

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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Geezertising

Will we adjust advertising standards for an aging population?

I read recently about a group of ad industry veterans who started a new agency to do the style of creative work they used to do—15 and 25 years ago. It was hard to read the profiles and quotes of these dudes without hearing Grandpa Simpson's voice in my head—"And in those days, type was hand kerned..."

For a moment, I thought it was a silly idea—but then I realized these guys might be just the ones to fill a niche that's becoming larger by the minute.

Americans are living longer, and we're at a point where senior citizens (and those about to be) are everywhere, and while they still count their change slowly and carefully at the checkout counter, they've got more change to spend than ever before.

The reality will hit us all—just because the baby boom generation is getting older, their vanity won't make them healthier. They'll need their Metamucil and their adult diapers and their reading glasses and their sensible shoes.

Will advertising adjust? How will our industry sell these products to an aging population still obsessed with youth?

For most people, tastes in pop culture are formed in, well, their formative years—teens and early twenties. It's not that they won't change and experiment with new brands— but there's less impulsiveness. Brands don't define older people in quite the same way brands define teenage life. However, the ad industry will still have to find ways to position brands to appeal to an ever-older audience.

An even bigger dilemma looms. Stylistically, much of today's "edgy" advertising may not resonate. These consumers will seek out what's familiar. MTV style quick editing doesn't work for generations that weren't weaned on it. 12-point body copy doesn't work for aging eyes. Ironic humor? Probably not. It's possible the disparity between breakthrough creative and marketing effectiveness will get wider and wider.

For young creatives (and ad people across all disciplines), bridging the learning gap will take a lot of work—people of Generation X and Generation Y can tell when ads that purport to speak to them don't ring true, and older generations are no different.

It's no secret that for the most part, long careers in advertising are rare. Will the industry retain more older workers because they understand the needs of this audience or will youth prevail like always?

I suppose if there's enough profit in a certain type of ad technique or market segment, the ad industry will chase it full force. That's the one thing that never changes.