



## The Dad Factor: From Sidelines to Center Field

By Molly Logan Anderson

Recent studies have shown that the time dad spends with his kids increased by seventy five percent between the late 1970's and 2000 and that the number of stay-at-home dads has tripled since then, some studies citing numbers nearing the two million mark. The benefits to kids from dad's increased presence are numerous, but how has this changed the way mom, the major decision maker of purchases for the family, can be reached? "As we plan for this year's M2Moms®-The Marketing To Moms Conference, we are seeing more brands utilizing dad's deeper daily participation to their advantage as a means to connect with mom like never before," says Elizabeth Barton-Fongemie, vice president of sales for PME® Enterprises, LLC, producers of M2Moms®.

### **Fatherhood, revised**

With generations X and Y taking center stage, a new family dynamic has emerged, with dads playing a starring role in every facet of their kids' day-to-day lives. Marta Loeb, founder of Silver Stork Research and 2007 M2Moms® presenter, urges people to take a closer look at pop culture to help grasp the changes that have unfolded over the last few decades. "In the 70s we had Archie Bunker (the totally uninvolved dad), in the 80s we had Ted Bundy (the out to lunch dad), in the 90s we had Frasier Crane (the divorced, uninvolved dad), and now we have George Lopez (the active and concerned father)." This shift in how dads approach fatherhood has resulted in big changes at home. How? "The most dramatic change in family households today is the leveled playing field for mom and dad. As mom works as much and contributes as much, dad is more involved and needs to contribute at home too," says Loeb. "Today's dad is a true and active parent partner."

While generation X was the first to stand up and try out emerging new facets of fatherhood, the group was still divided by those who did not yet have a vision for dads in new roles. "Gen Y on the other hand, as they have done in all their life stages, has accepted this new dad role as fact and reality," says Loeb. "It's OK to be a stay-at-home dad, actually many dads are admired for it." Laura Tomasetti, principal, 360 Public Relations and 2007 M2Moms® presenter and sponsor agrees. "Whether it's through dad's involvement at playtime, cooking, doing the grocery shopping, or changing diapers, dad is in the driver's seat more often and moms are welcoming that change. Kids are coming to expect this involvement, too."

## **Driving Your Message Home**

As dad's new role gains momentum in fresh marketing campaigns, brands have the challenging task of selecting whether to address mom or dad alone, or to speak to them together.

"Sometimes one message can work on two levels - resonating with both mom *and* dad," says Tomasetti. "For example, parents - not just mom and not just dad - are interested in brands that can deliver more 'quality time' and enhance 'family time.' We've seen this with our Crock-Pot brand client. In the future, expect to see more ads depicting both parents, with dad playing an active role."

According to Tomasetti, there is definitely a time and place for speaking to mom one-on-one as well. "Other times it makes great sense to target mom while still acknowledging dad - show dad but talk directly to mom." A recent study conducted by Diapers.com found that more dads are changing more diapers. 'Mom media' and mommy and family blogs reacted immediately to the story, giving it great attention. "Stories like this, about dad and dad involvement, have an incredible appeal to moms while also allowing the brand to endear itself to more moms through dad's increased involvement," says Tomasetti. Buy-in from mom seems to be huge and it appears that speaking to her with dad in mind can go a long way. "Brands who can figure out that moms are motivated and interested in involving dad whenever and however they can, will win," says Loeb. "As we've always said... dads are the next big opportunity in marketing to moms."

"A quick perusal through mainstream magazines reveals that top brands are already reaching mom through dad," says Barton-Fongemie. A recent four-page spread for Kellogg's Rice Krispies depicted dads in the kitchen with kids and mom nowhere to be found. As part of the successful *Childhood is Calling* campaign, the ad compels dads to spend more time with their kids, offers a plethora of quality time activity suggestions, recipes to try and more. "In addition to what dad obviously perceives in the ad, his participation in quality time speaks volumes to mom."

## **LEGO on Dad**

Folks from LEGO fully understand and embrace dad's new role in the home. "One thing we have known to be true for years is that dad tends to be the playmaker in the house," says Michael McNally, brand relations director for Lego Systems, Inc. and 2007 M2Moms® presenter. "He's all about the fun, and has no qualms about getting down on the floor and role playing dinosaurs, fending off monsters, and sometimes, I'll admit from my own experience raising two girls, getting a makeover." Dad coming on board and taking on more hasn't come without complications though, and LEGO is helping to ease things along. "A lot of moms welcome the help, but I think one of the biggest challenges for moms sometimes is in accepting that dads are no longer that Neanderthal that for so long has been portrayed as unwilling, incapable and uninterested in his role as a dad," says McNally. "Dads who want to participate, and who can do a great job, need an advocate, so it's really incumbent on moms, on the media, on parenting experts, to help people understand the importance of embracing dad's willingness to jump in and be a positive contributor."

LEGO knows that nostalgia is part of the process when it comes to dad's involvement in playtime, especially with lines like LEGO Star Wars, which allows mom to witness how brands are motivating dads to spend quality time with their kids. As far as messages used by LEGO to reach parents, "together" seems to work better than "separate." "We've found that we can achieve impact with both moms and dads through the same experiences and communications -

events, in-store materials, etc.” says McNally. “There certainly could be ways to tailor messages, but I’ve heard on many occasions that moms are asking why marketers want to entertain their husbands, but preach to them about parenting methods.” According to McNally, being better informed may allow marketers to be more successful with reaching parents down the line. “I think it’s something that everyone really needs to consider – maybe pushing pause and using the time to better understand the motivators that we have assumed to be true for moms and dads – especially in a market where consumers are creating the messages instead of the more traditionally accepted model of marketers creating the messages,” says McNally.

### **Dad is Popping Up Everywhere**

Even though they aren’t making the majority of spending decisions, it’s important not to minimize the media consumption and purchasing power that dads hold. “There are times when dads should be spoken to directly, especially when it comes to areas like home entertainment purchases,” says Tomasetti. For marketers, it’s important to keep reaching out to find dads where they live. “Dads are heavy media users,” says Tomasetti. “Of course they are big television viewers, but they’re also very reachable online. Dads can be found researching things for their families on sites like CNET and MSNBC, but they are also reading blogs in growing numbers; there is a myriad of sites and blogs with news and tips for dads.” As dad’s household role continues to expand, his participation in social networking will likely increase as well, providing a powerful and direct line to dad.

A new ad for Budget Blinds shows dad holding a baby in a freshly decorated room. The ad reads, “He cooks, he cleans, he rocks. Finding the perfect window coverings was like icing on the cake.” Providing evidence that dads are becoming so comfortable in their new roles that they are branching out to purchasing decisions traditionally made by mom. “Ads like this communicate to both mom and dad in different ways,” says Barton-Fongemie. “Even though they each may take away something different from new campaigns leveraging dad, both parents feel respected and valued, endearing them to the brand involved.”

Savvy marketers already understand the trend of leveraging dad’s increased involvement, but there is still plenty of room for more brands to get involved. According to Tomasetti, “This is a pervasive trend, not a passing one and it will last until we experience the next major social dynamics shift.”

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