

Orlando Sentinel

OrlandoSentinel.com

CENTRAL FLORIDA EDITION MONDAY APRIL 14, 2003

50 CENTS

FOUNDED 1876

What cyclical lifestyle means for businesses.

"Cycles: How We Will Live, Work, and Buy," by Maddy Dychtwald (Free Press, 274 pages \$26) A popular song of a few years past defied both conventional wisdom and the rules of English grammar by asserting, "Age ain't nothing but a number." Now comes generational marketing expert Maddy Dychtwald supporting the view expressed by the ungrammatical lyric. In her new book, "Cycles: How We Will Live, Work, and Buy," Dychtwald maintains that new demographic forces are reshaping how we live and what goods and services we consume. Those demographic forces, she insists, are undermining the usefulness of chronological age as a determinant in deciding what kinds of products businesses should offer to the public.

"There are three unprecedented trends at work," Dychtwald writes. "First is the ever compounding **longevity revolution**, the result of dramatic advances in medicine and biotechnology; second is the steady **decline of the youth society** based on both the declining birth and mortality rates; and last is the impact of the **pioneering values, attitudes, and traits of the boomers** as they continue to revolutionize maturity. The influence of baby boomers in pioneering lifestyle changes is one of the dominant themes of Dychtwald's treatise. She traces their effect upon society from youth through adulthood and to approaching senior citizenship." Boomers will be the pioneers that clear the paths for the cyclic life, merging the spirit and excitement of youth with the experience and perspective of maturity to create an entirely new hybrid a kind of youthful wisdom or even **ageless aging**, she writes. "In doing so they will lay the foundation for a new approach to living with the space for continual re-invention – a more cyclic approach."

It is that cyclic, as opposed to linear, approach to living that Dychtwald perceives to be the new wave. The linear way of looking at people's lives, she maintains, made sense when people lived short lives. It was great for business, she points out, because marketers knew what kinds of activities people would pursue at certain ages. There was, as she points out, a time and season for everything – a time for education, a time for work, a time for marriage, a time for retirement. Now a more cyclic approach to life is already beginning to evolve where the stages of life – education, work and family, and leisure – are reshuffling and reappearing multiple times throughout each lifetime," Dychtwald writes.

Marketers, Dychtwald emphasizes, can no longer afford to focus their attention disproportionately upon the young. Although the population of this country used to be primarily young, she points out, that is no longer the case. Adults 50 and older are the fastest-growing segment of the American population, while the number of 18 to 34-year-olds is declining. That, she points out, has profound implications for such things as education and even marriage.

"After all, when marriage was originally conceived, no one expected it to last for 50, 60 or even 70 years," she writes. "Cyclic monogamy has become the norm, with most people enjoying two or even three primary relationships over the span of their lengthening lives." Those cyclic marriages, she notes, have ripple effects in the marketplace that benefit those who sell such things as wedding attire, new homes and household goods. Dychtwald insists that businesses should concentrate on what she calls the "ageless consumer" because people of different ages today increasingly participate in the same kinds of activities. "Yet, many advertisers and product managers still chase the young out of a long-instilled habit that told us that youth was where the action was, the only market really worth pursuing," she writes. The media, she insists, work against their own interests by reinforcing that kind of youth-oriented thinking. "The value of a television show, for instance, still tends to be judged not by its ratings or even the spending power of its viewers, but by the age of the eyeballs it attracts," Dychtwald writes.

"Although 35-plus adults have far more economic clout than teenage boys, the television executives, producers, and the advertisers they covet still think teen-age boys are the more valuable because they *used to be* the market that was the largest and spent the most." The demographic changes driving the cyclic way of living, Dychtwald points out, are also beginning to change the American workplace. Companies, she maintains, will have to find ways to attract and keep older workers. That means they will have to provide a broader range of benefits, increased opportunities for education and training and other incentives. By the same token, she argues, the whole concept of retirement is changing as more people pursue different careers and interests beyond the traditional work years.

Dychtwald offers these guideposts to corporate product developers, entrepreneurs, government, educational institutions, nonprofits and the medical community for thriving in the new cyclic society: **Embrace the new ageless consumer; target lifestyle and life cycle, not age; constantly reinvent; empower consumers' organizations; target freedom and security; and optimize a cyclic work force.** She insists that the prize will go to those in the business world who best understand and serve the members of the cyclic society who navigate life at their own pace and choose their own activities. "They're out there and they're buying, but they're in a process of constant change," Dychtwald writes. "In a cyclic society, the onus is on business not just to keep up, but to stay a step ahead." - By Cecil Johnson

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