

# BRANDWEEK

THE NEWSWEEKLY OF MARKETING

VOL. XLVI NO. 17 APRIL 2005

## Top of Mind

# Reaching Out To Today's 'Multiminding' Woman

She paused in the middle of yet another frantic workday while facing a screen full of urgent e-mails, cell phone messages from her kids—one in college, asking for money, and the other a new parent asking for advice on dealing with a cranky, teething baby—along with a schedule

loaded with afternoon meetings and a half-finished presentation on her laptop.

My older colleague looked over at me, suddenly wistful, and said: "In the early Sixties, social trend gurus claimed that evolving technology would so simplify our lives that, by the turn of the century, work time would be cut drastically, leaving us with only one challenge: how to spend our abundant leisure time."

She sighed and stared back at her dual computer screens, muttering, "What were they thinking?"

What indeed?

Our lives have evolved along with technology, all right. Technology has, in fact, blurred the boundaries between work and home. Social changes hold



By Kelley Skoloda

women to high standards of performance in both arenas.

A recently released Department of Labor survey revealed that the average working woman spends almost twice as much time as a working man on household chores and care of children—not exactly hot, breaking news

to most women—and that 78% of women and 85% of men are in the workplace. Furthermore, according to the survey, men and women are equally likely to work on weekends and take work home in the evenings.

What this all boils down to is that women, especially those between the ages of 25 and 54, are busier than ever juggling their lives at work and at home. This requires not only expert

multitasking, but also "multiminding."

What is multiminding? It means that today's typical woman, even if she appears to be relaxing in front of a late night television show, reading a magazine or tackling an array of projects at work, is constantly thinking about and preparing for the multiple dimensions of her life, mentally juggling an unending array of work, home and self-care concerns while tackling or embracing the moment.

Increasingly, multitasking has meant that single-focused pursuits, like recreational shopping or watching television, have become quaint reminders of a simpler past. Research shows that fewer women than ever are browsing malls and that when women are watching television or cooking dinner, they may be simultaneously working online.

Studies conducted by Yahoo! and Starcom Media have led to what is being called the "38-hour day," where women indicate their total time spent on individual activities in one day added up to 38 hours of activity inside a 24-hour period.

Multiminding, which has come about in this era of time compression, means that female consumers have little or no time for commercial messages. Even at leisure, women's minds are hard at work, making it less likely than in the past that a woman is paying full attention to a television program or commercial. She is less likely to spend much time reading a long newspaper or magazine article.

Indeed, some media have responded to the fast pace of life today. Many newspapers have changed their design and format to make news more quickly and easily accessible. A number of women's magazines have responded to the challenge of today's multiminding woman by shortening articles and by adding more boxed items and news briefs.

Meanwhile, advertising has lagged behind, according to a worldwide survey of female consumers by Leo Burnett: 65% of women ages 35-40 found ads aimed at women to be patronizing while 50% found the ads presented to be "old-fashioned."

The fact is, traditional advertising works when someone has time to pay attention. Most women today don't have that sort of luxury.

And yet, women in the multiminding ages of 25-54 have never wielded as much power in the marketplace. They are choosing how 88% of every disposable dollar is spent, according to the Burnett survey.

And we're not just talking laundry soap, groceries and other household items. Women make the primary spending choices on 53% of stock purchases, 63% of personal computer buys and 75% of over-the-counter drug sales. They buy half of all new vehicles and are major consumers in other areas traditionally dominated by men: women are buying 61% of major home

improvement products and are involved in 89% of all consumer electronics decisions.

Beyond the statistics, the fact is that women consumers can't be underestimated in either importance or sophistication. Not only is multiminding making some traditional advertising approaches obsolete, but also women's use of technology is changing the rules. Smart, savvy, time-challenged women today are not as dependent on traditional media for buying information. The Internet has become a major factor in purchase decisions, with nearly 90% of women surveyed reporting they do more product research online than offline.

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## Women are busier, and more involved in decision-making, than ever nowadays.

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So how do we reach this increasingly vital and decreasingly attentive group of consumers? We need to:

- *Start asking instead of assuming.*

Women between the ages of 25 and 54 are a diverse group. They include baby boomers and Gen Yers, mothers of young children, those whose kids have left the nest and women who are not parents at all. They are women with traditionally female and nontraditional jobs, professionals and blue (or pink) collar workers. They embrace a myriad of ethnicities and cultures and a wide range of political beliefs. One size, quite definitively, does not fit all. Focus groups and surveys are more crucial than ever in helping to determine what women want. But we need to go beyond that to make these sur-

veys and these groups more representative of the increasingly diverse segments within the 25-54-year-old female consumer cohort.

- *Accommodate the demands on her time and attention.* Timeliness, credibility, and relevance to her busy life are key to capturing women's attention. We need to get to the point and give vital information in a way they can hear us.

- *Embrace holistic approaches.* Want to make the short list of her choices? Weave your information and messages within the complicated fabric of a woman's life today: letting her know what is available, why and how it meets her needs, and subtly communicating throughout the busy hours of her life via whispers, not shouts, and through Web site content development as well as more traditional media.

- *Take the female consumer seriously.* She has the money, but not the time. She is making primary decisions on major purchases with increasing frequency. And she is quick to turn off or tune out any advertising message that is perceived as old-fashioned, offensive, silly or otherwise lacking in credibility. Time is too short. Fail to give her the vital information she needs right now, and she will quickly go elsewhere.

In sum, reaching today's time-challenged woman by listening to her needs, by keeping up with trends and by surrounding her with useful information via new media sources congruent with her complex lifestyle is vital. To lag behind and to do less with today's powerful, techno-savvy, multiminding female consumers just doesn't make sense.

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