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“Good health is the new luxury”

- The spending power of the 65+ generation offers incredible opportunities for the leisure industry.
- At present, the leisure industry is more involved in curing rather than preventing sickness and selling the joy of life.
- Older people have the opportunity to get involved in an active, healthy lifestyle and not be defined solely by their age.

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Franz Linser is a global wellness summit board member as well as the founder and CEO of Linser Hospitality.

In your opinion, what impact will ageing populations have on the leisure industry?

Life expectancy has undergone a significant change over the past three or four decades. At first glance, it has increased considerably—today you will find people in their 70s riding mountain bikes, surfing and pursuing other activities that have traditionally been offered to people 20 years younger than them. Looking more closely at the generally growing life expectancy, I would recommend distinguishing between “health expectancy” and “sickness expectancy”. Depending on people’s lifestyles, for example not doing enough exercise or eating too much, health expectancy in many cases has either stayed the same or has even decreased, while at the same time sickness expectancy has risen.

"The industry should not sell products that cure or prevent sickness, it should sell the joy of life!"

Do these developments lead to new opportunities for your industry?

These developments will be quite a challenge for the leisure industry in the years to come, but they also

offer the kind of new, incredible opportunities that the industry has never had before. People regularly need healthy inputs during their leisure time, and it is particularly the 60+ generation that also has the money to spend.

Do you think that the leisure industry has adopted a new approach to its senior customers?

The English language has a very suitable synonym for the term “ageing”, that is, “growing older”. This offers a nice opportunity for the leisure industry to put the focus on the word “growing”. The industry has a tendency to treat people aged 65+ as really old people, although many of them don’t feel old at all in their minds. At present, the leisure industry is more involved in curing rather than preventing sicknesses. Hotels that specialise in curing illnesses have been very popular in Germany, Austria and to a certain degree also in Switzerland. They were very successful in the past, but their focus was always on curing their guests’ ailments. Today the industry is trying to promote an active, healthy lifestyle, which will make a huge difference to the way in which people age.

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How is the leisure industry appealing to this older consumer base? What type of products and services are they offering?

The evolution of the wellness industry revolves around a growing emphasis on lifestyle change. If people go to an advanced wellness place, it is mainly to change concrete lifestyle issues. These issues often revolve around stress and weight loss. The wellness industry helps to tackle such health issues. For example, older people are encouraged in a positive way to change their lifestyles while at the same time being offered concrete advice. That means that people will be offered check-ups in order to get valuable feedback on their body functions and motivation for a healthy diet and exercise. These positive offerings encourage people to lead a healthy lifestyle before they get sick.

Which segments of the population aged 65+ will be of the greatest interest to Europe’s leisure industries from a marketing point of view?

In my opinion, the industry has not yet recognised the full potential of older guests. Today’s leisure industry is still primarily interested in younger people. But I am convinced that the industry will soon realise the financial potential of the 60 to 65+ age group. Apart from this traditional age segmentation of target groups, there will be more differentiation between lifestyle groups in the near future. More and more people will be attracted by lifestyle specials such as culinary outdoor gatherings, health activities and compatible communities. I think the leisure industry will act quickly to take advantage of this situation. It is a tremendous opportunity for those aged 65+ to get involved in a different way in an active, healthy lifestyle and not be defined solely by their age.

How do you think the industry can improve and move forward?

The leisure industry needs to make a trend out of living a healthy lifestyle. Good health is the new luxury for many people today. The leisure industry sometimes sells people very concrete solutions, such as a specific product to help alleviate backache. It should think differently, though. The industry should not sell products that cure or prevent sickness, it should sell the joy of life! This can be done, for example, by offering joyful and healthy movement sessions in a beautiful natural environment with likeminded people of all ages, who are interested in maintaining a well-balanced and healthy lifestyle.

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