



MARKETS

Paging the Household CEO

She'll listen to your pitch, just don't waste her time by **Larry Dobrow**

Mothers are generally acknowledged as "CEOs of the household" by catchphrase-happy marketers, meaning that they're the ones responsible for the lion's share of purchasing decisions in the home. Yet despite a sharp increase in the number of online programs specifically targeting moms in recent months, marketers still

You know you want to get her attention (above). Good sites provide content she can use (opposite page).

seem to be more keen on coying up to the guys. It's an oversight that could be costing them dollars. While moms may not have time to fiddle around on YouTube and MySpace, they land on the Web for everything from parenting tips to advice on school districts and kids' health information. They research product and service options diligently.

Nearly 95 percent of moms polled in a Haystack Group survey go online at least once a day, with 88 percent relying on the Web for parental guidance and tips, 86 percent shopping online, and 85 percent actually clicking on an online ad.

And, unlike the stereotypical male who won't ask for assistance no matter how lost or clueless he may be, moms seek out similarly situated peers for advice and product recommendations. More than 90 percent of mothers in the Haystack survey prefer to purchase brands recommended by other moms.

"[Companies] are slowly understanding that mothers are a great market," says Elena Neitlich, owner of Moms on Edge, which produces behavioral products for children. "Billions are spent on kids' products every year, and mothers are doing an awful lot of the buying."

As a businessowner and mother of four, Neitlich knows firsthand the time constraints faced by most mothers. At the same time, she says savvy marketers have many opportunities to reach them. "I don't want to say that moms are stuck at home, but a lot of the time we're held hostage by the nap," she explains. "From 10 to 12 or 2 to 4, you're trapped in the house. That's a time when you see a lot of mothers go online to shop or visit communities where they feel supported by other mothers."

Forget the Fluff

Which brings us to rule No. 1 about online marketing to both at-home and working moms: Respect the fact that time is their most valuable commodity. Their Web-surfing habits might best be described as task-oriented, so marketers who attempt to lure them with bells and whistles or interrupt their flow with pop-ups and flashy videos will likely annoy rather than entertain.

"There's a little more of a purpose when [moms] go online," says Mitch Galbraith, chief executive officer of Insider Pages, a local search site featuring consumer reviews. "They want information quickly and easily. They're willing to sacrifice on fluff and form as long as the substance is there."

As for that fluff and form, marketers must rein in their louder or more abrasive tendencies for any campaign targeting moms. "Sound and music is bad. Sometimes it's blaring, so I live in fear of waking a napping child," says Claudia Weber, founder of bottomsUp, a company that makes clothing acces-

sories for pregnant women. And then there's the relevance of the pitch. Owing mostly to time constraints, most moms won't bother with turkeys and (subservient) chickens. "I would never click on a link to something just for curiosity's sake," Weber says.

Allen Rathey, founder and president of HousekeepingChannel.com, suggests that the way around the relevance barrier is by providing legitimate content, as opposed to marketing-first druck. "Moms are probably the smartest people on the planet," he says. "Rather than be superficial and play on old stereotypes, we get as technical as we can. That's one of the big myths of the Internet, that moms need to be spoon-fed."

Indeed, most marketers believe mothers respond to relevant, intelligent online marketing no matter what their time constraints. Allan Levy, CEO of SilverCarrot, the lead-generation company behind Recipe4Living.com, points to a survey his firm recently conducted. Of the 500 women who participated, a "large majority" said they're willing to check out new brands online and test new products based on information they get online. "For companies that play it right, the opportunities are definitely there," he says.

Rippling Word-of-Mouth

Marketers may not have figured out how to play it right just yet, but more creative thinking has been applied in the last three or four months than there was in the 18 months that preceded them.

Earlier this year, around the time that the Consumer Electronics Association unveiled a study noting that 65 percent of women ages 25 to 34 are casual gamers, Johnson & Johnson partnered with Fuel Industries to create "Johnson's Buddies Scrubbies." The advergame challenged players to get

a digital little'un bathed and ready for bed. Georgia-Pacific's Dixie cup brand made its move by aligning itself with the hyper-popular MommyCast weekly Internet radio show.

To promote two baby brands — Egba Originals, a custom invitations brand, and Little Ruler, a marketer of infant and toddler apparel — Matt Meyerson, senior vice president of product placement at B|W|R Public Relations, pushed hard for a blog presence. "Targeting this audience doesn't mean finding the biggest publication or Web site; it means finding the

people you feel will buy your product, who are getting information from blogs more and more," he says. "People forget that and end up blowing a lot of money."

Then there's MomJunction, a company whose central mission is to help mothers organize their chaotic lives. After leaving his job creating enterprise/knowledge-management tools for large companies, Sang Kim started a new firm from home. There he got an up-close look at the way his wife balanced the demands of two children and running the household. "There was nothing for moms to help them manage their jobs like corporations had for their employees," says Kim, CEO of MomJunction.

This past Halloween, MomJunction launched its

"Online Life Tool" for mothers, allowing moms to tap into the knowledge of an extended network.

"Let's say a mother has a question about whether her son may be developing allergies. She can drop a question into her personal group and the people in it can 'ripple' the questions in their personal groups. The idea is to tap the word-of-mouth out there, which moms trust more than any other kind of information." ■

