



## Marketing to Today's Women: Focus on Life Stages, Not Ages

by Nancy Pekala

Men may still be Mars and women still from Venus but savvy marketers looking to cash in on the significant purchasing power wielded by women today means they must understand and appeal to female consumers in very specific ways.

Indeed, a [study](#) by the [Boston Consulting Group](#) earlier this year, women control \$12 trillion of the world's \$18.4 trillion in annual consumer spending, a percentage which will likely rise as a new upwardly mobile class of young female professionals overtakes their peers in wealth and status. BCG notes that women will likely be the ones driving the recovery.

Long recognized as the key purchasers for American households, another study finds women are also gaining influence over categories typically dominated by men, such as consumer electronics and cars. *"The Female Factor: Women at NBCU Purchase Power & Influencer Study"* was conducted by WomenatNBCU, a relatively new NBC Universal content and marketing initiative that connects marketers with the company's female-centric properties such as Oxygen and iVillage. The study, conducted in partnership with Gfk Roper, looked at women's current household purchasing roles, comparing the results to the findings from a similar 2000 study conducted by Gfk Roper and cigarette brand Virginia Slims.

In this year's study, 96% of women said they are involved in purchasing high-priced consumer electronic products compared to 99% of men. In finance, another traditionally male category, nine out of 10 women said they deal with financial advisers, up 18% from 2000; and eight in 10 said they buy and sell stock to make money, up 20% from nine years ago. Moreover, seven in 10 women said they are their household's primary "accountant" compared with six in 10 men.

However, while women are more connected than ever to technology, they are still less confident than men (79% vs. 85% for men) about their computer purchasing decisions.

Demonstrating how a product or service can enhance their lives is one critical way marketers can reach today's female consumers of all segments—from Gen Y and X to moms and everyone in between.

### Marketing to the Sandwich Generation

In fact, while much attention is paid to the Gen Y market, Ann Mack, Director of Trendspotting, JWT, noted that Gen X women are fighting back and are a segment to be reckoned with. "They're fighting against the millennial machine," Mack said, "and are

bringing the best of the old way of doing things and combining them with the best of new ways of doing things.”

Mack noted it’s an interesting time for Gen X women who find themselves living in the middle of a “Mancession”, where 82% of job losses affect men. “Two-thirds of women agree technology allows them to work wherever, whenever while 71% use technology to work more independently and call their own shots,” Mack reported during her presentation, “*Generation X: Flirting with Forty*” delivered during a recent AdWeek Media workshop in Chicago.

Yet, Gen X women find themselves the “sandwich generation,” forced to hand over part of their paycheck to the boomer generation to support them in their pursuit of a happy, healthy retirement while also preparing to pay for the children’s escalating education costs.

To reach these women, marketers need to speak to life stages, rather than ages, Mack suggested. “Messaging should focus on the meaningful rather than the trivial.” The “core competency mom” has emerged allowing moms to be “perfectly imperfect,” outsourcing trivial duties such as doing dishes. Brands like Dixie are capitalizing on that trend with commercials that show mom serving dinner on Dixie’s paper plates in order to spend more quality time with the children.

To be truly effective in marketing to women, marketers need to understand them better, to fully recognize what makes them tick. Men and women are quite simply wired differently and those differences need to be figured into any marketing campaign.

For example, Jill Nykoliation, President of [Juniper Park](#), noted in her presentation, “*Discovering the Other Woman*,” that marketers pay particular attention to how women process guilt, communicate and handle emotion.

“The worry center of women’s brains is three times the size as men’s,” she explained. “Women are their own harshest critic. Yet, while men compete with each other, women possess a universal desire to become their better selves.”

Nykoliation noted that studies indicate that only 2% of women feel beautiful and constantly struggle with the perception that they fall short. Brands that play to this “best self” concept would be well served when trying to reach women. For example, rather than exploiting women’s insecurities, Olay presents one of its products as a skin care technology made accessible to all women, letting consumers know that Olay is “on their side.”

Paige Premium denim goes one step further with its campaign that compels women to love their body. Tucked into each pair of jeans is a card that reads: “I want you to love your body. Feel comfortable in your own skin. Feel comfortable in your jeans. Thanks for believing in our product.”

[Evolution of Smooth](#), a maker of shaving cream products, elevates the task of beauty in its marketing campaign. Its messaging emphasizes that no moisturizer is required after shaving, its ingredients are 100% natural and 98% organic, and the packaging itself is recyclable and in

an ergonomic shape, perfect for gripping when wet (and made for a woman's hand). With a price point of \$3.99, the brand's product is accessible to most women.

Nykoliation also noted that empathy is a key motivator for women and that marketers would be wise to understand how empathy fuels women's drive for personal connections. Apple is one company that does this well. The company's popular Mac vs. PC ads aims to evoke empathy for both characters, even though clearly the goal is for viewers to prefer the Mac representative.

"Marketing to women is about building a complete brand proposition," Nykoliation said. "It has to be thoughtful and authentic. Marketers would do well to invite women to join their brand by giving them a story, one that celebrates her best self rather than playing to her insecurities."

A number of brands are taking deliberate steps to appeal to women. OfficeMax, for example, has created a fashion brand of office products to better target female customers. The company also screens job candidates based on well they will be able to interact with women.

### **Marketing to Moms**

Perhaps no other segment of female consumers gets more attention in marketing circles than moms. Marketers have fully come to recognize that moms pack a powerful purchasing punch. But just who is today's mom? According to Tina Sharkey, Chairman and Global President, BabyCenter LLC, it is significant to note that today's mom comes in very distinct purchasing shapes and sizes. Speaking at a recent Adweek Media workshop on *Marketing to Women*, Sharkey revealed some insights on distinct mom categories from BabyCenter's "[The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mom™ Report](#)".

In addition to bigger trends shaping motherhood such as comfort with technology and increasing eco-friendliness, becoming a mother is a huge, life-stage transformation that

### **Tips for Marketing to Women**

- **Be helpful.**

Focus messaging on how your brand can make a woman's life easier, better or provide them with what they value the most such as spending quality time with their family.

- **Engage female customers.**

Women make great brand ambassadors. They are likely to pass on information about a great product or service they've found to others. Include them in testimonials, loyalty and referral programs.

- **Be empathetic.**

While men are driven by competition, women are motivated by empathy. They are seeking to make connections and share information with them.

- **Focus on the practical, not the trivial.**

Women must keep a lot of balls in the air so time is of the essence. Focus on what matters the most to women.

- **Start with a story.**

Women are hardwired to be more intuitive and connected to their emotions. Telling a good story about your brand will help that brand resonate with female consumers.

- **Sweat the details**

Women are used to sweating the small stuff so be sure to include the details in your marketing message.

- **Be positive.**

Women are motivated to become their better selves. Rather than playing to their insecurities, focus instead on how your brand can lead women to become a better version of themselves.

alters a woman's lifetime purchasing behavior and criteria and triggers a significant re-evaluation of products and brands. For example:

- 85% of moms say having a baby changed their purchasing habits.
- 73% say it changed their purchasing criteria.
- 62% say it changed the brands they purchase.

Before having children, BabyCenter said that women are most concerned about product and service quality, features, and design. After becoming mothers, they are much more likely to shop based on safety, quality, and price.

The study also found that pregnancy and parenthood create a series of entry points which create a timeline of purchases for such things as home renovations, digital cameras, travel and appliances. Based on which products index highest for each stage, the study found moms are 423% more likely to buy a digital camcorder in the first six months of motherhood than prior, and they are 153% more likely to buy life insurance in the latter half of the first year of the child's life.

Sharkey also offered these specific insights about distinct "mom" segments:

#### ● *Social Mom*

Motherhood ignites social media participation. Moms engage in social media to find friends and get advice. Social moms also behave differently across various social media sites. "On Facebook, they're socializing, catching up with friends and posting updates on their visit to the park. That's their friend network. They're not trying to learn and decide there," Sharkey said. "Moms on Facebook don't want to be 'outed' in a public way. They don't want their updates shared in a news feed. The anonymity of being a mom in that journey is something they take really seriously."

Sharkey also suggested social moms share more than just advice. They also share coupons, information on the latest new products and promotions. "Bargain hunting clubs have become popular," she said. "Social media has grown up. Marketers need a rigorous and segmented social strategy to meet moms."

#### ● *Media Mom*

Marketers lose three media hours a day when a woman becomes a mom, Sharkey related. Before becoming a mom, women spend 9 hours a day in media. Once they become a mom, that number decreased to 6.1 hours.

"Naptime is the new primetime for moms," Sharkey said. "Moms grab time when they can so DVR usage increases and the percentage of women who never read magazines once they become a mom jumps to 54%."

Moms also regard their cell phones as their life line. Ninety percent of moms, according to the survey, indicated they wouldn't leave home without their phone. More than half use their cell phones to keep in touch with nannies and daycare. Cell phones allow moms to go out in the real world and connect."

BabyCenter developed some phone apps with these moms in mind. One app turns moms' phones into something their kids can play with. More than half of moms say their kids play with their phones. Another app called Booty Caller provides would-be moms with a built-in ovulation calendar.

Other interesting statistics about "media moms":

- Moms average 111 text messages a week (in comparison to 30 for Gen Xers)
- Millennial moms often prefer to text before making a call allowing them to multitask.
- Moms view an average 9.5 minutes of video monthly.
- Moms are the primary decision maker for technology purchases

● *Doctor Mom*

Moms today are committed to obtaining the best information possible when it comes to healthcare for their children. They rely on a blend of expert and mom-to-mom wisdom to make decisions. Sharkey suggests that in order to meet Doctor Moms, marketers should focus on education and a product's ingredients. It's also helpful to understand and accommodate this kind of mom's interest in alternative treatments and utilize social media to interact with her.

Marketers can be most effective in positioning their brands when they understand that the women's market is not one-size-fits-all but rather one comprised of multiple segments based on the varying life stages and behaviors of today's women.

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