

Meet the Future of Personal Fitness Training

Build your business with clients from the Baby Boom Generation.

Their births began just after World War II ended, and they grew up during the Vietnam War (1965–73); some live with the memories as Vietnam veterans. The assassination of John F. Kennedy (1963) saddened the nation when they were children, and they watched as the Richard Nixon Watergate scandal unfolded (1972–74). Many remember the untimely deaths of Marilyn Monroe (1962) and Elvis Presley (1977). The Beatles reigned supreme (1964–1970), and classics like *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), *The Sound of Music* (1965), *The Godfather* (1972), *Star Wars* (1977) and *Grease* (1978) graced the movie screens. Some of them partied at Woodstock (1969) and have the photos to prove it.

The Baby Boomers grew up in a world that was very different from that of their parents—those to whom the fitness industry currently refers as “seniors,” “older adults” or “mature adults.” In 2007, however, members of the generation born between 1946 and 1964 will reach the ages of 43–61 and begin to approach retirement age themselves. Make no mistake; although they are aging, they are not old, nor are they ready to get old. Their interest in preserving their youth creates an immense opportunity for the fitness industry—a 78-million-person opportunity, to be precise.

Seeing \$\$\$

For personal fitness trainers (PFTs), the aging of the Baby Boom Generation translates to dollar signs. Just look at the numbers:

- By the year 2016, more than 111.3 million people will be older than 50 (SIR Boomer Project).

- People older than 45 account for 52% of consumer spending, and people older than 50 own 67% of the nation's wealth (ICAA 2005).
- Baby Boomers already account for approximately one-third of fitness facility memberships, and Boomers are expected to continue flocking to health clubs as they reach retirement age (IHRSA 2002).
- The 45–54 age group accounts for 30% of personal training clients, and the over-55 group makes up another 25% (ICAA 2005).
- Nearly half of adults between the ages of 50 and 64 live with at least one chronic condition, such as arthritis, hypertension, diabetes or heart disease, all of which can be improved through exercise (IHRSA 2004).

The numbers speak for themselves: Many millions of Baby Boomers have the need for your services and the means to pay for them.

Understand Your Audience

To make the most of this opportunity, you need to know your audience.

Be careful not to judge Baby Boomers by their birth year. Chronological age proves to be an ineffective method for describing the demographic; “old” will become much older as Baby Boomers outdo the generations before them.

“Realize that the people in this market are different,” advises Colin Milner, chief executive officer of the International Council on Active Aging (ICAA). “Spend time with them and embrace them. Become a student of the population for optimal success.”

Most Baby Boomers tend to measure themselves by what they accomplish. Many nearing traditional retirement age

have no plans to retire. They intend to work, volunteer and stay busy. To maintain their lifestyles and fight the chronic diseases that come with age, they know they need to stay active—and they will seek the help of PFTs to do so.

But if you just look at this population as a way to fill the empty spots in your schedule, you could miss out on an amazing opportunity. Without making the Baby Boomers a significant part of your practice, you run the risk of greatly limiting your potential. To keep up with the demand, you need to rethink your approach and “step up” your services. According to reports from Les Mills International, creator of BodyPump® and other exercise-to-music fitness formats, a significant increase in programming could be necessary to meet the needs of this population.

To service these clients with targeted programs, you should know a few things. Study what happens to the body as it ages, and focus on concerns such as arthritis and joint issues, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis, back pain, the effects of stress, and the losses of strength and functional ability. Then learn how exercise can improve or alleviate those conditions. Cody Sipe, 2005 IDEA Program Director of the Year, personal trainer and co-owner of Miracles Fitness in West Lafayette, Indiana, goes so far as to recommend, “Trainers should have formal training in how to deal with these issues and how to work with medical providers effectively.”

In the Gym

While you are expanding on your medical and scientific knowledge, hone your communication and coaching skills. Connect

elements of a baby boomer fitness program

- balance work
- integrative training that simulates everyday activities in duration and exertion
- body-mind exercise
- multifunctional strength training
- exercises that promote stability, mobility and joint flexibility
- motivational music
- versatile equipment
- group training

with potential clients on a personal level to develop their trust. Foster a sense of humor and put effort into developing a comfortable environment. Consider that the atmosphere, not just the exercise, attracts participants to a given mode of activity. Use the power of music to evoke an emotional response and motivate clients.

Design programs that help your clients manage their health issues, combat the effects of aging, achieve their goals and maintain independence and quality of life. Be sure their workouts are well-rounded and include all the basics of any exercise program, but consider additional elements of functional training, such as balance work. Teach clients how to fall to minimize injury. Also use integrative training that simulates everyday activities in duration and exertion. For example, begin with cardiovascular training, do a little strength training, and then perform more cardio work before proceeding to core work, etc.—intermixing the modes of training, just as your clients intermix types of activity during daily living.

Research from Les Mills supports the inclusion of body-mind formats, with an emphasis on tai chi; multifunctional strength

work (more to promote a fully functional body than to tone); exercises that promote stability, mobility and flexibility in the joints, especially the hips and shoulders; and the use of versatile equipment (the fitness ball is a favorite). Also consider group training, which provides a social connection that offers built-in support, improves motivation and fosters retention.

Variety may be your mantra with Baby Boomers, partially to provide tailor-made, well-rounded fitness programs, and partially to keep clients from getting bored. When being creative, however, make sure you do not increase the risk for injury or intimidate your clients.

Most important, help clients find an activity that they really enjoy and that gives them what they need. Emma Barry, creative director for Les Mills, tells clients, “Find what you love and people you love doing it with.”

Baby Boomer Marketing 101

If you build it, they will come—but your success rate will fare better with some savvy marketing tactics. “Take the typical marketing approach [used] by many personal trainers,” Sipe says. “They sell their own good looks and hard bodies. Or they sell the idea of a hard body. While Boomers certainly want to hang onto their youth as long as they can, this approach falls short with, in my opinion, the vast majority of the potential client base in this country.”

“With these people, it’s about changing their lives, not changing their physique,” says Milner. The themes of independence and self-reliance resonate with members of this generation, so show them how you can help them stay active, maintain their quality of life, and improve their physical capabilities for practical, functional reasons. Focus on their ability to travel, play

golf, hang out with the grandkids and participate in the community.

Baby Boomers have the willingness to be challenged and want to feel energized, alive and youthful. What they don’t have is the time for a long sales pitch or hours and hours of workouts.

Whether you are developing marketing materials or speaking with potential clients, provide positive messages that focus on the benefits of exercise. Use simple language, not technical terms. Also use inclusive language that won’t intimidate or alienate unfit or new exercisers, and refrain from referring to age. Baby Boomers do not want to be called “older,” “senior” or “mature.” Instead, market by implication and use the stories of real people in the age group you want to attract.

If your marketing materials include photographs, use images of people with a range of body types in the age group you want to target, and picture them in comfortable clothing and relaxed environments. While you want fit and healthy models, using only the young and beautiful, or the sweaty and muscle-bound, will most likely turn Baby Boomers away. “The paradigm shift from [a focus on] youth [and] body image to a more mature and professional attitude really needs to occur quickly if we are going to tap into this market,” says Sipe.

Since women make 80% of a household’s buying decisions, employ female-friendly marketing strategies, such as using female models on brochures, posting fliers on the walls of the women’s locker room and giving presentations to local women’s groups.

Your most effective recruitment tool for new clients will probably be your current clientele. Word-of-mouth marketing ranks among the most powerful motivators with Boomers. Do right by your current clients—provide results and keep them motivated. Then let them help you build your business.

The time to reach out to Baby Boomers is now; the market is ripe. The future of the fitness industry rests with the aging Baby Boom Generation—in the here and now, and going forward for many years to come.

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marketing to baby boomers

DOs

Promote positive messages.
Focus on the benefits of exercise.
Use photos of healthy, real people.
Use simple language.
Be supportive and inclusive.
Focus on practical possibilities.

DON'Ts

Use scare tactics.
Focus on negative health issues.
Use photos of very young or very old people.
Use technical terms and complex terminology.
Be condescending.
Promise the impossible.

trainer to group fitness instructor and from program director to assistant general manager. She holds an undergraduate degree in journalism and a graduate degree in sports and fitness management.

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