

Large population of baby boomers with leisure time and money **top casino guest lists**

By David Grisham

The recent AGA State of the States report reveals that 33 percent of casino visitors are age 50 to 64, accounting for the largest age segment of casino patrons. All members of this age group fall neatly within the baby boomer classification. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, baby boomers are people born between 1945 and 1964.

As they have aged, some boomers have even entered the second largest demographic group of casino visitors, the mature consumer group of 65 and older. This group comprises 25 percent of casino visitors. Combined, these two groups make up 58 percent of casino guests.

Melissa Radovich, director of marketing for IP Casino, Resort & Spa, said the size of the baby boomer market alone is part of the reason so many people age 50 to 64 visit casinos. The number of baby boomers in the United States is estimated at about 80 million.

"Baby boomers are the country's largest age demographic," said **Doug Burkhalter**, senior vice president and chief of marketing officer for Isle of Capri Casinos Inc. "And we offer a form of entertainment that they enjoy ... in addition to the gaming, we have restaurants, entertainment, hotels, spas and more."

While the sheer number of boomers offers the obvious reason for their rank among casino visitors, Radovich said, other factors come into play. "In general, this segment is looking for a short escape from reality — with a chance to hit a big win. Also, they are at the stage in life where most kids are likely grown and out of the house and they may have more money (and time) to spend on travel and entertainment."

And they do have the money. The size of the baby boomer market is matched only by its spending power. A recent report by Wall Street Journal states that baby boomers control half of U.S. consumer spending.

In addition to having the time and money to travel, baby boomers also have also shown the desire to travel.

According to a survey of boomers and matures by AARP, more than 81 million of this group plan on traveling.

"Baby boomers have the discretionary income and time," Burkhalter said, "as well as the interest in the casino industry to make them influential in the marketing approach of a casino. They are our bread and butter, and we can't ignore that."

Word-of-mouth marketing is also important, according to AARP, and their survey reveals there is "very little brand loyalty" when it comes to travel planning. This provides casinos with the opportunity to attract new business from an age group that once upon a time was considered too brand-loyal to easily sway. Baby boomers continue to prove to be much different from the generation that came before them.

"Our marketing is focused on our core customer, which is the baby boomer," Burkhalter said. "While we may offer some promotions that would be attractive to a broader audience, we don't stray too far in fear of alienating our current loyal guests."

"We do promotions specifically targeted to that (baby boomer) demographic," Burkhalter explained. "All of our casinos offer special perks for guests age 50-plus throughout the week, and we tend to offer promotions with prizes that would appeal to them. Our entertainment calendar is also guided by the demographic of our guests; we bring in the acts and artists they want to listen to."

Radovich said boomers are looking for an all-inclusive experience, an escape from the real world where they feel welcomed and not simply a promotion or discount for seniors. "Previously, we offered a senior promotion for members 55 years and older," she said. "During these promotions, our casino was busy and obviously full of age 55-plus visitors, however, very few were taking advantage of the promotions. The guests were choosing us as their destination ... not because of our senior promotions, but because of the value they receive at our resort and the relationships formed with our staff. Who likes to admit they are a



senior, even if it is for a discount?"

Radovich said that while each age segment has their own drivers and trends, how to market to them really depends on the individual's drivers and trends, more so than their age group. She offered an example. "On one hand, my own mother, who is 70, owns a HTC Hero, has a Facebook account and recently asked me to get set up on SKYPE, and I live 20 minutes away! On the other hand, my brother, who is 50, just recently signed up for cable, owns a flip phone, can't type a text and can barely get on his dial-up Internet." She continued, "Marketers today have to be more creative with their marketing dollars throughout all segments. If possible, identify what drives the player individually and utilize more one-on-one marketing across all segments, regardless of their age."

More key findings of the AARP survey offer additional insight into the popularity of the casino resort experience with baby boomers. The survey respondents indicated that safety is a big concern when considering a travel destination. However, "while boomers perceive themselves to be more adventurous than matures, adventure should be within the context of safety," the report states.

Offering excitement and adventure in a safe environment, casinos are attracting baby boomers by providing them a travel destination tailor-made for them. ♠