

FEATURE

Medieval man and the over-50s' dance club

The over-50s are the fastest-growing sector in the UK, but are largely ignored by advertisers and the media. But, as **Dick Lumsden** discovers, there are some people out there who want us, even if we don't want them!

LOOKED at myself critically in the mirror this morning. It wasn't pretty - but then, I wasn't looking for pretty. I was looking for medieval.

My interest had been piqued by a random ad I spotted from an agency called *The Casting Collective* looking for film extras. "Are you over 50? Do you have a skinny build, with longer hair and a beard? Or a good, characterful, medieval face?"

Well, I'm definitely not skinny. I'm pretty much bald and clean shaven... but maybe I look medieval... hmm. I'm not convinced. And even if I did, would I want to shout about it? "Look at me... I have the face of a serf"

The ad got me thinking, though, so I decided to see who else was interested in the over 50s, and why.

I'll gloss straight over "single male, 39, slim build, Southport" who was seeking "a mature couple over 50 for some no strings adult fun". I don't think Mrs Lumsden would fancy the long drive.

I was more interested in the hilarious ad from a group of students studying television production at Bournemouth University.

Shooting a short movie on the topic of "secrets and lies" they are concentrating on the "lie" of Santa Claus, and seek "a rather tired man, who no longer believes in the magic of Christmas. He drinks and possibly smokes and is probably also rather depressed". He has to be over 50 and - crucially - own his own Santa suit.

Ah well, that rules me out then.

What about Scunthorpe United? "The Iron" have just signed Ipswich Town's Liam Trotter on loan, but I see they are also advertising for players to start an over-50s team to play against other clubs including Tottenham, Everton and Nottingham Forest. Tempting, but a bit too energetic, I feel.

Plus, I have no discernible talent on the football pitch.

Maybe I could be tempted with a bit of "no Dad" dancing? Next time I visit Helsinki I must remember to pack my dancing shoes and head to K-50, a disco exclusively for the over 50s where if you happen to look under age you will be asked for ID before entry.

Club owners say that because of their strict door policy, bar brawls are unheard of and you never see anyone blind drunk (nothing like most of the over 50s I know then.) The only controversy which exists is what choice of music to play. For some, the nostalgia wave goes back



NOSTALGIA SELLS: Many over-50s have indelible memories from their teenage years of The Bay City Rollers

Photo: PA

to The Beatles and middle-of-the-road pop - while for others it is Led Zeppelin or The Rolling Stones.

Perhaps inadvertently, the owners of K-50 have stumbled across one of the staples of generational marketing.

Psychologists tell us that what we see and absorb in the first three years of our lives will shape our adult personality. But it is what we see and hear in our teenage years that will leave a lasting impression and which binds us together as "generations".

I was born in 1956 and, as a teenager, I remember watching Neil Armstrong step onto the moon; I remember the "winter of discontent", The Bay City Rollers and the birth of punk. All of these left a lasting impression on me and everyone else my age.

Now, I may have little in common with someone the same

age as me who lives in another city, works in a different profession, doesn't have a family and has completely different interests to me... but what we do have in common is an indelibly stamped memory of these times.

So a sure way to get our attention in advertising on TV or in the press is to take a music track or some archive images and weave them into the creative work. Sex sells, but so does nostalgia.

The hardest job of any ad is to make the reader or viewer sit up and take notice. Once you look, you register (consciously or subconsciously) and the chances of you buying increase proportionately.

Of course, these tactics would work just as well for any age group but particularly so for the over-50s as there are now more than 21 million of us in the UK - that is about the same as the

total population of Australia and just as diverse.

We have an almost infinite number of different tastes, likes, dislikes, and circumstances, so big brands need to work hard at knowing their customers before they even begin to develop new advertising campaigns.

But when they do, the difference between a successful ad or a mediocre one could be as simple as the backing track - just as in the K-50 club in Helsinki. What would get you interested... The Carpenters or The Clash?

■ Dick Lumsden is managing director of Senioragency, one of the few companies specialising in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views, or are over 50 and would like to take part in occasional consumer research, please contact him on dlumsden@senioragency.co.uk

