

# OLD SCHOOL VS. YOUNG GUNS



## Sharing **Strengths** and Strategies

Lessons from another generation give seasoned sellers and 20- and 30-somethings alike the boost they need to write their own tickets to sales success.

BY JULIE BARKER

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**H**ow old are you? If you are part of the biggest demographic in the industry, you're between the ages of 45 and 63. Indeed, if you break down the industry by *Advantages'* readership, Baby Boomers make up the largest set: The industry is made up of about 3% Gen Yers (born between 1982-1995), 26% Gen Xers (1965-1981), 64% Baby Boomers (1946-1964); and 7% of those from the Silent Generation (born before 1945).

With four different generations in the workforce, industry newbies and veterans alike are finding they can learn a lot about sales just by observing one another. For example, with three years in the industry, 26-year-old salesperson Lauren Itzkovitz considers herself new and is soaking up whatever she can learn from her boss, Larry Cohen, the 45-year-old president of Axis Promotions in New York (*asi/128263*). His philosophy is that Axis needs to be a creative resource. "It's not about which item we sell our clients," he says. "It's how that item works in the context of their advertising campaign." Searching through catalogs for ideas is one back-to-basics trick he's taught Itzkovitz.

"My generation is more inclined to do things online," she says, but she has found that flagging catalog pages is also helpful. When she's flipping through catalog pages, Itzkovitz is thinking about future pitches and future campaigns. She's assembling ideas.

Cohen realizes that asking his salespeople "to do the mental gymnastics for the client" is a tough

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requirement. "It does make the job that much harder." But a job demanding mental exercise is ideal for a person of Itzkovitz's generation, Gen Y. These 75 million Americans are characteristically innovative and resourceful.

Still, Cohen isn't doing all of the teaching. It turns out, Itzkovitz, and other members of Generation Y, have a lot to teach members of the older set as well. One key lesson: how to leverage the Web as a networking tool.

#### **GEN Y (1982-1995)**

##### **Great Qualities:**

Innovative,  
Energetic, Social  
Networkers

##### **Need Help With:**

Selling Basics, Face-to-Face Connections

#### **GEN X (1965-1981)**

##### **Great Qualities:**

Self-Reliant,  
Team Players,  
Techno-Savvy

##### **Need Help With:**

Making Phone Calls,  
Engaging Clients  
One-on-One

#### **BOOMERS (1946-1964)**

##### **Great Qualities:**

Multi-taskers, Natural  
with Peer-to-Peer Relationships,  
Patient Mentors

##### **Need Help With:**

Using Technology to  
Get Results

#### **SILENT GENERATION (pre-1945)**

##### **Great Qualities:**

Disciplined Cold  
Callers, Trustworthy

##### **Need Help With:**

Technology, Staying  
Enthusiastic About  
Sales



## It's About People

Generalizations about how any generation of workers will act in the workplace are just that: generalizations. Plenty of young workers hate to cold-call, but we spoke to a couple who are great at it.

Internet users may not value the old ways as much, but 25-year-old Adam Wright, an account executive at Freestyle Marketing (*asi/198342*), sends clients handwritten notes, because "that's the only thing that doesn't get screened by a receptionist" (or, for that matter, put into a Spam folder).

And for every older worker who is primarily a mentor, there's one who is learning from working with salespeople 20 years younger.

Each day in this industry, sales techniques are passed from generation to generation. Fathers pass them to children, mentors to mentees, and in at least one case, a son passed a tip to his mother: "After I'd been in sales for a decade, my son Michael came to 'assist' me and gave me a significant piece of advice," says Marsha Londe, an industry consultant in Atlanta and principal at Tango! "I always face my clients when speaking with them. Michael commented that if I turned my body slightly to include him or others, then he would be part of my conversation rather than on the outside of it. I've never forgotten this subtle but inclusive gesture."

Michael Londe has since joined the Atlanta office of Summit Marketing (*asi/339116*), where he is director of sales.

Larry Alford, 42, from Axis Promotions (*asi/128263*) has 19 years experience selling ad specialties. "I have some peers in my company whom I learn from daily, but I also run things by people who are younger and greener, because they are sometimes closer in age to the client I'm selling to," he says.

Like a lot of the best salespeople, Alford enjoys the learning. Younger people have turned him on to trends. "I also watch people. What is the younger crowd doing that is particularly effective as far as their networking, as far as doing cold calls? What's working for them? If someone has a good elevator speech, you've got to stop and listen," he says.

By absorbing information from the people who work with and around him, Alford, like many others in this industry, stays on top of his game.

**“When you’re on the bleeding edge, really trying to maximize the technology that is available, it tends to obscure the fact that business is still done one to one.”**

– Matthew Watkins, LogoSurfing.com (*asi/246818*)

## **GENERATION Y: Masters of Social Networking**

Members of Generation Y have a few strategies of their own to share with older workers. This age group has made Facebook and LinkedIn its business tools.

Adam Wright, 25, an account executive at Freestyle Marketing in Scottsdale (*asi/198342*), says that by using social networking sites, “I know everything about the prospect before I call them.” That’s the easy part. The difficulty is connecting by phone. “For the entire month of February all I did from 8 a.m.–11 a.m. was cold-call every single day, and I probably spoke to four people the entire month. It was voice mail, voice mail, voice mail. Nobody returns calls,” he says.

Still, Wright remains undeterred, because he’s had

great sales training at Freestyle from owner Michael Stoll, who has been in the ad specialty industry for over 35 years. “When you start at Freestyle,” says Wright, “you get five straight days of sales training; 100% prospecting, introductions, how to continue to wow a client, and how to use ad specialties as an advertising and marketing medium.”

Wright’s colleague, Christine Westrum, 32, says Stoll challenges young salespeople to come to the office and not turn on the computer, but instead pick up the phone and make appointments. She sees the value in that, but Twitter and Facebook are her generation’s substitute for just driving by to say hello. “A lot of clients have become more than clients, they’ve become friends,” she says, “so I do my best to try to keep in touch with them on whatever platform I can – keep Freestyle and my name in front of my clients as often as I can, and the more often I do that the more successful I am.”

Stoll, who is in his early 60s, is very open to learning about technologies like Facebook. “But his concern is that you’re spreading yourself so thin that you just forget to do business, forget to do sales,” Wright says. Taking Stoll’s concerns into consideration, Wright makes sure he uses these networking applications as money-makers, not time-wasters.

Technology is the great divide between the generations that grew up before and after 1987, when the personal computer was in 19% of homes and was poised for enormous growth.

“Most of our great timesaving ideas have come from our younger salespeople,” says Nate Bettinger, sales manager of Pingline (*asi/78137*), in Chicago. “We have been able to offer new services, like our eMergeDrive, by listening to our younger salespeople’s ideas. One of them came to us and said, ‘Why can’t we make a logo pop up, then go away, or play a video every time the drive is plugged in?’ After consulting with our engineers, there were only a few hurdles.” The result was a new software promotional item.

## **GENERATION X: Results-Focused**

Gen Xers were also raised in the era of video games and computers, but their world wasn’t defined by the Internet in the same way as 20-somethings’. Gen Xers grew up in latch-

key homes and are generally characterized as self-reliant, impatient and skeptical, but team players.

Atlanta-based LogoSurfing.com (*asi/246818*) is owned by partners Matthew Watkins, in his mid-30s, and Brenda Porter, mid-50s. Both are comfortable with technology. Porter had run an IT company and was familiar with e-commerce tools, but not the newest generation of such tools. What Watkins brings to the company is knowledge of getting results with that technology: search engine optimization, how to get prominent positioning on Google, and how to use the social aspects of the Internet to market.

Porter is a natural at personal, peer-to-peer relationships. “When you’re on the bleeding edge, really trying to maximize the technology that is available,



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it tends to obscure the fact that business is still done one to one," says Watkins. "Brenda is always trying to remind me of that – we still have to be making those phone calls and having our customer base engaged on all levels."

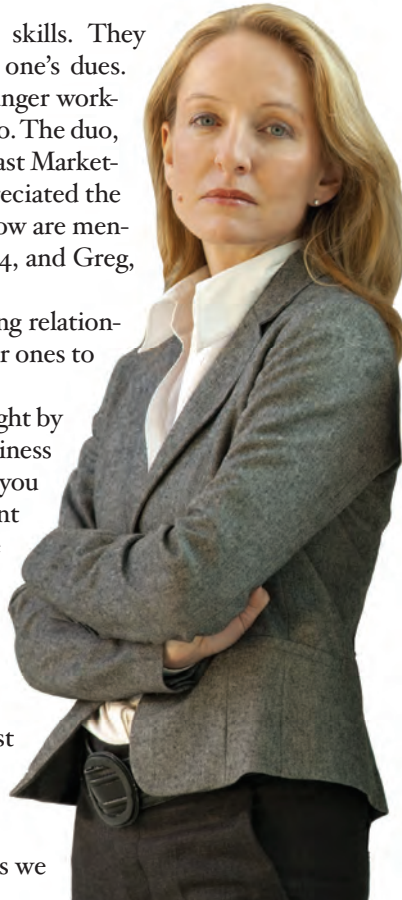
### BABY BOOMERS: Teachers, Mentors

Boomers, like Porter, have good people skills. They believe in playing by the rules and paying one's dues. They tend to be good at bringing along younger workers, the way Randy Eubanks and Bob Scala do. The duo, both in their early 50s and partners in Suncoast Marketing (asi/339154), in Fort Lauderdale, FL, appreciated the mentoring they received 30 years ago and now are mentoring others, including Bob's sons, Chris, 24, and Greg, 21, who are both on Suncoast's sales staff.

"We grew up pressing flesh and establishing relationships, which we try to encourage the younger ones to do," says Scala.

Eubanks says one of the lessons he was taught by mentor Gus Stavros, who owned Better Business Forms in Largo, FL, was that on commission, you can make as much as you want. "You don't want to work for the same check every week," he says. "The other thing Gus said to me was, 'In sales, like in all of life, the act of standing still is the beginning of decline.'" Eubanks says he has shared the lesson over and over that "you can't tread water for long."

While the partners notice that the youngest members of the staff are energetic and bring a willingness to go out and knock on doors and bring in new business, they sometimes notice some of the older sellers coasting. "As we



## Recession-Proofing Sales

These economic times are driving sales back to basics at many companies. "It used to be that we were in a comfort zone and could sit back at our desk and work on e-mails, but we can't do that anymore," says Joyce DePalma-Ponton, a 52-year-old marketing consultant at HALO/Lee Wayne (asi/356000), in Union Bridge, MD, who has been in sales for 25 years.

She says her biggest inspiration for going out and finding clients is a younger member of her sales team, Kevin Quinn, who is in his 30s. She actually interviewed him to learn how he does what he does. "He is constantly on the phone and he doesn't stop. He drives down the road and he sees a sign, a billboard, he makes a call back to his office and leaves himself a voicemail about who he has to contact the next day, and he does it. He is constantly prospecting," she says.

DePalma-Ponton admires Quinn's terrific follow-up. "Even though he's younger, he's of the old-school mindset that once you get the person's name, you have to follow up with it."

Thanks to her "interview" with Quinn and some other advice she internalized, Ponton had a 42% sales increase in the first quarter and opened up seven new accounts.

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– Bob Scala, Suncoast Marketing (*asi/339154*)

get further along in life and the kids move out, the pressure to sell may not be as great,” says Scala. “It’s good to have the young bucks here. They show the older folks, ‘Hey, there’s business out there.’”

Eubanks agrees that enthusiasm is contagious. “When the younger guys get excited and the sales trainer gets excited and I, as VP of sales, get excited, yeah, it’s contagious. Success breeds success,” he says.

### **SILENT GENERATION: Disciplined at Cold-Calling**

Think of the generation tagged “Veterans” as the older brothers of Vietnam War protesters. These workers, now 64 and up, have a vet’s respect for authority and take satisfaction in a job well done.

Phil Sunshine, 71, with 41 years in the industry, is a member of that group.

Damien Wiesenfeld, 33, a salesman turned co-owner of The Sunshine Group (*asi/339525*) in Maitland, FL, credits his partner with teaching him, above all, discipline. Wiesenfeld says he learned the benefits of cold-calling from Sunshine. “I hate it, but he proves time and again that it works. People my age don’t want to do that. We want to use the Internet, send an e-mail,” he says.

The Silent Generation also exudes trustworthiness. Melinda Nestor, 55, owner of Momento Advertising Specialties in Chillicothe, OH (*asi/275300*), learned the principles of sales from her father. “He taught me your word is your bond,” she says. ▲

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