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Isaac M. O'Bannon • Jan. 21, 2013

Restaurants and retailers often focus most of their marketing on the younger demographic groups, especially the 18 to 34 range. Their intent is to establish long-term brand loyalty. But restaurants may need to rethink that strategy: Baby Boomers and seniors are dining out more often, while those in the Millennial generation have cut back.

In a new report by market research firm [The NPD Group](#), the recession may be a major factor. The study showed that the percentage of the foodservice industry's business "from visits made by older consumers has grown steadily over the past five years." During the same time, the proportion of business from Millennials has declined.

For the first time, the average number of restaurant visits for older consumers, up six percent since 2008, is now the same as for younger ones, which is down 6 percent.

The firm calls Baby Boomers and seniors "Mature Traditionalists," and says that they are making more visits to every segment of the restaurant industry than prior to the recession. The full report is titled [\*Boomers and Beyond – Targeting for Success\*](#).

The foodservice industry boomed in the United States following World War II, as more Americans lived further from their employers, often commuting from suburbs. It was further strengthened as dual-income households became the norm.

According to the report, the result is that, historically, older consumers were less frequent restaurant visitors than those in younger age groups. So, this group received less marketing attention compared to younger customers.

This is spurring restaurant owners to rethink what Boomers and seniors “expect

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credited directly to increased visits by Older Boomers and Mature Traditionalists. The same group is also largely the reason for the overall recovery of lost evening meal visits. Per capita, those in the “Older Boomer” age group (55-64) are now the most frequent users restaurant eaters during breakfast and dinner than any other age group.

“A lot of restaurant marketing dollars are aimed at Millennials but market share capture remains the growth path for restaurant operators, just as it has been for the past five years,” says Bonnie Riggs, NPD restaurant industry analyst. “Gaining market share among population segments increasing in both number and their use of restaurants, like Boomers, eases the struggle. Operators just need to keep in mind that reaching the older customers requires recognizing what it is they want from their restaurant experiences.”

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