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Still Sexy at 60?

Start-Up Magazines, Web Sites Beckon to Aging Baby Boomers; Donny Osmond on the Cover

 By **KELLY GREENE**
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Jeff Taylor, founder of Monster.com, is spending \$10 million to build an online social network. But he couldn't care less about teenagers, college students and 20-somethings, the biggest users of such Web sites. Instead, he wants their parents and grandparents.

Later this month, Mr. Taylor, age 45, plans to launch Eons.com, a kind of MySpace for the 50-plus crowd. He hopes it will one day become the online "center of gravity" for the 78 million Americans born from 1946 to 1964. "If you are over 50, please join us ... to start living the biggest life possible," a notice on the Web site says.



Donny Osmond is the cover model for an upcoming issue of Grand magazine.

A growing number of new ventures are targeting aging baby boomers, their obsessions in the final third of their lives -- and their \$2 trillion in annual spending power. Start-up magazines with titles like GeezerJock, Grand and What's Next are beckoning to boomers with advice on triathlons, grandchildren or new careers.


(Gracing the cover of recent and coming issues of Grand: Donny Osmond, Martin Sheen and Goldie Hawn.) Retirement Living TV, started by a retirement-development operator with \$50 million, is set to hit cable TV screens in September.

Advertisers of everything from autos to electronics have traditionally preferred to link their brand images with younger consumers, and they reveled in baby boomers as children and

teens in decades past. Now, with the oldest boomers turning 60 this year, the new ventures raise the inevitable question: Will marketers have any use for them when they're 64?

Mr. Taylor thinks so. "A lot of corporations have openly embraced [the idea] that most of their customers are over 50, but they've never said that publicly," he says. "There's been this sensitivity to not wanting to skew too old." He says advertisers won't worry about the image fallout if they are seen on Eons.com,

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because the Web site's self-selecting audience will be made up of people 50-plus.

History suggests that it won't be easy: The magazine industry tried once before to cash in on boomer demographics, when the oldest boomers started turning 40 in the 1980s. *New Choices*. *Second Wind*. The titles all failed.

Samir Husni, a journalism professor at the University of Mississippi, recalls back then helping a student sell an idea for *Grandparents* magazine to **Meredith** Corp., the Des Moines, Iowa, publisher. The upscale magazine aimed for a circulation of 500,000; it quickly folded for a lack of ads. "People didn't want to be reminded that they were old enough to be grandparents," Prof. Husni says. A Meredith spokesman says, "We just didn't think it was going to be a sustainable business going forward."

Some media entrepreneurs this time around are slicing and dicing the interests of older adults into smaller niches. A magazine and Web site in development at *Looks Media Inc.*, a Laguna Beach, Calif., start-up, plans to focus on health, beauty and fitness for boomer women.

And there are signs of changing attitudes among advertisers. Three years ago, Jeremy Koch left the job of president of consumer marketing at **Time Warner** Inc.'s Time Inc. at age 50 and started *What's Next Media*. His goal was to launch a lifestyle magazine for 45- to 64-year-old men, addressing "all forms of life transition." "A number of people discouraged me from pursuing it because of the conventional wisdom that advertisers aren't interested in this demographic," he recalls.

Mr. Koch says the conventional wisdom so far hasn't proved wise: "We've gotten a very warm reception." He expects to publish the first issue of *What's Next* magazine early in 2007, starting with 200,000 copies. A Web site, whatsnext.com, is already up and running.

GeezerJock, a 50,000-circulation magazine for competitive amateur athletes over age 40, published its first issue in October 2004. Its founders, two Chicago journalists, got the idea after one of them, covering suburban sports, realized older athletes were highly skilled and had a following. *GeezerJock* has run ads for **Anheuser-Busch** Cos.' Michelob Ultra and nutrition-supplement companies. To lure makers of athletic gear, the company plans to start up sport-specific titles for Masters tennis and cycling next year, says Brian Reilly, publisher of *GeezerJock Media*.

Two magazine-industry veterans started publishing *Grand*, targeting boomer grandparents, in September 2004, using their own savings and money from friends. *Grand* has converted almost half of its 100,000 readers to subscribers, the partners say. It hasn't turned a profit, but it is staying vigilant about its image. "I have turned down ads that I thought were skewed much older than our audience," says Judi Awsumb, executive vice president at *Grand Media*. She says she recently signed **Marriott International** Inc.'s vacation club as a sponsor for a family-reunion promotion.

The jury is still out on *Retirement Living TV*, which is set to hit cable TV screens in September. John Erickson, chief executive of Erickson Retirement Communities, of Catonsville, Md., started the fledgling network with \$50 million, and it is scrambling to bank four hours a day of original programming aimed at viewers age 62 and older in time for its Sept. 5 launch. The network is producing shows including "My Town USA," about retiree hot spots; "The Voice," a live call-in show; and "The Doctor's Hour," with experts answering viewers' medical questions. It is set to make its debut in 7.5 million Comcast Corp. households in New England and the mid-Atlantic region.

Retirement Living hasn't even started looking for advertisers so far. "In all honesty, we can't really see how this gets to a profit yet," says *Retirement Living TV* president Brad Knight. "But we want to establish ourselves now as the portal for information about aging." He says he thinks advertisers will come, as marketers wake up to the economic might of his target audience. "We think Madison Avenue is

10 years off the pace," he adds.

Mr. Taylor, of Boston-based Eons, says as boomers approach retirement, the appetite is growing for a social-networking venture, one he describes as less interested in "how people look" -- à la **News Corp.**'s photo-heavy MySpace -- and "more interested in aspirational things." Users will create "My Eons" pages, sharing profiles and photos of themselves that "challenge and inspire."

Mr. Taylor's theory is that many boomers see themselves as "graduating" from corporate jobs to pursue entrepreneurial or personal goals. Even those who stay at a regular job "want to be able to do something with a hobby or their personality, not just their technical skill-set." "The idea is that rather than be completely off-put by the concept of turning 50, we're going to try to turn that on its head and celebrate turning 50," he says. "It's been a guiding business principle."

Boomers need a social-networking Web site tailored to them, Mr. Taylor says. They want purposeful connections, he adds, not just "getting to know each other." While 44 million older people are online, he notes, the percentage of over-50 users on MySpace is "minuscule."

Still, Eons is soft-pedaling its social-networking components, emphasizing instead tools such as a personalized "longevity calculator." "To come out and say you're going to be a place where people meet isn't as interesting as saying, 'This is a place to get things done,'" Mr. Taylor says. "It's like a restaurant that has great ambience: You talk about the great food, and the culture evolves around it."

Earlier this month, the Eons site concluded a contest asking visitors to list their goals by the age of 100. (The prize: \$15,000 to use toward achieving a goal.) The readers' collected goals will be "central to Eons going forward," Mr. Taylor says. "These dreams and adventures are a contagious thing." When people turn 50, he adds, younger generations "are going to be completely jealous of the party."

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