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Effectively Reaching the Generation X & Y Markets

Tips From Sherif Zaki Salons & Spas in Delaware

By Hannah Mayo

Spas are experiencing a shift in clientele from Baby Boomers to one made up of the X and Y generations. As Generation X -- born between 1965 and 1980 as well as Generation Y born between 1981 and 1995 visit spas in record numbers, they are shaping the experience to meet their own distinctive needs, wants and desires. The buying power and unique attributes of these two generations is changing how salons and spas need to communicate to their audience. The professionals at Sherif Zaki Salon & The Oasis Spa share their tips on how to successfully communicate to each specific and distinct target market.

As a spa owner or professional, you should feel lucky -- both Generations X and Y feel "spa-entitled". This means they will keep coming back. They perceive spas as necessities rather than occasional indulgences, seeking out wellness rather than pampering. They will also often visit spas in groups, creating the relatively new trend of social spa-ing. These generations exhibit an extraordinary comfort level with cosmetic med-spa procedures, and are adopting them for prevention purposes.

On the flip side, these generations do not respond to traditional marketing like previous generations did. In order to reach these markets, spas need to rethink everything from design, to service menus, to communication devices. All spas will need to embrace new marketing and communication techniques and tools.

Generation X and How You Reach Them

Representing over 50 million consumers, it is important to know that Generation X is the first tech-savvy generation and is one of the best educated. They are often the children of divorce. Therefore, they tend to replace family with friends. They are also likely to postpone marriage and parenting. Generation X is interested in lifelong education and as consumers are less brand-loyal and trustworthy.

This generation expects useful products. As a group, they place less value on a product or service's reputation and focus more on the greater value of affordable quality. This market is much more practical than generations before them. They need to believe that they are receiving value.

Xers dislike when services or products are portrayed as "hip". Any attempt to make a product, service or advertisement appear to be contemporary or hip may appear comical to this generation and make them feel patronized by your attempts. You should also be wary of the use of hard-sell tactics. Bashing Generation X members over the head with a message will simply not work. On the other hand, humor, especially bizarre and thought provoking, for the most part can be effective.

Generation Xers are realists. They trust themselves and their friends. Beyond that, they usually tend to dismiss the claims of marketers as simply that -- claims. Straight talk is more effective than hype for this market. Given their lifelong exposure to mass media and advertising, they are well aware of manipulation. To this group, information provided through the media will not be accepted as factual.

Direct mail has proven to be one of the most successful communication tools for attracting and maintaining the attention of this generation. According to a recent study conducted by InnoMedia, NuStats, and Vertis, "86% of Generation Xers bring in the mail the day it's delivered. Furthermore, 68% of Generation X direct mail readers have used coupons received in the mail. Also, Generation X consumers rate 75% of the mail they receive as valuable." With these impressive statistics, it is vital that you begin or continue a direct mail campaign to reach this target market. Sherif Zaki Salon & The Oasis Spa sends out flyers and postcards with a succinct, clear message and service or product offer. No fluff, just fact.

When used as the main vehicle of your marketing campaign, direct mail is your key to success with Generation X. Also remember that direct mail marketing campaigns should be complemented with other forms of marketing. This should include Internet marketing, website search engine optimization, advertising and social media marketing.

Generation Y and How You Reach Them

Generation Y consists of 71 million Americans that spend over \$200 billion a year. They will also soon replace the baby boomers as the largest percentage of the workforce. Generation Y is the truly tech-obsessed market. They like to multi-task, demand instant gratification, communicate via IM, text messages and blogs. They are socially and environmentally responsible, they exhibit even less brand loyalty than Generation X and they are the most ethnically diverse of any prior generation.

Even though many salon and spa professionals have still not entered the digital age, this generation has grown during a time of expansive technological development. Cellular telephones, voicemail, text messaging, email, Facebook and Twitter are all communication tools you should be using to reach this market. Digital media has produced a new language for this generation. Verbal and visual literacy have converged, creating a new language that you must learn in order to communicate with this fundamental audience.

Word of mouth marketing is essential to reaching this market. You will have to provide reviews and allow easy access to information about your products or services online. Generation Y members turn to their peers instead of the media for advice and recommendations. They are more likely to spend on something their friends and online community recommend than trust what you are saying about yourself. When we say this generation turns to their peers, remember that we are referring to blogs, Facebook, Twitter and online communities.

When expanding your reputation and brand to reach the Generation Y audience, remember to be honest. Generation Y is extremely skeptical when it comes to marketing, and will tend to disbelieve any claim you make. This means that you shouldn't make any claims that you can't back up and you should work to become a trusted service provider.

Free, free, free! To really get your message out there, consider giving a free trial or offering some aspect of your spa service or product for free. If you can't provide a full spa service or product for free, then at least try to offer free samples. You need to determine whether your full service or product price is right. Even though this generation spends \$200 billion annually, it is important to know that they prefer to make a lot of small purchases rather than a few large ones. Unlike their Generation X predecessors, Generation Y is willing to trade quality for a more affordable price.

If your spa can afford it, participating in community events is also a great way to reach this market. If you can sponsor school sports teams, advertise in their catalogs and yearbooks or even have booths at certain events, do it. This young generation pays attention to their surroundings. Spark their interest by showing up where they are. In fact, both Sherif Zaki Salon & Spa locations participate in every community event possible. They donate to charities, place advertisements in event programs, appear at fashion shows and even provide gift cards for free or discounted services while there.

Co-owner of Sherif Zaki Salons & Spas, Emon Zaki, notes, "These generations are becoming more and more of our primary clientele. We've been using social media, direct mail and our website to attract their attention. More importantly, we are changing what we say and how we say it. It is important to communicate **with** these generations. Do not talk to or at them. Talk with them."

The majority of your most ideal current spa and skincare clients are probably Baby Boomers. You will still need to keep that clientele interested, loyal and coming through the door as new clients. You do not have to stop marketing to this generation to reach a new one. It will be in your best interest to have two separate and on-going marketing campaigns, one for Baby Boomer and one for Generations X and Y. The communication tools and messages that X and Y generations are likely to pay attention to are similar enough that you can create one extensive marketing campaign and still see a high return on your investment. And remember, Generation Y is likely to outgrow Baby Boomers in number and spending power. Your salon or spa simply cannot afford to let these generations pass by untouched.

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Editorial Notes: Sherif Zaki Salons & Spas are full service salons and spas in Delaware. They have two locations – Rehoboth Beach and Greenville. Sherif Zaki is a nationally respected hairstylist with his styles also published internationally. Visit www.SherifZaki.com for more information. Hannah Mayo is a Marketing Director at Marketing Solutions, Inc. in Fairfax, VA. Marketing Solutions is a full service marketing agency specializing in the beauty industry. To contact Hannah, email at MktgSols@MktgSols.com or call 703-359-6000 for more information.