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RETHINKING MOM, AGAIN

THE COMING EMERGENCE OF GEN Y MOM

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A while back I wrote an article called Rethinking Mom. It was about the need for marketers to shift their entrenched mom mindset from Baby Boomer Soccer Mom to Gen X Domestic Goddess Mom. A shift from career-focused Boomer moms who used a hands-off approach for raising resume-enhanced children to Xer moms who are happy with their “mommy” title and have created a much less rigid relationship with their children than Boomer moms had.

Well, guess what? In a couple of years it'll be time to rethink mom again and really start paying attention to Gen Y moms, who promise to be quite different from both Boomer and Gen X moms. Actually, the smart marketers are already working to understand the nuances and complexities of this coming motherhood force.

Depending on what source you use, Gen Y has roughly 80 million members (give or take a few million). The leading edge of this generation has begun turning 30 this year and approximately 9 million are already moms.

Gen Xers are still the dominant child-rearing generation, but they won't be for long. Because of Gen Y's sheer generational size, when they start having children en masse, it is likely to be a bigger baby boom than the period after World War II that produced the original Baby Boomer generation.

Gen Y moms' attitudes, values and beliefs were shaped during their formative years in the prosperous 1990s. As tweens they had stylishly decorated bedrooms from Pottery Barn and \$100 American Girl dolls on their beds. They spent spring break in places like Cancun, Jamaica and Puerto Rico. They've always had their own computer, TV, DVD player, cell phone and MP3 player. Mass affluent brands like Coach, Tommy Hilfiger and Dooney & Bourke were standard gear. As young teens they were pampered with manicures and pedicures and drank \$3 lattes on their way to high school. As moms they're likely to push their infants in \$700 Bugaboo strollers and carry \$300 Kate Spade diaper bags. Appearance for both themselves and their children will be very important.

Gen Y moms also grew up in an era of teamwork (versus individuality/do-it-myself for Gen Xers). They have very strong relationships with their mothers, many of whom are Boomers, and these Boomers moms will likely play a big role in helping Gen Y mom raise her children (an appreciated team approach). Boomer mom will be a highly trusted source of not only child-raising information, but also brand/product/service information.

Their teachers and parents always told them they could do no wrong. They were taught to voice their opinions and expect results when they did so. They are not “control freaks” like their Boomer moms were, but they like to be in control. Individuality is important, but not at the expense of group structure.



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These emerging moms are exhibiting a return to traditional values exhibited by the Mature generation (who are Gen Y's grandparents and many call The Greatest Generation). As teenagers and young adults, volunteerism, philanthropy and religion have all played a big role in their lives and impacted their thinking on everything from work to politics to family life. They are very in tune with not just local issues, but global issues that relate to the wellness of others and the planet.


Another similarity to the Greatest Generation has been found in several studies with Gen Y females. These studies have found a desire for having more children and starting to raise their families at a younger age than Boomers or Xers did. This will lead Gen Y to be a powerful mom force for several decades.

The Internet will continue to be a huge player in daily life. Gen Y moms will use it to broaden their circle of friends (or tribes as some have called them), joining social networks and blogging their experiences with like-minded moms. Information and insights gleaned from these trusted social networks will be very powerful and generally hold much more value than all but the most focused marketing messages.

While it may seem overwhelming to think about how to communicate and connect with Gen Y moms, in reality it should be fun and exhilarating to engage the first truly digital-native generation and interact with them on terms they set versus the terms brands have always set for the preceding generations. To use a sporting metaphor, it's not just a new ballgame, it's a new sport.

Some things for marketers to think about as this approaching tsunami of Gen Y moms rapidly gains momentum:

1. This is the most marketing-savvy generation ever seen. This coupled with their mastery and reliance on the Internet for word-of-mouth information from moms in their social-networking circles, will leave traditional marketers with a very challenging proposition for creating brand connections.
2. Their Internet and social-networking savvy has created a generation of moms who are used to being (and expect to be) involved in the creation of ideas and content. They don't want marketers selling to them; rather they want to be invited and engaged by brands. They know they have a strong voice and expect marketers to listen and adapt to them, not the other way around.
3. Gen Y moms will be looking for ideas and inspiration that can help them create a healthy, active and rewarding life for their families.
4. No matter what generation they are from, most moms never feel they have enough time in the day. For marketers speaking to Gen Y moms, it may not be so much about trying to create time as it is about showing an understanding of the lack of time and asking how they can help.



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