



Act Your Age?

Why Generations Still Matter in Our Ageless Society

By Marian Salzman, EVP, Chief Marketing Officer, JWT Worldwide

Today, we grow up faster, and we stay young longer. We are wise beyond our years and look great for our age. We have come to understand that mind can win over matter. Though we haven't found the fountain of youth just yet, we're learning to turn back the hands of time. Age has truly become an attitude, not a number.

As a result, the traditional milestones on the path from youth to maturity have become less linear and more random. More and more people—by choice and due to circumstance—are living life out of sequence. The generations are rubbing up against each other as they share experiences at wildly varied ages. Preschool parents, for instance, can range from 55 (Boomer) to 25 (Gen Y). First-time brides can be 20 or 60. Home buyers seem to be getting younger. And the new kid on the job or on campus is increasingly likely to be a Cusper embarking on his or her “second adulthood” adventure.

So age is irrelevant, right? Wrong. We are still governed by time, and we still have much in common with the rest of our generation, the people who were formed by the same cultural trends and events. Age still offers wisdom that is elusive to youth; experience builds on itself. Plus, when it comes to trends and the way people relate to them, age matters, perhaps more than ever.

Unlike some trends in popular culture, wellness trends have a broad audience: everyone. We all have a vested interest in knowing what might help us feel better, look better and live longer. Though we are living in an “ageless society,” the way each generation relates to wellness trends has much to do with age and cumulative experience.

Following are 10 wellness trends and the generation that is driving each of them:



1. **Vitamin C (For Confidence):** Confidence has become the latest wonder drug as women strive to redefine beauty, ordinary people achieve extraordinary physical goals, and self-esteem becomes the rallying cry for improving the health and well-being of our kids.

Driven by: Boomers and Cuspers. Confidence is key to this generation. Their efforts are changing the way we look at and value assets beyond the superficial.

2. **New Standards of Beauty:** We've had enough of Photoshop. We're weighing our models, Barbie has been replaced by Bratz, and ad by ad, we're trying to undo years of beauty/body distortion. Race. Age. Weight. These set the new parameters of beauty, and they're wide open.



Driven by: Generation X. The first truly tolerant generation—in terms of race, sexuality and the elimination of various prejudices. Beauty comes in many shapes and colors for Gen X.

3. **Going to Extremes:** Whether you are all-natural or all-science, the tools and techniques to keep healthy are getting more extreme. From prosthetics to pills, people of all ages are doing just about anything to get ahead.



Driven by: Boomers and Cuspers. Even as they age with humor and wisdom, Boomers and Cuspers are putting up a good fight. They take drugs and supplements (even if they're not FDA-approved), and they are comfortable with cosmetic procedures.



4. **Deprivation, the New Indulgence:** Abstinence, extreme dieting, fasting and sobriety: We've gone from hedonists to ascetics in our search for health and longevity. Maybe "no" is the safest way to go when there are no guarantees.

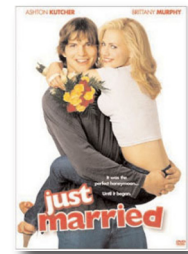
Driven by: Generation Y. They are beginning to say no more than yes when it comes to activities related to health and well-being (e.g., smoking, drugs and even sex).



5. **No-Taboo Sexuality:** When anything goes, what then? Boomers are doing it (and it's rowdier than ever), Xers are doing it (finally pro-creating!), Y is doing it (friends with benefits). And it's all online for anyone to see ...

Driven by: Generation Y. It takes a lot to shock a cohort that is adept at manipulating virtual characters into sexual positions and can find all manner of porn online day or night. The result has been a depersonalization of sex.

6. **The Return of the Long-Term Relationship:** In our culture of instant gratification, the temptation is to stray. But the real relationship challenge is in keeping the fires burning year in and year out. We admire those who can make love last. Older couples are stimulated by the spiritual challenge. Younger couples long for certainty.

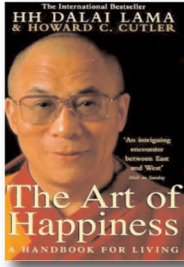


Driven by: Generation Y. One result of today's oversexed, overindulgent world is a desire for the opposite: stability, consistency and safety.



7. **Striking a Balance:** We're a culture that considers "What do you do?" an ice-breaker. The work/life balance is just now coming into focus as burnout sets in and values start to change. The impact of stress and over-work on health are too great to ignore.

Driven by: Generation X. Always creative in their professional endeavors, they have found ways to seamlessly marry life and work. Looser gender roles, with Dad sometimes staying at home with the kids, help.



8. **Lighten Up:** Happiness is the new national pastime. We're obsessed with how to get it, and once we have it, with how to keep it. Some look to Jesus, some to God; some buy books with checklists and worksheets. Some simply believe laughter is the best medicine.

Driven by: Boomers and Cuspers. Optimism is something you can't completely cultivate until you've seen enough to stop worrying.

9. **Old Ways, Best Ways:** As a relatively young country, we have always emphasized "progress." But our obsession with experimentation may be leading to a crisis. New is not always better. Evidence is beginning to support a return to the basics: nature, traditional wisdom, folklore and age-old remedies.



Driven by: Generation X. They're gravitating toward all-natural, organic, artisanal and old-world foods, treatments and healing methods.



10. **"T" and the Future:** The future is no longer scary and uncertain because we've finally grabbed the reins. It's become a personal responsibility.

Driven by: Generation X. This generation is leading the global movement toward more sustainable living and socially conscious consumerism.

So what does all this mean? Because of their shared history and common health concerns, generations drive attitudes toward wellness trends. Boomers and Cuspers are shaping views on aging: They are late to the game, so they favor aggressive tactics and big ideas. Generation X is poised to change attitudes: They've always been the radicals. Wise beyond their years, they favor slowness, balance and consciousness trends. Generation Y has the passion of youth working for them. They are trendy when it comes to health and wellness (because they can afford to be). They have good intentions and are open to new ideas, and are neither as idealistic nor as skeptical as Gen X. Simply put, age still matters.