

The Boon of the Aging Boomer: Structural Design Needs To Be Inclusive

By Simon Gainey



As demographic slugs go, the Baby Boomers represent a huge proportion of spending power in the consumer product market, and they are not getting any younger. Package designers need to think about this demographic in new ways through an “inclusive” design philosophy.

The 80 million strong Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are unlike their parents in several ways:

- They are in denial about getting older and are looking for “age-defying solutions.”
- They are often financially secure and “free,” now that the kids have grown up.
- They are usually highly informed, particularly about their health and well-being.
- The term “retirement” no longer applies; more appropriate is “a new lease on life.”

Of course, the Boomer phenomenon is not a new one, and they have

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been strongly influencing the market for years. The difference today is that these consumers are undergoing a period of transition that significantly affects how they experience and use packaging, both mentally and physically.

Deteriorating eyesight means that Boomers struggle with package labeling and graphics legibility. This can manifest itself in declining visual acuity, “near”



accommodation, reduced contrast sensitivity, reduced color sensitivity, or sensitivity to glare. Boomers struggle both in the store and at home to see a whole host of information crammed on today’s packaging. This affects:

- Brand recognition and claim statements.
- Understanding variants and flavors in store.
- Reading labels and ingredients.
- Opening and use instructions.
- Dosage, preparation, and usage guidance.
- Expiration dates.

Loss of hand and finger mobility, weak grip, inability to squeeze, and reduced strength directly impact Boomers’ ability to open, use, and close packaging. The aging process has brought more meaning to “easy open.” Common Boomer complaints are:



- Tamper-evident seals that are near impossible to open.
- Tear openings that are inconsistent and fiddly.



This Walgreens prescription bottle cap is designed to be both child-resistant and senior-friendly, depending on the side of the cap the consumer uses. As empty-nest Boomers age, innovations like this might prove to be valuable brand building tools in consumer goods categories.

- Small closures that are tricky to grip and open.
- “High” force openings on caps, seals, openings.
- Complicated child-resistant caps.
- Heavy lifting and difficult dispensing or pouring.

Like everyone, Boomers’ **cognitive performance** (the ability to process and understand information) will decline over time. Complicated product application, dosing and



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