

## **Marketing Family Values**

Family values is such a huge issue in the United States that political and business careers can be built and destroyed on its alter. The idea that family is supreme is not new in America, and neither is our willingness as consumers to collectively spend billions of dollars in pursuit of some wholesome family fun. Our quest for family fun has encouraged many businesses in the food and entertainment sectors to adjust their initial offerings to better serve the needs of the entire family. The result has been a marketing bonanza that emphasizes the worthiness of family fun without necessarily delivering on the promise (ever wait in a line at Disney World?).

Still, the ideal image and the notion we desperately want to live up to is the joy to be found in a family having a great time together. We hang on to this idea because it is embedded in our values system. It is also dear to us because its purity and innocence is constantly under attack from elements in the entertainment sector who produce product for the adult segment. It is no surprise that clean family fare like Finding Nemo, Shrek and the Disney films rank up there as the most successful movies.

But our dedication to family values is not only a reaction to the assault we sometimes feels the virtue of family must overcome. It is also a response to the changes in the way we conduct our family lives. The guilt we feel over working too hard (and as a consequence spending less time with our kids) is alleviated a bit by our undying devotion to the idea of family.

Also, we may be a bit frightened that we stand to lose the family values we hold dear, as television, computers and other technologies come into our homes and invade the time we typically spent together. These new technologies have raised the cost of living significantly as the average home now needs to accommodate the costs of cable television, internet connections and cellular telephones – which in turn means that the parents need to work that much harder, having less time to spend with the kids.

### **Reality Check**

We may love the idea of the family, but – no offense intended – we ain't exactly family poster material. Fact is, only 5% of American families meet ideal image of 2 parents and at least 2 kids, all one original family unit. Single parent homes and homes with step parents are more the norm.

This does not mean there is no such thing as family values, only that they are very different values from the "Father Knows Best" image of the 1950's. From a marketing perspective this is critical because it means that while we, on one hand, market to embrace the image of the American vision of the perfect family, we need to, on the other hand, be sure not to exclude the majority of the existing family units that do not reflect the image we are projecting. This is not all that different from other types of marketing that, under different circumstances, market images of men and women that are very far from the look and lifestyle of the average American male or female. The idea is to present an image that can be aspired to, not related to.

### **Super Mom**

Even in today's fast paced world Mom is still the go-to person keeping the wheels of the family moving. In most cases, Mom still gets a great deal of her own personal joy and satisfaction from family related activities and seeing the family together, happy and healthy. From a marketers perspective this means that any product that can be sold to kids also needs to be sold to their moms. In almost all cases the Mom will have the last word on the purchase. Her emphasis is buying what is best for the family within the scope of the family budget. She seeks ways to save time and still deliver to her family the nutrition and love she sees as her place to provide.

### **Super Dad**

Dads are taking a much greater role in the family dynamic these days. No longer the provider and disciplinarian only, the father is now a key supporting cast player in helping to organize and run the family. Dads want genuine relationships with their kids and seek the opportunities and the activities that provide them. From the marketers perspective Dads are not the target for smaller, more common purchases, but they are the central figure in the decision making for larger items, such as cars. The Dad is often the more impulsive buyer and typically can be tempted to spend outside the budget easier than his spouse.

### **Super Kids**

According to some studies conducted for children oriented television channels, kids influence as much as 60% of the purchases made in the average American home. This is an extremely significant number and shows both the extent to which kids have become educated consumers (from all the various media sources directed straight at them) and also how parents are (either through guilt or lack of time) willing to listen to their kids when making buying decisions. From a marketers perspective this means that while Mom may have the final say in a purchase, the kids have the opportunity and the ability to make the case for or against. This means that kids need to be considered in most marketing efforts directed at the family.

### **Marketing Family Values**

Marketing family values is a complex process because you need to make sure that you are communicating simultaneously to at least the children and the mother, saying different things to each and making sure that what you are saying isn't prejudicing the buy decision in the group to which the message is not directly intended. The idea of family fun and family oriented products does not have any inherent resistance from any family member (with the possibility of teenagers who may want to be somewhere else instead of with the family regardless of the activity).

Orienting your business or product to meet the needs of the family is not nearly as complex as it seems unless your business or product is inherently unsuited for the family (such as bars, nightclubs, etc.). Restaurants across America, for example, expanded their customer base to include the entire family by including a kids menu and, in some cases, offering kid discounts on weekday evenings. Car companies focus on family values by emphasizing safety. They try to establish a shared value in the idea that our children's safety is a supreme goal.

The family as an ideal and as a buying power is stable and a huge market force. The ability to market to it in a way that is meaningful and effective could serve to broaden the scope of your company's appeal and create new revenue streams from opportunities you have yet to explore.