

## Praise for Advertising to Baby Boomers

In the future—after many of us Baby Boomers are dead and buried—Nyren’s book could well be hailed as a classic in the annals of advertising education. Looking back, some may call him a pundit. Others may call him a visionary. Both would be correct. In my opinion [the book] is a “must read” for any executives who wonder which half of their advertising dollars is being wasted.

—**Eric Voth**, ERV Productions

I bought over 80 books on the subject of Boomers, advertising, and marketing for my M.A. thesis on images of Boomer women. Chuck Nyren was the only writer who put it all together, brilliantly, in one source. His book was the mainstay of my citations. Any advertiser who does not understand his premise that Boomers are diverse adults who do not want to be seen as Steve Martin’s caricature of “wild and crazy guys” is going to alienate this pivotal generation—or, worse yet, miss them all together.

—**Mary Duffy**, Ford Models, 40+ fashion and beauty writer

Chuck Nyren’s wit and charm only partially disguise the razor-sharp teeth that he flashes at an industry in denial.

—**Marc Middleton**, founder and president, The Growing Bolder Media Group

If you get the idea that you need to reach baby boomers, Chuck’s book is the foundation for that effort.

—**Jon Currie**, Currie Communications

Chuck Nyren is a funny writer. Well, he’s a serious writer who’s funny. Since everyone is trying to figure out how to market to Baby Boomers, his book will probably be the best guide yet.

—**Jan Reisen**, *AgingHipsters.com*

I like the way [Nyren] seems, between the lines, to be giving us boomers our dignity back.

—**Julie Muhlstein**, *The Everett Herald*

*Advertising to Baby Boomers* unlocks the minds and hearts of the large and affluent generation that challenged the reconfigured society’s rules at each stage of life. . . . Nyren is serious about his precepts, but easy to read and humorous in his writing style. . . . even the most experienced professionals are likely to hit upon new ideas for increasing their products’ appeal among boomer market consumers.

—Excerpted from *GenerationTarget.com*

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# Advertising to Baby Boomers

REVISED & UPDATED

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This book is dedicated to my favorite copywriter,  
GAYLE SCHWINN NYREN (1925–1994)

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

THE FIRST EDITION of this book was published in June 2005. Copies ended up in the hands of some influential folk thanks to Paramount Market Publishing and Len Stein of Visibility PR.

There was one outcome I wasn't ready for: *Advertising to Baby Boomers* was selected as a classroom resource by The Advertising Educational Foundation. Only thirty or so books have been selected as classroom resources by AEF out of thousands of marketing and advertising books released each year.

I was shocked, flattered, and obviously honored. *Advertising to Baby Boomers* isn't exactly an academic treatise. It's been described by many as a bold, breezy read, often polemical, a rant, with humorous asides and potent advice nestled between shrieks.

Since then, hundreds of college and university libraries around the world have scooped it up. I receive a steady stream of emails and phone calls from students and professors. Not a typical one, but a fun one:

To: Chuck Nyren

From: (A professor at a university in Pennsylvania)

Subject: Keep Preachin'

Keep preachin' brother because some still refuse to hear. My students just presented a campaign geared to baby boomers to a group of judges at the National Student Advertising Competition. When we mentioned your book as proof that boomers don't like flashy ads, some 25-year-old copywriter/judge from BBDO West told them, "I can't believe boomers don't like slick ads." So, keep preachin' and maybe they too will one day hear.

In August 2005 I was a guest on *Advertising Age's* syndicated radio program *The Advertising Show*, where I mixed it up with industry pros Brad Forsythe and Ray Schilens. Again, lots of fun and an honor to have been invited. Then came a bunch of positive reviews, dozens of interviews in newspapers, magazines, and on radio, and offers to write pieces for trade mags, web sites, and advertising agency newsletters. I've spoken at many summits and conferences around the country. I just keep preachin'.

But the bigger story is all the press Baby Boomers are receiving lately. Technically, the first Baby Boomer turned 60 years old in January 2006. *Newsweek*, *Businessweek*, *MSNBC*, and dozens of media outlets have had special reports about this unwieldy generation and its non-stop influence on just about everything. Conventional wisdom says that this influence will continue for at least another 25 years.

And shock of shocks, the advertising industry is beginning to acknowledge this demographic. However, I'm not so sure that they are doing an adequate job with their marketing and creative campaigns. I talked about this in the first edition, and expand on it in this edition.

The victims, of course, are advertisers. Most are not getting their money's worth. The lessons about marketing and advertising to Baby Boomers in this book and a handful of others have yet to be put to good use.

### About This Edition

Five chapters have been punched up and updated. There are a handful of fresh chapters. Most of the new material was inspired by the dozens of people I've met over the last year and a half: other advertising and marketing folk, clients who have come aboard for consulting and creative work, professors and students eager to learn from me (but I end up learning more from them). What great company I've been keeping.

Write a business book sometime. You'll think that you've said it all. Then people read it, you make friends, you discuss the themes in your book, they have their own ideas and opinions about it all—and you're humbled a hundred times over.

—CHUCK NYREN  
January 2007

“NO, I DON’T THINK A 68-YEAR-OLD COPYWRITER . . . can write with the kids. That he’s as creative. That he’s as fresh. But he may be a better surgeon. His ad may not be quite as fresh and glowing as the Madison Avenue fraternity would like to see it be, and yet he might write an ad that will produce five times the sales. And that’s the name of the game, isn’t it?”

—ROSSER REEVES

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Geritol Syndrome

IF YOU'RE A BABY BOOMER you remember the early television ads for Geritol™ (“*Do you have iron-poor, tired blood?*”). They were dry, stilted, and among kids fidgeting in front of the box, often evoked laughter.

One from the Fifties had a husband coming home to a messy house and an apathetic wife. He pulls out a pistol and pulls the trigger. Out pops a banner, unfurling the word “Geritol.” The next day the house is clean, the wife perky.

Others were more dramatic. The plots for these one-minute soap operas went something like this: A mother or grandmother was tired, irritable. A husband would notice—and with concern, lovingly comment. Sage advice followed. The message: A daily spoonful of Geritol saves marriages. One memorable tag line was: “*My wife. I think I'll keep her.*”

Today the Geritol spots are considered an anathema when discussing 50-plus marketing. You could use them as examples of what *not* to do. But no one talks about how effective they were in reaching their target market. As usual, the truth lies somewhere in between. The Geritol campaigns were successful because of their simple, direct messages. A similar campaign today, using vague, anxiety-ridden scare tactics, might not work for Baby Boomers. We're too smart (or perhaps too jaded) to be fooled by hackneyed situations and simplistic answers.

However, this doesn't mean that a clear, direct message about your product or service would not be effective. The real reason the Geritol ads were funny was because they weren't exactly the cutting-

edge of advertising “art.” These weren’t *sexy* ads, ones that an agency would brandish as their best work. Over martinis just off Madison Avenue, I doubt that you ever heard, “Wow! Did you see the latest Geritol spot? Baby, *fantabulous!*”

And so continues the Geritol Syndrome. When advertisers *do* “get creative” and target Baby Boomers, they’re usually off the mark. The spot for Cadillac using Led Zeppelin’s “Rock and Roll” oozes cognitive dissonance, but after an initial jump in sales, the commercial is now considered a flop. The campaign was revamped, keeping the music (snippets of the guitar breaks, none of this “Been a long time since I rock ’n’ rolled”), and are now targeted to a younger demographic.

Too bad; they probably could have done better.

Then there are the prescription drug ads, like the one with Boomer pod people standing motionless on some sci-fi planet, eerily announcing, one-by-one, how they feel better after . . . I don’t know . . . after becoming pod people.

*“Baby, fantabulous!”*

To be fair, it’s not always the agency’s fault. Clients often have some vague notion of what they want, and the balancing act isn’t always easy, or successful. Do you create a campaign for the client or for the public? This is a familiar-to-ad agencies dilemma.

But if Cadillac wants to appeal to Baby Boomers (we think of Cads as cars gangsters drive, or as hearses) do you really have to position them as something that will make us feel young again as we zoom around blasting rock and roll while our car is in cruise control? Only occasionally do we sit around and daydream about being eighteen again. Most of the time we don’t feel that old.

To promote prescription drugs (or almost anything) must you use overblown computer graphics to create some visually demented atmosphere that looks like the latest video game? I think not.

Personally, I often get a chuckle out of computer morphing and all the latest special effects (although they’re getting old fast). And I don’t mind being entertained with witty turns-of-phrase. But Baby Boomers have seen it all. We grew up watching commercials.

*You can amuse, but don’t assume.* Give us the facts. Pitching to the

emotions instead of the brain is the biggest mistake agencies make when marketing and advertising to Baby Boomers.\* We'll decide for ourselves how fast to take the curves in our new Caddies.

We'll also decide a few other things before long, including how, when, and where we will be marketed to. The ubiquity of the worldwide web and cable television, the ease and affordability of computer printing of magazines and books, along with other forms of communication are creating new ways of reaching all demographics. But it will be the Baby Boomers who will be the first to pick and choose, to ignore or be seduced by leading-edge technology marketing.

There's a simple reason for this. *We have the money to buy this stuff.* Experts say we'll continue to have the money for at least the next twenty years. Write us off at your own peril.

So What Are the Target Markets for this Book?

Let's work from the bottom up:

Tertiary: On the surface, it might seem that *Advertising to Baby Boomers* is a "how-to" for major advertising agencies and multi-national marketing firms, the big guys.

I'm sure they'll get something out of it. According to internet stats from various websites I write for, they already have, downloading and printing many of my articles over the last few years.

But corporations are hulking behemoths, not amenable to new ideas or sweeping changes. I'm proposing a minor revolution in the advertising industry, one that won't trickle down but bubble up. It's not a technology driven revolution. It's a human one.

Secondary: Small-to-medium-sized advertising and marketing agencies. They may squirm at first, even kick and scream—but eventually will be co-beneficiaries of this common sense revolution. Some may become the heroes and heroines of this reasoned paradigm.

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\* Actually, there are ways of "pitching to the emotions" of Baby Boomers (emotional branding). The problem is that advertising agencies more often than not pitch to the wrong emotions—and there's a reason why. I'll talk about this later.



Primary: It's a book about advertising—but I've written it for anybody who owns or works for a company—large, medium, or small—and is involved with marketing a product or service where one of your target markets is (or should be) the 40-plus demographic. Even though it comes from a creative advertising perspective, this book is *for the client*.

When targeting Baby Boomers, I'm not convinced that the advertising industry is serving its clients well. You're not getting your money's worth. Some simple demands, a bit of vigilance, and you could change things around, and get *much more* than you're paying for.

*Advertising to Baby Boomers* is also for anybody with a marketing or product idea, yet to be realized or about to come to market. Venture capitalists take heed: the largest demographic of entrepreneurs are over forty, the largest consumer demographic the same. Baby Boomers will soon be marketing to themselves again, after a hiatus of twenty-odd years.

### What's to Be Gleaned from These Pages

If this is a “how-to” book, it's how to effectively communicate and partner with an advertising agency or creative freelancer.

- How to find a good one for your product or service, one that understands on an instinctive level how to communicate with the 40-plus market.
- What questions you should ask when interviewing or being “pitched” by an agency.
- How to help develop a campaign with your agency.
- When to step in with advice and demands, and when to leave them alone.
- When to trust the advertising or marketing agency, and when to question its judgments.
- How to demand more from your ad agency when building campaigns aimed at Baby Boomers.
- How to critique ad campaigns.

I'm not leaving out the small entrepreneur with the bullets above. Many examples I provide, comments I make, and ideas I propose focus on advertising campaigns and products with which you are probably familiar. Don't be intimidated. The advertising principles are the same for General Motors worldwide as they are for a General Store in a semi-retirement or vacation community.

Or you may have a flair for writing, for graphics, for marketing and selling. If you've developed that better mousetrap and you are marketing it, on eBay or anywhere else, *Advertising to Baby Boomers* may spark some ideas of your own. Use this book as a starting point for your handmade campaign.

I'll also be causing some trouble, ruffling feathers. (I already have, if you haven't noticed.) But the purpose of this book is to get your brain roiling and place you on track when you're focusing on advertising to this specific market and its cohorts. If you think I'm off the mark every so often (or even often), fine. If what comes out of this are better ideas of your own, then as far as I'm concerned *Advertising to Baby Boomers* has served its purpose.

That's what this book really is: a catalyst for creative thinking.

And, if you're a businessperson, you know that creative thinking doesn't begin and end inside an advertising agency.