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REFLECTIONS OF THE MATURE MARKET AND WHAT IT SAYS TO THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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Today we are aware of the changing population pyramid in the United States. We are in the midst of the graying of America. Today there are over 64 million individuals 50 years of age or over. The median age of the population in the United States rose from 30 years in 1980 to 33 today. In 30 years, one in every three Americans will be 50 years of age or older (1). This diverse group will impact all aspects of our society. They will arrive in their later years with new expectations and roles (2). The emerging elderly segment of the population will present new marketing and management challenges to both the private and public sector.

Any marketing and management strategy designed to cultivate this segment must be based on data and facts rather than myths and stereotypes related to the "elderly." As Menchin (3) wrote "creative marketing to the older population starts with recognition of the shared interests and common needs, as well as the differences and diversity of lifestyles, within the 50 and over age segment. Understanding the great range of interests and lifestyles within today's older population is the key to success in marketing to the mature." (p. 22) This special issue of Visions in Leisure and Business addresses not only interests and needs but also characteristics and behaviors of the mature market.

The paper by Balazs provides information needed to better understand the forces acting to shape the travel behavior of the mature traveler. Mature individuals share many characteristics with consumers of all ages. One such characteristic is their response to poor service. LaForge and Cantrell analyze the relationship of how consumer complaints are handled and future interactions between the user and the service provider. These two papers are general in nature and have implications for anyone catering to the mature market.

The next three papers examine the trip and travel characteristics and behaviors of domestic, mature travelers. Reid focuses on motorcoach

tour operators and their adaptation to changes in the senior market. Blazey compares segmentation based on the sociodemographic variable of age to a proprietary psychographic segmentation technique (VALS). The final paper in this triumvirate, by Harper and Perdue, provides a microanalysis of travel behaviors and characteristics of mature visitors to North Carolina.

The final two papers in this issue are indicators of the global nature of the mature market. The first, by Shen and Gartner, profiles characteristics of outbound mature visitors to the People's Republic of China. However, the outbound visitor is only half of the international equation. Equally important is understanding the inbound visitor. The paper by O'Leary and O'Malley focuses on mature visitors to the United States from West Germany.

We believe this issue captures the essence of the mature travel market. The diversity of this market opens new doors to research and practice. An issue such as this is only a beginning. It is our hope that the exciting papers in this monograph provide fertile ground for future efforts.

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