

Viva the Vital

## Boomer Grandparents Make Back to School Fashionable

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Now that half of the over 70 million grandparents in the country today are Baby Boomers, we think it is time Boomers embrace National Grandparents Day.

The first Sunday after Labor Day is officially recognized as National Grandparents Day, thanks to a 1978 proclamation by President Jimmy Carter (and yes, so ends any speculation that his best years have been post-presidency). Carter's inspiration was West Virginia housewife Marian McQuade, now 91, who wanted grandchildren to visit elderly grandparents in nursing homes to celebrate. Plus, she had 43 grandchildren and owned stock in Hallmark (seriously, she had 43 grandkids, but we made up the stock part).

Thirty years later, the big celebration could use a little updating. Boomer grandparents years away from the old folks' homes. Indeed, they're more involved in the lives of their grandchildren than ever. During these tight economic times, the evidence suggests that Boomer grandmas and grandpas have been whipping out their wallets during those "Back to School" sales. After loading up with goodies, the grandkids should use Grandparent's Day to show the love.

We analyzed the data from BIGresearch's July 2008 Consumer Intentions & Actions™ study among 7,000 adults. It showed that Boomer grandparents planned on spending more on "Back to School" items than did parents of school-aged kids.

Items for Back for School	Parents with Kids Under 17 in the Household	Boomer Grandparents
Clothes	\$ 245.77	\$ 259.49
Shoes	115.32	120.68
Supplies	101.71	101.51
Total	<u>\$ 462.80</u>	<u>\$ 481.68</u>

Older grandparents reported they'd spend about half that amount. Which is what you'd expect. But Boomers attack grandparenting with a zeal, zest and checkbook simply not seen before.

Why do Boomers lavish so much money on their grandkids? One reason is that they have it to spend: Boomer grandparents, average age of 54, are frequently two-income households in their peak earning years, with more disposable income than ever before.

Another reason could be the ingrained generosity that Boomers display to their offspring. After funding the dreams of their children - soccer camp, piano lessons, school trips, college educations - Boomers are psychologically primed to spend money on the grandkids.

## Not Just Back to School

Sales clerks at CWDKids, a catalog and Internet retailer specializing in children's clothes, noticed a trend at its three retail outlets in Richmond: Many of its customers were grandparents.

The children's clothier created a "Grandparents Day" promotion for Tuesdays, its slowest day, and gave a 10 percent discount for customers for showing photographs of their grandchildren. Tuesday business jumped, President Jim Klaus told *USA Today*. Now he is trying to devise a similar promotion online, where he has noticed a spike in gift orders with notes signed, "Love Grandma and Grandpa."

The experience of CWDKids should prompt retailers of any children's product to think about broadening their advertising and marketing programs beyond the parents of young children. Grandparents, especially Baby Boomers, spend on average \$330 annually to ensure that their progeny are well-attired, according to the BIG data. It may not be as much as the \$570 spent by parents with kids under 17 living at home, but it's still a big chunk of the market - too large an opportunity to ignore.

## The Life Stage

The grandparent life stage is new territory for older Boomers, and any retailer or marketer who thinks we're talking about Grandpa from *The Simpsons* needs to update their thinking. Little "Opie Cunningham" from *Mayberry* and *Happy Days* (actor Ron Howard) is 54 and a granddad. This is new ground indeed.

Boomers are embracing this new life stage, even if marketers miss out. The growth in multi-generational travel is booming, as is the growth in multi-generational purchases of 529 college savings plans. Money is being spent.

We're waiting for a smart family casual restaurant chain to tap into Boomer grandparents. We think Boomers would treat the tykes to an early dinner at the local apostrophe S establishment if only someone would cater to them. It's time to drop age-based deals and "early bird" specials and start attracting Boomer grandparents with special pricing, selections and interactive menus designed to foster communication across the generational divide ("What was your favorite movie growing up and why?" "What was the first rock concert you attended?"). There are lots of ideas for interacting between Boomer grandparents and grandkids at [grandparents.com](http://grandparents.com), a web portal for new grandparents.

Boomers as grandparents are here to stay, and will spend and invest in their grandkids. Even if they don't get a card this Sunday.