

## CHAPTER

## 1

# The Consumer Today

**B***eing the Shopper* is about increasing your success in selling your products and services by better understanding the way real shoppers think and act. Yesterday's marketing rules dictated that brand plans define a single target market—for example, trying to sell a particular gourmet chocolate dessert to women 18 to 34 years old, with two children, and a household income of over \$75,000. As you become increasingly familiar with your shopper, you'll rely less and less on demographic information. However, in the beginning, it's important to understand the major population trends and their implications for your brands and retail environments. Consider the chart on the next page with U.S. census information. You'll notice some fascinating fluctuations as baby boomers age. The 25- to 34-year-old category is predicted to wane considerably. In this section and in the next chapter, I explore the

## 10 The Consumer Today

### Population Projections by Age

The U.S. Census Bureau's statistics on population projections by age is a fascinating look at future population trends. In this section, I review the major trends that will shape the shoppers of tomorrow.

Age	1990 (millions)	2000 (millions)	2010 (millions)	Change 1990–2010 (%)
All Americans	248,709	275,307	299,862	20.6
<5	18,354	18,865	20,099	9.5
5–19	52,967	59,586	61,014	15.2
20–24	19,020	18,518	21,151	11.2
25–34	43,176	37,441	38,851	–10
35–44	37,579	44,894	39,443	5
45–54	25,223	37,166	44,161	75.1
55–64	21,148	24,001	35,429	67.5
65+	31,242	34,835	39,715	27.1

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000.

implications of these population trends and explain how to learn about the actual individuals within these categories.

### Are You Prepared to Sell to *These* Shoppers?

In this section, I review some of the biggest changes over the last two decades within particular demographic groups. These trends are significant because they've created new and unique potential markets. Also, the stark contrast between today and yesterday can feed into ripe marketing opportunities. For instance, many of the women who are likely to return to work shortly after giving birth were raised with traditional stay-at-home moms. This new generation of working mothers may be receptive to brands of food that are quick to assemble, but deliver the home-cooked taste and wholesome nutrition that their mothers valued.

Knowing your shoppers' ages is one thing, but appealing to how they really feel is another thing entirely. As a marketer, you'll be far better attuned to your shoppers if you can understand the difference. I empower my audiences, at every one of my speeches, to understand that the first step in being the shopper is to not form opinions of others based on their ages. Each member of the audience is asked to turn to the person next to them and tell them how old they are. After the nervous laughter, I then ask them to turn back to the same person and tell them how old they feel. Six members of the audience (three men and three women) are asked to voluntarily to share the information with the entire group.

In the thousands of times I have presented this exercise, my volunteers have always reinforced my message by proving the difference between how old someone is and how old they feel. On average, these people feel 10 years younger than they actually are.

Appealing to emotions of a consumer will *always* be more effective than developing a marketing campaign based on an age classification.

## Changes in Motherhood

One major trend in recent years has affected women of childbearing age. In 1976, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 31 percent of mothers returned to the outside-the-home workforce within a year of giving birth. In 1998, the figure had risen to 58.7 percent. For women with a college education, statistics show that 68 percent will return to the workforce before their child celebrates his or her first birthday.



Look for opportunities to market to these working moms. Some of them belong to the category of women who want it all: the career and the family. Others may be struggling to make ends meet, and face the challenges

## 12 The Consumer Today

of single parenthood. If they find a superior product that meets their needs, they'll buy it, week after week. You might also try getting to them through their kids—as I discuss in Chapter 2, teens and preteens have increasingly become decision makers within the retail realm.

### Men's Roles as Parents

In addition to trends in motherhood, men's roles in raising children have changed dramatically. Mediamark Research reports that the percentage of male homemakers (defined as the person in the household who does most of the shopping) reached 30.3 percent in 2000, up from 15 percent in 1985. Most of these male homemakers live alone, live with children, or live with other men.



Learn about the stay-at-home father. Does he act like a big kid himself—indulging the children with junk food and special privileges that mom wouldn't tolerate? Does he, like many stay-at-home moms, keep up with the latest trends in childrearing by reading parenting magazines? Does he grapple with issues of masculinity, or does he reject Rambo and other stereotypes of macho behavior? Who are his role models?

### Single-Person Households

Fifty years ago, single-person households made up just 10 percent of the population. According to the *2000 Census of Population and Housing*, those shoppers now account for over 25 percent of households. Single-person households are increasing most rapidly of all demographic groups; that trend is expected to continue. Women are the majority (58 percent) of those who live alone, and half of those are 65 or over. In contrast, of the men who live alone, almost half (47 percent) are 25 to 44 years old. U.S. Census Bureau projections

to the year 2020 show a dramatic increase in the number of middle-aged singles. Single-household women aged 45 to 64 will increase by 65 percent, and single-household men age 45 to 64 will increase by 83 percent.



Like shifts in parenthood, this trend in living alone is a new phenomenon. How might you appeal to this new and emerging group? Like many working mothers, they likely were raised to value family and community. As I discuss in Chapter 5, making customers feel like part of a larger community is a powerful marketing tool.

## Getting Married Later

The median age for marriage has increased from age 20.8 for women in 1970, to age 25.1 in 2000. Men's marrying age has increased from 23.2 in 1970 to 26.8 in 2000. Obviously, there are a multitude of reasons that people are waiting longer to marry, but there is little doubt that this trend allows individuals more time to become established in the workforce before they marry.



The trend toward getting married later means that there are many twenty-somethings immersed in their careers. Like working mothers, they might have little time for traditional activities like cooking, but still retain a desire to be healthy. For others, their twenties are an extension of the teenage and college years, with few responsibilities and the desire to remain young and vibrant. Learn about these Peter Pans by reading their magazines—*Maxim* and *JANE*—watching their television shows and movies, and learning to approach them in their venues.

So far, I've outlined several different population trends. However, knowing these trends and applying them to marketing efforts

## 14 The Consumer Today

are two entirely different things. Walking up and down the aisles of a supermarket with a working mom, male homemaker, single shopper, and late-marrieds will begin to shift your consumer behavior paradigm as you learn to perceive your product through their eyes, ears, and taste buds. For example, each of these individuals might have one purchase in common with the others—Coca-Cola. How they make the purchase will vary drastically—for instance, the late-married might choose a two-liter bottle of Diet Coke, while the single shopper might choose cans of caffeine-free Coca-Cola. The working mom might choose a single chilled can of Cherry Coke

In your quest to be the shopper, it helps to know what factors draw certain individuals to choose a particular brand over another. Here is a list of what different groups rated as the most important attributes in their food-purchasing decisions:

Attribute	Groups
Nutrition	Women, especially women at home; seniors; nonwhites; shoppers who often cook at home.
Price	Household income below \$35,000; members of blue-collar households; high-school graduates.
Ease of preparation	Cook dinner at home fewer than 4 days/week; frequent microwave users; Southerners.
Environmentally responsible packaging	Nonwhites; seniors; women, especially women at home; frequent microwave users; high-school grads.
Convenient/easy-to-use packaging	Nonwhites; seniors; high-school grads.

Source: Grocery Manufacturers of America, *Consumers Speak Out*, Spring, 1999.

and hide it from her kids because soda is not allowed in her house, while the male homemaker might select Coke in vintage glass bottles, and keep the bottles for his kids' art project.

---

*Knowing these preferences is critical to attracting these shoppers. Use the demographic information and population trends as your starting point for discovering their unique desires and needs. Remember that age and population data are not absolutes, particularly if they contrast dramatically with how the individual shoppers perceive themselves.*

---

