, or even second, place they are likely to seek information about arts events.

Gen X and the Arts

Xers offer tremendous potential for arts audience growth. Since they didn't receive the traditional arts curriculum in school, the live arts are a new and unusual experience, something Xers seek. Some ways to reach to Xers:

- Facilitate eclecticism. Xers need to believe they will be getting something new everytime they visit your venue. A mix and match approach to subscription/ membership will work best.
- Leverage the “honesty” of live arts events with Xers. There is no hiding behind technology in live performance, and Xers find this fascinating, and yes, risky.
- Diversity is a hallmark. On the downside, this means that work by dead, white men will have the least appeal. On the upside, it opens the door to a wide variety of artist presentations.
- Fun equals adventure for most Xers. Therefore the arts need to provide a total experience in the mode of Blue Man Group or Cirque de Soleil.
- Xers are at a split lifestage, some are household building while others are new parents. This splits an already small target into an even smaller one since parents with children under 6 will generally not participate in arts events, unless specifically designed for young children.
- As a result of their shifting familial structures, this generation more closely associates with friends than family. But while the source may have changed, word of mouth is still a key marketing tool.
- Fewer Xers carry cash. Their money management of choice involves credit and debit cards, so you better accept plastic if you want Xers to participate in your offerings.

Traditional arts promotion is often what keeps Xers from trying unfamiliar offerings. Remember, this is an extremely visual and action-oriented generation. Promotional materials need to reflect the nature of the arts experience, and often it is a type that will attract Xers. Also, Xers are extremely suspicious of anything that smacks of the hard sell. Thus, “This season's must see!” is an instant turn-off. Avoid hyperbole and you just might have a chance of attracting Xers.

Lastly, the internet is the information source of choice. Increasingly smaller numbers of Xers read newspapers for news or leisure activity information. They are much more likely to turn to Facebook, Yelp.com or even one powered by the local paper.

Yers and the Arts

This generation is full of casual curators. Much of their arts participation is self-selected and customized like the music in their iPods. Their independent nature is changing the model of arts attendance to be more event-driven, responsive and audience inclusive.

- As new traditionalists, Gen Yers are looking for eclectic date nights. Museum attendance is up among this group, and they dress up for it. After-hours parties in cultural spaces have become the new “in” place for this generation.
- Being at a young age, Gen Yers tend to travel in packs. Before they get to the traditional date night, they are likely to go on “group” dates where no particular pairs are determined. To leverage this behavior, arts organizations could offer group packages for smaller groups, such as 5 or 6, instead of the usual 10 or 20.
- This generation is predicted (and has already begun) to marry younger and have children younger, well within their early twenties. This life-stage will conflict with increased arts participation.

The internet has had a significant influence on this generation’s buying patterns. They are accustomed to finding significant product information on the web, before having to make a purchase decision. If you do not provide this level of information, you are likely to lose the sale. Also, the internet is the first, and sometimes only, source of information for Gen Y. The computer is such a regular part of their lives, they expect to be able to complete all transactions on-line.

The iGeneration and the Arts

This group is full of influencers that can’t stop texting in class. They have heavy exposure to “commercialized” arts through Disney extravaganzas like “High School Musical.” However, they are getting involved in real-life performances as well. 32.8% of parents in the NEA’s 2008 participation study reported taking their 5-17 year old to a theater, music, or dance performance outside of school.

Keep Your Objectivity

For most arts organizations, there is potential within all of the generations for audience development. And most arts products can be cross-marketed to multiple generations. But one marketing truism remains true in generational marketing – you are not your target audience. Keeping an objective view of your target will position your organization for the greatest success.

Generational myopia can plague even the most talented marketers. Generational myopia is what happens when members of one generation attempt to describe and understand the members of another generation. A disconnect can occur when the actions of the new generation are interpreted through the values and experiences of the other generation, usually the older generation.

However, it's not simply a matter of being “young at heart” or hip. Younger marketers can suffer from generational myopia when attempting to target older audience members as well. It's really a matter of opening the mind to new concepts and fully doing the necessary homework before targeting any new audiences. What do they value? What kind of experiences are they looking for from their arts participation? Where do they get information? How do they process that information? With whom do they attend arts events? When do they attend arts events? What currently keeps them away?

The above questions are not specific to generational marketing, but are used in any target marketing. Generational marketing is simply another tool in your tool box. And remember what the authors of *Rocking the Ages* stated so aptly, “You must walk with them in their shoes, not walk on them in your shoes.”