



Picture-perfect marketing

Choosing the right photography will make your marketing more effective

by Todd Harff, CAASH

Our economy may finally show signs of recovery, but in 2010 many marketers of wellness/health facilities and services to age 50-plus adults will continue to be challenged. They'll be asked to connect, motivate and inspire Baby Boomers and beyond with advertising, websites and other communications. All with potentially smaller budgets, reduced staff and less time.

How can your team rise to the challenge? One way is to harness the incredible power of pictures.

More than 1,000 words

The United States Commerce Department doesn't get it. Their idea of "aging in the Americas" is summed up with the poster on page 37, available on their website and pushed out to consumers and government agencies. Strangely, while the poster portrays older adults from diverse cultures, there's little diversity in how these images portray aging.

As International Council on Active Aging® members know, such images have little to do with how active, vibrant older

adults see themselves. Yet a quick scan of websites and brochures often reveals photography that is similarly out of step with a contemporary 50-plus consumer and, at worst, demeaning and degrading.

The old adage was that pictures were worth a thousand words. Today, that is a major understatement if you are trying to connect with and motivate active older adults.

Why images matter

There are three important factors as to why images are especially important when communicating with Baby Boomers and beyond:

1. Changes in vision

The first reason is that our vision changes as a result of physical aging. As our eyes age, they change in the following ways:

- They absorb less light, which means we need more light for seeing.
- The lens of our eyes yellows, making it harder to distinguish between blues, greens and purples, while easier to see reds and yellows.
- Presbyopia sets in, making it more and more difficult to focus on near objects. This condition affects 85 million Americans,¹ almost all of them in their 40s or older. Without reading glasses, a typical 60-year-old, for example, is unable to see objects clearly at a distance of less than one or two yards.²
- Our eyes become susceptible to other age-related eye diseases. By age 80, more than half of all Americans have cataracts.³ Macular degeneration is likely the leading cause of blindness for people over 50,³ and more than nine million adults ages 40 and older in the US either have it, or are at risk of developing it.⁴

The result of all of these age-related changes to our eyes is that it becomes difficult to read type, especially fonts that are small, “swirly” or reversed out (e.g. white text on a black background). For some people, reading text is impossible. For others, it is difficult. But for most, it is simply an unconscious chore.

Images are superior to text because they allow marketers to make an impact faster and in a way that is more comfortable to the older viewer. Since the audience is more relaxed, the message is more likely to be received in a positive frame of mind. Of course, to have the right impact, you need to have the right images.

2. Changes in the brain

The second reason why imagery becomes more important as we age is that we

experience physical changes in our brain that affect the way we make decisions.

In his book *Ageless Marketing*,⁵ David Wolfe applied research on how the brain functions and ages. He noted that verbal memory declines faster than visual memory as we age. He also observed that the right brain dominates.

Marketers should understand that the right brain:

- is where emotions and memories reside
- looks for patterns or relationships
- forms more complete or holistic images than the left brain, which focuses more on individual details
- plays a “gatekeeper” role, processing incoming information and deciding whether it’s worth sharing with the left brain for evaluation
- works in sensual imagery, not words

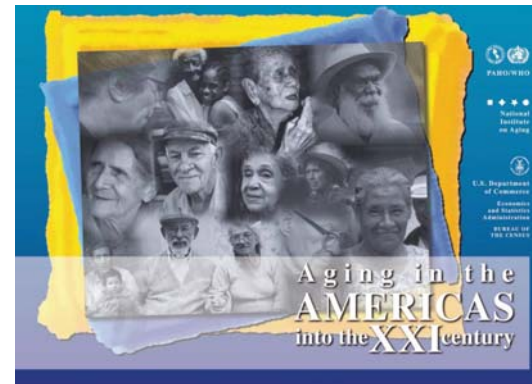
Thus, the power of imagery increases as we age because it speaks the language of a mature brain.

3. Life experience

The third reason for the importance of imagery with active older adults is that photography is effective and efficient for telling a complete story. Yes, this is true for all ages, but because older people have had more life experience, they “get the gist” faster than younger people. Research conducted by our marketing agency, Creating Results, reaffirmed this fact. We observed again and again that older respondents consistently formed their opinions about imagery much faster than younger respondents.

The right images

At Creating Results, we have always understood the power and importance of imagery for motivating the mature consumer. What we lacked was data to help us select the most appropriate and effective images for different segments of



As shown in the cover of 'Aging in the Americas,' portrayals of aging often lack diversity and seem out of step with how today's older adults see themselves. Image courtesy of the US Commerce Department

older adults. We wanted to move beyond the insights we had gained and better understand how the preferences of these consumers were changing. We also wanted to look at narrow market segments and see if there were differences in what appealed to them.

To gain this information, we developed and conducted a national survey of 414 older adults. Each person over 40 years old was shown a series of photos and asked questions that revealed which imagery was most effective to them. Data was broken down by various demographic factors (age, marital status, employment, education, etc.) and psychographics (travelers, volunteers, and so on). Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed, then final results were compiled into the eBook *Photo Finish* in January 2009 to share with marketers focused on these demographics. A sneak preview of the research was given to attendees of the International Council on Active Aging Conference in San Antonio, Texas, in December 2008.

Based on our survey's findings, we offer the following five tips for motivating older consumers with photography:

1. Keep it clean and lean

Our research showed that single-image ads were more effective than collage-style

Continued on page 38

Picture-perfect marketing

Continued from page 37

Resources

Creating Results: Photo Finish
www.creatingresults.com/photofinish

For more information about Creating Results' research project, *Journal on Active Aging*[®] readers may download the complimentary eBook, *Photo Finish*.

International Mature Marketing Network
www.immn.org

This global organization provides education, networking and resources for organizations that are marketing to people ages 40 and older.

Mature Marketing Matters
www.maturemarketingmatters.com

Presented by Creating Results, this blog is for those who want to learn more about connecting with and motivating Boomers and beyond.

ads with all consumers in their 40s and beyond (see above). Sixty-six percent of all survey respondents preferred seeing a single image over a collage. And the higher the level of education, the more appealing respondents found the leaner, cleaner design approach.

2. Show them a subject's face

Sixty-five percent of all the respondents preferred to see an identifiable person in an image. Just 35% were motivated by cropped images that did not show the face. (View both images at the top of page 39.)

This preference grew stronger with age. The older consumers were, the more they preferred to see the face of a subject in a photo. While 46% of respondents ages 40–54 years (younger Boomers or Generation Jones) were comfortable with cropped photography, only 24% of those 75 years and older felt the cropped ads



Single-image ad, 66% prefer

were effective. So the importance of context grows as people age.

There were also distinctions by gender (men preferred by a higher degree to see the entire image) and employment (retirees, who tend to be older, wanted an identifiable picture).

Since many creative departments include younger people, who often have an artistic preference for cropped images, it is critical to share this finding with your entire team.

3. Reflect the vibrant attitudes of your targets

We also tested photography featuring vibrant colors and expressions versus a cool color palette and subdued or contemplative models. Overall, the vibrant images were more appealing to older audiences. Caregivers and parents of children over 18 were most motivated by vibrant pictures—"It's as if it were a shot of sunshine," said one survey participant.

Because research shows that vibrant oranges and reds are perceived better by aging eyes, we had predicted that the Silent and Greatest Generation respondents would prefer the vibrant image choice. We were surprised, however. The 75-plus age group actually showed a slight preference for the subdued image (53%). Women of this age went contrary to the choice of women at younger ages. The researchers probed the reasons and,



Multiple-images ad, 34% prefer

through comments and discussions, concluded that the older women were turned off by the messiness and informality of the photo (shown on page 40).

Illustrating how different people have varying reactions to imagery, men at all ages bucked the trend and preferred subdued imagery. What was interesting is that the older the men were, the stronger they connected to the subdued imagery. What we could not determine is if they were reacting positively to the cooler/calm color scheme or the subject matter. (Turn to page 40 for this image.)

4. Reflect the active lifestyles of your target audience

We discovered that all age groups were pretty consistent in a preference for lifestyle photography over product shots. And, when all 12 images from the survey were compared, the two most popular photos were lifestyle images.

Lifestyle photography was a "safe bet" across all income levels, and had the most positive impact on those with household incomes of over \$150,000/year. Curiously, the preference for lifestyle photography became weaker for those with higher levels of education, but still ranked as one of their top two "favorites." (View the lifestyle image on page 40.)

For those respondents who spend a significant amount of time in a nurturing



Identifiable image, 65% prefer

role (caregivers, volunteers and gardeners), lifestyle images and intergenerational images proved especially effective.

Among respondents ages 65–74 years, values for the lifestyle image were very high. In fact, Silent Generation respondents had higher positive net values for images that featured groups or families—they related strongly to the connections depicted in the pictures. This finding didn't surprise our research team. As we noted earlier, photos that create an emotional response are most effective with older individuals.

5. Give in to the appeal of animals

The test image in the lifestyle category (shown on page 40) included a pet. This sparked many comments about the dog and led to shared stories about pets, many of which had gone to pet heaven years earlier. As one respondent said, the picture had “everything—multiple generations *and* a dog.”

In both research and in practice, pets can have a positive impact on the recall and effectiveness of marketing with older consumers.

Putting the research to work

How can these insights and additional findings from the *Photo Finish* research lead to more effective marketing campaigns? Take the example of the recent campaign for Westminster at Lake Ridge, a continuing care retirement community



Cropped image, 35% prefer

in Occoquan, Virginia. Creating Results' marketing team recommended that investing in original photography would help the community stand out in a crowded and competitive market. So the art director worked with a professional photographer to produce pictures that followed guidelines based on our research and matched the specific target market preferences as follows:

- single images (no collages)
- clearly identifiable (no cropping)
- vibrant expressions
- lifestyle rather than product
- real people rather than models for greater authenticity
- pets included to increase emotional appeal

The models were posed on the Lake Ridge campus, showing the “product in use.” These images were then used in an



integrated online/offline marketing campaign. (Our eBook, *Photo Finish*, provides specific findings and tips on candid versus posed images. See “Resources” on page 38 for information about where to download this publication.)

Offline, direct mail postcards caught the attention of age 70-plus targets. Each postcard featured a URL (website address) for a corresponding online “landing page,” a specially designed webpage delivering a customized, specific sales pitch.

So what happened when older adults met John, Pat and Penny (a dog owned by a Westminster at Lake Ridge resident)?

Overall, the campaign generated an increase in leads of 267% over the same period in 2008. And Penny the dog was clearly the most popular! She got the most traffic and led to the most online registrations of all three Westminster profiles. (See below for the campaign images.)

Parting shots for marketers

While images are very powerful, they are also very personal. For as many folks that loved the dog in the survey's lifestyle image, there were a number who truly disliked it—and made sure our researchers knew it!

Remember that no single image will magically appeal to all age, demographic or psychographic groups. You need to find out which images will make emotional connections and help you establish personal relevance with your prospects. A

Continued on page 40

Using photography that matched market preferences, the Westminster at Lake Ridge marketing campaign generated a significant response



Vibrant image, 65% prefer



Subdued image, 35% prefer



Lifestyle image, 59% prefer

sophisticated and efficient marketing program will vary images based upon subsegments of target markets.


Choosing photography requires starting from a deep understanding of older adults. Focus groups and other marketing research methods can help you test assumptions and learn what works/what doesn't with your ideal prospects. When conducting research, don't expect to find a universally appealing image. It is equally critical to avoid settling on images that are just accepted, because no one objected to them. The problem with these plain vanilla images is that they aren't likely to be motivating.

Without a true understanding, marketing and sales teams can turn their prospects off. With it, they can select images that make their marketing more effective, which in turn will:

- cut through marketing clutter (including competitive advertising)
- increase awareness
- reinforce perceived advantages—price, quality, etc.
- improve recall of your brand and marketing

- build positive emotional connections
- increase referrals and word-of-mouth, as what people see reinforces what they heard

And, finally, the right images shorten the purchase process. The stronger the emotional response, the quicker people are to act.

Based on Creating Results' photo research and your specific target market insights, be willing to be bold. It's how you get noticed. By taking this research and our guidelines into account, you'll be on your way to 2010 marketing that is "picture perfect." 

Todd Harff, CAASH, is president of Creating Results, LLC, a strategic marketing, public relations and advertising agency that motivates mature consumers to purchase lifestyle-oriented products and services. Creating Results has invested 16 years in studying the more affluent consumers of the Generation X, Boomer and Silent Generations, to better understand what urges them to leap into action. The agency has helped 47 retirement communities in 12 states, convention and visitors bureaus, hotels, professional service firms, and health and wellness companies improve the return

on their marketing investments. Harff is a founding member of the International Mature Marketing Network. Find out more at www.creatingresults.com.

References

1. Sweeney, C. (2009, January 25). Taking long view on Presbyopia. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/2009/jan/25/health/chi-0125-presbyopia-betterjan25>.
2. Wikipedia. Presbyopia. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyopia>.
3. Prevent Blindness America and National Eye Institute. (2002). Vision Problems in the U.S.: Prevalence of Adult Vision Impairment and Age-Related Eye Disease in America. Available at <http://www.preventblindness.org/vpus/amd.pdf>.
4. US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2006). Improving The Nation's Vision Health: A Coordinated Public Health Approach. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/pdf/improving_nations_vision_health.pdf.
5. Wolfe, D., & Snyder, R. (2003). *Ageless Marketing: Strategies for Reaching the Hearts and Minds of the New Customer Majority*. Chicago IL: Dearborn Trade Publishing.

Images courtesy of Creating Results, LLC