

# The Generation Changes

insight

David Baker | April 2008



There is an interesting article in the current issue of *Harvard Business Review* entitled “The Next 20 Years: How Customers and Workforce Attitudes Will Evolve.” This article speaks to the many emerging trends within six generations and the attitudinal, financial, societal, political and the relative impacts on how the workforce will evolve in the coming years. In looking through these generations, I put the “email” filter on to see how they consume email, how they are consumers of digital mediums in general and any impacts our channel should be aware of.

**GI Generation (born 1901-1924)** – This generation consists of the grandparents and great-grandparents that we know today. The elderly are a fascinating group who have evolved in their use of email. This group isn’t the fastest adopter of the Internet, but there is no mistaking their presence. Considering the youngest in this generation is in their 80’s, email is traditionally kept to social networking and research related activities.

**Silent Generation (born 1924-1942)** – This generation is widely recognized as the “activist” generation and are still driving social changes that you see today. The meat behind “cause marketing.” To see their influence, look at how “cause marketing” and fundraising through the Internet have evolved and you’ll see a progressively growing trend in how they use email for business, marketing and general awareness of issues. Although an aging generation, this group is the older parents and grandparents that buy/sell and email every joke, religious and motivational viral message there is.

**Boom Generation (born 1943-1960)** – The phenomenon of the Internet can be attributed to this generation. They are the consumers, the high-value earners, the suburban dwellers, and the first generation of women challenging the corporate glass ceiling. There are many books written about the power of “women”, including their influence on household income and how that income is disposed of. The women are the health researchers when their parents are ill, the surfers of the web, the catalysts to retail and have even progressed as buyers of high-priced items. Email is a fulfillment vehicle to them, a tool for social networking and a way to be more efficient in their day. The primary activity on the Internet for a Boomer is email, closely followed by search. This group is VERY involved in their children’s lives, more so than the previous generation. Key examples of this have been the popularity of child-related sites, parent support sites, health-related sites and social networking in general. PTA groups have each other’s email addresses now and schools have email newsletters. While Generation X is the catalyst of email as a social networking tool, the followers that bring “mass” to this phenomenon are the Boomers. When I tell you that my mother makes a conscious decision to switch ISPs in order to manage her email better, you know the Boomers “get it.”

**Generation X (born 1961-1981)** – Is the MTV, hip-hop and risk-taking generation. Of all living generations, they are the most active in the management of our lives via digital channels. We

are best described as wanting to be our own bosses and will be the generation that struggles to coral the next line or workforce entering the market in the next 20 years. In the US, this group also represents the largest percentage of immigrants, which has added fuel to the emerging trend of globalization. Email fits nicely as it bridges the global with local for what PEWS research terms “Glocalization,” bringing social networks closer through the use of email and digital channels. This generation is the one that I see at conferences and raise their hands when I ask who has more than 4+ email addresses, has answered email at church, answered email before they brushed their teeth and have answered email while driving. This generation is why they have written books like “Send: The Essential Guide to Email for the Office and Home” – to help us cope balancing efficiency with lifestyle.

**Millennial (born 1982-2005)** – The oldest member of this group is 25 and entering the workforce. This is our new workforce that grew up with email and text messaging in high school and are the catalysts to MySpace and YouTube. I like to call this the multiplex generation. We had Atari and Nintendo and this generation has video on demand, Xbox and Wii. This generation is exposed to so many stimuli and choices it will be difficult to “institutionalize” this generation and keep their interest. There is no denying this group’s use of email, and how pervasive it is, but they have less patience for clutter and will put more demands on the businesses to optimize channels and media.

**Homeland (2005- 2025?)** – This generation is close to my heart. The first thing I did after my daughter was born , after I sent out photos and alerts of the new baby through email was get my daughter’s name with email accounts on Gmail, AOL, MSN, and Yahoo. Who knows who will own who and who will be around in ten years when she begins to socialize through email. And I don’t want her to be forced to Tara0809766632212@aol.com.

All generations rely on the email channel in one way or another. Thus the nuances of your programs should adapt to their differing needs and their uses. This view only helps you understand the “value” that consumers put on each message, how they process it in their daily lives and how your business can use this to build brand and customer loyalty.

*\*\*This article was originally published in MediaPost, July 2007*

## About the Author

David Baker is the Vice President of Email Solutions for Avenue A | Razorfish. Baker’s responsibilities include expanding email marketing offerings and expertise across the agency and tightly integrating programs into the current and future global digital marketing initiatives of clients.

Baker is an accomplished speaker and a weekly “Email Insider” columnist and advisory board member for Media Post. He frequently presents at industry conferences, including the ad:tech, OMMA, DMA, Inbox and International Conferences. Currently, he sits on two email sub-committees for the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB), and participates in several Email Round Tables with the Email Experience Council (EEC).



Baker has more than 15 years of experience in marketing and advertising and hails from Agency.com where he served as the vice president of email and analytical solutions. In that role he was directly responsible for developing the email and analytical business practice for seven of Agency.com's national and international offices. He helped build brand recognition for clients including VISA, Ladbrokes, 3M, UPromise, Shutterfly, Miller, CNN, Maidenform, Energizer Brands, Del Monte Foods and others. Prior to his position at Agency.com, Baker worked for Targetbase another OmniCom agency building out integrated email services into their direct marketing service practice.

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