

THE BOOMERS STRIKE BACK

The jig's up all you Gen Y and Gen X upstarts. Boomers are back in the headlines and they're mad as hell.

All we've heard about for the past five years is Gen Y this and Gen X that, with their apologists snivelling about the impenetrable ceiling created by the generation ahead of them. They have characterised Boomers as boring old fogeys, grimly hanging on to wealth and power, and preventing the younger generations from getting a foothold on the ladder of success.

Well they were right about wealth and power, and wrong about old. And Boomers have had enough.

Did you know, for example, that of the 6,000-plus CEOs of New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ listed companies, only 98 are under forty? That's 1.6 per cent under the age of forty.

Boomers rule. Literally. Barack Obama at forty-seven is the fifth youngest American President in history. Both Obama and Australia's fifty-one year old Prime Minister Kevin Rudd are both Baby Boomers. Obama with his young daughters doesn't strike anyone as an old fogey. And what about Johnny Depp and Brad Pitt? They're both Boomers but definitely not seniors.

According to a new research study, there's another reason why a bunch of Boomers are bristling. One million of Australia's 5 million Baby Boomers are part of an influential breed known as the new economic order or NEO. These NEOboomers out-perform, out-rank and out-spend the younger generations 2:1.

Characterised by their determination never to retire and by their progressive social values, these NEOboomers vote governments in and out, are more confident about the economy (yes, even in these times of financial crisis), are less interested in religion and spend more than anyone else in the economy.

Using Roy Morgan Research data from 50,000 respondents across the country, the Social Intelligence Lab has found that NEOboomers are reshaping our preconceived notions of Australian's in their fifties and sixties.

For example, almost all of them, 95 per cent to be exact, are in what is known as the Big Spender category – that's the top third of discretionary spenders in the economy. This compares with only 40 per cent of the younger generations, those parsimonious Gen Xs and Gen Ys who are supposed to be the marketer's dream.

Just how much myth-busting can the youngsters bear? They talk constantly about being better educated than their parents. Sorry! Almost half of NEOboomers have university degrees compared to only a quarter of Gen Xs & Ys combined. And then there's the endless chat about how much they earn. Half of NEOboomers earn more than \$100,000 a year compared to only 23 per cent of Gen Xs & Ys.

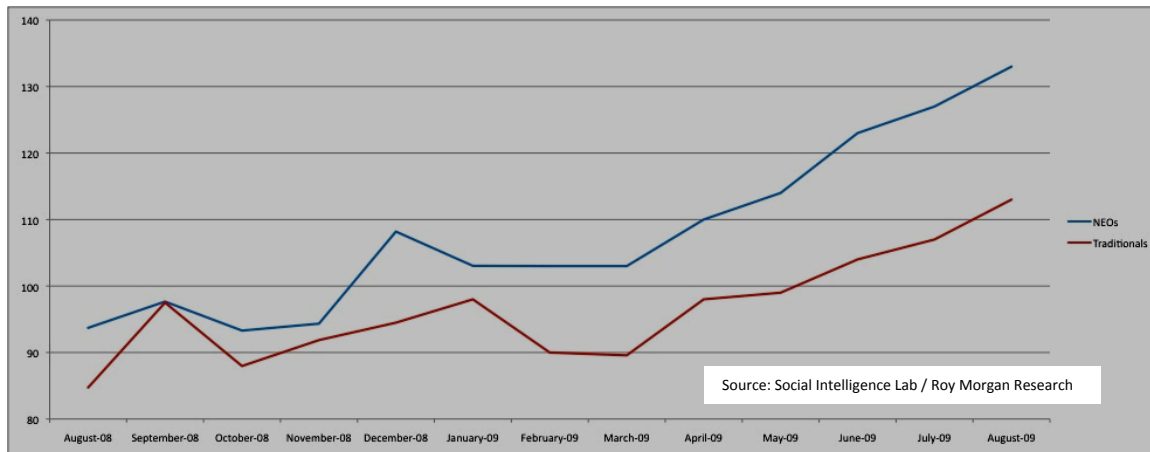
What about the R word: that's retirement not recession. Only 8 per cent of NEOboomers are retired. That means that 92 per cent are happily working and planning their next career. Compare that with the 19 per cent of the population who have retired, and the stereotype starts to wilt.

Hold the phone. The mobile phone, that is. How sick are we of hearing about young people and their mobile phones? A higher proportion of NEOboomers own mobile phones than Gen Xs and Ys. NEOboomers are 3 times more likely than the general population and twice as likely as Gen X and Gen Y to spend up big on their mobile phone bill: that's more than \$160pm.

So it is that these NEOboomers are redefining the age clichés. Even the stereotype of the balding bloke buying a sportscar as part of his mid-life crisis is exploding. The Mini Cooper and the Audi are on the NEOBoomer must-buy list, not the Porsche and the Ferrari.

Then there's the issue of climate change. These are the people who were talking about global warming when Al Gore was just a politician. That's why two-thirds of NEOboomers are considering buying an environmentally sensitive hybrid vehicle as their next car. Compare this to less than half of all Gen X and Y.

While their confidence as consumers took a rare hit when Wall Street darling Lehmann Brothers collapsed in September last year, it recovered by Christmas and is leading other consumers out of the global gloom. NEO consumer-confidence runs an average 15-20 points above the general population in the US, Canada & Australia. So, they're not blinking as the global recession runs its course.



When it comes to banking, the NEOboomers prefer NAB – 43 per cent ahead of the general population and 48 per cent ahead of Gen X and Y – followed by Westpac and ANZ, with Commonwealth bringing up the rear.

But it's in their social attitudes and behaviour that the NEOboomers really stand out. They love the arts and are far more socially progressive than Gen X and Y and look forward to an 'exciting life' rather than the 'secure life' their traditional cousins prefer.

So, next time you hear someone rattling on about how Gen Y rules the airwaves and the workplace, just whisper NEOboomer and move on. And as for traditional marketers? Perhaps the time has arrived to take an evidence based approach to the world of consumer rather than just being dazzled by the latest shiny object.

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