

Boomers Are Slower to Adopt New Technologies, but They're Likely to Stick with the Ones They Value

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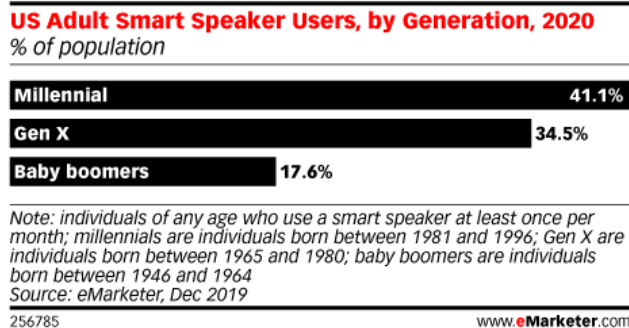
Mark Dolliver

Boomers aren't entirely nondigital—they were, after all, the pioneers of adopting home computers—but at this point in their lives, they're a bit more reluctant about adopting newer technologies. That's true even for tech with real-life utility, such as voice assistants and smart-home devices, which could help boomers age in place and deal with the physical challenges that accompany increasing age. Along with concerns about things like privacy, it's partly a matter of the inertia about adopting new things that tends to set in as one gets older.

Voice technology is a conspicuous example. It ought to have appeal for older boomers, whose ability to read a small screen and manipulate a tiny virtual keyboard may be declining. Yet boomers who own smartphones have lagged in using the voice assistant capability. We estimate that 38.6% of smartphone boomers will use the voice assistant this year, vs. 49.0% of Gen Xers and 53.1% of millennials.

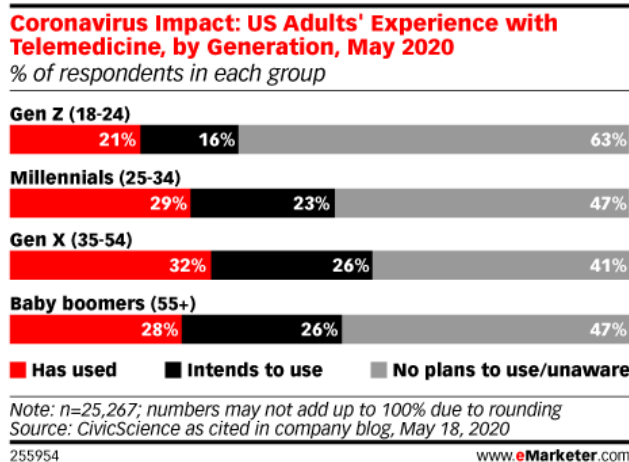
Boomers also have scant adoption of smart-home technology, such as monitoring devices, internet-connected home thermostats and smart appliances. According to a September 2019 AARP survey, penetration of such devices was lowest among the oldest boomers (who might

benefit from them most)—falling from 11% among 50- to 59-year-olds, to 10% among 60- to 69-year-olds and to 7% among those ages 70 and older. Boomers also lag in adopting smart speakers, which bump up against their chronic worry about digital privacy. We expect just 17.6% of boomers to own smart speakers this year, barely half the device’s penetration among Gen Xers.



Telehealth adoption has risen across age groups during the pandemic, but among boomers, the increase has come from a low pre-pandemic base. In November 2019 Gallup polling, 7% of US adults ages 55 and older (vs. 18% of 35-to-54s and 16% of 18-to-34s) reported using mobile apps to track their health. More broadly, YouGov polling in the same month found 7% of boomers (vs. 13% of Gen Xers and 18% of millennials) had used telemedicine technology to communicate with their doctor.

Boomers’ below-average usage of telemedicine pre-pandemic leaves open the question of whether their recent behavior will stick long term. That said, CivicScience polling published in May 2020 found the proportion of adults in the US ages 55 and older who had tried telemedicine rose from 13% in March to 28% in May. And its April polling found that 73% in this age group who tried the technology were satisfied with the experience.




When boomers and seniors do try a new technology and find practical benefit in it, they're like to stick with it, according to Dr. Alison Bryant, senior vice president of research at AARP. "They may not literally be the first kid on the block to adopt it," she said. "But once they do, they will use it if it's of value to them. And they have the discretionary income to actually purchase it."

To learn more about how the boomers are handling the COVID-19 recession, eMarketer PRO subscribers can read our recent report:

Report by Mark Dolliver Aug 03, 2020

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