

Viva the Vital
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Winning with Boomers Takes Heart

By Matt Thornhill

At age 46, Tom Lynch is a trailing edge Boomer. But he has already made an important shift in his life from focusing on becoming someone to being someone. It's a shift marketers need to understand if they want to effectively connect with today's older Boomer Consumer.

For background, Tom is a marketing guy. His career has been in marketing and advertising, on both the client and advertising agency side: He's been with Gallo Wines, Glen Ellen Wines, his own interactive ad agency, the global financial services giant ING, and interactive marketing firm Razorfish.

But he's left all that behind for a new venture. One that fits with what motivates him today, and capitalizes on what motivates Boomers today, too.

Tom runs Worthwhile Wine Company, (worthwhilewine.com) an importer of South African wines that are sustainably made. The concept is simple, according to Tom: "First, we have to deliver great wines – if not, we won't be in business very long."

Then, he adds, "We have to make a difference. Our company needs to help make people's lives better."

Tom's operation does that by being a "triple bottom line" business (profits, people, planet). It is Fair Trade certified, donates proceeds to a nonprofit in the U.S. and South Africa, and buys off-sets so each bottle entering the U.S. has the same carbon footprint as domestic wine.

This focus is a far cry from the rest of Tom's career, where he was always trying to get U.S. consumers to buy more stuff that they probably didn't need – or as he put it "selling cookies to fat kids."

The turning point came when he and his then 13-year-old daughter, Miranda, took a two week trip to South Africa, visited a rural Zulu village and helped the inhabitants create sustainable food gardens. No cookies and certainly no fat kids. Miranda was so affected by the disparity between her life in Atlanta and life in the village that she started a nonprofit, Isipho, (isipho.org) to help.

Isipho ("i-SEE-po") provides villagers training and tools to grow their own vegetables, thus reducing the birth defects, learning disabilities and illnesses brought on by severe and chronic malnutrition. Isipho also supports the schools with materials and teacher training with the aim of boosting literacy, school attendance and graduation rates.

Working with Miranda on the nonprofit at night while promoting conspicuous consumption by day did not fit right with Tom. Something had to give and the result was Worthwhile Wine, where he leveraged his experience in the wine industry with his desire to make a profit while still thinking about people and the planet.

In our work studying older consumers, Tom's personal transformation is common. Typically, around age 50 we see a shift away from "success" and more towards "significance" as an underlying behavioral motivation. David Wolfe, author of *Ageless Marketing*, points out that such a shift isn't a generational thing, it's a developmental thing. Make it to age 50 and beyond and one's motivation for many decisions in life shifts.

Younger consumers are drawn to buy things to fit in, to demonstrate that they've made it, or are successful. Older consumers tend to buy things that have meaning for them, perform well for them, or meet their personal needs. As Wolfe describes it, older consumers are fulfilling internal needs. Younger consumers are pursuing more social needs.

Not surprisingly, Tom's shift also mirrors what is happening in the market with today's Boomer Consumers. They have moved, too. Today's Boomer is 54 years old. They want to buy products and use services from companies that meet their emotional needs, not just their rational needs. They want to feel good about what they buy and why.

Organizations focused on reaching Boomers need to understand this shift so they can connect with older Boomers. Part of the success of companies like Whole Foods, Starbucks, and even IKEA can be attributed to their socially responsible approach to sourcing their products. Other organizations, who demonstrate a soul, or some "heart," will attract the attention of America's largest demographic group.

Going forward, companies and brands with a "triple bottom line" – profits, people, planet – focus will most certainly be the ones that attract Boomer dollars.

We think the future bodes well for those who combine *rational* marketing value (price and quality) with human, *emotional* values. Companies like Worthwhile Wines will succeed simply because Boomers will vote with their wallets, which apparently are now attached to their heartstrings.

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