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## Understanding the Consumer

**'At Your Service' Spotlight: Joe Nevin – understanding the needs of the traveling baby boomer**



Photo Courtesy of Bumps for Boomers®

When Joe Nevin set up Bumps for Boomers® in Aspen, Colorado in 2003, he had already carefully chosen his market segment: baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) who he felt were keen to carry on skiing into their old age. These are often dubbed Zoomers – boomers with zip – and have no intention of slowing down in passive retirement and are looking for more active travel pursuits in which health and fitness play

prominent roles. With life expectancy over 80, there will be 115 million people 50 or older in the US by 2020, 50% more than now.

Having investigated all the latest research into boomer skiers, Nevin produced the tagline Ski For Life™. 'Boomers are slowing down and concerned about injury. They are also worried about skiing on overcrowded runs where they could get knocked down. But they want to go on skiing as long as possible,' says Nevin. His program instructs on moguls and powder, expanding the terrain that boomers can enjoy and spreading their skiing away from the crowded groomed runs where most collisions occur.

He devised a program specifically to satisfy boomers' needs as well as a delivery that would have them raving about their experiences to all their friends. His focus is on longevity and safety, coupled with fun. Choosing Aspen was also a key: it is one of the most luxurious ski resorts in the world. Outside the B4B offices, the sidewalk has underground heating, so no-one has to negotiate icy patches in their slippery ski boots. There is a ski valet just up the stairs by the lift station and a kiosk dispensing free coffee nearby. On the slopes there are ski-in, free cider and water bars. And the on-mountain lodges feature in-house masseurs along with all the typical cold-weather comfort food.

Choosing boomers was already a smart move. The senior travel market is both lucrative and unique because it is less tied to seasonal travel, involves longer trips, and is not wedded to midweek or weekend travel, so it can boost occupancy rates for business and leisure travel opportunities. But this group has 'been there, seen it, done it all' in their decades of travel. So, what does Nevin do to make his boomers feel pampered and at home in Aspen?

The service starts before they even arrive with personal phone contact and booking. 'We do not use an automated booking system because we want to talk to prospects and make sure that we have fully answered any and all questions and safety/physical concerns about taking a mogul program,' explains Nevin. Next follows free mogul and powder skiing tips by email to give them a head start on the learning process. Prospective clients are also directed to the Mogul Techniques Learning Center on the website for additional information and are encouraged to take advantage of two free ski fitness video training programs to help them get into optimum shape for their holiday. The site also features encouraging testimonials from other boomers who have taken the program.

Nevin's coaching team consists of boomer-age instructors with whom his clients can readily identify. Nevin recognizes the comfort and camaraderie of being in a peer group: 'You can't take a 30-year-old instructor and expect them to know what it's like to be 50, 60, 70 or even 80,' he says. His motto is 'Designed by Boomers, Taught by Boomers, For Boomers' and he helps out with coaching himself.

Skiers are carefully grouped by pace so that no-one either holds a group up or races ahead. Short skiboards are used to reduce terrain anxiety and minimize speed with their shorter turn radius. 'This in turn accelerates learning due to less concern regarding injury,'

says Nevin. 'We introduce mogul techniques on groomed runs so people can easily learn new techniques without worrying about terrain anxiety, emphasizing good balance and speed control rather than fast skiing.' Not only do his concepts increase skiing efficiency, they also counteract fatigue and reduce knee and back strain.

Nevin has also noted subtle differences between the way men and women learn and makes an effort to cater for this in the program. 'I have taken a number of women's fear clients run by the PSIA (Professional Ski Instructors of America). Over at Snowmass there's a clinic called "The Women's Edge" – a female-specific program. They get a kick out of it when I'm there because I am the only guy at the training session,' says Nevin. He maintains that both genders get more fearful of injury as they age and equally appreciate his emphasis on finesse and control. One of his mantras is 'you are the CEO of your own skiing' which reassures all students that pace, direction and style is an individual choice and there is no need to try to keep up with younger, macho mogul-munchers.

Nevin has spent considerable time in analyzing the best ways to teach his demographic. He realized that the first day is always the most overwhelming in any kind of instruction program. Although skiing is essentially a practical sport, Nevin developed several pages of 'homework' reading for his students, setting out all his theories on paper with diagrams to help the message sink in. This is given to each student at the end of day one and is very rare with ski teaching which traditionally uses the basic 'follow me' method.

He adds the personal touch by going round to each group of students during the day, troubleshooting specific issues and adding extra reinforcement for the B4B philosophy. He also waits for the perfect weather and takes group photographs for all the clients with their coaches which he provides for free. Nevin's five-star service continues after the holiday with a survey for all participants designed to encourage feedback which will be integrated into teaching improvements. Results of the surveys are provided on the website. Due to demand Nevin has also introduced a follow-up course, Master of Bumps Academy program for graduates of the regular B4B course.

**Sources:** Personal interview with Joe Nevin on 20 October 2011; Hudson, S. (2010); <http://www.bumpsforboomers.com/>

## Customer expectations

In a highly competitive environment, customers increasingly expect service providers to anticipate their needs and deliver on them. It is therefore important that customer expectations are understood by those delivering customer service, and the opening spotlight provided an excellent example of a service provider – Joe Nevin in Aspen – totally in tune with customer expectations. Customers evaluate service quality by comparing what they expected with what they perceive