Understanding Younger Baby Boomers' Digital Usage

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eMarketer Editors

Younger baby boomers are not a digitally clueless bunch, but marketers cannot assume that they are as digitally active—or as mobile in their usage—as millennials and Gen Xers. Rather, they have their own distinctive ups and downs with digital.

As commerce takes on an increasingly digital skew, many marketers will want to connect digitally with younger boomers. But they must wonder whether (and how) it can be done.

"Younger boomers were early adopters of the personal computer and email. But where do they stand in an era of smartphones and social media and ecommerce and all the rest?" asked Mark Dolliver, analyst at eMarketer and author of the new report, "Younger Baby Boomers as Digital Users: Just How Far Do They Go?"

Many younger boomers have used computers through much of their adult lives, and we estimate that about 85% of 55- to 64-year-olds will be internet users this year. And yet, the internet does not fill as much space in their lives as it does for younger generations.

In a Pew Research Center poll from January 2018, 39% of 18- to 29-year-olds and 36% of 30- to 49-year-olds said they use the internet "almost constantly." In the 50-to-64 age bracket, less than a quarter (17%) said the same.

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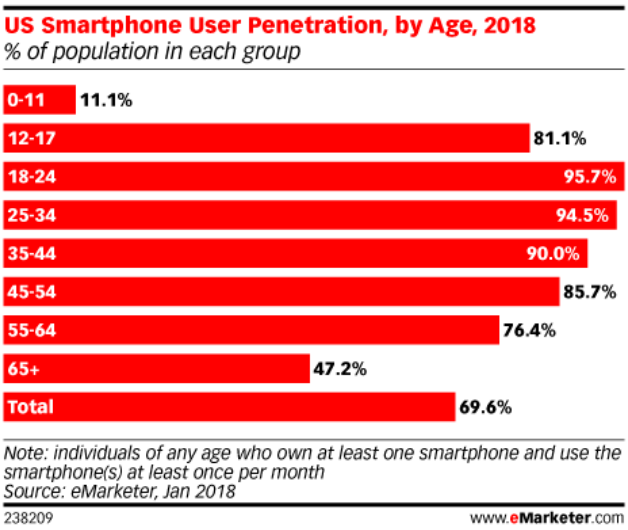
Then there's the smartphone factor. To millennials, digital life without smartphones is almost unthinkable. A majority of younger boomers have a smartphone, but they are not as attached to it as younger people are, partly because they perform fewer functions on it. It doesn't help matters that more and more younger boomers are becoming empty nesters. Without kids around, they lack the in-house tech support that one's offspring can provide.

Defining Younger Boomers

Surveys often use ages 55 to 64 as a demographic breakdown, and that age bracket serves an approximation of "younger boomers." The boomer generation as a whole encompasses people born between 1946 and 1964.



In short, the topography of younger boomers' digital usage has more ups and downs than that of younger people, whose usage is consistently high. Marketers cannot write off this population as digitally clueless, because it's not. Instead, they must be attuned to the distinctive ways younger boomers do use (and fail to use) digital technology.

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In addition to writing about younger boomers' digital lives, Dolliver wrote another report examining their finances as they move toward their retirement years. eMarketer PRO subscribers can access both reports below.

Meanwhile Mark Dolliver sat down in eMarketer's podcast studio for a pair of conversations about the younger end of the baby boom generation. The first of these sessions focuses on how this group engages with digital video and their willingness to shop online.

The second session focuses on younger boomers' finances: How much they have saved, how much they owe, and how the recession affected them.

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