



# Strategies for Success in Our Future Landscape

By Bradley Stephenson and Chris Auty

*"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination."—Jimmy Dean*

**O**ur industry, just like many others, experienced its fair share of change in past years, and what we can all rely on is change will forever be an influencing force on our market and our businesses.

Let's take a high-level look at some of the most prominent changes in the past decade.

## People Changed

We are all aware that the aging population continues to grow, but this in itself is not the core topic

of interest, which is that there is a major shift in attitudes toward advertising and marketing (Roberts and Manolis, 2000).

The customers of yesterday, known as the silent generation or traditionalists, are fading away quickly. Having lived through some challenging times, these customers are defined by a set of very clear values. This generation began their job interviews with questions related to planning for the future (i.e., pension plans), rather than a sole focus on benefits for the present (i.e., vacation). This focus on the future certainly benefited this generation, as they are described as the wealthiest

generation of elders ever to live (Howe, 2014).

What about today's customers? Known as baby boomers, they are characterized by a completely different set of values with idealism, image, and optimism defining their outlook on life. They are known for their work ethic, and often are consulted for ways to improve the work ethic for other generations (Gordon, 2018). They are comfortable with their financial arrangements, and will use modern finance options to support their purchase decisions.

## Marketing Changed

As a result of the changing influences of different generations on businesses in general, there is a corresponding shift in marketing and communication strategies.

Mass advertising sustained marketers since the 1920s with the inception of mass radio use. The last stage of this period—from the 1960s to about 2010—was called the Consumer Era. It was characterized by a shift from advertising and marketing focused on the product to getting into the heads and hearts of consumers.

In the past, marketing was a simple four-step process:

1. Research what customers want.
2. Offer a product/service satisfying this want.
3. Create advertising based on this want.
4. Publish advertising in media and maximize cost-benefit ratio.

These principles must now, however, be discarded—why?

First, there is the unavoidable collapse of mass media and mass marketing, and the hyperfragmentation of their online successors. Meanwhile, fast-forwarding, spam filters, and skip options on live TV essentially reduce the viewing audience.

Second, mass marketing only appeared efficient, while in truth its effects were frustratingly short-lived—with great expense, little equity. Purchase advertising and sales grow; stop advertising and sales slow.

## Welcome to the Relationship Era

Welcome to the Relationship Era, when the true winners will be

those who typically spend little on advertising because they won't have to—they found a new, more sustainable approach to driving interest and loyalty to products and services.

What happened with the onset of this new generation, the baby boomers, is that the purchasing journey changed, regardless of the industry. Earlier, the purchase journey began with an awareness of your products and services, followed by consideration to purchase these after acquiring knowledge. The actual purchase, however, was based on a conscious decision across the options available. The goal throughout this process was to first satisfy the patient (customer), and then to create loyalty afterward.

---

**Our industry, just like many others, experienced its fair share of change in past years, and what we can all rely on is change will forever be an influencing force on our market and our businesses.**

---

This paradigm has now been turned on its ear with this new generation. While our marketing efforts continue to focus on creating awareness, there is a fundamental shift in the power of customer advocacy in creating awareness of our brands.

The question we now need to answer is: when does the purchasing journey start? One could easily argue that it starts when you create an advocate of an existing patient, so much so that they are eager to spread



**ZPower silver-zinc rechargeable batteries are a new technology now available for select products from almost every major hearing aid manufacturer. With new technology comes many questions, so we have introduced an “Ask the Expert” program to answer your questions about silver-zinc battery technology.**

### **How often should the batteries be charged?**

The batteries should be fully charged every night. Once the hearing aids are finished charging, the indicator lights turn from blinking green to solid green. A full charge may take up to 7 hours — the charge time varies based on how much the battery was depleted during the day.

### **What happens when the silver-zinc rechargeable battery is getting low on power?**

The hearing aid wearer will hear the low battery warning. Once the low battery warning occurs or once a hearing aid shuts off due to a low battery condition, do not open the battery door to reboot the hearing aid. Rebooting after the low battery warning can over-discharge the battery. If a low battery warning from the hearing aids is received, place the hearing aids in the charging base for charging or replace with non-rechargeable batteries. Store your rechargeable batteries in a safe place away from metal objects like coins or keys.

### **Should a patient open the battery door to turn off the hearing aids when not in use?**

If a patient removes their hearing aids during the day, the hearing aids should be put back on the charger. Rule of thumb — if the hearing aids are not on the ears they should be in the charger. The batteries will not overcharge, and this will not decrease the overall life of the battery. If the charger is not available, it's ok to open the battery door for a few hours until they are worn or can be put on the charger. If the hearing aids are not going to be worn for an extended period, the batteries should be removed.

Have more questions? Please visit [www.ZPowerhearing.com/ask-the-expert](http://www.ZPowerhearing.com/ask-the-expert) to enter your question.

the word on how great you are within their network and beyond.

## Focus on the Patient Experience

In the Relationship Era, the patient (customer) experience is a critical strategic pillar of many businesses and industries. How much conscious attention does it get in your business? If not very much, how do you get started in excelling with an experience-based strategy?

### Step 1. Create a clear customer experience vision.

Every good customer experience strategy starts with a vision of what the desired experience looks and, arguably more importantly, feels like. Your vision needs to be descriptive yet simple, achievable, and instructional—both in the eyes of your employees and your customers.

### Step 2. Empower all employees to deliver on the vision.

Share your vision with your employees and allow everyone to feel part of something bigger than themselves.

### Step 3. Nurture your online reputation.

Make sure all services are listed; all other social media links are up to date; and the address, hours of operation, etc. are all correct. Don't forget to let patients know where to find you (Yelp, etc.) and don't beg for positive reviews. Remember that review sites can act as a form of satisfaction survey. Monitor and learn from the feedback.

### Step 4. Create an emotional connection with your customer.

You want people to get excited about your business and that can't happen without establishing an emotional connection. Treat every touch point with your customers like a face-to-face conversation. Be genuine and

develop an authentic relationship with your patients. This is the most important activity you can engage in to ensure customer satisfaction.

### Step 5. Capture (and act on) customer feedback in real time.

Spot satisfaction surveys only capture customer emotion in the moment. How do they feel outside of that single moment—and where are they expressing their views? Make yourself visible and make it a priority. It's not all about online. What opportunities are there for patients to leave feedback in the practice?

### Step 6. Redefine success.

In the relationship era, the definition of success is no longer how many hearing instruments you sell in a year: It's how many advocates of your brand you create. Consider implementing metrics such as net promoter system (NPS) in your clinic, but remember measures such as NPS need to be more than just a number. You must ingrain the full system into your business culture and DNA.

## Conclusion

During my student days, a supervisor shared a book titled *Who Moved My Cheese* (Johnson, 1998). It was a simple read, but it has had a lasting impact on my career.

In short, the book describes change management by using the analogy of cheese in a maze. If cheese is moved to a new location in a matrix, how do we react? Do we keep going to the old location or do we begin the process of finding the new location? And when do we make this change?

As we learn in life, there is never 100 percent certainty as to when and how. For our industry, however, we need to recognize that the characteristics of this new generation will require us to change our approach to business. Why not start with a focus

on their experience with your hearing health-care services?

*Bradley Stephenson, AuD, is the manager of claims substantiation for Phonak AG, and is working on an MBA. He is also a member of the Academy's Business Enhancement Strategies and Technique (BEST) Committee.*

*Chris Auty is managing director of One Source Hearing, LLC. He studied audiology at the University of Nottingham and has 20 years of commercial industry experience in European and North American markets.*

## References

- Gordon J. (2016) Understanding baby boomers at work: Fast facts for CHROs. [www.forbes.com/sites/adp/2016/04/11/understanding-baby-boomers-at-work-fast-facts-for-chros/#3df55f21238b](http://www.forbes.com/sites/adp/2016/04/11/understanding-baby-boomers-at-work-fast-facts-for-chros/#3df55f21238b). April 11.
- Howe N. (2014) The silent generation, "the lucky few" (Part 3 of 7). [www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2014/08/13/the-silent-generation-the-lucky-few-part-3-of-7/#131ced242c63](http://www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2014/08/13/the-silent-generation-the-lucky-few-part-3-of-7/#131ced242c63). September 1.
- Johnson S. (1998) *Who Moved My Cheese: An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*. New York: Penguin Putnam.
- Roberts JA, Manolis C. (2000) Baby boomers and busters: An exploratory investigation of attitudes toward marketing, advertising and consumerism. *J Cons Mark*, 17(6):481–497.