

# THE BIG BOOM THEORY

## Zoomer Boomers Expand Retailing Universe

A 60-year-old mother of three in New Jersey recently gave birth to her fourth child. She’s a psychologist. And she plans to return to work within a month of her delivery date. She’s a quintessential Zoomer Boomer – a high-energy Baby Boomer intent on remaining significant.

While not all women born from 1945-1964 are planning pregnancies for their sixth decade of life, Boomers continue to redefine growing up, if not necessarily growing old. And retailers and marketers are doing more than ever to reach out to this previously neglected group.

“As Boomers age, they have no intention of fading into the woodwork,” says Mary Brown, a partner at JWT BOOM: Boomers & Beyond, a subsidiary of J. Walter Thompson. “They perceive themselves as vibrant individuals and they like their appearance to reflect this, regardless of age. They also believe in treating themselves well. This combination of factors makes for an eager shopper.”

In fact, 40 percent of female Boomers say they like or love to shop for clothes, according to Cotton Incorporated’s *Lifestyle Monitor*™. And they shop for clothing 1.7 times a month. Compare that to GenXers (women aged 30-42), 45 percent of whom say they like or love to shop, and go out shopping 1.9 times a month.

In 2006 , Baby Boomers accounted for 35.3 percent of unit sales and 33.3 percent dollar sales of apparel, according to data from NPD *Fashionworld’s AccuPanel*. In the first three months of 2007, unit sales of apparel for this age group declined 3.3 percent but dollar sales increased 3.0 percent.

“Boomers are at the peak of their earning power and have more disposable income than other age groups,” Brown asserts. “Boomer women spend over \$2 trillion per year, and they are absolutely not tied to particular brands. So, it’s very possible for retailers to win new customers and lots of business by connecting with the Boomer market.”

Although the NPD numbers show most Boomer purchases (34.6 percent) are made at the mass market level, another 30 percent of purchases come from chain and specialty stores.

Talbots, the retailer of classic styles that sells its product in stores, online and via catalog, knows proper fit is imperative for its customer.

“Having the right styles in a range of ‘real world’ sizes is key,” says Betsy Thompson, Talbots spokesperson. “These women don’t want to dress like their mothers or their daughters.” Coldwater Creek, which also has brick-and-mortar stores, a Web site, and catalog business, targets professional women 35 to 60 years old.

“Once fit has been established, making sure everything looks good — and ultimately attracts compliments — is why she’ll come back to Coldwater Creek for more,” explains Georgia Shonk-Simmons, president and chief merchandising officer.



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- Betsy Thompson, Talbots

### WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT CLOTHES SHOPPING

	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers
Love to Shop	38%	18%	13%
Like to Shop	30%	27%	27%
Don't mind Shopping	15%	24%	20%

Great service is another must for the generation that invented the term “multitasker.” Talbots offers personalized assistance, as well as services like “Style by Appointment” and “Red Line Phone Service,” designed to allow for the best use of time.

Coldwater Creek is introducing a personal shopper program for time-strapped Boomers who “are staying involved in their communities, their careers, and their families,” Shonk- Simmons says.

JC Penney is using a lifestyle, rather than generational, approach to help shoppers find specific styles. For instance, the Nicole by Nicole Miller line was introduced two years ago as apparel for the Baby Boomer generation. Now, it falls within JC Penney’s modern lifestyle category.

“We divide our merchandise into four categories: traditional, conservative, modern and trendy,” says Nicole Falagrad, spokesperson. “Defining the style preference of each customer group ensures that we have clear assortments and focused brand offerings.”

JC Penney may have repositioned the Nicole line, but there have been a couple of noteworthy exits from the Boomer retail scene: Gymboree’s Janeville and Gap’s Forth & Towne. Brown says neither shuttering is a reflection of the demographic. Rather, Forth & Towne’s closing is a reflection of Gap Inc.’s companywide difficulties over the past several years. Meanwhile, Gymboree returned focus to its core competencies — products for children.

Of note, neither Forth & Towne nor Janeville offered online shopping. Big mistake, Brown says. “We recently completed a study that found 74 percent of Boomer women shop online and 87 percent conduct product research online before making an offline purchase.”

Another thing to keep in mind: denim. *Monitor* stats show Boomers own 6.3 pairs of jeans, compared to 6.8 pairs owned by GenXers and 8.7 pairs by the 16 to 29 year old Gen Y crowd.

Talbots’ Thompson says since so many Boomer women grew up in denim, anything related to it has casual appeal, be it a denim blazer, flirty skirt or ballet flats.

Coldwater Creeks’ Shonk-Simmons says denim is “maturing beautifully,” with plenty of options: embroidered crops, stretch fabrics, a waist that’s not too high or low, and the new “Shape Me Jean,” designed with “real world” body types in mind. Boomer power is in their numbers, providing plenty of opportunity for brands and retailers.

“Boomers want to feel appreciated and understood as a customer,” Brown says. “We all want to look good.”

*This story is one in a series of articles based on findings from Cotton Incorporated’s Lifestyle Monitor™ tracking research. Each story will focus on a specific topic as it relates to the American women’s wear consumer and her attitudes and behavior regarding clothing, appearance, fashion, fiber selection and many other timely, relevant subjects.*



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