



Association of Fitness Studios **Guide Series**

# The Older Adult Market



ASSOCIATION OF  
FITNESS STUDIOS





“The older adult market has incentive and financial capability to seek training guidance for optimal health and fitness. Cody Sipe is the expert in the field.”

Josh Leve  
Founder & CEO  
AFS



“The aging Boomer population is the ideal client group. This Guide will show you how to reach them and keep them.”

Cody Sipe, Ph.D.  
Co-founder & Vice President  
Functional Aging Institute

## *The Older Adult Market*

There are the over 80 million adults age 55+ including seniors and the exploding group of leading-edge Baby Boomers – the largest age cohort in history. This growing, aging older adult population is not only huge, it is affluent, well educated and looking for trainers that can safely and effectively improve their health and fitness.

In essence, they are the ideal client group.

Baby Boomers represent a remarkable 25% of the market and an even more remarkable 75% of the disposable income. 10,000 people are turning 65 every day - a market that controls over 50% of this country's wealth and resources.

The mature market is not a niche. It is the largest and fastest growing fitness market in the world and will be for the next 30 years. They are focused on health and well being, quality of life, longevity, and disease avoidance. And they're seeking trainers and training opportunities with professionals who know and understand their needs.

If you're looking for a rewarding market that goes well beyond big arms and butt-blasting workouts – look no farther than the older adult market. They're looking for you.



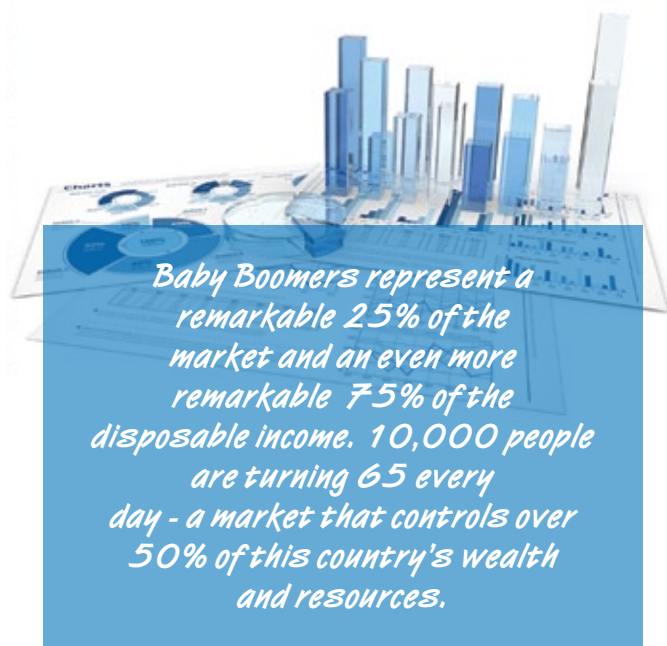
## *Communication & Positioning*

Many fitness marketing messages and strategies that work well with younger adults are ineffective with older adults and may even repel them. It takes more time and effort to move them through the sales process but once they make the decision to train with you they are loyal clients that stay with you for a long time.

Here are five keys to improving your communication with older adults, efforts that will pay off handsomely.

### **1. Don't Call Them Seniors**

Even though they might be over age 65 and therefore technically “seniors,” they don't identify with the label - often associated with old, frail and unhealthy stereotypes that Boomers don't want to have anything to do with. It is best to avoid age-related labels (e.g. older adult, mature adult, Boomer) at all or even the classic references such as “silver” or “gray.” Instead of calling them by any name or label it is better to speak to the values, needs and interests to which they closely identify.



## 2. Define Your Avatar

The older population is extremely diverse and should not be targeted as one big group. They are male or female; from frail to fit and everything in between; healthy or diseased; still working or retired.

They come in all sizes, shapes, ethnic, racial and religious groups. They have varied economic status, marital status, interests and hobbies. Where do they live? What charities do they support? Where do they volunteer?

All of these factors, and more, are important for knowing where and how to reach them. Dialing into the type of client you want very specifically enables you to speak to them effectively through your blog posts, newsletter, emails and ads.

## 3. Become a Trusted Authority

Older adults respect authorities – those with specialized expertise in an area. And they are especially eager to find authorities on topics of personal interest to them, as in functional aging. By positioning yourself as the “go to” authority you will create recognition and respect that can be leveraged in many ways.

Become an authority by publishing a book, giving presentations, appearing on local news, writing articles, and securing specialized certification. Of course, even with these credentials you must deliver original, high-value content that demonstrates your expertise.



## 4. Build Relationships

Relationships and trust come first and once established, they greatly enhance the sales process. Mature adults don't want to just know how great your training is - they want to know you. What makes you tick? What is your training philosophy? What have been your struggles and successes? What are your values? Speak to them authentically and transparently like you would a friend. Be patient because like any relationship it takes time.

## 5. Sell Them What They Want

Six pack abs and big arms pale in comparison to what most Boomers really want out of a fitness program – to feel and move better; to improve health and function for continued enjoyment of life. Selling aesthetics and body image will provide only very limited results.

Yes, they want to lose some weight and look their best, but they no longer aspire to look a 20-year-old. As they have aged they have experienced more aches and pains and are starting to become concerned with their future wellbeing.

## *Client-Getting Strategies*

One of the most frequent questions about marketing to older adult is the simple “What works?” Trainers want to know where to go and what to do in order to build a loyal clientele of affluent older clients.

Sometimes their current methods and strategies just aren't working very well or they just don't have enough time and energy to figure it out on their own. There are plenty of misconceptions trainers have about how to find and engage with these potential clients.

Extensive research from the Functional Aging Institute has developed the following strategies.

## *Facebook*

If there is one sure place to find older adults interested in your training services it would be on Facebook. They are the fastest-growing segment on Facebook for the simple reason that they value relationships. They want to stay in touch with their children, grandchildren, friends, and other like-minded people.

Facebook provides a great forum to develop relationships with older clients by providing high-value content that truly speaks to their needs in a relaxed environment. Plus, they really value the opinion of friends so when your information and testimonials are shared by older clients they take the time to look and listen.

And if you really want to be effective on Facebook - use videos. Older adults consume video content on Facebook at a startling rate. They love it!

## *Presentations*

Giving presentations is a way to establish your authority and expertise on a subject. Older adults are avid learners and eagerly attend opportunities to learn about topics that are meaningful and interesting to them. Plus, it gives you an opportunity to meet a lot of people and allow them to get to know you a little.

Now, of course, you have to deliver a solid presentation packed with tons of useful content that engages the attendees, so don't be that stuffy, know-it-all expert. Be personable and relatable. Interject some humor. Ask meaningful questions. You want to connect on an intellectual and personal level.



## *The List*

You have probably heard that “the list is King” or “the money is in the list.” It’s true.

Email marketing continues to be king among almost all populations but especially older adults. While some younger generations have shifted away from email, the older generation has not.

It is vital that you build an email marketing list as large as you can and then communicate with those on your list very regularly (3-5 times per week). Your three most basic list “buckets” should be Prospects, Clients and Former Clients. Some communications, such as your newsletter, can go out to all three but you also need to speak to each of these groups separately.

Obviously you want prospects to become clients; you want current clients to refer their friends; you want former clients to come back and give you another try. These messages need to be crafted separately.

## *Direct Mail*

Yes! Direct mail works for older clients. They read their mail at a much higher rate than other age groups so it's a great way to step inside their home and speak directly to them.

Marketing resources are available so you can easily target your ideal client based on age, income level, education and other critical factors so you know you are reaching high value prospects that are more likely to become your clients.

But direct mail campaigns must be done well. Typically this means a 3-5 postcard series designed with a single goal in mind – to get the prospect to take one specific action. The action could be coming in to get a free gift, taking you up on a low barrier offer, signing up for a free resource on your website, or something else. But it needs to be specific.



## *Low Barrier Offers (LBO)*

An LBO is a short-term training program at a greatly reduced cost. It is intended to get prospects that have been considering your program for a while but just haven't pulled the trigger yet to make a small commitment so that they can experience it for themselves.

The goal is to remove the barriers of cost, time and fear of the unknown. Most LBOs will be 14-28 days long and may cost anywhere from \$29-99 depending on your typical training costs and the structure of the LBO itself.

Keep in mind that you want to attract people that can pay your regular prices but just need to get in and see how awesome you are before making a long-term commitment. During the LBO treat these short-term clients like you would your normal long-term clients so they experience your training and culture and begin developing relationships with staff and other clients.

Be up-front with them that the purpose is to let them experience all of this so that they stay on long-term. That way, when you offer them a long-term commitment it isn't a surprise.

## *Building Relationships with Older Clients*

Typically, marketing is impersonal. Put up a cleverly worded offer in a newspaper or online and then wait for the clients that you've never met or spoken with to respond. For many types of products and services across many industries this approach works.

However, when it comes to aging adults and fitness this approach is seldom fruitful and leads to a vicious cycle of frustration. Put out an ad; wait for clients to respond; wonder why they aren't; change the headline; switch out the image; and try again.

Compelling headlines and images are important, for sure. Learning how to write good copy is critical. But older adults have been marketed to all of their life. They have seen tens of thousands of incredible ads. In today's fast-paced environment you will need to take a different approach to be heard above all of the noise.

The key differentiator that will help you stand out from every other fitness facility and trainer is the relationship you build with potential clients. Older adults are very relational.



Here are some ways to start cultivating those relationships.

**Be Authentic** – Let people get to know you by showing the other sides of you other than your role as a fitness professional. Share personal insights, stories, experiences and opinions. In effect, show them who you really are.

**Show Your Face** – You can't really get to know someone from a distance. You need to get up close and personal with them. That means getting out of your office and facility and into the community. It is important to look them in the eye, shake their hands, give them a hug, smile, schmooze, chit-chat and just hang out. In this world overloaded with technology it is sometimes easy to forget that older adults prefer to communicate the old fashioned way - in person.

**Go Where They Are** – Instead of waiting for them to come to you it is critical that you go to them. Meet them in the places and situations that are a normal part of their life. Figure out where they like to go and what they like to do. Then go there and do those things. Fund raisers, social events, art, music, theater, social clubs, churches, etc.

**Be Everywhere** – Online and offline you need to have many poles in the water. Facebook, email, blog, newspaper articles, news appearances, places and events... it is not enough to just do one of them. You need to be everywhere your clients are.

**Be Consistent** – This is where many fitness professionals fall flat. They go to some events and put out a few ads and then get busy with other things and forget to email or don't get the next event on their calendar. So their presence in the lives of their potential clients is inconsistent at best and the relationship lags. They forget about you.

**Vary the Conversation** – Like with any good relationship you just can't talk about one topic over and over again. Don't just talk about health and fitness. Talk about topics that are important to them. Talk about serious topics but also be light-hearted and humorous. Be poignant.

**Speak Their Language** – Communication styles vary between generations. Boomers and Traditionalists communicate very differently than younger generations. They are more personal, relational and formal. Avoid slang and texting lingo. Use formal punctuation. Don't rush the conversations.

Slow down and don't be rushed. Take the extra time it takes to get to know them. In fact, many of their conversations are about the relationship instead of the "transaction" at hand.

By following the recommendations in this Guide, your marketing to the older population will improve – to the enhancement of both you and your clients.



**Cody Sipe, PhD is the co-founder of the Functional Aging Institute and a leading authority on exercise and aging. For more information on training, marketing and sales go to [www.functionalaginginstitute.com](http://www.functionalaginginstitute.com)**



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