5 Tips on How to Successfully Market to Millennial Moms

These moms consume media and shop in ways remarkably different from that of any other segment. What are you doing to reach them?

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Despite what marketers may think, the way into a millennial's wallet goes beyond employing such strategies as the use of trendy colors and Instagram-worthy photos.

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Who are these millennials, anyway? The *Wall Street Journal* has called them "a group of people who are building major companies, altering the way we work and live and challenging long-held notions of family and society." But the *Journal* also (last year) berated itself for treating them "like an alien species" by describing them with too many "snotty" remarks.

I, meanwhile, consider "millennial" the best shorthand option for referring to people born between 1981 and 1997. But let's get a little more detailed …

Specifically, millennials are growing up. And they're having kids. So, within this group is a growing subset of women with children, a.k.a."millennial moms," and there may be more of them than you think. Representing about 1 in every 5 mothers, and accounting for almost 90 percent of the 1.5 million new mothers counted last year, millennial moms have carved out a

unique market segment 9 million strong. To put it simply, if you want to talk to a new mom, she's very likely a millennial.

While this group is sought after by marketers, many of these women say they don't feel understood by those marketers, and that could be a big miss for brands, given these mothers' connectivity, spending power and influence. What's also important here: 55 percent of millennial moms are included in all purchase decisions, compared to 39 percent for all U.S. mothers. So, for businesses, missing an opportunity to connect with millennial moms could mean missing out on a valuable share of the market.

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If yours is a business that would gain by appealing to this group, here are five tips for doing that:

1. Lead with product functionality to build meaningful connections.

While nearly half of all millennial moms care that a company's values align with their own, and will do the research necessary to find out which brands are worth their time and attention, there's a real opportunity for those brands to build a lasting and meaningful connection with these moms.

That opportunity? Marketing physical products that demonstrate one or more of their values.

The millennial mom often arrives at a store with a specific set of buying needs, and when she can pick up a product that not only meets those functional needs but builds off social values that she can get behind — such as ethical sourcing and sustainability — she'll be more likely to purchase, then talk about that purchase to her friends, online and off.

Some forward-thinking companies are aware of that opportunity – Target being a good example. Living up to its "Design for All" philosophy, Target expanded its in-house Cat & Jack clothing line to include items with sensory-processing sensitivities: What that involved was heat-transferred tags and flat seams for kids bothered by itchy tags and seams that irritate their skin.

The line was also marketed to parents looking for a low-cost option. So, the clothing company's announcement was met with appreciation by moms (and dads), grateful that the clothing would help alleviate their daily struggles to get their children dressed. The line's sensory-processing features also increased an affinity for the master brand across the board.

The message here is that while there's a time and a place for the brand storytelling so ballyhooed today, "storytelling" means much more to our millennial mom when the physical product involved is tangible proof of why that story matters.

2. Align with like-minded brand partners.

When seeking advice on parenting, millennial moms are more likely to trust those they know who have "been there, done that." And that means relying on one other. Some 97 percent of 1,000 millennial parents in a *Crowtap* survey said they had found social media helpful to their parenting, and nearly half said they turned to social media at least once a day for parenting advice, on everything from swaddling techniques and getting through airport security, to product recommendations.

With the rise of influencers across a diverse set of lifestyles, millennial moms (and dads) are free to eschew advice from just one go-to source in favor of their fellow parents (usually moms) with whom they can identify.

The message here is that companies that align with the right online partners and show their product's value through those people can tap into existing fan bases and gain traction.

3. Get specific with long-tail keywords.

The millennial mom spends over eight hours every day online across a mix of devices, and new/expecting parents perform twice as many searches as non-parents. It can be assumed that these skills are further honed during late-night feedings, when the parent has a phone in one hand and a baby in the other. So brands are smart to figure out and then provide the content needed.

Because so many millennial moms know how to search, brands need to offer the right content at the time and place when and where she's looking.

The message here is that by recognizing millennial moms' search abilities and investing in an SEO strategy that implements a mix of long-tail keywords (sample: "tips and tricks for teething babies") companies will drive lower, but more qualified, volumes to their sites. Not to mention the fact that the lower competition for long-tail keyword bids can make SEO a much more affordable prospect, and provide for a more predictable, steady spend overall.

4. Practice utility above all.

Millennial moms have forged their own path in finding creative ways to earn money and support their families. And, in this regard, the digital revolution has proven critical in helping them do more in less time, with the flexibility they want and the income they need.

One in five millennial moms have blogs with substantial

followings, and more than half of millennial moms in one survey said they had plans to start their own business. Whether our millennial mom is creating the content for her blog or consuming someone else's, the time she spends online is focused and purposeful.

Smart companies are ready to answer that purpose: Furniture and home decor retailer West Elm, for example, offers an #AskWestElm series, offering video tutorials on simple home-management basics, like the proper way to press a tablecloth and linen-closet organization. The tutorials also focus on seasonal needs, such as how to set a buffet in November and spring cleaning tips that may be employed in April, making West Elm a trusted ally in the home category.

The message here is that for brands, it's important to take a measured step back from only pushing products to a strategy of gauging where *utility* can be offered as well. Showing expertise in and around the brand's product categories without overtly selling those products is likely to be well received. It also allows our millennial mom to get to know a brand and its values and helps her engage with the brand even when she's not shopping for specific products.

5. Make room for Millennial Dad.

Millennial moms are often married and/or living with milennial dads; and, as a pair, these couples are blurring the lines between traditional gender-specific household roles.

The amount of time millennial dads spend with their kids is nearly three times that of previous generations. In other words, they are taking an active role beyond just bringing in household income: They're influencing purchase decisions and taking responsibility for daily child care.

Importantly, although they are changing the traditional role of dads at home, millennial dads are not taking over the roles

of moms, but instead carving out their own identity as parents and looking for resources to support them. These men are also ready for a new narrative and will likely respond positively to a real reflection, in ads, of their valuable role and engagement as partners to millennial moms.

An example? In 2016, not wanting to disturb the baby sleeping on his chest, Patrick Quinn, co-founder of the *Life of Dad* blog, passed the time by stacking Cheerios on his son's nose. Quinn then snapped a pic and uploaded it to this blog's Facebook page, challenging other dads, "How high can you go?"

The response was so immediate and enthusiastic that the blog became a hit just in time for Father's Day and quickly secured support from General Mills, digitally speaking, which helped the challenge go viral. One year later, Cheerios' brand spot, "Good Goes Around," incorporated Cheerio-stacking (0:21!) and multiple glimpses of dads being involved at home with their kids.

In sum, millennial moms have emerged as a distinct segment that is certainly acknowledged by marketers, but not widely understood. Parenthood makes these moms different from other mennials; yet their age sets them apart from older parents. The result is complex individuals who use technology, consume media and shop in ways remarkably different from those of any other segment.

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To connect with millennial moms, brands need not reinvent marketing but simply to view this cohort through its members' own perspective, recognizing their needs and answering their expectations.

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