

The Senior Discount

By: Chris Clancy

As more and more people prove themselves members of the “Ageless Generation” by taking up new careers, new causes and new lifestyles instead of retiring, more and more companies are expanding their “senior” discount offers, slashing prices for those as young as 50.

It's a situation that begs the question: Does corporate America really consider those of us in the 50-plus range to be (gulp) senior citizens?

According to Joan Rattner Heilman, author of “[Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50](#),” that question is best answered with another question: Who cares?

“It's very common, especially among people who've just turned 50, to become squeamish at the idea of being called a senior,” Heilman said. “You can see these people go up to counters and whisper, ‘Senior rate, please.’ But after a few tries, they're likely to get bolder and begin taking advantage of all that's out there.”

Rich Gray, author of “[The Frugal Senior: Hundreds of Creative Ways to Stretch a Dollar](#),” also recommends accentuating the positive side of growing into the senior category.

“With the senior percentage of the population increasingly growing, more opportunities and resources for seniors exist than ever before,” he said. “There's not a whole lot you can do about it, so you might as well enjoy the ride.”

Heilman and Gray both cite the travel industry as the traditional leader in offering discounts to seniors — or, as many in the industry prefer to say, “seasoned travelers.”

“With a few exceptions, the airlines stopped offering senior coupons about three or four years ago, when the industry was in dire financial straits,” Heilman said. “But hotels are offering them quite a bit now, in order to stay competitive. Car rentals are another place for the 50-plus crowd. All you have to do is ask.”

According to David Smidt, president of [SeniorDiscounts.com](#), a free online database of “age-related discounts,” chances are good that, as baby boomers redefine themselves, companies will redefine the senior discount. You might not even have to ask.

“It used to be, ‘Thanks for your hard work, here's your ten percent discount,’” Smidt said. “But that was based on the old AARP model, where people were expected to retire at 62 and die at 65, which is not the case anymore. Companies are just now beginning to realize, ‘Hey, we've got to go out and capture this market, because they're 75 million strong.’ That's why we're currently seeing this bend in the age requirement; it's so the [companies] can reach that market.”

Smidt cites KB Toys’ “[Grandparents' Rewards Club](#)” as a prime example of corporate America reaching out to boomers. Installed last September, the “Grandparents' Rewards Club” offers 10 percent off of purchases made on Tuesdays by those who are either 50-plus years old or a grandparent.

“KB started this to stay competitive with Toys R Us,” said Smidt. “But we're finding that Tuesday is now KB's busiest day of the week, and they didn't even get stuck calling it a senior discount.”