The Overlooked: Social Media Marketing For Senior Citizens

By Katie Moran, Boston College

Though Madison Avenue largely forgets seniors in general, they are now a demographic grossly overlooked on social media. Those 65 years and older are changing: they are living longer, are more active, and becoming increasingly literate online.

Not only does this age group have 47x the net worth of households headed by those 35 and older (according to AdAge), but they are now the fastest growing users of social media. These days, they don’t just have an email account, but they are searching on Google, browsing Facebook, newsfeeds, and watching YouTube—sometimes from their iPad. According to the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, “the 74-plus demographic is the fastest growing demographic among social networks.” There are currently 39 million people aged 65 and older using Facebook, Twitter, and Skype, making them the fastest growing age demographic on these sites.

While people are starting to notice more and more grandparents on their Facebook accounts, the figures are actually much greater. According to an All Assisted Living Homes 2010 report, 11% of Facebook users are seniors. These 14.8 million users represent a 1,448% yearly growth in this demographic. More and more classes are being held to train senior citizens how to use online tools like Facebook, and 1 in 5 of these users will log on for an hour any given day. The Pew Research found that 13% of adults 50 years and older are already using Twitter and estimate this figure to only continue rising.

Why Are Seniors Going Social?

Another All Assisted Living Homes report found that senior citizens are turning towards Facebook mostly to connect with others, just the same as every other Facebook user.

- 40% to connect with family and old friends
- 30% to share photos
- 20% for social gaming
• 10% for contests and games

In the same way that I use Facebook to keep up with my friends’ lives, seniors want to stay informed on their children and grandchildren, as well as reconnect with lost friends. As for Twitter, seniors are finding it an easily accessible resource for following streams of information, like news sources, health information, and literary publications.

How Are Brands Connecting Socially To Seniors?

Unfortunately, some brands are still trying to understand social media in general. But some companies have figured out a way to connect with this rising demographic on social media. Two companies in particular are leading the way with social seniors.

**Merrill Gardens**

Merrill Gardens is one of the leading assisted living homes in America, with over 7,000 residents among their 50+ communities. The company is using social media to connect with both their residents, but also the children of their residents. Specifically in terms of marketing, Merrill Gardens uses these accounts for lead generation with the adult children of their target market, who are researching homes for their parents online. Beyond lead generation, their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts are used as a way for their residents to stay involved with community events, as well as for adult children to follow the events and news of their parents’ assisted living homes. They even have a Pinterest account with creative boards specifically for senior citizens, including Car Memories at Merrill Gardens, Love at Merrill Gardens, Top 10 Merrill Gardens Moments, and Knitting Inspiration.

**AARP**

The American Association of Retired Persons is a nonprofit organization providing a wide range of benefits to people aged 50 and older. With over 40 million members, the AARP is one of the largest service providers for this demographic. According to the AARP, “the top four online activities for people over 60 are Google, Facebook, Yahoo +1.99% and YouTube,” and the organization has tailored their social media similarly. The content on their Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube accounts is targeted directly to their older members, with posts often referring to members’ grandchildren or offering helpful tips for staying healthy. They are relating and connecting directly with their target market just as any other brand is connecting with us. With 62,000 Twitter followers and over 1 million likes on Facebook, they are connecting with senior citizens more than some other brands with younger demographics.
How Can Other Brands Keep Up With Seniors?

For brands that target senior citizens but never considered social media marketing, now is a good time to consider. For brands that already have existing social media strategies, they might want to have separate accounts for this specific demographic so they can cater their content more specifically. Though senior citizens use social media accounts for mostly the same purposes that say . . . Millennials do, there are some slight differences in types of content. For example, research is showing that this demographic prefers images and stories, rather than promoting services.

But besides type of content, the same principles apply in creating a social media marketing plan: have a focused target, engage with users, listen carefully, and commit to frequent use. Brands must also narrow their target focus—knowing whether they are targeting senior citizens or their children.

According to AdAge, “every day for the next two decades, 10,000 boomers will join in the marketing wasteland of ‘seniors.’” At the very least, brands need to start understanding social media marketing towards senior citizens before all of the Boomers retire—a demographic that will be more computer literate than any senior generation before.