



Sonic Boomers – Ignore Them at Your Peril

Socially, idealistically, and economically, a special generation of Americans have long existed as agents for change and realized opportunity. Now, more than ever, they are a force to be recognized and respected, with potential benefits for all.

From the years of 1946-1955, America saw the birth of a generation unlike any other. While their parents were products of Depression-era politics and isolationist outlooks, they were raised in an environment of competitive possibility, now on a global scale. The first children born following the conclusion of WWII, they entered a world of post-war prosperity, opportunity, and economic growth.

Although they would come to be seen as part of the larger two-decade Baby Boom, these individuals, whom we call Sonic Boomers, have consistently differentiated themselves from the younger Boomers (1956-1964) in terms of life experience, outlook, and agenda.

Sonic Boomers were raised on shared experiences, as walls were shattered through the advent of new media. They could “see” and “hear” the world around them, crossing boundaries of region, philosophy, and race. This exposure would lead to a trademark activism, openly stating opinions and catalyzing material change.

From birth, the world was laid open to this generation and they took it willingly, making it their own.

Now, as they enter “retirement” age, Sonic Boomers are once again redefining the ideals, as they maintain an active life pace. Questions emerge regarding how this group will spend their wealth and respond to the changing economy, while continuing on their self-selected paths. A generation built on inquisitive possibility and change, there is no doubt that they will take on these new roles and challenges in a way unlike any group before.

In recognition of their unifying fast-paced and self-determined, world-changing and establishment-shattering mindset, we call this generation by the moniker ‘Sonic Boomers.’

Sonic Boomers equal active spending power and social initiative, as they invest themselves and their funds in proactive ways. Subsequently, by garnering their interest and appealing to their life outlook, businesses and corporations have the opportunity to tap into a plentiful, ready revenue source.

Keating Magee will help you understand how Sonic Boomers hold target potential for your product or service, and what your brand offering will mean to this forward-focused generation.

Who are the Sonic Boomers and from whence did they come?

Before you can understand where the Sonic Boomers are going, it is best to look at where they’ve been.

From their earliest years, they were a generation offered opportunity on a silver platter. Their parents had returned from war with a renewed faith in the American dream and a dedication to being amongst the “haves” of the world. Sonic Boomers grew up with a television set in the living room and a car in the driveway, seeing where they wanted to go and the means to get there. All the while, dishwashers and the other conveniences born of war-era technology provided more time to dream.

Television alone would become a gateway for the Sonic Boomers. Hanna Barbara provided programming that was “just for them,” as cartoons became a Saturday morning staple. They learned good and bad as a battle of “white hats vs. black hats” on ‘Gunsmoke’ and ‘Bonanza.’ They found music on the ‘Ed Sullivan Show,’ and formed their first crush on the bad-boy when Elvis appeared. While the story lines and lyrics were of their parents’ world, the images were their own, seeing and judging on their own terms the world around them.



While these early exposures laid the ground work for the more holistic Sonic Boomer outlook, it would be the experiences of their formative years, 1962-1972, that would seal their values for a lifetime. In “Red Terror,” they’d learned how to safe guard themselves from bomb attacks by crouching under school desks; and it was from these same seats that they received the intercom announcement of President Kennedy’s death in Dallas. In a world of larger-than-life international enemies and unseen assassins, they lived through social upheaval, both on the streets and through their television screens. Everything was aflame, from bras to draft cards to villages in Vietnam.

Sonic Boomers not only lived through the integration of races, philosophies, and styles, they were often the first to step across demarcated lines. The Civil Rights movement vividly exposed deep-seeded animosities, tore down the walls of legal discrimination, and ended the long-standing institutionalized segregation of America’s races. They heard Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” and they carried the banner into multiple arenas, even following his tragic demise. Woodstock saw the breakdown of musical barriers, as artists of many backgrounds and divergent genres took the stage in a celebration of cultural amalgamation. This cultural change paved way for permissible personal change, self-searching as a right-of-passage and realization of possibility. Just as The Beatles could change from black-suited bucket-cuts to beaded guru experimenters, one person could attempt many paths along the road of life and embrace many lessons along the way.

Despite the pervasive freedom and insistence on change, Sonic Boomers could not completely escape all of the established norms. Many families spent their entire lives in a single town, seeking the economic stability and ease-of-mind. Men were still the household bread-winners, serving out their careers in a single company with loyalty heralded at any price. In realization of these examples set before them, many Sonic Boomers took their personal discoveries and sought to make their place in a similar way. However, unlike their parents, they had an entirely new set of horizons, possibilities marked most poignantly by the first man on the moon.

Between the years of 1976 and 1995, Sonic Boomers set out to build careers and family structures of their own. Quickly they came under the effects of economic excess, spending and living with the “have” mentality that was a right of their birth. This prosperity was temporarily halted by recession (July 1981-November 1982) and “Misery Index,” including 16% interest rates, 9% inflation, and 6% unemployment, before the pendulum swing of economy returned them to a thriving form. Disposable incomes resulted in larger homes and nicer cars, carrying Sonic Boomers to and from the booming suburban residential centers. Unfortunately, this growth also brought problems, alcoholism grew and drug-related problems extended outside the urban centers. These factors, combined with the increasing movement of women from home to the workforce, sent the divorce rate soaring and the emergence of the first “latch key” generation. For Sonic Boomers, the change that had heralded so much progress proved to have a darker side.

The Sonic Boomer self-perception began to show itself as a conglomeration of the open-minded pursuit of dreams and a tightly-held insistence on economic comfort. ‘Dynasty’ and ‘Dallas’ represented the cultural mores of having it all and enjoying the fruits of prosperity. Likewise, this drama-laden outlook on success came to a head with America’s status when communism crumbled and the United States affirmed lead-position once again. Overseas travel increased, as Sonic Boomers opted for cruise ships over planes when setting out to see the world of their making.

Sonic Boomers came to the realization that upward changes are often balanced by downward woes, but never so harshly as in the years since 1986. More and more, this group has become the “sandwich generation,” balancing children and parents’ needs in the midst of continually fluctuating economic stability. The up-swings and down-turns have included a Dot.com boom and bust, with companies disappearing almost as quickly as they appeared. Corporate superstars, such as Worldcom and Enron, fell under the weight of scandal, followed by the dissolution and potential bailouts of Lehmen Brothers and Bears Stern. Political leaders became punch-lines for questionable integrity, from Marion Barry, Jr. to Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Their John Lennon-glazed dream of world peace was dashed on 9/11, with dinner table conversation turning to Terror Alert levels and security measures. For Sonic Boomers, the “bad guy” was no longer “Big Brother,” but rather individuals, such as Osama bin Laden, and bigger, more indelible forces on which no easily recognizable face could be pinned.

Today, change is as prevalent as ever within the Sonic Boomer existence. With Barack Obama, America has elected its first African-American President in history. At the same time, Sonic Boomers try to piece together a future with the greatest economic uncertainty in recent memory.



No matter the outcome, there is little doubt that Sonic Boomers will embrace these changes with time-tested tenacity, testing the boundaries and making the rewards their own. Their idealistic goals and agendas will not be set aside, even though the definitions of these aspirations may alter. With money to spend and goals to achieve, Sonic Boomers are in tune to businesses and corporations that will assist them on their way.

How are they communicating within their current world?

In order to reach Sonic Boomers and get them tuned into your brand, it is important to understand where they are and how they're getting information. As the first generation to fully embrace television culture, they've remained open to new media, even if not the first group to adopt format use. Newspaper usage remains high amongst this audience, as are numbers for television and other forms of traditional media. It has been noted that Sonic Boomers making \$100-150K pre-tax in retirement listen to the radio daily; a behavior which extends into the generation's other economic strata. While usage varies amongst geographic regions and ethnic subsets, newspaper, television, and radio all hold onto their positions as communications mainstays for Sonic Boomers. Amongst all media formats, the fastest growth has been in regard to Internet. At this time, an estimated 85% of Sonic Boomers are online, with 73% and 42% having access from home and work respectively. While they're not often assumed to be online leaders, this generation has a higher rate of Internet use and access than members of the general population.

The Internet has not only emerged as a Sonic Boomer source of information, but as a means to social advancement as well. Social networking has entered their vernacular with growing use of general sites, such as Facebook, and generational specific outlets, such as Eons.com. Likewise, as empty-nesting occurs and Sonic Boomer divorce rates transpire at a predicted rate of around 50%, Match.com and eHarmony.com are making their appeals. Other networking groups reach Sonic Boomers through their community-centric agendas, offering participation opportunities on sites such as VolunteerMatch.com and politician-affiliated outlets. All these formats and offerings appeal to the generation's desire to be included and proactive, advancing personal relationships and greater causes along the way.

While information-gathering and socialization have aided Sonic Boomer assimilation into the online world, some of the greatest Internet-driven behavior changes have been in regard to product and service purchasing. Outlets, such as Amazon.com, have driven growth in their purchasing of everyday items, including books, music, and clothing. Pricier items, such as cell phones and furniture, and service providers are often subject to Sonic Boomer online research prior to later in-store purchasing. The recommendation format of many sites appeals to this generation, allowing them the opportunity to both garner peer guidance pre-investment and provide their own thoughts post-usage. Regardless of whether purchases are made online or in-store, the Internet provides Sonic Boomers with in-the-know peace-of-mind and the chance to be a voice in the consumer-generation process.

In addition to an analysis of media consumption behaviors, it is invaluable to understand what topics and concerns are at the forefront of Sonic Boomer minds as they engage with brands of all kinds.

What brand categories do Sonic Boomers keep top-of-mind?

Healthcare, both preventative and procedural, are important concerns in the everyday lives of Sonic Boomers. While many state they feel twenty to thirty years younger than their actual age, they continually strive to maintain a physical acuity that matches their mental outlook and social goals. Preventative health is of the utmost importance, ranging from diet and exercise to "brain" maintenance. Sonic Boomers are more likely than the general population to seek regular medical care, including general practice, specialist, and psychologist visits. In the spirit of travel and making everything an opportunity, they practice "medical tourism," journeying substantial distances to acquire this care, whether to other cities or even countries. Between the receipt of these services, they are more open than most about adopting holistic, "alternative" minds to mind-body care. This interest explains the steady increase in the number who are practicing yoga, using vitamins for wellness maintenance, and choosing acupuncture over surgical procedure. Likewise, it is this multi-level personal awareness that drives them to "retreats" at spas and other vacation destinations, such as Canyon Ranch resorts.



While they want credible medical guidance, they approach health with a proactive “do-it-for-yourself” mentality. Through this mindset, Sonic Boomers have been ready proponents of “wellness advisors,” such as Drs. Mehmet Oz and Phil McGraw, both of whom they helped launch to television and literary stardom through their dedicated following.

Not only are health and mind-body balance important for Sonic Boomers, physical appearance is highly valued as well. For this generation, there is no “letting oneself go,” as they seek for their exteriors to reflect their inward strength and peace-of-mind. At the same time, this need is pushed further by the fact that Sonic Boomers, especially men, are competing with younger individuals, within both the work and social arenas. While many of them exercise and diet for health purposes, the leading reason for food intake management is the pursuit of weight loss for either recapturing or maintaining a “good look.” This desire is echoed in the rates of at-home hair dyes and self-tanners amongst Sonic Boomers, as they buy at higher rates than members of the general population. Beyond weight management and topical measures, this group is also the leading consumer force within the cosmetic procedures industry. While the women will take on the knife for breasts lifts and tummy tucks, more and more of the men are opting for less invasive procedures, such as liposuction. For Sonic Boomers, it is of continual importance and a worthwhile investment to both feel good and look one’s very best.

Like healthcare, financial opportunity and stability are consistently top-of-mind concerns for Sonic Boomers. At a higher level than any generation before, they responded to periods of economic fruitfulness with spending and pleasure fulfillment. Following the lessons of their “world on a silver platter” upbringing, they used their monetary prowess to travel, purchase homes and automobiles, and fund other social ventures. While they remained solvent enough to survive downswings with little scathing, these acquisitions resulted in smaller savings accounts and a generation with less put away for retirement. Now, in more troubling economic times, Sonic Boomers look for ways to make the most of what they have in order to survive down-turn once again, rather than reacting with knee-jerk panic. Financial advisors, in-person, televised, and online, have become more valued, as this generation surmises their monetary standing and determines how to “best invest” for the future. As with the “on-air doctors,” wealth-management gurus, such as Suze Orman and Jim Cramer, are the freshest faces of Sonic Boomer guidance, as they show consumers how to balance fiscal responsibility with living well.

While Sonic Boomers remain generally positive in the wake of the current economic slump, the financial instability has caused them to “redefine” their approach to retirement. In light of having more active outlooks and longer life-spans, many members of this generation had long-planned on entering second-careers, following departure from their primary jobs. Beyond serving as additional sources of revenue, these employments would revolve around areas of Sonic Boomer interest, such as owning an art gallery or teaching a particular craft. They planned on working in what they like to do to fund what they want to do, finally attaining the optimal work-life balance. While these second-career goals have not been given up, in most cases, they appear to have been set aside for the time being. Until things become economically settled, many Sonic Boomers are opting to stay in their current jobs and steadying spending, rather than risking giving up a primary revenue and seeking “fresh employment opportunity” in a weakened job market.

One trend that is continuing in light of and in conjunction with the slowed economy is that of Sonic Boomers downsizing their living spaces. The shift started primarily with the movement of these individuals from suburban locations to urban settings, often from houses to apartments or condos. While the change has definite cost implications, it was also driven by the desire of Sonic Boomers to be in cultural-centers with easy opportunities for transit and experience access. Now, even if not switching market locations, many are opting to invest in smaller living spaces. With children out of the house, fewer rooms are needed, proving the opportunity for down-scaled convenience and savings. Likewise, the increased divorce rate has resulted in many newly-single Sonic Boomers searching out “second-bachelorhood” pads with enough room for one. While the reasons for living-space shrinkage vary, Sonic Boomers are seeking more and more to live on a smaller scale.

These changes in Sonic Boomer housing are having major implications within the home furnishings market. In the case of these individuals moving into smaller spaces, it has been observed that new furniture doesn’t necessarily equate less. Rather than opting for fewer pieces, Sonic Boomers are seeking fixtures that are inherently smaller or can be compacted for easy storage, allowing them to still “have” it all. Amongst those who aren’t moving spaces, but experiencing a newly “empty nest,” it is found that rooms are be converted to the gaming center or office they’ve always wanted. Likewise, Sonic Boomers are embracing the opportunity to get “nicer” pieces, as they no longer have to be concerned with same



levels of child-induced wear-and-tear. Even if Sonic Boomers downsize other areas of spending, investment in their homes and living spaces is still a priority, as these “personal castles” provide haven and are statements of hard-acquired personal style.

While Sonic Boomers are placing focus on how to change their living spaces, they haven’t stopped thinking about and planning ventures abroad. Despite current economic insecurities, they still look to international travel as a hope and potential option. Not only do they wish to visit foreign destinations, they have adopted a ‘geotourist’ outlook of combining tourism with social contribution, bettering the communities in which they are guests. Some wealthier Sonic Boomers have taken this giving mentality further, investing money in long-term foreign business ventures that herald the provision of sustainable income opportunities to local inhabitants. For those who are limiting their travel funds, there has been a shift to short-distance endeavors within one’s region of residence. On these trips, they tend toward visiting locations of historical and/or cultural significance, which provide the opportunity for personal learning and growth. Regardless of whether venturing abroad or close to home, Sonic Boomers look to combine pleasure with the prospects of self-development and giving back.

Who are Sonic Boomers and what do they mean to you?

Above all else, Sonic Boomers are about living life to the fullest and maintaining the ability to do so. Whether it's in expanding their personal domain or interacting with the world at large, they seek to enjoy what they have while laying the ground work for where they plan to go. Achieving health wellness and financial stability are valued not only as life security, but as the means to successful dream fulfillment. Through it all runs the belief that no one ever loses the right to change, whether it's one's mind, one's goals, or one's direction in life. No matter where Sonic Boomers stand, it is not a stance of stagnation, but rather an emphasis on moving forward for a better world, both personally and shared.

Within the marketing arena, some businesses are successful in reaching this generation, while others are not. It is important to stop and take a look at your current campaigns and approaches to consumer strategy, both idealistically and creatively. Does your business make a point to understand and reach the Sonic Boomer generation? Are you part of a competitive category that both historically and currently does so? Are you or any of your competitors successfully reaching Sonic Boomers? If you are speaking to this generation, are you doing so with respect and from a point of intrinsic consumer understanding? Do you know Sonic Boomers and do Sonic Boomers know your business? When assessing these questions you may not know the answer or be happy with your conclusions; however, it is not too late to reach out to this ever-engaged segment. Assess your business approach and thinking, then reach out to this generation with respect and honest, informed dialogue.

By understanding and appreciating the Sonic Boomer outlook on life and emphasis on change, businesses and corporations have the opportunity to tap into a powerful and willing revenue source. By providing the information, guidance, and opportunity for self-expression they desire, you will open the doors for successful brand-to-generation interaction.