

## **Building Connections For Moms: Everyone Wins**

By Molly Logan Anderson

Imagine the line items on a typical mom's daily "to do" list: "pick up dry cleaning, get kids to soccer, clean house." The list goes on and on. Unfortunately, most moms' lives don't offer a checkbox for "play with my kids," or "talk with my spouse." Moms' plates are too full for the most rudimentary aspects of parenting: spending time with those they love. "They are craving ways to fit it in and more importantly, to gain a stronger connection to their kids and spouses and even the community around them," says Elizabeth Barton-Fongemie, vice president of sales for PME® Enterprises, LLC, producers of M2Moms®-The Marketing To Moms Conference. In recent polls, forums and online discussions, moms have spoken about their need for deeper connections in all aspects of their lives opening up another venue for brands to reach these important consumers.

Amidst the ever-changing and always full schedule of today's moms, top brands are reaching out by finding new ways to foster the important connections moms are searching for. "By offering new products and services that allow for mom to be the kind of mom and woman she wants to be while cultivating better communication for the family, top brands are heeding the call," says Barton-Fongemie. Moms longing for meaningful ways to connect are finding inspired ideas everywhere, through brand initiatives and sponsored activities, websites and online communities.

### **It's Playtime!**

MarketTools, a leader in on-demand market research and 2007 Workshop Sponsor of M2Moms®, polled moms and followed them through guided and unguided conversations for over ten months. "More moms are participating in joint leisure activities with their kids in order to understand them, keep track of their interests/activities and to relax and have fun" says Emily Morris, director of product marketing for online communities at MarketTools. More simply, moms are finding that just playing with their children is one of the best methods of connecting and brands can assist in this arena.

By creating products that appeal to the whole family such as Sony's Wii entertainment system, the interactive, multi-player game Rock Band or even The Learning Channel's line up of family suitable programming, brands create a space for entire families to engage and have fun while learning and enhancing their relationships. Brand websites offering online family-friendly games and activities are also hitting this mark. "Despite being wary about most advertising and marketing directed at kids, moms are OK with branded websites that offer kids fun, yet educational activities and games," says Morris. "Moms will even participate in the activities and games on these sites along with their children – providing them with some quality time together."

Some companies are looking to make it easier for moms to add "play" to the "to do list. Recognizing that moms are busier than ever led Ketchum Public Relations, a 2007 sponsor and presenter at M2Moms®, to partner with their client Kellogg's Rice Krispies on a recent initiative

titled Operation Spark. Operation Spark provided methods for parents to change everyday activities into communication builders and meaningful moments for the entire family. Packed with all sorts of family bonding activities and simple ideas for creative play, the program was directed by an esteemed panel including psychologists, best-selling authors and kid rock stars. “The expert panel gave parents lots of great examples of how doing what they love can easily translate into fun with their kids,” says Kelley Skoloda, partner/director of Ketchum Public Relations and frequent M2Moms® and M2W® presenter. “Listen to music together, get down on the floor and really play—tune out the rest of your responsibilities and have fun again.” Operation Spark and its panel of experts and ideas are available to parents through the website, [www.ChildhoodIsCalling.com](http://www.ChildhoodIsCalling.com).

### **Helping Kids Connect**

Today’s moms—especially those that fall into the Gen X and Gen Y categories—are looking at playtime as an opportunity to connect with their children now, but also as a way to help their children better connect with their community. A new initiative by Pepperidge Farm Goldfish called *Fishful Thinking*; is designed to educate parents and teachers about the power of optimism and its role in childhood development. Through a variety of activities, parents can connect with their kids while helping them learn valuable skills about self control, hope, emotion awareness and broadening perspectives. The site also offers monthly features written by optimism and parenting experts, as well as quizzes to get parents going and newsletters to keep them connected.

Every activity parents choose to participate in has a worthwhile goal and builds character. According to the website, “The Fishful Thinking program provides the tools parents need to teach their kids how to think optimistically about themselves and how to use their optimism to overcome life’s obstacles, persist in the face of adversity, and transform setbacks into manageable challenges.” Deeper familial connections and kids rooted in sound family values while learning skills they can take into future, addresses today’s moms’ main concerns.

### **Building A Community For Mom**

It should go without saying that brands that choose to champion these deeper connections for families are really participating in a win-win situation. “Moms develop trust and confidence in companies who provide them with forums to connect with one another and share their ideas and opinions. By giving moms a platform to share their opinions and to tell companies what they need and want, a company lets mom know that her opinions is important and that the company has her interests in mind,” says Morris. “In addition, the company gains valuable input from moms on what products and services they need and want and what they like and dislike.”

MarketTools recently launched ZoomPanel Moms, an online environment where moms share real, unfiltered opinions about products and services. Companies subscribing to ZoomPanel Moms are able to become part of a mom-based social network and act as “flies on the wall” to all sorts of online discussions. “By observing moms’ conversations with one another, companies can understand the psyche of today’s moms. They can learn about the issues faced day-to-day and can identify evolving trends in the mindset of moms today,” says Morris. “In addition, companies can get a view into the unmet needs that moms are experiencing, so that they can take this information and create products and solutions that can solve those needs.”

As the MarketTool initiative shows, moms look to the Internet as a conduit for connecting with others and no online tool connects moms better than blogs. Of the 13,000 blogs currently accessible via BlogHer, 25% belong to the “Mommy and Family” category. This facet of the online community has amassed great popularity with staggering numbers of online moms and recent studies show that women are migrating from television shows to online blogs and communities. Why? “Accessing the news, information and community I want when I want it – that’s the clarion call we’re hearing from women online at BlogHer and why the Internet is now our favorite medium, beating newspapers, magazines and television,” says Lisa Stone, co-founder and CEO of BlogHer.

When speaking with hundreds of online moms, Stone asked “Are your online friends *real* friends?” The answer she received was “...a resounding, “YES!” Genuine, lasting friendships and advice are the core reasons why so many women today blog.” The benefits of the bonds being created between moms online are numerous. “Parenting can be a lonely game in today's nuclear family,” says Stone. “Part of why blogging is so popular is that blogs can act as virtual sandboxes or kitchen counters online where today's parents can meet.”

To help marketers successfully tap into the blogosphere, BlogHer has created The BlogHer Network, a syndicated content and advertising network. “We work every day to give women who write superlative blogs the recognition we think their extraordinary stories deserve, as their publicists and publishers,” says Stone. “The growing importance of blogs has resulted in the creation of innovative ad networks like BlogHer, which help bloggers build self-sustaining businesses.” By assisting blogging moms in finding ways to turn their passions into income, BlogHer is continuing to help moms build connections within the community, while assisting brands to reach customers in a new way.

“In today’s hustle and bustle world, what could be better than creating an opportunity for emotional and economic growth, education and deeper connections with peers and those held most dear?” says Barton-Fongemie. “Thanks to top brands, moms are finding it easier to create moments in their lives that allow them to put down their laundry lists of chores and focus on fun, family and once in a while, even themselves.”

---

*Each week M2Moms®, M2W® and Good And Green E-ssentials bring you important stories on the latest trends, brands, methods and ideas for marketing-to-moms, marketing-to-women, and green marketing. They're your weekly updates to the M2Moms®, M2W® and Good And Green conference communities of contacts, sources and resources, to help you increase share and maximize your marketing ROI. M2Moms® The Marketing To Moms Conference; [www.m2moms.com](http://www.m2moms.com) M2W® The Marketing To Women Conference, [www.m2w.biz](http://www.m2w.biz); Good And Green – The Green Marketing Conference [www.goodandgreen.biz](http://www.goodandgreen.biz). PME®, PME-EVENTS, PME ENTERPRISES, M2Moms® and M2W® are trademarks and servicemarks of PME® Enterprises, LLC. Copyright © 2008 PME® Enterprises, LLC. All Rights Reserved.*