



USING Multi-Generational Marketing

to Target Donors

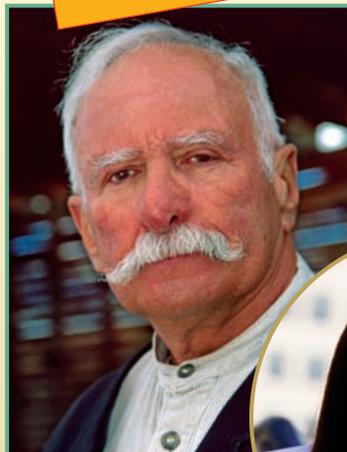
By George Williams

The greatest transfer of wealth in history will occur over the next 50 years. A portion of this wealth will find its way directly to nonprofit organizations, but the remainder will be distributed among four of the five living generations. Nonprofit leaders who understand the backgrounds, morals, values, characteristics, institutions, lifestyle preferences, and priorities of each generation, and who can adjust their fundraising, communication, and marketing strategies accordingly, will reap the greatest benefit. Is your organization ready?

The best way to ensure your organization's longevity is to build relationships with each generation represented in your community. Generationally-determined lifestyles, social values, and shared experiences have as much, or more, influence on donors' decisions than do such factors as income, gender, and education. Only by knowing the underlying values of each generation will you be able to tailor your communications to



Are you ready to reap the benefits of the greatest-ever transfer of wealth?





They participated in the rise of the middle class, sought a sense of security and stability, and expected prosperous times to continue indefinitely. Post-war grandparents are healthy, active, educated, and endowed with sizeable nest eggs.

Spending by grandparents on their grandchildren is on the rise, and grandchildren of this generation stand to inherit substantial wealth. As the Silent Generation enters elderhood with unprecedented affluence and a reputation for indecision, they worry whether they will outlive their savings. Here's how you can create bonds with this important group:

- **Emphasize** “traditional” values — discipline, self-denial, hard work, obedience to authority, conformity, commitment, responsibility, celebration of victory, financial and social conservatism.
- **Promote** a “you-earned-it” attitude.
- **Earn** their trust. They believe that people’s word is their bond.
- **Don’t waste** their time. They want their information presented to them in summary form.

• **Use formal language** in your written and face-to-face communications with this generation.

• **Appeal to patriotism**, team-building, and sacrifice for the common good.

• **Show your appreciation for them** with messages such as “We respect your experience” or “We value your perseverance.”

• **Don’t stereotype them** as “seniors.” They hate the term.

• **When planning events** for this group, note that romantic themes, candlelight dinners, and soft music strike a chord with them.

• **Treat them** as having a badge of distinction and honor. Respecting them because they overcame daunting odds to achieve success gives this group “permission” to spend their money.

• **Don’t dismiss** computer technology. While as a group they feel no need to be part of the information age, some embrace new technology.

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has already taken place in many respects, but there are still ways to build rapport with them:

- **Use face-to-face communication** as much as possible with this group.
- **Try getting in touch** with this group through their children.
- **Remember that financial security** rules their thinking.
- **Contact them through professional advisors**, such as lawyers and financial managers.
- **Talk to them** at formal social gatherings and recognition events.

2. THE SILENT GENERATION (1925-1942)

When the Silent Generation grew up, conformity seemed to be the ticket to success. As a group they’re not likely to break the rules or disrespect authority. They grew up in tough times when simple things were rationed, when saving for a rainy day was considered prudent, and when morals and ethics defined a person’s character.

Slow to embrace anything new, the Silent Generation distrusts change and prefers the status quo. They saved their money and consider retirement and leisure time rewards for sacrifices made earlier in their lives. Their attitudes were formed during an era in which they became united against common enemies. They witnessed America’s emergence as a superpower.

The Silent Generation also experienced a time of remarkable economic growth and social tranquility, a time of family togetherness.

their needs, interests, and desires. Understanding and capitalizing on the different generational perspectives is the key to increasing your response rates and expanding your donor base.

Each generation has preferred methods of communication and trusted sources they will use to learn about your organization. There will be exceptions, but the following descriptions are generally unique to each of the five living generations:

1. THE G.I. GENERATION (born 1901-24)

The G.I. Generation built glistening new suburbs, invented miracle medicines, and launched rockets. They experienced the Great Society and Model Cities but were worn down by Vietnam, Watergate, deficits, and lack of vision. Their lives began with high expectations, which were shattered by World War I.

Those born from 1912–21 came of age during the Great Depression and experienced economic strife, elevated unemployment rates, and having to take menial jobs to survive. The transfer of wealth from the G.I. Generation

Younger members of the Silent Generation form a portion of the fastest growing group of Internet users.

- **Use inclusive words** such as “we” and “us” to create a sense of trust.

- **Offer activities** that are easily digestible, presented in a non-confrontational and non-controversial manner.

- **Stress simplicity** when promoting a product or service. This group sees convenience, accessibility, ease of use, service, and support as key features that will sell them on new technologies and products.

- **Take advantage** of such key communication methods as face-to-face conversation, formal social events, recognition and tribute events, professional advisors, direct mail, telephone, and the Internet.

3. BABY BOOMERS (1943-60)

The Boomers are the creation of postwar optimism, the children of World War II veterans. Their parents wanted them to have the best, and they grew up as indulged youth during an era of community-spirited progress. As young adults they turned against the secular blueprints of their parents, demanded inner vision over outer vision, and valued self-perfection over teamwork.

Boomers lived through an economic boom and tremendous growth, which was tempered by a series of tragic events that included civil rights abuses, assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate, the Apollo 13 disaster, an increase in international terrorism, and shootings of world leaders. They witnessed technological feats of wonder, followed by breakdowns that produced a sense of despair. This led them to rebel against conformity and to carve a perfectionist lifestyle based on personal values and spiritual growth. Challenging institutions has been a way of life for this group. They appointed themselves arbiters of the nation's values and crowded into culture careers such as teaching, religion, journalism, marketing, and the arts.

Throughout the past decade, Boomers have seen their sense of entitlement ripped apart. High-paying jobs, large houses, and multiple cars disappeared during the massive layoffs of the late '80s and early '90s. Rocked by years of relentless change, they now long to stabilize their careers.

This generation is the most populous and influential of all. They have enjoyed unprecedented opportunities in education and employment. They are truly the “Me” generation and feel entitled to a “good life.” To them, autonomy is key. They want to do it by them-



Spending by grandparents on their grandchildren is on the rise.

selves. When communicating with Boomers, follow these suggestions:

- **Cater to their need to rebel** and forge their own path.

- **Recognize their attraction** to new products and technologies that will make their lives easier.

- **Present information** in terms of categories and options. They want facts before they make a decision. But don't overload them with too much data. They desire to simplify.

- **Give them quick fixes.** Perfect programs for them would require little change in habits and produce improvement instantly.

- **Provide plenty of personal gratification** and public recognition. Motivational messages such as: “You're important to our success,” “Your contribution is unique and important to us,” and “We need you,” will work best.

- **Eliminate any bureaucracy** in dealing with Boomers. They don't appreciate rules for the sake of having rules and are eager to get rid of the command-and-control style of earlier generations.

- **Give them a cause** to fight for, and they will give their all.

- **Use word-of-mouth** communications from trusted advisors and friends to sell this generation on a program. They tend to seek the advice of someone who has the knowledge they need or who has participated in the program they are considering.

- **Tie your programs** to health, wellness, and family values, which are all-important to Boomers.

- **Pay attention** to your body language when talking to Boomers. Communication should be open and direct but not controlling.

- **Answer their questions** thoroughly. Don't be surprised if they press for details.

- **Give them options** that show flexibility in your organization.

- **Let them know they're in charge** of their decisions. Self-directed funds are popular with them.

- **Use social gatherings and professional seminars** to create word-of-mouth advertising.

- **Communicate** through the Internet. Older Boomers form a portion of the largest growing group of Internet users.

- **Show** a sense of fun.

- **Use such key communication methods** as social and recognition events, professional advisors, direct mail, face-to-face conversation, and e-mail.

4. GENERATION “X” (1961-81)

The “Xers” could be dubbed the “Why Me?” generation. They are the shell-shocked products of changes that are ripping apart the fibers of society, the family, and the workplace. Often denounced as “slackers” by the media, they are actually a savvy generation, eager to take on new challenges.

Characterized by an economic and psychological “survivor” mentality, these “latchkey” children grew up quickly, experiencing rising divorce rates and violence.

They are disillusioned with almost everything and feel they're reaping the sins of their forefathers.

More Xers were raised in single-parent and working-parent homes than any other generation. Thus, they took greater responsibility for raising themselves and tend to be less traditional than any other generation.

Xers watched their parents suffer devastating job losses and became wary about their own future. They entered the job market in the wake of the Boomers and were hit hard by downsizing as the economy plunged into recession. It's natural that they're skeptical of authority and cautious in their commitments. Their self-reliance has led them, in unprecedented numbers, to embrace free agency over company loyalty. They start about 70% of the new businesses in the U.S.

As young adults, they maneuvered through a sexual battlefield that included AIDS. As a result, they date and marry cautiously. Their splintery culture, with music

ranging from grunge to hip-hop, has a hardened edge. Politically, they lean toward pragmatism and non-affiliation, and they would rather volunteer than vote.

Xers consider hard work a necessity. Unlike their predecessors, they won't rely on institutions for long-term security. They see technology changing their world, and to them, nothing is permanent. Here are some ways to communicate with Xers:

- **Give them plenty of access to information.**
- **Ask for their feedback, and share information with them regularly.** Keep them in the loop.
- **Reassure them** that the choices they're making are sound. Xers are still somewhat unsure of themselves.
- **Give them leadership roles** if possible. They're free agents, not team players. They don't like to feel they're being controlled.
- **Help them plan for the future** and balance the demands of work, family, and personal life.

• **Attract them with initiatives** that will make things more useful. They value practicality.

• **Ask them to volunteer** on entrepreneurial projects. Give them a lot of stimuli, a challenging environment, and flexibility without long-term commitment.

• **In face-to-face communication, use short sound bites** to keep their attention. They prefer an informal communication style.

• **Don't use overly slick marketing pitches.** Xers are skeptical of modern advertising.

• **Be frank, and present facts** in straightforward fashion. They demand candor and honesty.

• **Learn to speak their language.** Talk to Xers in a way that says, "You're different. We respect that." Such communication is very effective because it drops all pretensions and addresses them directly in a non-threatening way.

• **Give them opportunities** to learn, grow, and improve themselves.

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- **Make good use of group events** and word-of-mouth recommendations from Xers' peers. They think communally and often make decisions together.

- **Motivate them** with statements such as: "There aren't a lot of rules here," or "This is not a formal establishment," or "Do it your way."

- **Emphasize such communication methods** as the Internet, e-mail, multi-media, word-of-mouth, social events, and peer gatherings.

5. THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION (1982-2000)

The Millennials have developed an amazing optimism. They are well grounded and wise for their age and feel that preceding generations have made huge mistakes. They recognize problems in our world and want to correct them.

This generation's attitudes result from a backlash against hands-off parenting and a resurgence of values. Their beliefs resemble those of the generation of 1900-1920. They are civic-minded.

The Millennials' greatest advantage is that of being born into a technological society. Change is both normal and visual to them.

Millennials represent an immense untapped market.

They watched the Gulf War on television.

They consider education critical. They respect teachers, and most are planning for lifelong learning experiences. They don't, however, believe that educational institutions are doing an adequate job.

They know no limits. They are goal oriented, highly motivated toward their perceptions of success, and already planning for marriage and a family.

Many Millennials feel that positive race relations are hampered by government intervention and the biases of certain minority groups. They expect to change

Each generation has preferred methods of communication.

this. Most are color-blind when they relate to other people and accept each other as individuals little different from themselves.

Millennials are evenly dispersed across the political spectrum and aren't bound to any political party. They're pessimistic about the performance of government leaders, lawmakers, and the media. They like to be encouraged to break the rules.

Idealistic and social-cause-oriented, they represent an immense untapped market. Nonprofits who can connect with this group will reap tremendous benefits. Here are ideas for communicating with Millennials:

- **Appeal to their belief** that they can make the future better.

- **Be sure they know** that your organization's mission speaks to a purpose greater than the bottom line.

- **Feature your organization** as an instrument of change.

- **Give them systematic feedback** — as it happens. They value positive reinforcement at accelerated rates compared to older generations and want more input into all things in which they participate.

- **Use family events and gatherings** as ways to communicate with Millennials.

- **Contact them** through their parents and grandparents. Coming of age during a shift toward virtue and values, Millennials admire their parents but trust their grandparents even more.

- **Take full advantage** of technology. The Internet is the Millennials' playground, and that playground has no boundaries.

- **Use language that paints visual pictures** and action verbs that challenge.

- **Send them messages that stress team spirit**, such as "You'll be working with other bright, creative people," or "You and your team can make this initiative a success."

- **Approach this generation**

through e-mail and voice mail, but use visual communication to motivate them.

- **Encourage them** to explore new paths or options. They crave challenge.

- **Use humor** to show that you don't take yourself too seriously.

- **Embrace diversity.** One third of all Millennials are from a minority group, and diversity in communication is attractive to them.

- **Use such key communication methods** as e-mail, voice-mail, the Internet, and multi-media. ■

Resources

Costello, Tim & Bryan Lilly, "Improve Your Donor Base," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 19, No. 6.

Glasrud, Bruce, "Beyond Diversity," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 18, No. 2.

Mitchell, Mark & Robert Orwig, "Gen X: How to Manage, Market, & Motivate Them," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 1.

Remley, Dirk, "Relationship Marketing: Guaranteeing the Future," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 14, No. 5.

Tucker, John, "The Silent Generation Speaks Up," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 10, No. 1.

These resources are available at www.snpo.org/members. Also see Learning Institute programs online: Resource Development (www.snpo.org/li).

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