

Defining baby boomers' needs in a millennials' world



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03.20.2019

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Millennials. Generation Z. Millennials – again. There's a consistent focus on these generations as food companies study their preferences and buying patterns. After all, they are the future, and present, spenders. But while it's important to look at these people groups for marketing and innovation purposes, baking and snack companies shouldn't forget about baby boomers who have just as many wants and needs and just as great of a presence.

After peaking in 1999, baby boomers remain the largest living adult generation in the United States, according to Pew Research Center. Although millennials are soon going to overtake this number, older adults are generally wealthier – though they're more skeptical of prices than other generations – and remain influential in the market.



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“Baby boomers are renegades,” said Melissa Abbott, vice-president of retainer services, The Hartman Group, Inc. “They are the pioneers of the organic movement. They’re the first generation in America that is actually questioning their doctors; they want to try treating things with food first. And as they’re aging, they’re questioning how their food is produced.”

The pioneers of the organic food movement, baby boomers view this category as higher quality products, unlike millennials who view it as diverse and flavorful. They don’t think that organic food tastes good all the time but that it’s better and healthier from a pesticide standpoint. Across the board, from snacks to baked foods, baby boomers look to organic for nutrition and health purposes, and because they’re smart about callouts, they’ll be looking deeper to verify these health qualities.

According to the Innova Market Insights’ “Consumer Lifestyle and Attitudes Survey 2018,” of consumers in the United States, U.K., China, Brazil, France and Germany, 67% of baby boomers are making changes to their diets to become healthier. Part of this transformation includes products that are tasty but contain less added sugar and more fiber.

Older adults are more currently concerned about sugar than other generations. While younger consumers are often satisfied with one small treat – that includes real butter, real sugar and organic properties – Ms. Abbott said baby boomers often want to be able to eat something that has less sugar so that they can enjoy a larger quantity. She gave the example of Halo Top ice cream as a popular treat for baby boomers. This company boasts about one third less sugar and one third less calories than other ice cream companies.

Innova has seen an increase interest in fiber; in fact, the company’s research placed it at the No. 7 top trend of 2019. Virginia Lee, insights and innovation manager, Innova Market Insights, said baby boomers are driving this trend as they seek a solution for digestive health, weight management and boosted energy. Companies are responding, and Innova Market Insights found that snack launches with fiber claims experienced 20.9% CAGR between 2014-2018.

The Hartman Group has found that baby boomers are still concerned with cholesterol. So even though generally consumers now recognize that fat is good, older adults tend to be more cautious. Therefore, bakery products and snacks that are lower in fat can be more appealing to them.

Sodium is also an ingredient that baby boomers seek to reduce in their diet. Ms. Abbott said this is more due to aging as opposed to being a generational choice.

“They were the ones who were all about getting kettle chips out there and really indulging in those high-quality real foods, but now they can’t have as many as they used to,” Ms. Abbott noted. “They want real food ingredients – sea salt versus something low sodium.”

While they do seek healthier foods, it’s important to keep in mind that baby boomers are less likely to branch out and go for global foods and flavors like millennials. So to reach this generation, specifically in the United States, baking and snack companies should ultimately stick to what these consumers know.

“Baby boomers tend to really like more Americanized style food,” Ms. Abbott noted. “Especially as they’re aging more and are having more health issues pop up, they’re really looking for things that are more familiar.”

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