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OPINION

Listen to the Multi-Minders

Women are starting to take control of brands and businesses that mean something to them



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Research shows most women do it at least 10 times every five minutes. What is “it”? Multi-minding: mentally juggling a complex mix of family, career and self-care decisions at any moment, with little time for commercial messages to seep into the mix. With everything on a multi-minder’s mind, you’d think she already has enough to keep her busy. Not so.

I predict female consumers will take on an increasing role with brands and businesses—the next women’s liberation movement when women will co-manage brands with the official brand manager, business owner or marketing director. This partnership will exist with brands that dare to let go and share the steering wheel with consumers. Sound implausible?

The Web enables everyday consumers to be more involved in business. Where once there may have been a desire to connect, there is now that same desire coupled with tools that enable connectivity, especially with women.

Just like real-life relationships take time to build, it takes time to build trusting relationships with female consumers. Unfortunately, the traditional brand-management system, which assigns managers to a brand for a year or 18 months, doesn’t

Consumer voices and participation add insights to product development, marketing and product advocacy.

Relinquishing control to consumers may not be an easy decision. Choosing how to turn over control must be in line with the brand’s essence or corporate culture. Given consumers, especially women, say family and friends are the most trusted source of information, giving up some control should at least be considered.

Many brands haven’t cultivated a two-way level of involvement, which is one of the big reasons why there are so many “mompreneurs.” According to the Center for Women’s Business Research, for the past two decades, women majority-owned companies have continued to grow at approximately two times the rate of all companies. The center goes on to report women emphasize relationship building, as well as fact gathering, and are more likely to consult with experts, employees and fellow business owners than men.

There are many examples of women and moms who have created products because they experienced a need and could not find a solution in the marketplace. If marketers are not listening to women, women will go elsewhere—and not

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seem to have a vested stake in long-term relationships with consumers. In that case, relationship building can be institutionalized through communications agencies (advertising and public relations, usually) that stay with a brand longer.

The explosion of mommy sites and blogs is a prime indicator of women engaging businesses and brands. From highly trafficked sites like mommytrackd.com and cafemom.com to fast-growing sites like coolemompicks.com and themothhood.com, women express their viewpoints on everything from pregnancy to politics, and on every product imaginable. They will tell a marketer or business owner anything they want to know with sometimes brutal honesty.

Whether you like it or not, women are taking control of brands and businesses that mean something to them. That phenomenon inherently implies marketers and business owners are then losing a significant degree of control.

Not only is losing some control of your brand good, but it’s inevitable if your brand or business is to succeed in the future.

necessarily to the traditional competitor. They have the ability to do it themselves and they’ll slice into the market share of many products in the form of a million little razor cuts.

As the leader of G23, a senior strategic advisory group working to build relevant and sustaining connections with women, Janet Riccio believes women already help marketers. “The female sole” is how Riccio describes the manner by which brands or companies should approach their communications. “We need to literally walk in and out of the lives of women and the brands they use to really understand those relationships,” she said.

Women have the tools at their disposal now to build an inherent connectivity with brands and to launch new businesses. We must partner with women and invite their co-brand management for brands to continue to succeed in the future—let’s start by listening.

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