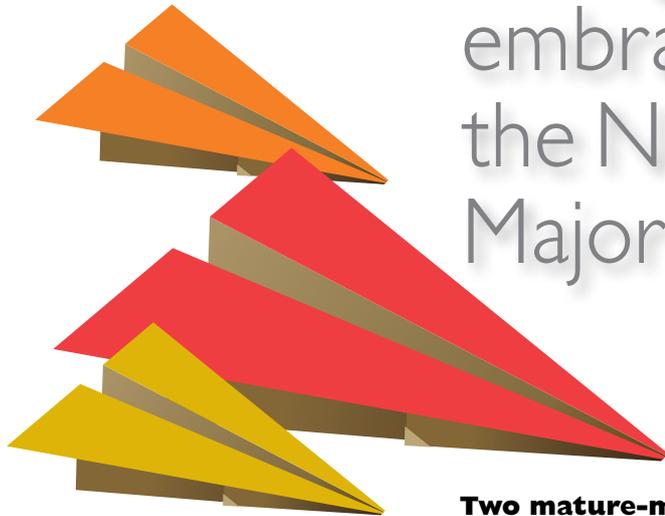


Marketing matters:

embracing and serving the New Consumer Majority



Two mature-market experts discuss ICAA's Rebranding Aging Awards and ways to improve marketing communications for the aging marketplace

by G. Richard Ambrosius, MA, and Helen Foster, BA

The United States is rapidly achieving a milestone: the nation's first "mature market." By 2050, Americans ages 65 and older will outnumber those under the age of 15, according to the US Census Bureau.¹ While this was already true in some European countries and Japan,² it is a change of epic proportion for the US. Yet little has been done to adapt marketing materials, hiring policies, sales training, or aging programs and services in response. When the media or politicians *do* address the growth of the older market, it is often to portray the rising number of older adults as a future crisis, problem or challenge, rather than an opportunity.

We are not only experiencing a dynamic demographic shift, however. The members of the New Consumer Majority

(defined as age 60-plus consumers) are also more informed, better educated and more autonomous than prior generations.³ The Baby Boom—that pig-in-the-python phenomenon that fueled yesterday's mass market—is developmentally aging just as the generations that preceded it. Since past generations of older adults did not have the numbers necessary to have a major impact on the economy, businesses and marketers generally ignored them unless they were specifically targeting those age groups. But for the next two decades, ignoring the older market will not be an option.

In spite of a growing body of evidence that the older brain/mind processes information differently than younger minds,⁴ many ad agencies, marketing companies and aging organizations continue to follow the features-and-benefits paradigm developed to communicate with yesterday's youth market. Paradoxically, the New Consumer Majority and the explosive youth market of yesterday are the same people—but different. Members of the Baby Boom generation,

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like all previous generations, have become more unique as they age, not more alike. As mature consumer behavior specialist David B. Wolfe frequently stated, the mature market is comprised of segments of one, but segments that share common values.

This article examines our experience reviewing entries for the ICAA Rebranding Aging advertising/marketing awards competition for the last two years. The contest is part of the International Council on Active Aging's Changing the Way We Age® Campaign, and recognizes excellence in efforts targeted to aging consumers in four categories (see the sidebar on pages 56–59). In the following pages we also make recommendations for improving the effectiveness of marketing campaigns based on our combined 50 years' experience in older markets.

Slow to change

With the Rebranding Aging Awards, what has most surprised us is that numerous submitted entries did not adhere to established standards for the creation of marketing materials targeting the older demographic. Many of these standards are outlined in ICAA's communications guidelines issued in 2011 for the Changing the Way We Age® Campaign (see "Resources" on page 53). On the plus side, the award-winners in all categories had clearly mastered most, if not all, of the elements of building ageless marketing campaigns that deliver results. Following are a few examples of marketing missteps we found among the entries, along with suggestions for improvement:

- **Excessive use of sans serif fonts.** Younger creatives who grew up in the computer age have accepted sans serif fonts (Arial, Calibri, etc.) as a new standard, which now dominates websites and emails. Yet sans serif fonts are harder to read and slow the processing speed and comprehension

of older readers. Interestingly, these fonts were created because the first computer printers could not print serifs (the stems that extend from letters), not because they were easier to read—even on computer screens.

- **Glossy paper stock.** Printing on glossy paper stock creates a glare that is bothersome to more sensitive older eyes. A quality matte paper stock with a 12-point serif font, such as Times New Roman, is recommended for all correspondence and communications materials. To create more depth in color photos, use spot varnish on photos only.
- **Objective appeals.** Materials are still dominated by objective appeals that use objective features-and-benefits presentations rather than emotional appeals that connect with later-life values and experiential desires. An objective appeal with excessive detail is more likely to be dismissed as hyperbole by experienced older consumers. Present a product, service or idea in a manner that is more suggestive than descriptive since the older mind is context sensitive. When using an emotional appeal, say enough to generate interest and leave enough unsaid to allow each person's brain/mind to complete the picture.
- **Stereotypical terms.** Most copy still includes stereotypical terms such as *senior*, *elderly*, *Boomer*, *Zoomer* and the like to segment consumers. Older consumers, however, are not conscious of their frame of reference (negative stereotypes), and disregard information that does not fit their perceptions. As mentioned above, the older brain/mind is context sensitive; it fills in the missing pieces of a picture with a bias toward a person's unique world views, values and life stage. We recommend you review all materials and delete all terms that could conjure up negative images of

aging, then reread the copy. You will realize how little impact these descriptors have and use the terms sparingly, if at all.

- **Sedentary photography.** The use of sedentary photography remains plentiful. Such photos are best replaced with those of older consumers engaged in meaningful pursuits, as pictures that tell a story will have greater appeal than posed, portrait-style shots.
- **Copy that focuses more on needs.** Too much copy still uses the language of exclusion and details perceived consumer needs rather than appealing to the values of targeted consumers. Appealing to emotions is essential to gain an older consumer's interest. When your message is relevant to a prospect's interests and grounded in the person's internal life-stage values, the message is more likely to survive the brain's screening and reach the conscious mind. Objective appeals require first gaining the prospective customer's interest. Reason will not fully kick in, however, until emotions give the green light to think about your offer.

What confuses those of us who have spent our careers trying to convince businesses, nonprofits and government agencies of the potential of an aging marketplace is why they refuse to accept what author and business guru Tom Peters might call "a blinding flash of the obvious." For example, consider Unilever's Dove personal care brand, which challenged stereotypes of beauty—and ageism—through its award-winning Campaign for Real Beauty. One advertisement and billboard featured a 95-year-old model and posed the question to viewers: "Withered or Wonderful?" Dove's campaign resulted in a 700% rise in product sales in the United Kingdom and a 600% rise in US sales within the first two months of its launch,⁵ and

Resources

Foster Strategy, LLC

www.fosterstrategy.com

ICAA's Changing the Way We Age® Campaign

www.changingthewayweage.com

ICAA's Changing the Way We Age Campaign: ICAA Communication Guidelines

www.changingthewayweage.com/Media-and-Marketers-support/guidelines.htm

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

www.icaa.cc

Positive Aging

www.positiveaging.com

yet few companies followed suit by embracing positive aging.

A context for aging

The Campaign for Real Beauty clearly demonstrated that consumers of all ages do not see what you want them to see, but what their brains want them to see by filtering with an unconscious set of assumptions, perceptions and aspirations. Dove chose to present aging in a positive context and was rewarded by consumers of all ages. These consumers did not just want to know that Dove wanted their business, but also that the company understood the importance of a positive aging self-esteem.

At the 2012 ICAA Conference in New Orleans, we opened our session with a three-minute, 2011 commercial for Taiwan's TC Bank created by Ogilvy and Mather Taiwan. This powerful commercial asks the question, "What do people live for?" The commercial tells the emotionally charged story of a group of older men seeking purpose and adventure in

spite of a variety of physical infirmities. It concludes with the bank's positioning line: "For Ordinary People with Extraordinary Dreams." Spontaneous applause followed the viewing, which has happened every time it has been shown during a keynote address or workshop.

We believe the failure to embrace and expand on this approach stems from a lack of understanding of later-life values. As the late David Wolfe observed in a 1998 article in *American Demographics* magazine:⁶

"There is no better way to begin dealing with those challenges than by making a concerted effort to learn more about adult development. Few consumer researchers and marketers have any grounding in adult development psychology. This is a costly deficiency. Knowledge of adult development can provide critical information about consumers that is not available from traditional survey and focus group research."

With members of the Baby Boom moving into the 65-plus age group and older generations living longer, this demographic will expand exponentially in the years to come. In fact, one in five consumers will be 65 or older by 2030.⁷ And that number will only continue to increase with population aging. If you believe the old adage that the majority rules, organizations are short-sighted to hold onto the marketing paradigms of yesterday.

From paradigm keepers to innovators

Despite the positive bottom-line results that Dove and others have proven possible, many companies still ignore the benefits of a new marketing paradigm. Surprisingly few have embraced ageless marketing even as the effectiveness of traditional advertising continues to

erode.⁸ Likewise, in our experience, a majority of aging services organizations and communities for older adults continue to use outdated medical models of operation and programs that can inadvertently perpetuate ageism. When it comes to aging, these organizations remind us of processionary caterpillars.

Pine processionaries move in single file, one leading and the others following with their eyes half-closed and heads fitted against the rears of their predecessors. In 1896, French scientist Jean-Henri Fabre demonstrated the rigid behavior of these caterpillars by manipulating them into a closed circle around the rim of a large flowerpot. Around and around the rim they went for seven days in a circle without a leader. On the eighth day, exhausted and starving, the caterpillars dropped to the ground.⁹

Similarly, too many organizations that manage aging services or create communications targeting older consumers conform to approaches that no longer work, confusing activity with achievement. As a result, they may not see the potential that lies within reach and the solutions that are readily available.

Positioning the offer

From wellness centers and communities for older adults, to "senior centers" and cities, we are in the business of facilitating human connections. If we do it well, we create vibrant/magnetic places that are not just active and appealing, but also experiential and authentic. In the sea of sameness and other possibilities, your organization needs to ask *why* it is worthy of the consumer's interest. What makes your offer unique and compelling? It's the *why*, not the *what*, that is key.

Aging services providers and communities tend to focus on the *what*, with posi-

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tioning statements or pitches that might sound something like this:

Our organization/community offers programs and services that address the needs of seniors/active adults.

Our services are easily accessible, meals are nutritious, healthcare and wellness services are exceptional, and much more.

Call today for more information or visit us at www.seniorstuff.com.

This approach makes an objective appeal. It builds upon what the organization has to offer while making claims about the product's quality, but without providing a context for readers other than their age. Focusing on the *why*, with a more conditional appeal, paints a more conditional picture:

In everything we do, we challenge ageism and aging stereotypes, celebrate the wisdom and experience of age, provide opportunities for meaningful service, and work with those we serve to enhance their personal growth and holistic well-being.

Our services are innovative and designed with the needs, wants and aspirations of older adults in mind.

To explore the possibilities and discover the power of positive aging, call xxx-xxx-xxxx or visit us at www.possibilities.com.

While most organizations understand that everyone is involved in marketing at some level, it is easy to confuse marketing strategy with communications tactics. The place to begin is not with how to design the next brochure, ad or promotion, but with an honest as-

essment of your product/positioning. This should be done well in advance of developing communications and media plans. Engage all stakeholders to gain a broader perspective by focusing on three critical elements of success: autonomy, choice and empowerment. Then let the big idea drive execution.

Remember that simplicity should be the focus when you create materials. If we are excited about our offer, we tend to over-create, over-promote and over-articulate. We forget that the customer that calls or comes to our location is already buying in; our job is to support and validate their perceptions. In a perfect scenario, the experience sells itself.

The good news is, your marketing solutions do not have to be complex or expensive to succeed. If you remain open-minded to all possibilities, you may discover that some big fixes can be surprisingly simple and inexpensive. ☺

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and retailers. For information, visit www.fosterstrategy.com or call 504-897-2236.

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'Positive, realistic views of aging': a gallery of

The International Council on Active Aging (ICAA) Rebranding Aging Awards honor marketing campaigns that present positive, realistic views of aging in four major categories: websites, direct mail, brochures and advertising. The list of the 2012 award recipients follows, accompanied by the judges' comments.

"The quality of this year's submissions is stellar," says ICAA's CEO Colin Milner. "ICAA is pleased to recognize these efforts and promote them as examples for others to follow."



a.

Messiah Lifeways' website boasts a 'consumer-centric approach to content, solutions and navigation'



b.



c.

WEBSITES

a. Gold award: Messiah Lifeways, www.messiahlifeways.org

- Colorful, attractive interface design without compromising usability.
- Consumer-centric approach to content, solutions and navigation.
- Quality photography that conveys authenticity.

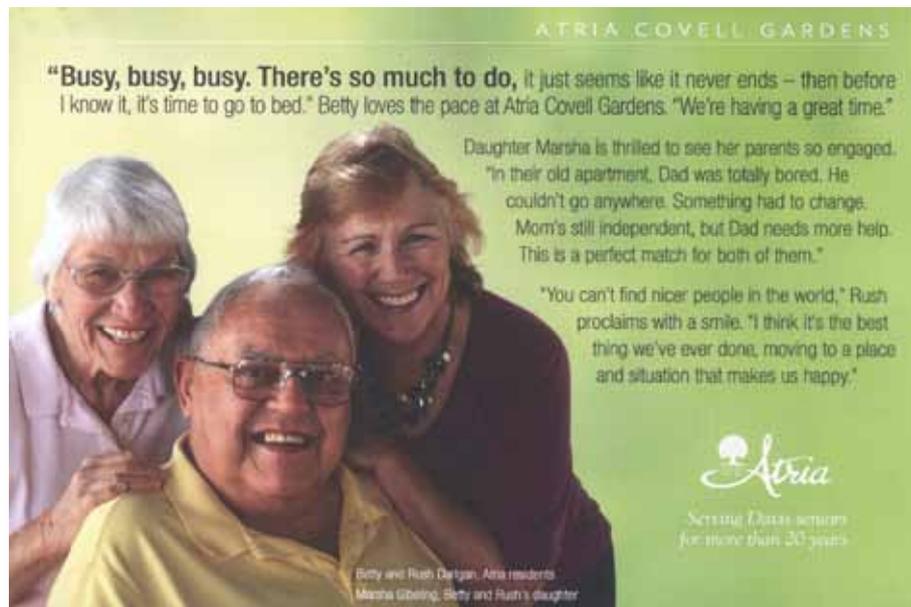
b. Silver award: Transforming Life After 50 (California State Library), www.transforminglifeafter50.org

- Kudos to the library system for not just tackling this, but taking the time to understand and do it well.
- The site isn't sexy, but it's clean and easy to use.
- The focus clearly was on the content, and the library system did a respectable job of making these resources available and easily accessible in multiple formats.
- Nice use of Pinterest (bonus, not factored in judging).

c. Bronze award: Restart Retirement (Willow Valley Retirement Communities), www.restartretirement.com

- This site is testament to the old saying, "A good idea can solve a lot of problems."
- This is a simple blog site that actually accomplishes a lot.
- Needs-based approach.
- Credible content and stories from the people that Willow Valley wants to target.
- Creative, intergenerational video of kids talking about retirement.
- Good site from an SEO [Search Engine Optimization] standpoint, but it seems to lack a connection to Willow Valley's core business.

2012 Rebranding Aging award-winners

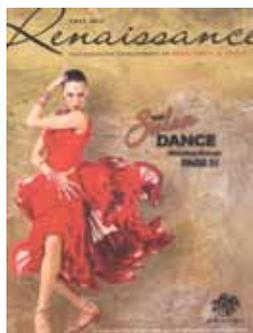


a.

In the direct mail category, Atria Senior Living makes ‘effective use of postcards with compelling real-people testimonials’



b.



c.

DIRECT MAIL

a. Gold award: Atria Senior Living

- Effective use of postcards with compelling “real people” testimonials.
- Focus is on the individual, not the community.
- Eye-catching layout and excellent, nicely balanced copy, with necessary attention to benefits and features while in context with the consumer experience. Nice work!
- Could be further improved by using a serif font in body copy.

b. Silver award: Messiah Lifeways

- Nice “magazine”-style approach, which is an effective technique for catching prospect attention.
- Piece covers a number of different “products” with different selling points (perhaps even different target audiences), but it’s woven together well here; the piece also does a good job of presenting a complex mix of information.
- Excellent color palette. For future productions, we suggest a little less

reverse text, a serif font, and a matte stock on interior pages.

- Attractive publication with a focus on events.
- Publications promote the lifestyle over features and benefits.

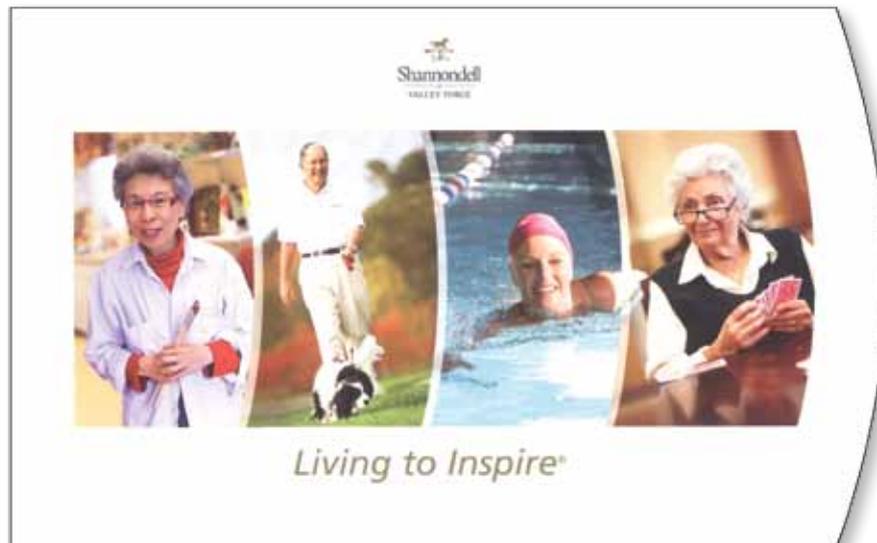
c. Bronze award: Willow Valley Retirement Communities

- A nontraditional “direct mail” piece; the Renaissance program presents an astounding array of activities, balancing mind, body and spirit.
- Copy is well done—engaging and concise.
- Visuals are well applied. All in all, it’s a great presentation of a great deal of information—easy to navigate. Especially like the perf (perforation) sheet with the full monthly lists of events.
- Could be further improved by using serif font in the body copy.
- Might suggest matte stock on interior pages to reduce glare.

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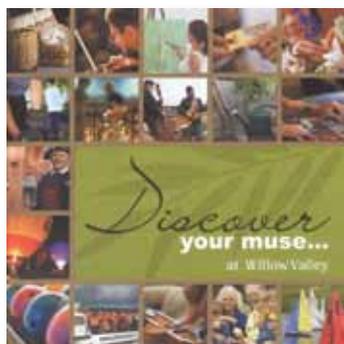
'Positive, realistic views of aging': a gallery of

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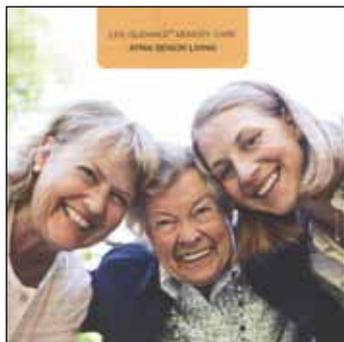


a.

Shannondell at Valley Forge's brochure has an 'attractive layout and excellent presentation of information, with realistic photos of engaged community members'



b.



c.

BROCHURES

a. Gold award: Shannondell at Valley Forge

- "Living to Inspire" title speaks to later-life values.
- Attractive layout and excellent presentation of information with realistic photos of engaged community members.
- Tone of the copy is inviting and warm, and at the same time informational—not an "over-the-top" sales approach. Well done!
- Serif font and matte paper stock with spot enamel on photos as recommended by ICAA's communications guidelines.
- Content addresses lifestyle values over features and benefits.
- Excellent shelf-life probable.

b. Silver award: Willow Valley Retirement Communities

- Concise, factual copy reflects a solid understanding of the target profile.
- Interesting concept and way to highlight the many, varied resident clubs,

groups and amenities available to those who live at Willow Valley. Instead of telling prospects that a lot is available, this brochure shows them in a nice, illustrative fashion with quality photography and graphics.

- Realistic photos tell the story of an engaged and empowered population.
- Could be further improved by using matte rather than enamel paper stock on interior pages.

c. Bronze award: Life Guidance® Memory Care—Atria Senior Living

- This brochure promotes memory care residences, with families of potential residents as the primary target audience.
- The brochure presents the subject matter sensitively, reflecting a keen understanding and appreciation for the target market's needs and considerations. Nicely handled!
- Copy demonstrates an understanding emotional appeal.
- Call-to-action insert is well done, consultative and supportive.

2012 Rebranding Aging award-winners

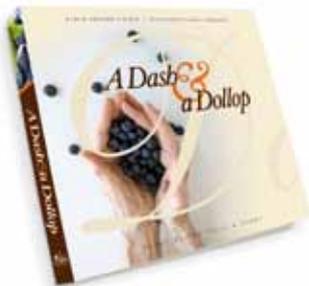


a.

Welcyon's Fitness After 50 advertising promotes fitness 'as a pathway to enjoying life, which makes it more appealing to those who have not yet given it much consideration or attention'



b.



c.

ADVERTISING

a. Gold award: Welcyon, Fitness After 50

- Nice approach! “Fitness” was promoted as a pathway to enjoying life, which makes it more appealing to those who have not yet given it much consideration or attention.
- Gardening was an appropriate theme for the video. Consumers can easily make the connection that Welcyon makes life (and gardening) more fulfilling.
- The video quality is nice. The female subject was both pleasant and believable.
- All in all, well executed.

b. Silver award: Eskaton

- The judges often shudder when judging assisted-living television ads, as these don't always go so well—but this one is great.
- The use of “thank you” notes to illuminate Eskaton's positive attributes, and the different voices and images of the handwriting added an authentic quality.

- The judges did wonder if the copy did enough to inform about who Eskaton is (or if it spoke enough to the *resident* experience), but the results do indicate that the ad was a success. Nice work!

c. Bronze award: Atria Senior Living

- What a pleasure it is to flip through the pages of this “incentive” cookbook!
- Well done—in terms of concept, production quality, construction/layout, and the organization and quality of content.
- Great “keeper value.”
- It is an incentive that prospects should enjoy receiving and look forward to putting it to use.☺