



## ***When the Boom turns X and Y*** Defining Demographics by Generation

Generations are not determined by any formal process; demographers, market researchers, the media and popular culture define what constitutes a “generation.” Increasingly, even members of the generation themselves insist on defining their age.

### **Baby Boomers**

There is some disagreement as to the exact beginning and end dates of any particular generation, and the “Baby Boom” is perhaps more complex than most; because of its size, length and demographic importance. But, the Baby Boomer range most commonly accepted begins in 1946 and ends in 1963 or 1964.

The problem with this definition however, from a psychographic stand point, is that this period is too long for a “cultural” generation. It simply defines a time of increased births following World War II. If the total number of births were the indicator; births began to decline from the peak in 1957. However, they did not decline significantly until 1960, with a sharp decline following in 1963. This makes any year from 1960 to 1964 a potential end of the baby boom in the U.S.

In the book Boomer Nation the Baby Boom is defined as 1946 to 1964, but also breaks Baby Boomers into two distinct groups; “Boomers” born between 1945 and 1957, and “Shadow Boomers” born between 1958 and 1964. These groups have also alternatively been called Leading-Edge and Trailing-Edge Boomers.

(The term Shadow Boomer is sometimes incorrectly applied to the children of the Baby Boomers; this group is correctly referred to as Echo Boomers. The distinction is not particularly helpful however due to the large and ill-defined range for the children of Boomers, placing them within several generations.)

Generations authors Strauss and Howe argue that people born between 1961 and 1964 have very different political and cultural patterns from those born between 1955 and 1960 and believed they fit more into Generation X, and the definition of Boomers as born from 1943-1960 is becoming more accepted. Many others put the dates at 1946 to 1963, because 1964 seemed the transition to a new cultural and population cycle\*.

\*The early to mid-1960’s does appear to be a bridge between the values and mores of the post-war Boomers and those of the Gen-Xers to follow. (U.S. social commentator Jonathan Pontell classifies this “bridge” generation as belonging to neither Boom or X, born between 1954 and 1965, and coined the term “Generation Jones” to describe it.)

As the term "Baby Boomer" was originally coined primarily to describe the post World War II generation in the United States, many people also use the subsequent "Generations X and Y" only to refer to Americans. Some have suggested that such geographic restrictions are unnecessary in the ever globalizing world. However this distinction does assist in determining size.

According to the 2005 Census there are 78.2 million Baby Boomers in the U.S.

## **Generation X**

Generation X is a term used to describe the generation immediately following the Baby Boomers. Because of the variations in the Boom's end, the exact demographic boundaries of Generation X are not exactly defined. It depends on who is using the term and how they define the generations before and after.

According to generation researchers Howe and Strauss, Generation X often includes anyone born from 1960 to 1978. As previously mentioned many place the end of boomers and the beginning of Generation X at 1964 and extend it through 1980. The term Generation X, or simply Gen-X, is used in [demography](#) and [marketing](#), though it is used most often in [popular culture](#) discussions. The generation's influence over pop culture began in the [1980s](#) and may have peaked in the late [1990s](#) (as the generational group first began to enter its 30's.)

There are at least 76 million Gen-Xers; beginning in 1964, depending on which ending date you use (1978-80.)

## **Generation Y**

Generation Y is one of the terms designating those born immediately after "Generation X." Because of the domino-effect caused by the preceding generations, there is a dispute as to the range of birth years that constitute "Generation Y" (and whether this term is specific to American's or people worldwide.) The only consensus is that those born in Generation Y follow Generation X; there is no widely accepted range. The use of the term "Generation Y" is also controversial and other terms are beginning to gain acceptance in reference to this group, especially within the group itself. Other terms include "The Internet Generation" and Millennials.

The periodical *American Demographics* typically uses 1976 to mark the start of Generation Y. Howe and Strauss consistently used "the High School class of 2000", or those born in 1982 as their demarcation. While many possible years are used as the endpoint of Generation Y, the term is almost never applied to current infants, who are part of a possibly as yet unnamed generation.

If the years 1980-2000 are used, as at THE STILL, then the size of Generation Y in the United States is approximately 70 million.

***Distilling ideas, marketing & media***

PO BOX 22721 LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL 32830 ▪ 407.729.7203 ▪ [WWW.IDEADISTILLERY.COM](http://WWW.IDEADISTILLERY.COM)

## Demographic Segmentation by “Generation”

<b>Baby Boomers</b> 78 Million	<b>1946 - 1963</b>
<b>Generation X</b> 76 Million	<b>1964 - 1980</b>
<b>Generation Y</b> 70 Million	<b>1981 - 2000</b>
<b>Generation Z</b>	<b>2001-</b>

Source: ideaDistillery.com

Due to the flexible nature of such demographic terms and their ranges, two people of the same birth year can identify as either Baby Boomer and Generation X; Generation X and Y, or in the future; Y and something that follows, such as a Generation Z.

Whether individuals within those groups identify more with one generation or another may depend on cultural clues, trends, and how the media defines and depicts their ages. It almost always relies more on how they see themselves.

This is one of the many reasons why it is important to analyze the marketplace and target markets carefully; not only for demographics, but also psychographics, as well as message and media appropriate approaches. It is critical to look at each consumer not only as part of any group, but as an individual.

### About the Author

David Hickman is a Partner at The Still and has over 25 years of marketing and advertising agency experience. He has directed several national ad agencies in New York and Atlanta as a Vice-President, Creative Director, Art Director or Marketing Director.

### About The Still

An intellectual property creation, marketing, and media consulting firm, The Still handles all aspects of your company's branding and positioning efforts. The Still provides media metrics analysis, marketing audits, and market research, as well as marketing execution and idea creation. See [http://www.ideaDistillery.com/About\\_The\\_Still.html](http://www.ideaDistillery.com/About_The_Still.html)

***Distilling ideas, marketing & media***

PO Box 22721 LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL 32830 ▪ 407.729.7203 ▪ [WWW.IDEADISTILLERY.COM](http://WWW.IDEADISTILLERY.COM)