

## **REACHING THE OVER-50S: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?**

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*At Summit 2006 Peter Ayton, Chief Statistician, Mintel, took a look at opportunities to engage with the over-50 market.*

Where once being 50 years old was seen as, if not the twilight years, then certainly heading that way, well, times they are a-changing.

With the over-50s now representing a third of the population in the UK, this demographic has changed hugely over the last few decades and will continue to do so in the short term at a least. Advances in medicine mean that men especially are living longer. This in turn has meant that there are more (often married) couples who are keen to spend time and money doing things that their parents never had the chance to do.

While fewer people are getting married in general, or are doing it later in life, it is still married people who enjoy life more in this age group. Enjoyment of life can be attributed to a number of factors, some of which are stress-related; when people are no longer bringing up children or working, stress levels almost inevitably fall. And it is only in the 80s and beyond that enjoyment of life begins to tail off slightly, which understandably often coincides with the death of a partner or deterioration in one's own health.

Being 'connected' is another area that the over-50s are becoming more and more interested in. The latest data indicates that 80% of under-50s have both mobile and fixed line telephones but the 56-60 age range is even higher than this, and even 50% of 76-80s have both types of phone. It's only in the over-80s demographic that the figure falls to around the 30% mark.

Meanwhile, the rise of the 'silver surfer' continue apace. The internet usage of 51-55-year-olds is now at the same level as the national average, at around 60%. The 56-60-year-old age group is not far behind and it is only in the over-70s that it drops to below 20%. This indicates that there is an increasingly fertile market online for reaching this demographic, no matter what your service or product offering.

While it's important to understand that segmentation can be crucial, it shouldn't necessarily done by age but by lifestyle. For example, Macleans 40 Plus, described as "toothpaste for older teeth", is largely bought by the over-60s who use it as it makes them feel younger. This aspirational attitude is key to getting the marketing right for your product, as sectors such as personal finance and leisure, and in particular holidays, have shown.

As far as retailers are concerned, Marks & Spencer already have a small but loyal share of the over-50s market, while Sainsbury's and Safeway have a healthy slice each. However, Asda and market leader Tesco both have more of a youth-focused outlook and will need adjust their thinking to bring the growing older generation with them if they are to maintain their overall position.