

Taking notice of those rock'n'roll over-50s

IMAGINE, for a moment, that you had nothing better to do for a whole day, than watch television – commercial, of course – read newspapers and listen to the radio. You would, in short, be exposed to between 300 and 500 ads.

The conclusion you might draw, based on the ads that dominate the media landscape, would be a strange one: that Britain's population is dominated by people under the age of 35, with a small sprinkling of pensioners targeted by ads for stair lifts and Viagra.

The reality, of course, is completely different, but then we are talking about the parallel universe known as advertising in which anyone over the age of 50 is virtually invisible.

In the real world the opposite is

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true. There are currently 20m citizens over 50 in Britain. By 2035 more than half the population will be over 50. And the over-50s are the ones with the money: they hold 80pc of the wealth, 60pc of savings, and many whose children have flown the nest are debt-free.

Nor are they necessarily sitting on their hands, leaving their money in the bank. These are the baby-boomers, and at the lower end of this

age group, they are spenders and travellers. But, exceptions such as the Saga group apart, advertisers rarely target them and the advertisers' agencies don't encourage them to.

The more enlightened among the marketing community are beginning to realise the potential of these consumers. Last week saw the launch of Senioragency, the specialist arm of an established agency, MPGM. Add a rival called Millennium, and a web agency called 50Connect.co.uk (a surprising number of over-50s are dedicated users of the internet), and you have a grand total of three agencies targeting this massive market.

The strange reluctance to acknowledge the over-50s market has its roots in the innate conservatism of the advertising industry and,

paradoxically, its obsession with youth. It doesn't help that anybody in advertising over the age of 50 is considered past it.

In the wider scheme of things, received wisdom has it that consumers over 50 are set in their consumption habits, so there is no point in targeting advertising at them unless it is for products only they buy, such as dentures.

That may have been true once, but today's over-50s generation is the one that came of age in the Sixties – an era of sex, protest and rock and roll. It's a generation richer, better educated and more open-minded than any that went before, and indeed some since. If that isn't a promising base from which to produce ads, it is difficult to know what is.