



National Media Preferences Report 2006

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A Wild Idea or “Why Media Preferences”

During my nearly fifteen years as a Director and Vice President of Marketing for Community Colleges, and my eleven years as CEO of Interact, I have always “yearned” for real information on what people are watching, when and why. I know quite a bit about media buying (as many of you do), and so I know the numbers I am getting just don’t show the whole picture. Some radio stations would have ratings, and others would not. Cable would have national data...but no local data. And no one had reliable data on internet use and connection speeds for my college area or district.

Over the years, Interact has done many media preference studies for clients...and because each one involved unique questions and samples of the public, they were not inexpensive to facilitate. They were expensive enough so that few colleges could afford to do them annually on their own, which is the only way a real media preference survey can be done and produce real decision-making data. Once out-of-date for a year, television shows that were hot are long-gone, and the same can be said about radio, internet and most of the lifestyle data.

So, the Interact team decided to create a national media preferences study. A study that we would commit to doing every fall, and deliver in time for spring, summer and fall advertising the next year. We recruited a mixture of 65 colleges in 27 states with a total of 45,000 community students participating.

The idea was simple. We would survey your own students by sending them up to an Interact survey website. Each college would have its own login so individual college data could be broken out. Colleges who purchased subscriptions to the annual study would receive their own data, as well as a look at national trends, and they could include up to five custom questions. For the colleges who were recruited to be part of the randomly-selected sample, they were offered a copy of the national findings as a thank-you for their participation.

The Goal of Media Preferences Research

Our goal is simple. We want to provide an annual survey of media preferences that gives every two-year college in America the kind of marketing information they need to compete in the marketplace. We want to do it at subscription prices, so that year-after-year, colleges can afford good decision-making data.

What you have here is the national findings of Interact's first (2006) Media Preferences Survey.

The Survey Areas

Television and cable preferences

Television viewing habits

Radio station preferences

Radio listening habits

Print consumption

Print versus web usage for critical college materials (catalog, schedule, etc.)

Video credibility

Email and instant messaging preferences

Attitudes toward your college's website

Website likes and dislikes

Lifestyle questions that examine where people "hang out"

Sample Size

44,360 community college students drawn from the United States population of 301,764,000. With a sample of 44,360 participants, this survey has a confidence interval of .46 or +/-<1%.

Methodology

The sample that comprises this study was made up of randomly-selected and subscriber colleges. Each participating college was asked to send three to five emails to their student population asking for their participation in the study. Each college was provided with a unique login and password, and a hot link to click through to the survey sign-in page. Each college that paid to participate was guaranteed that one student would win an iPod Nano. Nationally, another ten Video iPods were given away to students who participated from the sample non-paying colleges. Each college was asked to continue recruiting over a two-week period, to insure that a minimum sample of 400 students was gathered. Some colleges had thousands of students. A few smaller colleges had a couple of hundred. But together they created a participating sample of nearly 45,000 students from across the country.

Students completed a 205-question survey with 15 open-ended questions. The questions gathered broad information about what channels, stations, and media they used. Then it invited participants to provide their favorite shows, channels, and events.

What this means is that individual colleges can get great information on their own populations. But let's assume they are a college that is under-serving an important group, say Latinos. They probably don't have enough Latinos attending their college to get reliable data on what that audience segment is watching. That's where the power of a national sample comes in. While there are (of course) regional variations in what people watch, listen to, and do, there are also national trends across all populations, and trends among unique groups. Using a national sample of this size, individual profiles of unique groups can be created to help two-year college marketers make critical decisions.

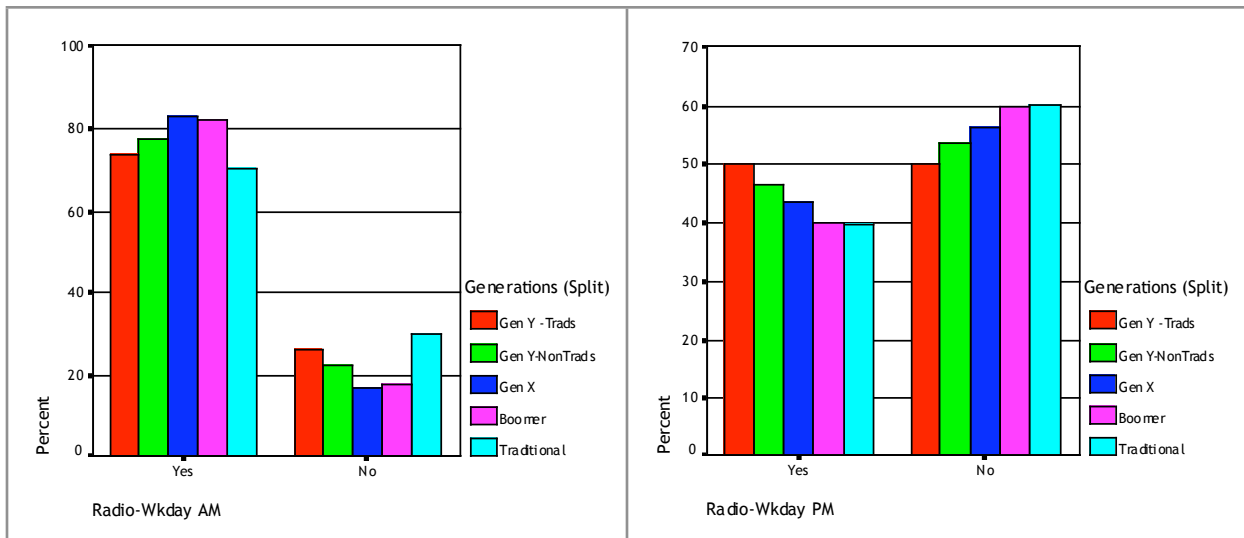
A Word About Generations

While all demographics can be important in attracting a target audience, for two-year colleges the most critical groups tend to be age-determined. Gen Y is actually an age group that runs from today's elementary age students to 29-year-old young adults. That range encompasses the traditional college student (right out of high school), as well as the returning adult, the non-traditional student. Two-year colleges market to Traditional Gen Y (Ages 17 - 24), Non-Traditional Gen Y (Ages 25 - 29), Gen X (Ages 30 - 40), Baby Boomers (Ages 41 - 60), and Traditionals (60+ years olds). In order to provide clarity, the information has been analyzed by generations with an age split in the Gen Y group. This offers more focused information for all your critical groups.

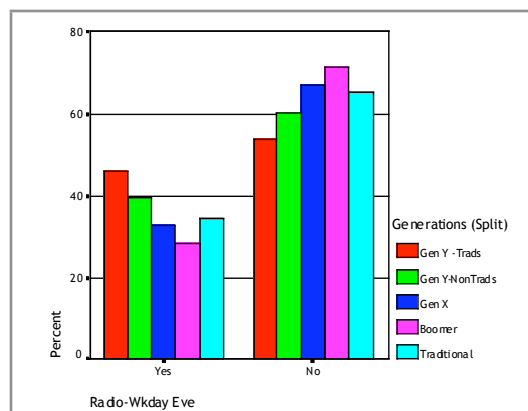
Radio

When They Listen

The rumors of radio being dead are vastly overstated. Mp3 players have definitely become a major source of “portable” music. But people of all ages look for types of music that they like and want, and for that they turn to the radio.



- Morning drive-time is still the time to get the single largest audience across all age groups.
- Afternoon drive-time is not bad either, and it reaches half of the traditional age Gen Y'er generation.

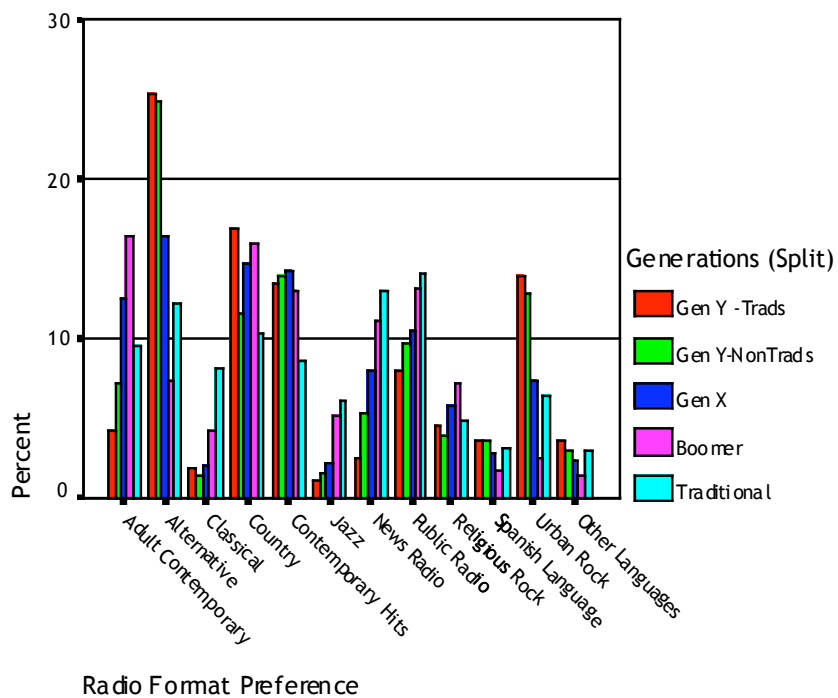


- But for colleges looking for the best media value, it may be weekday evening radio. Nearly 50% of the traditional Gen Y'ers are listening, and 40% of the non-traditional Gen Y'ers are also listening. Evening radio typically costs half of what daytime radio costs. So this may be one of the best values around.

What They Listen To

Radio stations self-identify as belonging to one of the general radio formats listed below. But that doesn't mean that the audience accurately understands what format they are listening to. For example, I may think I am listening to contemporary hits, but it's actually the adult contemporary format. I may be another deluded Baby-Boomer thinking I'm still cool when I'm not. With that caveat, the clear winner in formats are channels that are "alternative".

- 25% of all Gen Y are listening to alternative radio formats
- Nearly 18% of the younger Gen Y group listen to country, while about 14% listen to urban rock
- Gen X is listening to alternative (15%), country (14%), contemporary hits (13%), and adult contemporary (12%).



Where Do They Listen

- 40% of all audiences listen at home and 90% of all audiences listen in their cars

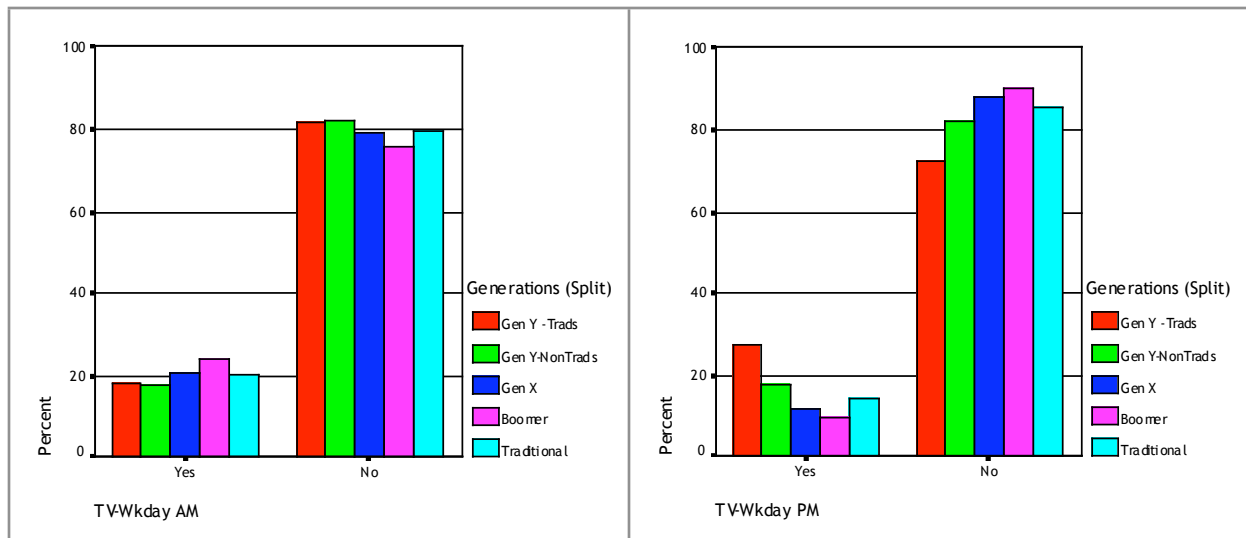
Key Finding

If you are advertising on the radio, remember that most of your audience will be behind the wheel of a car. Don't give phone numbers unless they are "sticky" or websites unless they are simple.

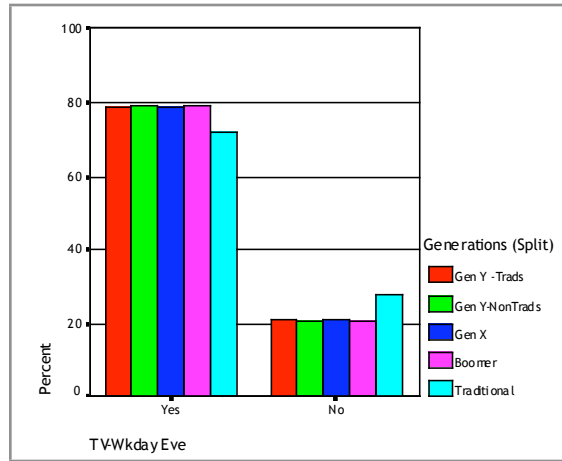
Television

When They Watch

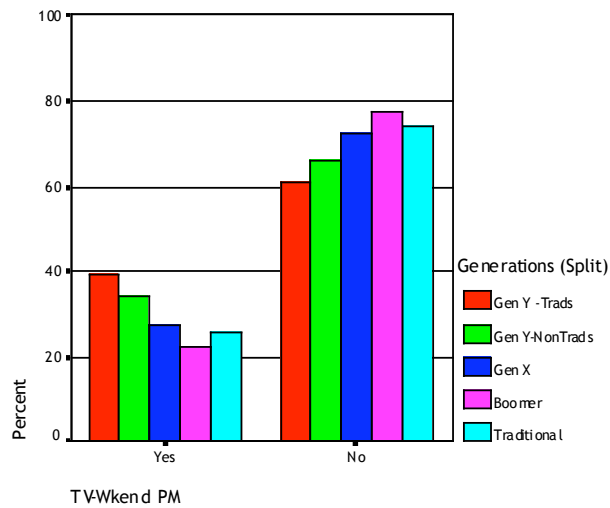
Television is not dead either. There are two issues to be aware of. First is the steady erosion of broadcast television and the “death-spiral” of television news. This research tells us that people are still watching broadcast, but cable has clearly made significant inroads. The second factor is this...media use is converging so that it is common for people to watch television while surfing on their laptops and listening to their satellite radio. It's difficult to get an audience to focus on one media at a time. For example, while I am writing this I have an episode of “Bones” playing on my kitchen computer, while I am scanning the news RSS feed. Three media, two computers. And I'm a Baby Boomer. Imagine what Gen X and Y can do with their fresh young brains.



- About one in five of all audiences watch television in the morning, although a larger percentage of Baby Boomers are morning people.
- Afternoon television is still a phenomena for the younger Gen Y group with nearly 30% watching.
- Evening television is the preferred time slot for all audiences, with four out of five generations watching.



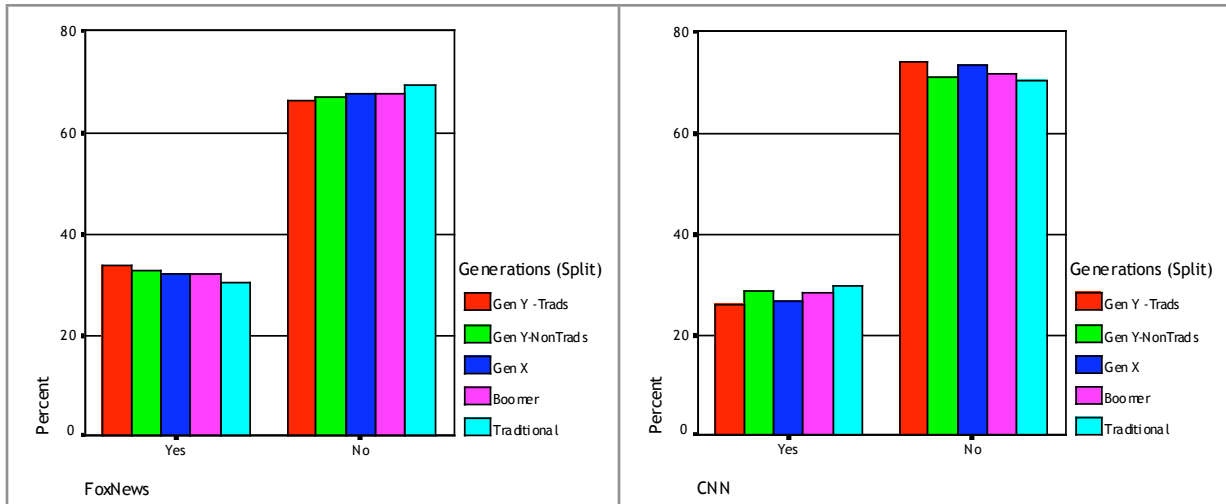
- For colleges looking for the best media value for younger audiences, it may be weekend afternoon television. Nearly 40% of the traditional Gen Y'ers are watching then, along with 35% of the non-traditional Gen Y'ers. Typically weekend afternoon television is low cost. Be careful, however, as the channel and show is an important determining factor.



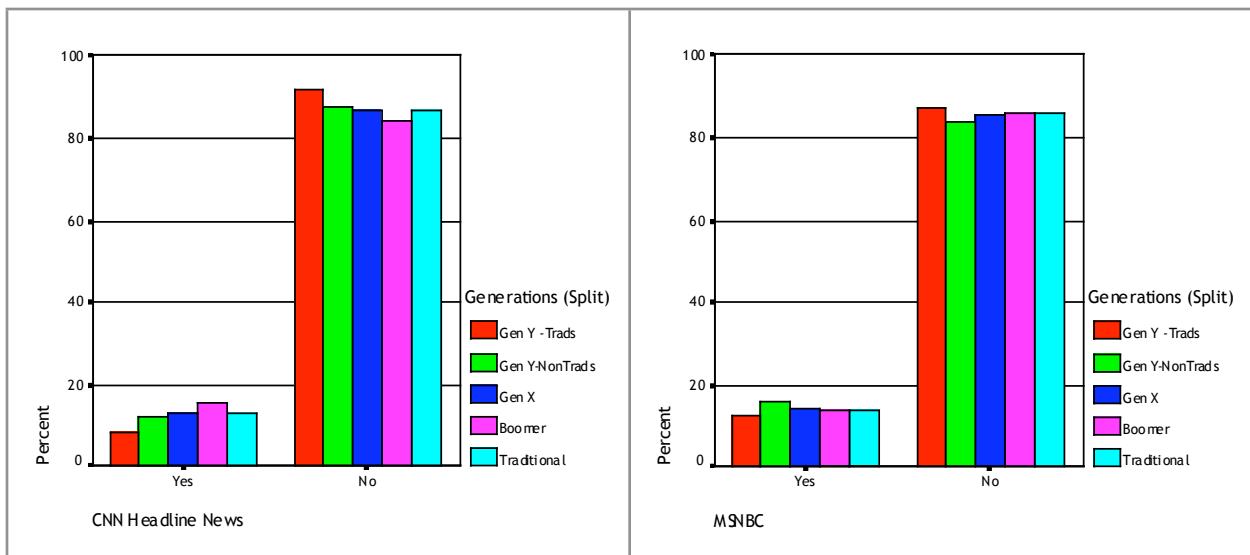
What They Are Watching

News

- They aren't watching Bloomberg or CNBC, as both stations drew less than 5% viewership.



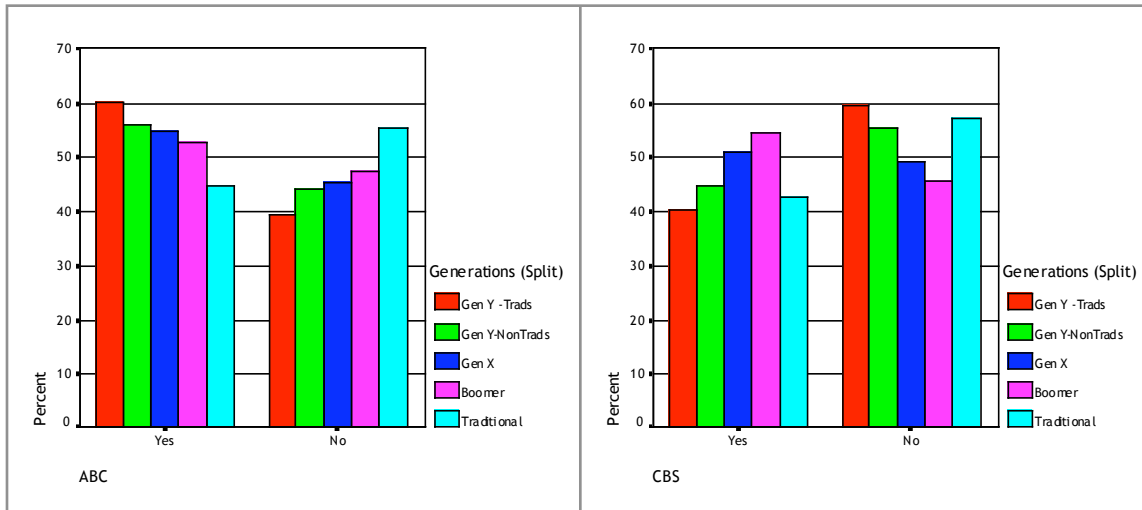
- Nationally Fox News draws the highest percentage of all generations and about one out of three viewers.
- CNN is significantly lower, but still draws about 25% of the market across all age groups.



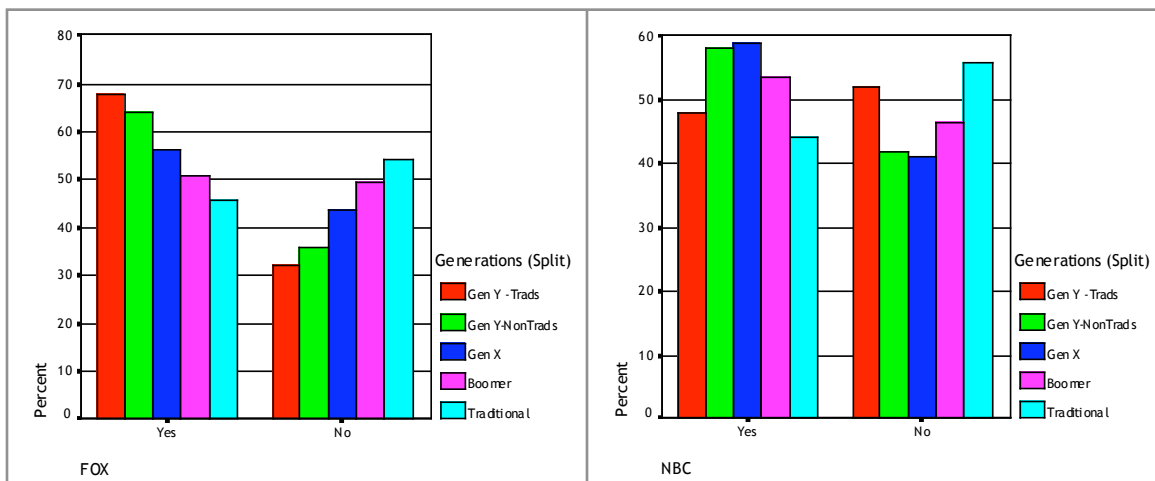
- CNN's Headline News (HLN) pulls less than 10% of the younger market and only about 18% of the Baby Boomer market.
- MSNBC does better than HLN, but is still far behind Fox and CNN.

Broadcast

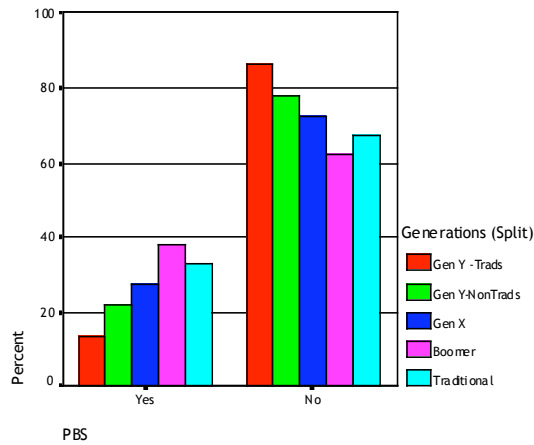
Broadcast television is still free television, and it draws large numbers of viewers. The cost of reaching these large numbers of viewers is what has driven the cost of advertising beyond the means of most two-year colleges. Broadcast television is one of the last mass media available. However, it is expensive, and given media convergence, it is its own competition with numerous media in peoples' homes.



- ABC and Fox pull younger audiences in larger numbers, with Fox being the best bet for Gen Y.
- NBC pulls well with older Gen Y's, Gen X's and Baby Boomers.
- Traditionals (Ages 60+) are egalitarian viewers, watching all the channels in similar proportions.



- PBS pulls best with Baby Boomers and Traditionals, and a few Gen X'ers. It is not the channel to reach Gen Y.



Cable

It should be apparent that we are leaving the era of mass-marketing behind. The growth of the internet and explosion of cable channels have shown us that when huge populations can access media, even small, unknown media can have a powerful following. What that means is that custom cable channels may have small audiences, but if they are the right audience and the cost-per-impression is low, then they can have a powerful impact in your marketing.

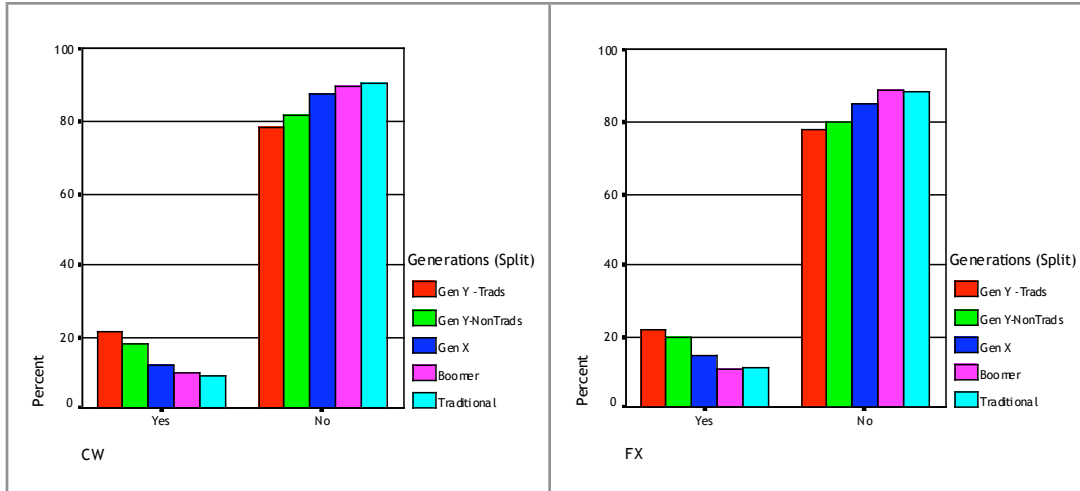
For example, imagine a Bill Gates television channel targeted to show all the things Bill Gates would like to see. All Bill, all the time. The viewership would be one lone person...Bill (and maybe Melinda, on occasion). But if you wanted to reach Bill Gates, then the number of viewers doesn't matter...only the fact that it reaches the specific target audience you want.

Many cable channels are like that. G4 and Tech TV target a unique geek audience. My husband, the physicist, likes it a lot. The number of viewers are low (really low), but if you wanted to reach a technically savvy audience about computer and IT training, its an audience poised to listen. That focus is the power of these boutique channels. Small, but focused.

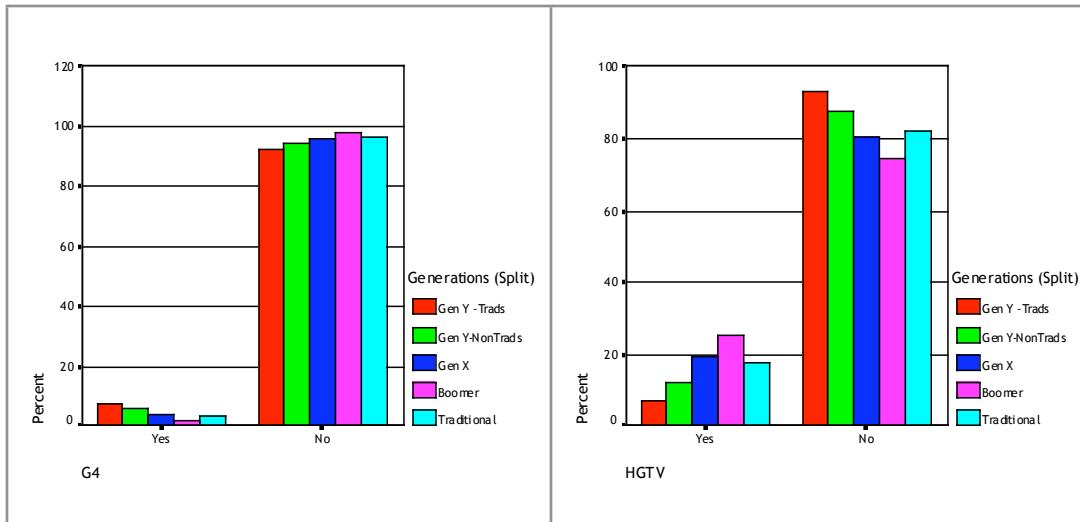
In the national research, Interact reviewed 34 cable channels. Some of them pulled surprisingly large audiences, while some only attracted a select few. Here are some of the more important surprises.

Tiny Interesting Audiences

- CW pulls the Gen Y group, as does FX

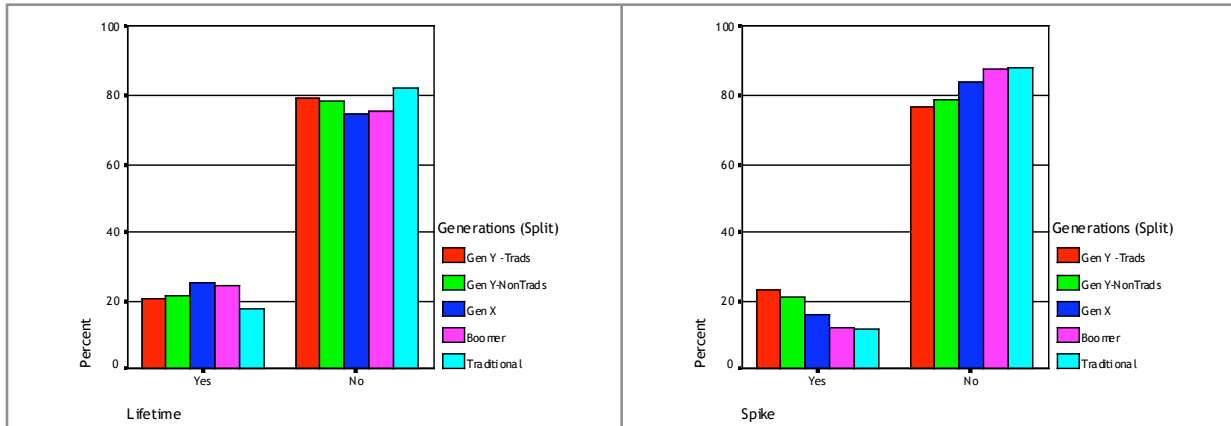


- G4 is a very tiny market segment, but focused on technology. This is a good place to advertise low-enrollment technology programs.
- HGTV hits a small Gen X, Boomer and Traditional age group. Consider this for everything from art and decorating programs to botany and carpentry.



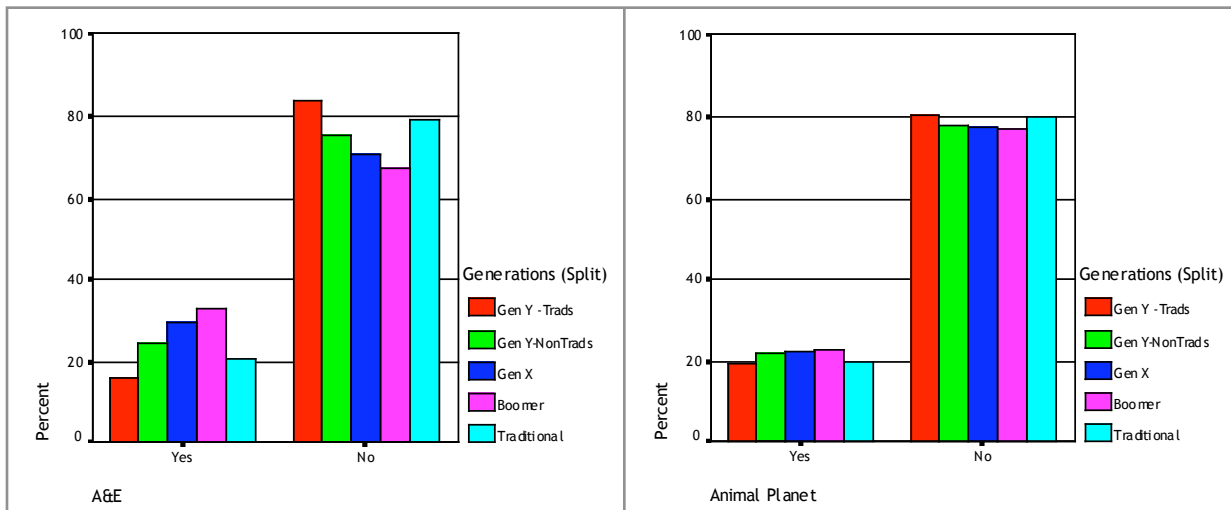
Interact Communications

- Lifetime pulls across all age groups, but it is a female audience.
- Spike pulls the Gen Y age group and it is a male audience. Consider Spike if you have lost enrollment among young men.
- ESPN draws numbers similar to Spike TV, but the cost is typically much higher.

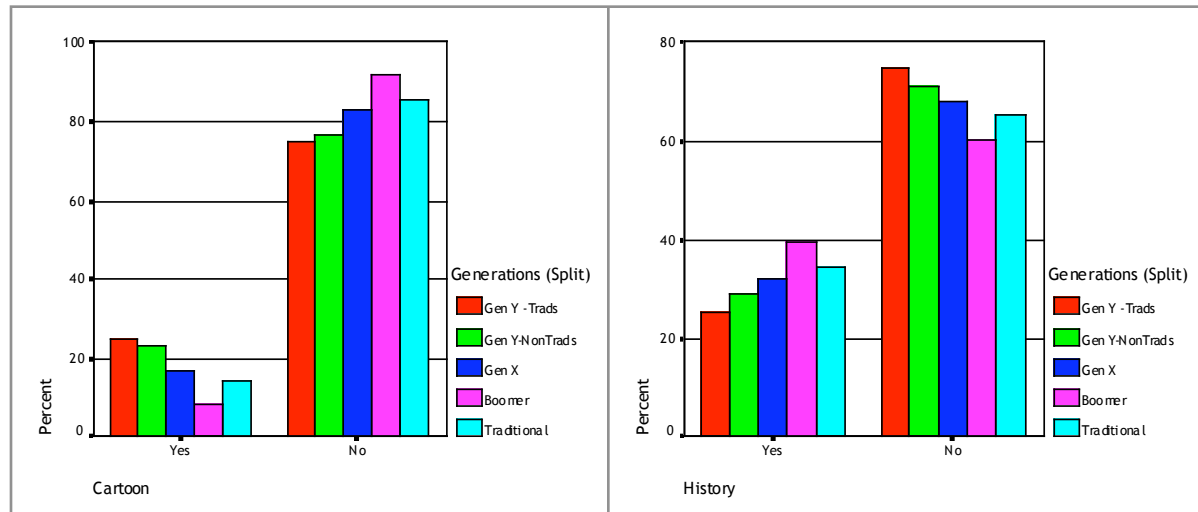


Niche Markets

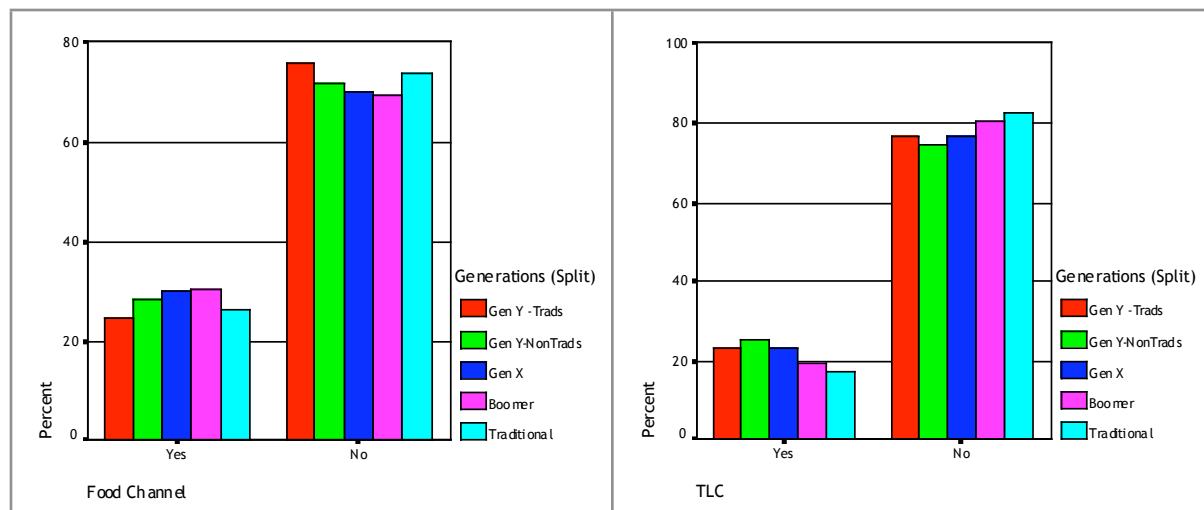
- A&E is surprisingly strong with Gen X and the non-traditional Gen Y age group. (It has the Sopranos and a whole raft of law enforcement shows so it can be a good source for folks with a “crime and punishment” bent.)
- Animal Planet has cute pets, puppies and funny animal videos. What’s not to like?



- Cartoon Network is a solid favorite with Gen Y. Consider Adult Swim as a show that will pull across to the older age groups.
- The History Channel used to be the WWII channel. Now you can watch Nixon and Elvis, History's Mysteries and Modern Marvels. This channel can be a good place to target your technical offerings, as well as humanities.

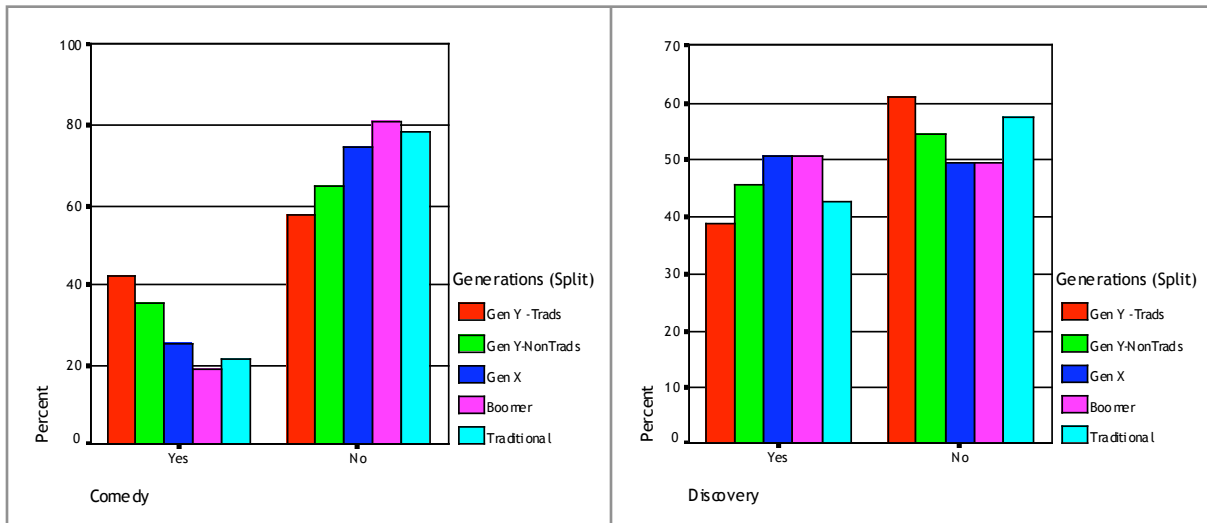


- The Food Network has everything from extreme cooking (Iron Chef) to Eggheads in the Kitchen (Good Eats). It pulls nearly a third of the older audiences and 25-30% of all Gen Y. It's a surprise channel.
- TLC has everything from shows on tatoos (LA & Miami Ink) to Trading Spaces. It pulls more than 20% of all markets (except the 60+ group).

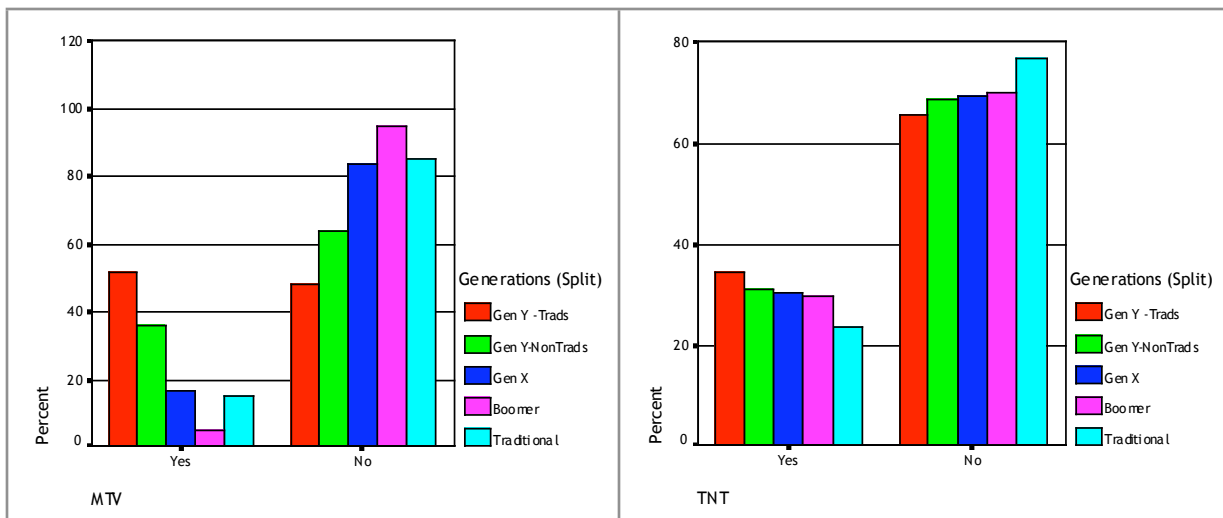


Powerhouses

- Discovery is THE powerhouse of this year's media preference survey. Fifty percent of Baby Boomers and Gen X'ers are watching Discovery. But what is really surprising is how well Discovery pulls in Gen Y Traditional (38%) and Gen Y Non-Traditionals (45%). Deadliest Catch, Mythbusters, Cool Jobs, It's All Geek to Me, Man Versus Wild and numerous other shows draw from a broad cross-section of age, gender and race.
- The Comedy Channel is a major source of news for Gen Y. The Daily Show and Colbert Report are mainstays of Gen Y viewing.



- MTV draws 50% of the younger Gen Y population and 38% of the older Gen Y population. Gen Y still wants their MTV.
- TNT attracts more than 33% of each group and pulls well across gender and race.



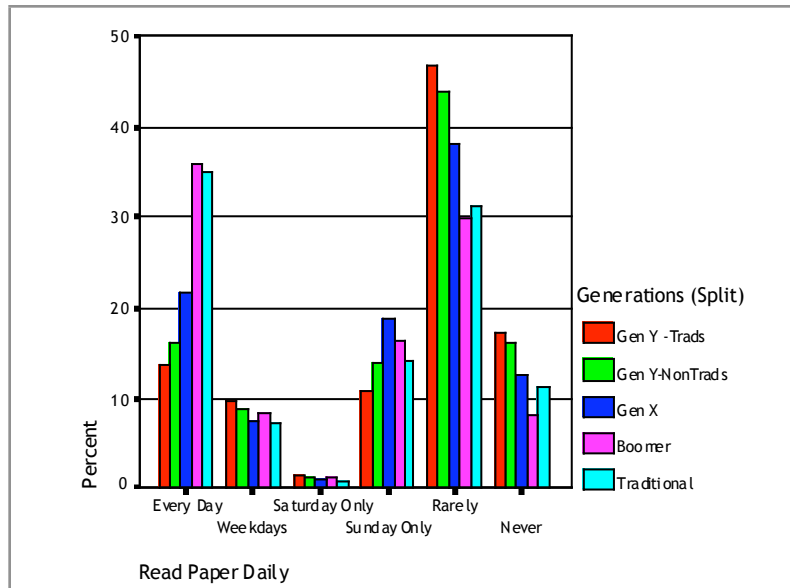
Key Findings

- If your college is looking for the traditional-age Gen Y'er, you may want to consider late afternoon television. It is significantly less expensive and still draws nearly one in three viewers in that age group.
- The Discovery Channel is a hidden winner. It pulls well across all age groups.
- Cable is significantly less expensive than broadcast television, and attracts groups with more in common than the typical broadcast audience. Cable should be strongly considered for targeted marketing by program cluster or individual program.

Print

When They Read

The days when the daily newspaper hits all the movers and shakers are long gone. The largest group of newspaper readers are Baby Boomers and Traditionals, but only 35% of each group read the paper every day. More than 30% of the same Baby Boomers and Traditionals say they “rarely” read the newspaper, and another 10% (give or take) say they never read it. Over all the age groups, another 10% say they only read the papers on weekdays.

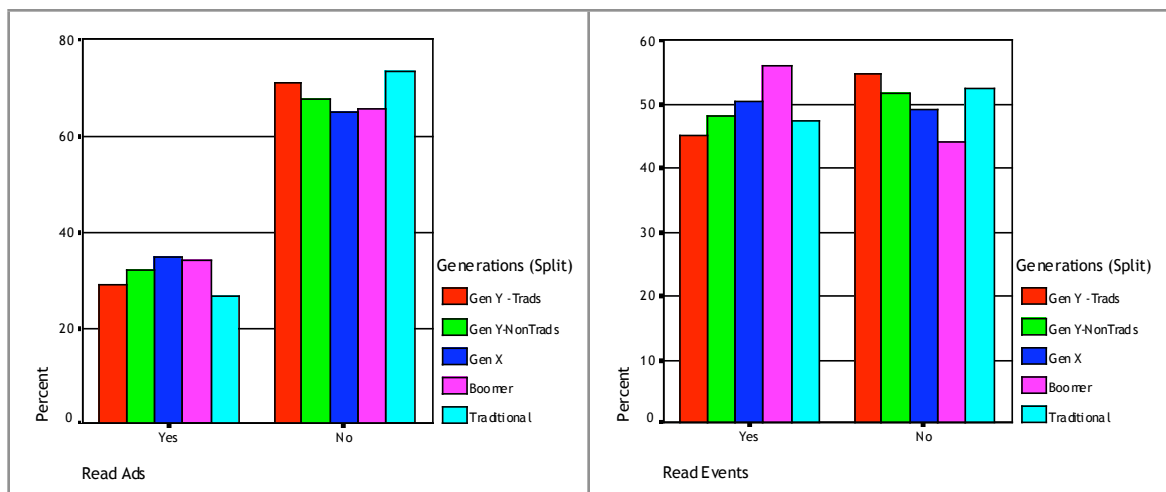
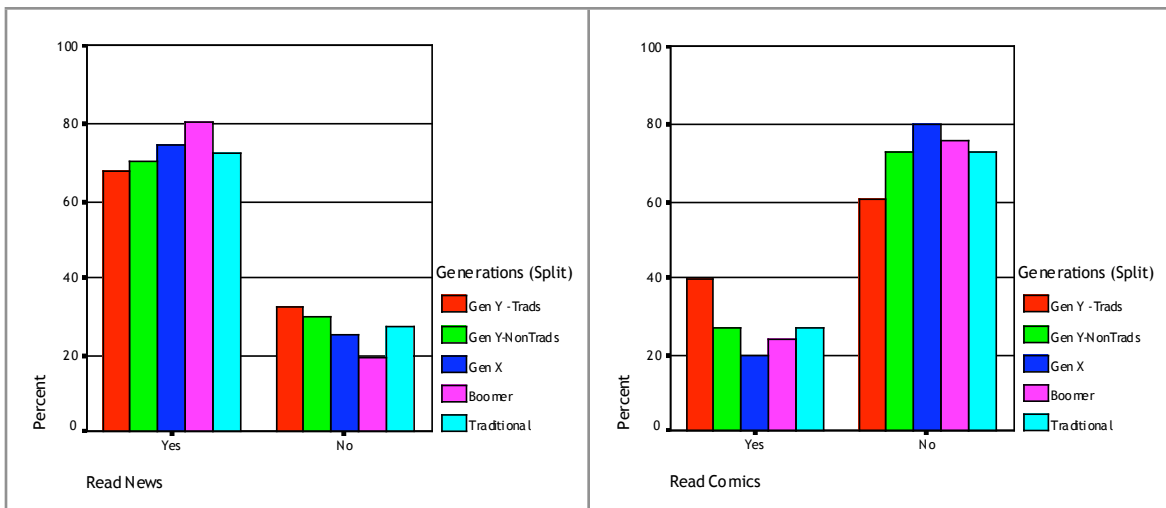


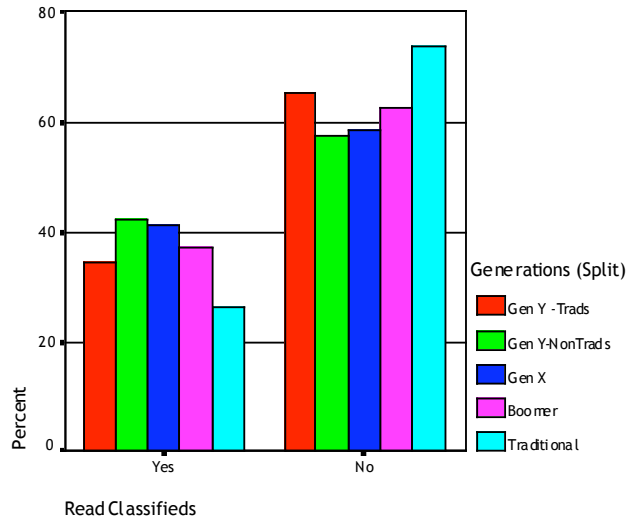
- What is clear is that the newspapers are not a good way to consistently reach Gen Y (traditional or non-traditional).
- Newspapers are a hit-and-miss way to reach the parents of Gen Y (Gen X and Baby Boomers) as readership is consistently only one out of three in this group.
- Newspaper should not be abandoned entirely (35% is still 35%), but it should be done with other media.

What They Read In The Paper

So if they read the newspaper, where do they turn when they open the paper? What draws their attention?

- About 70 to 80% of all readers turn to the news.
- The second most important area in the newspaper (after the news) is the event advertising.
- Two out of five Gen Y non-traditionals, and one in four of the traditional Gen Y'ers, turn to the comics.
- About one out of three people of all ages read the advertisements, and another two out of five read the classifieds.





Key Findings

- If you are considering a referendum or an image campaign where the opinions of older, typically better-educated community members matter, then the newspaper should be a cornerstone of the campaign.
- If you are looking to increase enrollments among an older, lifelong learning population, then the newspaper is a good bet.
- If you are looking to put information in front of parents of Gen Y, then the newspaper is a good first step, but should not be your entire focus.
- The newspaper is a weak and expensive way to reach a Gen Y (17 to 29 year old) market.

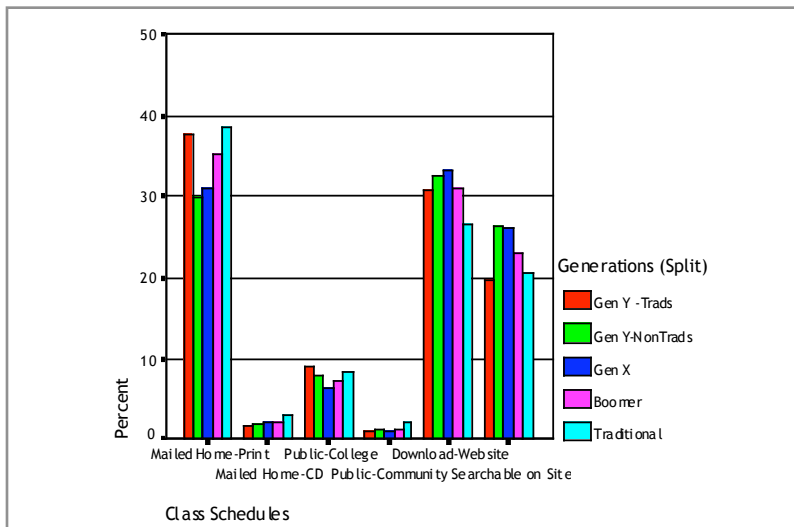
College Materials

Getting Them to “Attend” To Your Materials

Getting students to “attend” is a big issue in colleges, and I don’t simply mean showing up for classes. I mean “attending” to messages...paying attention to what you are telling them. How many times have you had students miss deadlines when they had received the schedule (with all the dates in it) once, twice or more? You provide your communities and student with thousands of pounds of information in the form of schedules, catalogs, mailings and the like. But the issue is not what you **send** them. Rather it is what they **attend** to.

So how do they want information? How do they prefer to receive information? These were critical questions for the National Media Preferences Student Survey.

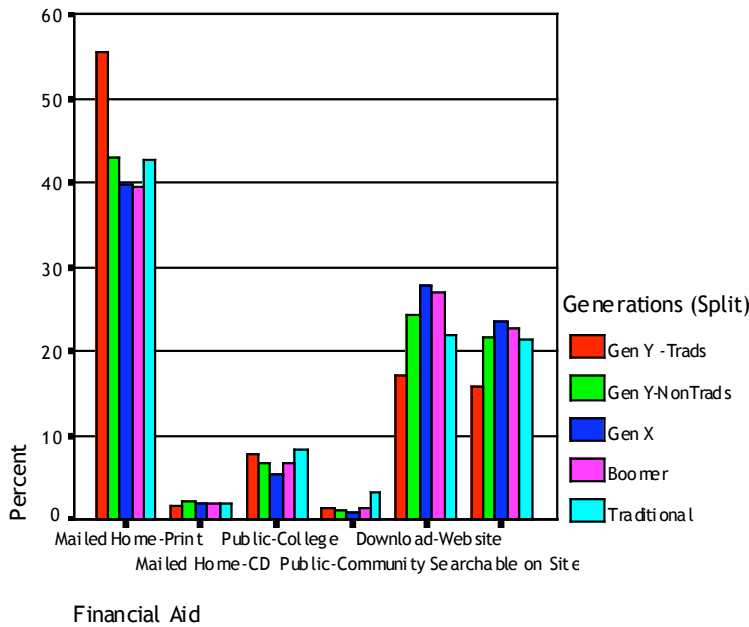
Class Schedules



- Nationally we have tipped to a point where less than 40% want a printed class schedule mailed to their home.
- Virtually one third of all audiences (except the 60+ Traditionals) want it downloadable off a website.
- Another 20-25% want it searchable on a website.
- There is a group of almost 10% who simply want it available on campus in print.... and less than 2% who would like it available in the community.

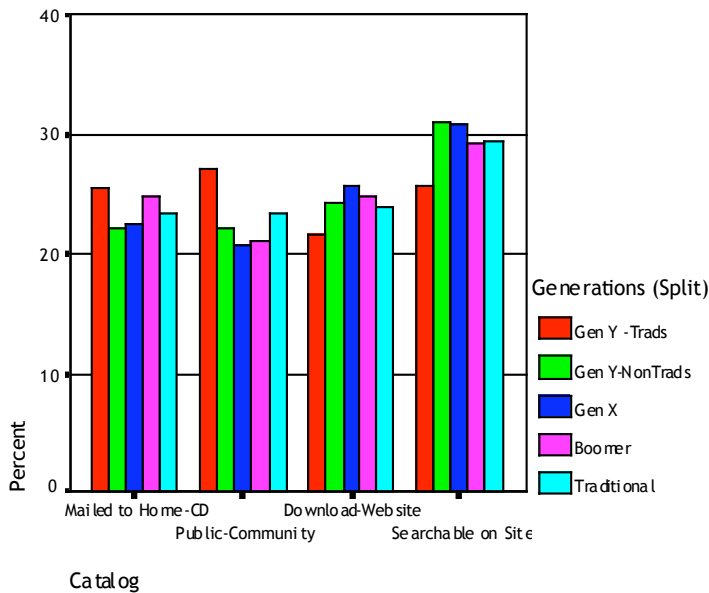
- One Warning: While the tipping point has been reached nationally, there is wide variation in attitudes by college. At some colleges nearly 65% still want it mailed, while in others less than 20% want it mailed to their home. So, be careful.

Financial Aid Information



- Yes, I know Financial Aid is available online through the Federal Government, BUT it is clear that the younger the student, the more they would like something in print.
- More than 55% of the Traditional Age Gen Y'ers wanted financial aid information mailed to their home.
- There is some interest in downloadable information (25% downloadable and 22% searchable), but the mode (the most frequent response) was "Mail printed financial aid information to my home."
- The key finding here is that some kind of printed financial aid information would be a good thing, particularly when you are recruiting that recent high school graduate.
- The other key factor here is that the call for print information is also a call for clarity. Think "Step 1, Step 2, Step 3" in a linear fashion. The web provides powerful and rich information, but finding information can be a non-linear experience.

Catalogs



- There is clearly a great deal of ambivalence about how to access catalogs.
- While only one in four students want a catalog mailed to their home, another one in four want it available somewhere in the community.
- The largest group wants the catalog available and searchable on the website, while one in five want it downloadable from the site.
- There is no clear preference here, so that said, you might go with whatever saves you the most money.

Key Findings

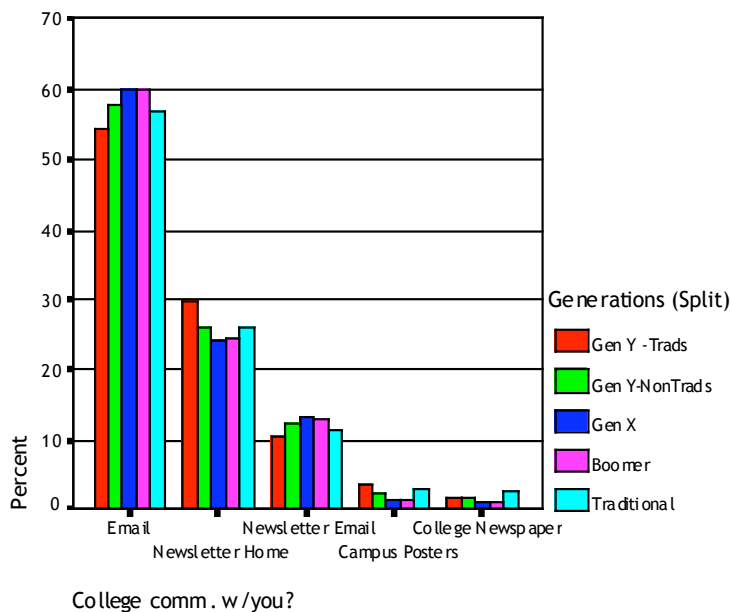
- If you are still spending a small fortune on printing and distributing class schedules, it may be time to change. If you are struggling with it, consider a smaller print quantity and an alternative method of delivery other than mailing. Numerous colleges have used the real estate racks at stores as a free delivery mechanism, while still others are doing a direct mail to former students and including a postcard that asks for a schedule to be mailed.
- Financial aid is convoluted and scary. Keep it simple!
- Consider making your schedule available online and cut down on mailing, but survey your own students to be sure.
- Regarding your college catalog, do what works for your budget.

How to Contact Students

It's Not When, It's How

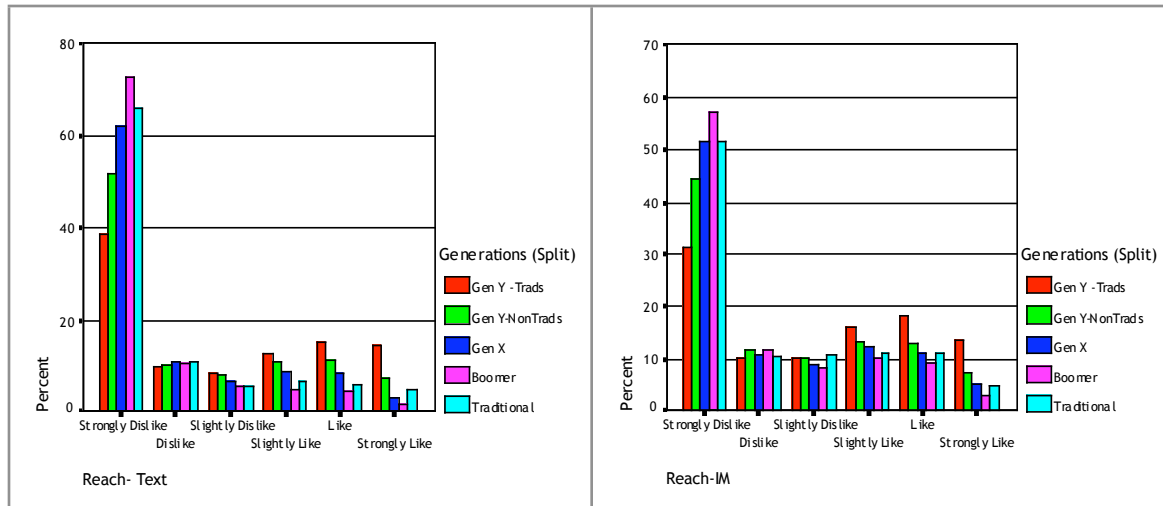
More and more the main issue affecting communication between students, faculty and the college itself is not when people call or send a message, but by what means. Marshal McLuhan's "The Medium is the Message" is even more correct in this day and age of instant communication via multiple media. There was a time when the expected response times to email kept getting shorter and shorter. That day is gone as email has returned to its roots as an asynchronous communication vehicle, and been replaced by IM (Instant messaging) and TM (Text Messaging).

So how do they want the college to communicate with them?



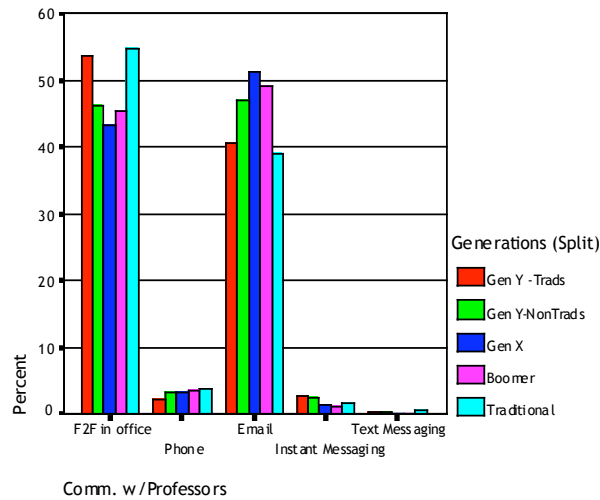
- Nationally 54% of all Traditional Gen Y's and 58% of all Non-Traditional Gen Y's say they want the college to communicate with them via email. And among Gen X and Boomers the percentage is closer to 60%.
- Almost one in three of the youngest group say they would like newsletters at home, but for everyone else it is less attractive.
- Newsletters in email form are also much less successful.
- Campus posters and the college newsletter are not choice vehicles for communication. Less than 4% of any group found posters and newspapers (or newsletters?) to be a good way to communicate with them.

Instant Communications

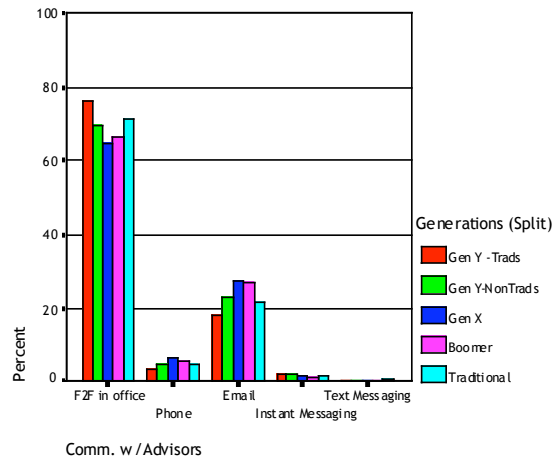


- First a few definitions. Text messaging (TM) consists of short messages sent directly from one cell phone to another, or from an email account to a cell phone. It requires the individual's cell phone number in order to connect. Instant messaging (IM) is a computer-to-computer way to send instant text, voice or video messages to other individuals. It requires the individual's AIM, YAHOO, MSN, GMAIL, or other IM identity.
- There is a major difference in how different age groups feel about the college using instant communications to reach them.
- Among the traditional age Gen Y, nearly 45% strongly like, like or slightly like having the college use the text message capability of their cell phones to reach them. While another 55% are on the negative side, 40% strongly dislike the idea.
- Among the non-traditional age Gen Y, about 50% strongly dislike the idea of the college reaching them through their text messaging. Overall only about 25% of the group feel positively about it.
- Gen X, Boomers and Traditionals are even less supportive of the idea, with 70% of all Baby Boomers strongly disliking the college use of text messaging to reach them.
- The numbers are virtually identical in instant messaging, although people are not so strongly negative. Only about 45% of Traditional Gen Y's are supportive of the college using their instant message to contact them, with only 32% strongly disliking the idea.
- Among the non-traditional age Gen Y, about 45% strongly dislike the idea of the college reaching them through their instant messaging and about 25% of the group feel positively about it.
- More than half the population of Gen X, Boomers and Traditionals strongly dislike the use of their instant messaging to reach them, but this dislike is significantly less virulent than the feelings on the use of text messaging.

Communicating with College Staff

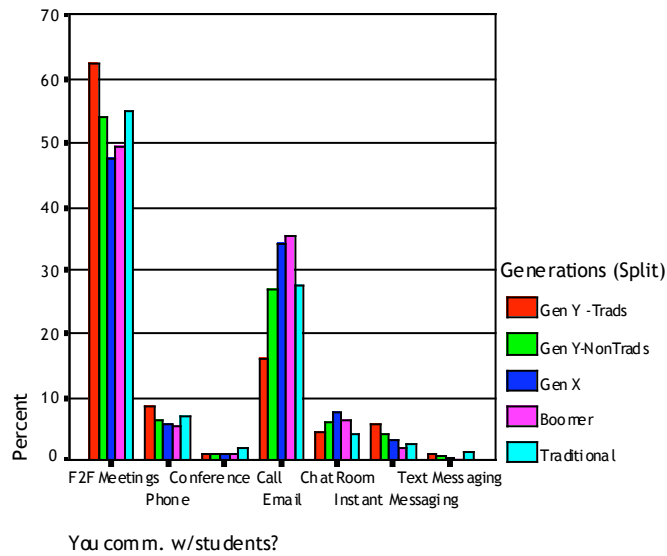


- The oldest students (Traditionals age 60+) and the youngest students (Gen Y traditional age students) both prefer to meet with professors face-to-face (F2F) in their offices.
- All the other age groups also like F2F, but its between 43% (Gen X) and 46% (Gen Y Non-Trads and Baby Boomers).
- Gen X shows a clear preference for email exchanges (52%), while Baby Boomers (48%) and Gen Y Non-Traditionals (47%) also like email. The groups who least prefer email are traditional age Gen Y'sers and Traditionals.
- Using the phone to communicate is preferred by less than 5% in each group, with instant messaging preferred among less than 3% of the groups.



- It is clear that students feel that the content and context of communications with their advisors is more complex than with their professors. I say this because between 65-78% of all students say they prefer to meet with their advisors F2F.
- Email is preferred by only 1 in 4 of most populations, and in the case of younger Gen Y's, only by one in five of them.

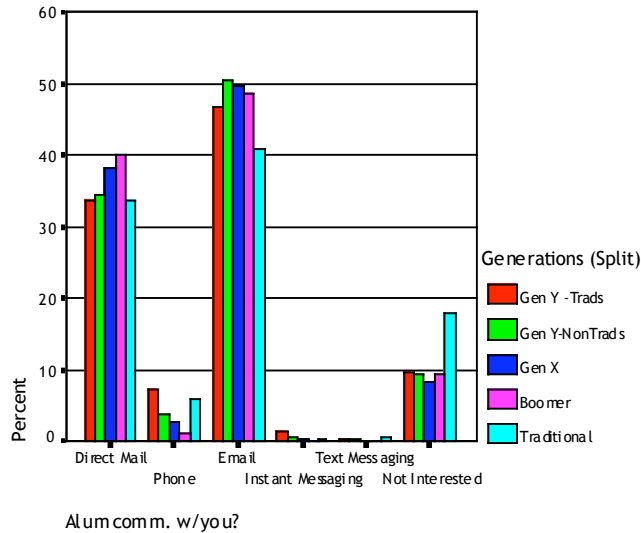
Communicating with Other Students



- More than 60% of Gen Y traditionals would rather talk to their friends F2F, and nearly 50% of every other generation.
- One in three Gen X'ers and Baby Boomers would use email to communicate with their friends.
- Phones, chat rooms and instant messaging are also possibilities, but very low on the list compared with email and F2F.

Ways for the Alumni to Reach Students

Two-year colleges have notoriously been unable to connect with their millions of alumni, particularly to leverage that alumni for fund and friend-raising activities. So that raises the question. How do students want to be kept informed about the alumni associations on their campuses?



- While one in three of younger students (Gen Y'ers) and older students (Traditionals) like direct mail, two out of five Gen X and Baby Boomers think it's good.
- The surprise was the large number of students among all age groups who prefer email as a contact vehicle. The lowest approval group (Traditionals) at 42% were higher than the largest group who liked direct mail.
- The phone was a very distant third.
- There is a small group (about 10%) of all ages who are simply not interested in being contacted about an alumni association. However the fact that 90% of all age groups (except Traditionals 60+) picked a contact method and did not pick "not interested" is good news for struggling alumni associations.

Key Findings

- A critical take away message is that nearly half of all students want to be contacted via email. Colleges who want to reach these alumni would be well advised to give these students a college email address, and let them keep it after graduation. It costs the college very little (especially compared to the cost of mailing and calling), and it could reap huge benefits in alumni contact and a continued affiliation with their alma mater.
- Students are more comfortable conducting classroom business with their professors via email than airing their scheduling concerns with their advisors. There is a clear preference for F2F meetings with advisors and counselors. Students are fairly split between F2F and email communications with their professors.
- Email is the preferred way students want to be reached by their colleges.
- Only younger students are interested at all in receiving messages via their TM or IM accounts.

A Final Concern

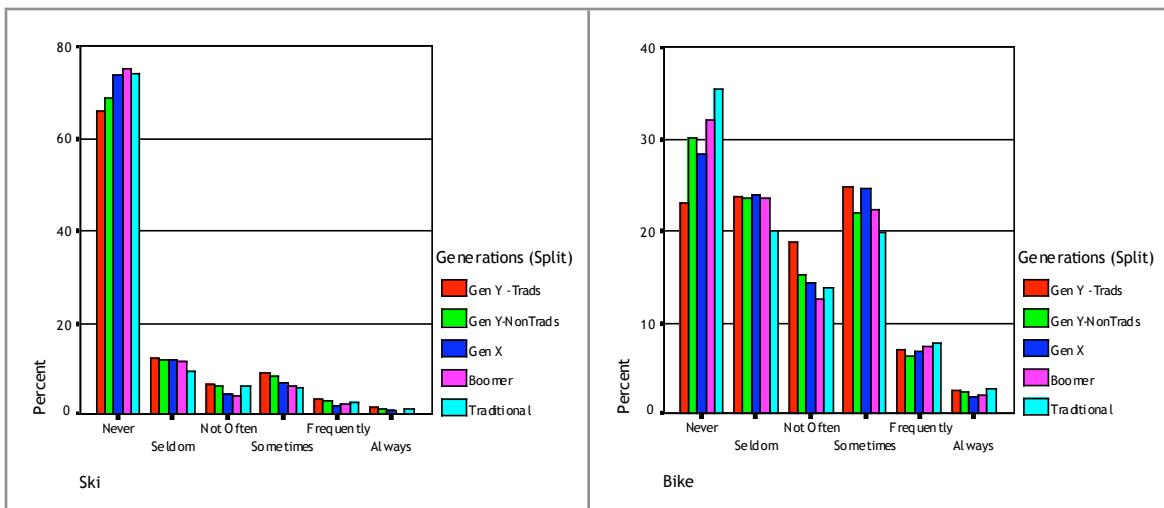
Colleges are not at the tipping point where most students would appreciate getting messages to their TM or IM accounts from their professors or colleges. However, as more and more students abandon home phone numbers and move to their cell phones as their major communication vehicle, colleges should be actively gathering these cell phone numbers. First, they may be the only reliable way to reach students to tell them “pay your tuition” or “see a counselor.” But secondly, with cell phone and TM technology advancing all the time, it is very possible that TM address for thousands of students could be stored and sorted by classroom and time, allowing colleges to literally dismiss a college by building. We need only remember the lessons of Virginia Tech to know why that capability could be critical.

Lifestyle Locations

Where They Gather

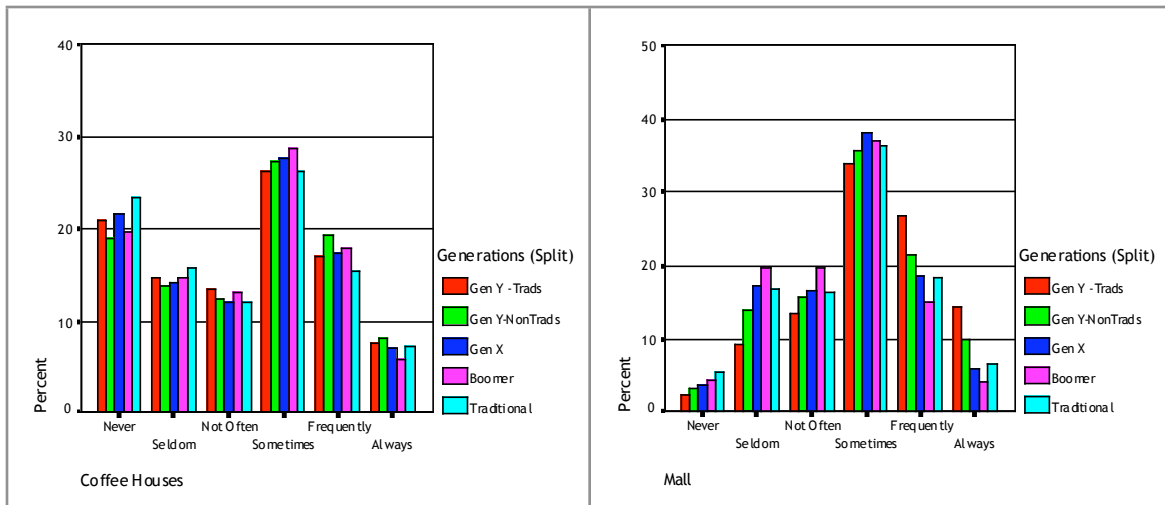
Mass media is expensive, and for every person it reaches that your college actually *wants* to reach, it reaches 100 that you don't want. Targeted media like cable and radio is good but expensive, and it only allows you to buy one impression at a time. Where are those opportunities for your college to create a solid ongoing impact? In other words, where's the fishing hole where the fish are waiting? They exist in locations where people with similar interests gather. They exist in experiential choices.

What They Do and Don't Do

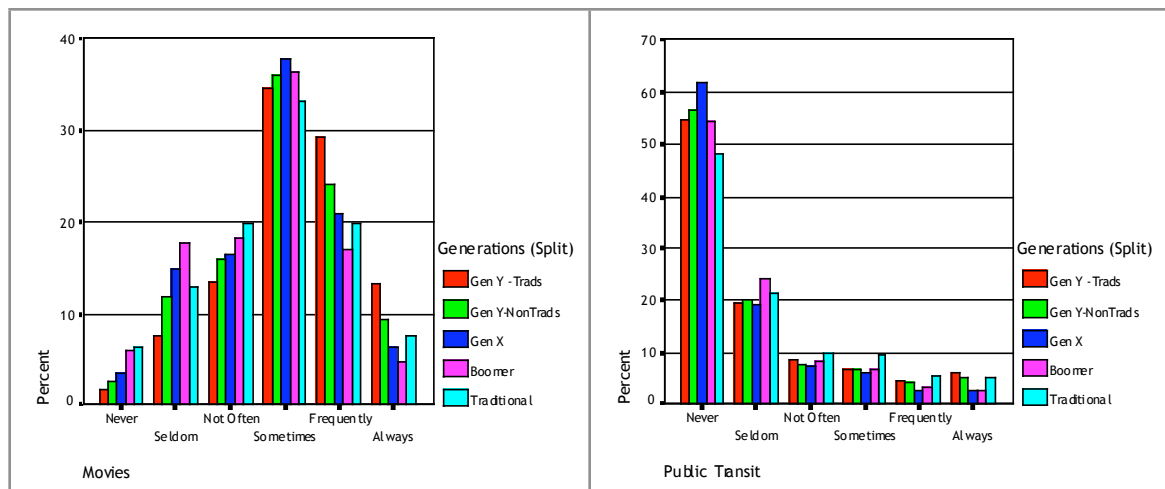


- They aren't "skiing," but a substantial number of Gen X and Gen Y'ers wrote in "Snowboarding" as a choice. It may mean that there is a sizable population out there that is outdoorsy, athletic and not willing to use the word "ski."
- Biking is a toss up for most generations with about 2/3 never, seldom or not often doing it, and 1/3 doing it sometimes or frequently. If you are recruiting for a program with a certain athletic type, biking shops might be a reasonable place to do co-marketing.

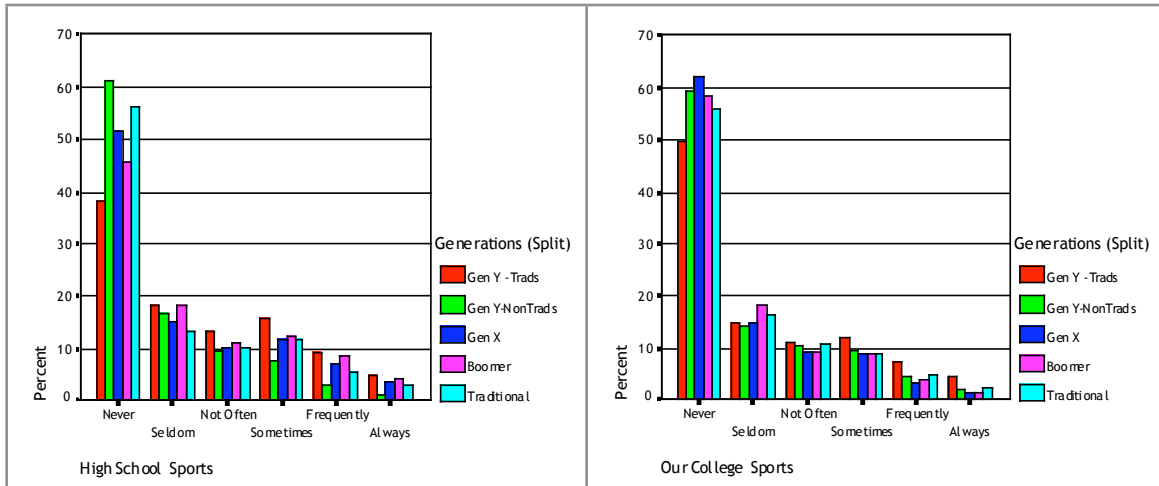
Interact Communications



- Nearly 2/3 of the population go to coffee houses always, frequently or sometimes. Try co-marketing with your locally-owned coffee houses, or doing small ads in the specialty newspapers and magazines that tend to end up there. Either way, this is a viable way to reach your core audience.
- The mall is still a staple of community life and there are few differences between the age groups. The only exception to this is that younger students tend to “hang out” at the mall more often than other groups. In major cities, malls are expensive places to advertise. In more rural communities, they may be a great spot to place banners, ads or even a kiosk.



- Movies are a staple of the experience of your students, with nearly 2/3 saying they attend movies always, frequently or sometimes. While sometimes is the mode response, there are nearly 35% of the Gen Y group who say they go to movies frequently or always.
- Public transit serves less than 20% of the current community college student population. However, if your college believes it has under-served populations in your communities, you may want to try public transit advertising. The population is not large, but it may be the correct one.



- This is probably not news to most of you, but college students are not going to high school sports, nor are they going to your own college sports.
- More than 3 out of 4 students of all ages said they “never,” “seldom” or “not often” attended sports at your college. There is a solid 25% who say they attend college sports, and these may be students that your college would be unable to attract in the absence of a sports program. This does raise the issue of cost and efficacy, however.

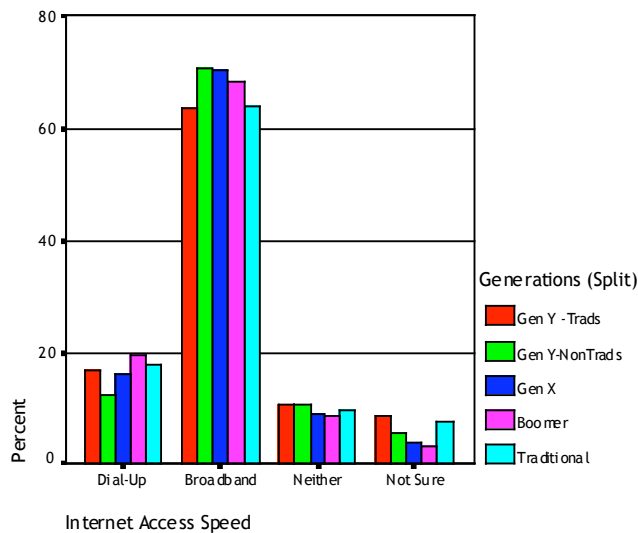
Key Findings

- College sports are attracting less than 25% of the student population, with only 5% saying they “always “ attend. The issue of the cost of your athletic programs compared with the benefit to the college and its students is an important issue, and the question of effective use of college money should be raised.
- Movies, malls and coffee houses attract large numbers of community college students, and they may be excellent places to find more. In small and medium communities consider looking for co-marketing opportunities with these groups. In large cities, look for the boutique movie house, mall and coffee house. They are likely less expensive and probably more exclusive. This may fit into a recruitment AND image effort.

Web Issues

The Need for Speed

All right, tell your IT department its official. They can stop building ugly fast sites because “not everyone has broadband you know.” Well, most of them do, or at least 2 out of 3 know they have broadband. Less than 20% of community college students at your college have dial up, and even if those who are not sure WHAT they have, it is still less than 25% of the audience. The tipping point has been reached. It’s time to build your 3rd generation websites. It’s time for real interactivity, media integration, and sites that intrigue and attract.



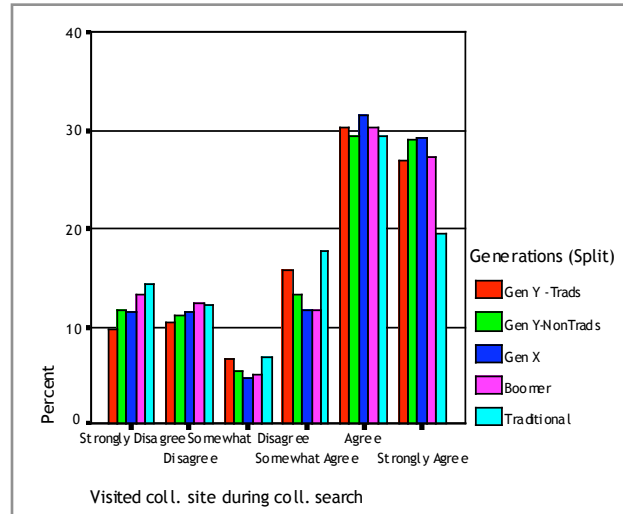
Choosing Colleges From Websites

Ok, pet peeve time... How much money does your college spend on outreach, recruiters, counselors, orientation, advisers, registration and all those wonderful people and things that are meant to pull potential students into the college from the cold, cruel world? My guess? Hundreds of thousands of dollars, and in some cases, millions. And you spend this year after year after year. But then when someone says, “lets upgrade our website,” people swallow their tongues when they are told that it might cost “more than \$100,000” ****gasp****.

Yes, any post-pubescent teen can build a website. But before someone in Accounts Payable convinces you to let their cousin Dwayne build your website, think of this. Your college websites are more than websites. They are virtual campuses that must be 508 compliant, serve multiple audiences with multiple web preferences, integrate with your portals and your student records systems... and they must do one more thing. Let me think, what is it...? Oh, yes.....

THEY CREATE THE ENTIRE FIRST IMPRESSION FOR YOUR COLLEGE! Why would you turn that over to a rookie? And why in the world when your college is spending millions annually on marketing, recruitment, and student intake (salaries AND external expenditures), would anyone grouse at the cost of a web update when the web can support or completely undo everything you have worked for?

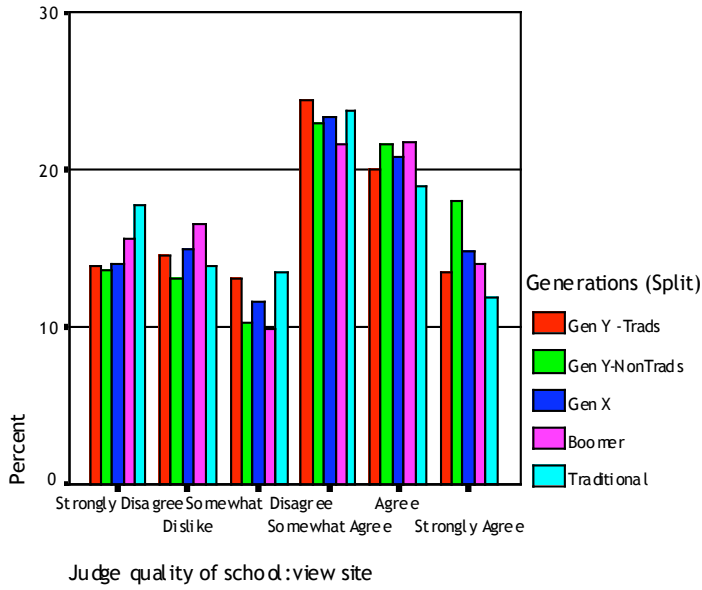
OK, my rant is done, and here is the proof of what I am saying.



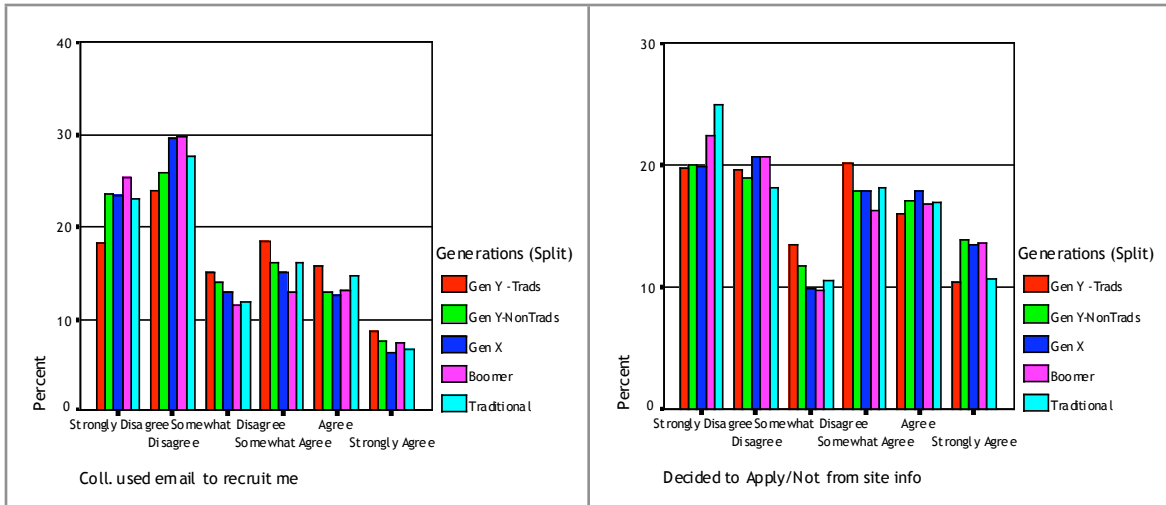
- Nearly 60% of all Gen Y, Gen X and Baby Bombers agreed or strongly agreed that they visited the college website during their search.
- Less than 25% responded negatively about visiting the college website.
- This means that 3 out of 4 of your potential students are going to your website to get a sense of who your college really is.

Now I know what someone is thinking, “Well sure they go up to the website, but they are just looking for facts or how to register, right?” Uh, actually no. They are busy forming impressions of how good your college is, by looking at how good your website is.

Interact Communications



- Nearly 58% of traditional age Gen Y'ers say they make judgments about how good your school is when they view your website.
- Nearly 63% of non-traditional age Gen Y'ers say they make judgments about how good your school is when they view your website.
- Those opinions are echoed by Gen X and Baby Boomer. Only Traditionals give your college a little more leeway.
- **Overall, only 1 in 3 say they don't judge your college by your website.**



- Two out of three students say their colleges did not use email to recruit them.
- Two out of five students say they made their decision to apply or not apply based on a college website.

Key Findings

- College websites are critical to the image and recruitment efforts of most colleges.
- The single most critical factor to remember is that students correlate the competency of your college with the competency of your college website.
- Most colleges are not using their websites or emails for recruitment or outreach as much as they should.
- With the majority of students having access to broadband, its time to get rid of ugly simple sites designed to improve download speeds on slow dial-up modems.

Final Thoughts

Mass media are not dead, but they are wounded and simply are not the best way to reach community college audiences anymore; and

Private industry has suddenly discovered that education can be profitable and so “for profit” colleges are springing up everywhere, but online in particular; and

Competition between community colleges is getting more fierce every day; and

We are experiencing a “greying” of our college districts as the next generation of high school students come from places where land is cheap and families can afford homes, leaving behind whole districts with aging, well-educated, well-off community members who don’t need a transfer OR occupational degree; and

The “Field of Dreams” marketing model, or “If you offer it, they will come”, simply doesn’t work anymore.

To attract students we are going to have to be faster and better at communicating our real differences to our critical stake holders and potential students.

And (gasp), we will have to look at our programs and make tough decisions about what programs stay and go, and how to fix them.

What I am trying to say is that times are tough and going to get tougher. Also, if community colleges are to survive and thrive in this shift, they will do it with good information, smart decisions and timely implementation.

This National Media Preferences Study is the first step in knowing what works, what doesn’t, what can hurt you, and what helps. Wisdom begins with knowledge, knowledge begins with information, and information begins with facts. Here are the facts. Make good use of them.

Pamela Cox-Otto, Ph.D.

Highly skilled, a brilliant strategist, and with a wild sense of humor, Pamela Cox-Otto, Ph.D., brings a wealth of experience to meeting the marketing needs of community colleges. Dr. Cox-Otto has created statewide image and recruitment programs for community colleges, implemented government relations efforts, and recreated the brand of colleges coast-to-coast. She has written the book on best web practices for colleges, and college branding (LRP, Publishers). And now she's designed the research instrument and conducted her first national media preferences survey.

Communications strategy and tactics come alive under Dr. Cox-Otto's able leadership. As a founding partner of Interact Communications, she, her partners, and staff, are committed to serving the unique needs of America's two-year colleges. She says the community colleges she works with aren't just clients, they're partners. "We solve problems and offer the colleges solutions," said Dr. Cox-Otto. "You don't just pay for a stack of paper that sits on somebody's desk."

Dr. Cox-Otto's expertise in research, planning, and communications began simply, as a television news reporter in the tiny California town of Eureka, back in 1974. From there her experience as a reporter developed through covering Salinas/Monterey, the State capitol (Sacramento), and ended as a reporter in the San Francisco television market. Her doctoral work included original research in web-based persuasion, interactivity and web-audience analysis, focused on community colleges.

Dr. Cox-Otto is a dynamic national and international speaker. One of her most recent presentations was as keynote speaker on Generational Management, before the Orange County Community Colleges; and, she presented a paper on "A Statewide Advocacy Plan That Worked" before the American Association of Community Colleges. Her all-time favorite speaker's review came from a college president at an AACC presentation. "If Robin Williams were a woman, he would be Pam."

She maintains a busy schedule, including teaching at Viterbo University in Wisconsin, raising a family, and writing. "Whether I'm teaching classes, making a presentation to college presidents, or developing a marketing plan for a college board, the emphasis remains that I'm finding out what people need to know, and developing the models to enable problem solving and communications," said Dr. Cox-Otto.

