

Master Marketing to Moms

Mom has the power of the family purse. So why do marketers so badly miss the mark when attempting to target mothers?

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PURSE POWER: If women control so much of a family's spending, why do marketers stereotype and so poorly target mothers?

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magazines, I felt like the treatment of mothers was incredibly idealized and trivialized. I never noticed this before I became a mom.

So the picture of mom in that matching outfit is not the image to market?

The images are certainly inaccurate. I don't look so polished and put together everyday, nor does any mom that I know. The moms that I've studied don't actually say that they're striving for perfection. They're striving to keep everything under control, keep the family moving. Perfection is certainly not a goal of theirs.

If you're going to market mom, you need a product that makes her life easier?

Exactly. I think that companies should be developing better services, better products for moms to help make their lives easier. I just have the belief that when you idealize the mother's life, it doesn't show what it's really like. It's not going to feel like you understand her. Just the notion of having the goal of making mom's life easier is implied that life isn't perfect.

It seems like there might be a whole sector of goods and services out there that aren't marketing to mom, but maybe they should be.

Absolutely. Even with the role of digital, in the studies that I've done, moms will tell us

The modern mother performs a complex—and unceasing—juggling act. She balances a career, children, and—most importantly to business—the family bank accounts. Moms accounted for \$2.5 trillion in spending last year, according to BSM Media, a market research firm based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Not that mothers are necessarily happy about it: 75 percent of mothers say marketers and advertisers don't understand what it's like to be a mom, according to global market-research agency MinTel, which also conducts an annual report on marketing toward mothers. "Given the fact companies small, medium, and large spend billions of dollars to sell to moms, and 75 percent of moms say they don't get it: That's a pretty big problem," says Katherine Witsch, who recently created a new division for The Martin Agency devoted solely to marketing geared at mothers. It's called The Mom Complex. Inc.com's Abram Brown spoke with Witsch on mommy stereotypes, tapping the purse's spending power, and winning the hearts of mothers everywhere.

What pushed you to start The Mom Complex?

It started as a personal frustration of mine. When I was at the stage of having a 3-year-old and an infant, I was practically crying myself to sleep at night because it was so hard. And when I watched television ads or read

that the role of digital in her life is to make her life more efficient. A good company might combine multiple tasks in an app. If you can cut out a trip to the store with an app or through a website, then I think companies need to start thinking about what their efficiency quotient is with moms: How do we make their lives a little bit easier?

Have you seen any small businesses that have done this effectively?

There's a new company called Plum. It's a small start-up that calls itself the "Netflix for kids' clothes." So what happens is that, I order a bag of Size 2 boys clothes. I keep those clothes for as long as I need to use them; I return them for a Size 3 bag of boys clothes. It's making my life easier. There's another similar company called Rent the Runway, where you can rent designer clothes for your one event and then give them back.

Those two companies have the perfect product to market mom. But have you seen any business with the right product and the right campaign?

CitySitters.com. It's a small company recognizing that moms need sitters all the time. It's hard to find a sitter. So it's screening them for you. It's basically the Match.com for babysitters, which is brilliant. And their communication is really, really well done. It's smart. It's funny. It's intelligent. They depict the baby sitter having a blast with the kids, which I love. You want your kids to love the babysitter and to be really, really entertained. But then the babysitter is really conscious to clean up the house, put it back together again. So for mom, it's the best of both worlds. A babysitter who has fun with her kids, wrecks the house, but then puts it back together again. That's reality. That's what happens what babysitters come over.

There's no mom in that ad, though.

Which I like. A lot of marketers think you have to show a mom in order to connect with the mom, and it's simply not the case.

So what are some key mistakes when it comes to marketing mom?

One is that the moms are always happy, especially when cleaning. Children are always depicted as obedient angels—you know, the kids are all too happy to eat their vegetables. Another one is the wardrobing of mothers. You'll notice that almost all of them have cardigans and Capri pants. That's the wardrobe of a mother in advertising. Another one is that so often the moms are talking to camera. You know, "Hi, my name is Susie. You too can have a clean house if you follow what I'm doing." It's almost as if there's another mom talking down to us.

What happens if you violate these rules?

I think you've missed a connection with the mothers. I think it impacts sales and other things like loyalty. I think the ultimate reaction is that mother just dismiss it. It doesn't catch their eye. And one of the things that's frustrating is that we're not talking about a group of aliens here. We're talking about mothers. And most marketers are a mom. They have a mom. Or they're married to a mom.