

Meet The Mom Next Door

New research underscores the power of face-to-face communication with moms

BY LAURA TOMASETTI

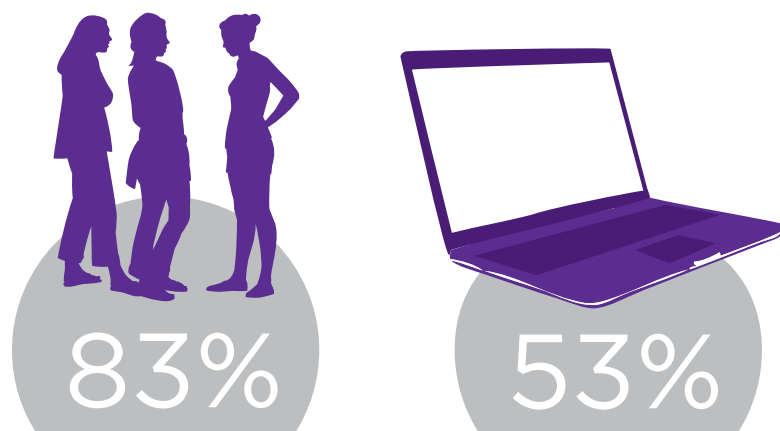
Much has been written about the power of word-of-mom marketing. In recent years, in part fueled by the explosion of social media, brands have increasingly shifted dollars from traditional marketing, such as advertising, to vehicles that enable brands to interact more directly with moms. The goal, of course, is to get moms to use and recommend your brand to other moms, which has largely fuelled brands' interest in bloggers. But what about the millions of other US moms who make product recommendations each week without a blog? And who's more influential—the Facebook mom or the mom chatting up other moms when they drop their kids off at school?

360 Public Relations joined with Lindberg International Research and Mom-It Forward to gain insight into “the mom next door” and examine why and how she makes recommendations. While social media is here to stay, the research findings underscore the power of face-to-face conversations, and can help brands better understand and plan their approach to the mom next door.

We talked to more than 1,000 US moms with children ages zero to 12 between August and October 2012 via quantitative web-based interviews with 964 moms, a series of in-home focus groups with 95 moms, and an online event with 27 social media moms. Nearly three-quarters of moms said they recommend brands at least monthly, with half doing so daily or weekly. When it comes to toys and entertainment products for children, there's a very high degree of “mom-it-forward” influence, with approximately two-thirds of moms saying they're likely to turn to other moms for recommendations.

The Power of In-Person

More moms make recommendations in-person than online.



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The power of in-person

In today's online world, it surprised us to find that more moms (83%) rated in-person contact higher than social media (53%) as their preferred way to make recommendations about brands. On the receiving end, in-person recommendations also rated higher, with 59% of moms giving in-person recommendations the highest possible rating for trustworthiness, while just 14% of moms rated social media recommendations as “most trustworthy.” That's a bit of a wake-up call for brands. They need to find more ways to connect with moms in person.

The women surveyed told us what they really value is discussions with other moms who know them personally—that mom next door who's been to her house, knows the ages of her kids and the details of her life, whose house she's visited and whom she admires. “I know she'll give it to me straight,” a Chicago mom explained. “I will use products that I see her use in her own house.”

In each of the six in-home focus groups we conducted, it became apparent how readily moms latched on to the moms making recommendations in the room, and how those moms stepped forward to lead the discussion. They are the moms spearheading their school fund raisers, organizing the weekly play group, and answering questions posed by their mom networks about what birthday presents to buy, movies to see and apps to download.

Where are all the moms?

To some degree, the answer to that question depends on the ages of their children. For example, moms of older kids (ages nine to 12) index higher for conversations with other moms in the workplace, because many have returned to the workforce by the time their kids are in grade school. On the other end of the spectrum, moms of kids ages zero to three are more isolated and index higher for chatting with other moms online. But for the greatest number of moms (58%) across all age spectrums, those quick conversations at daycare or school drop-off and pick-up time present the biggest opportunity to network with other moms.

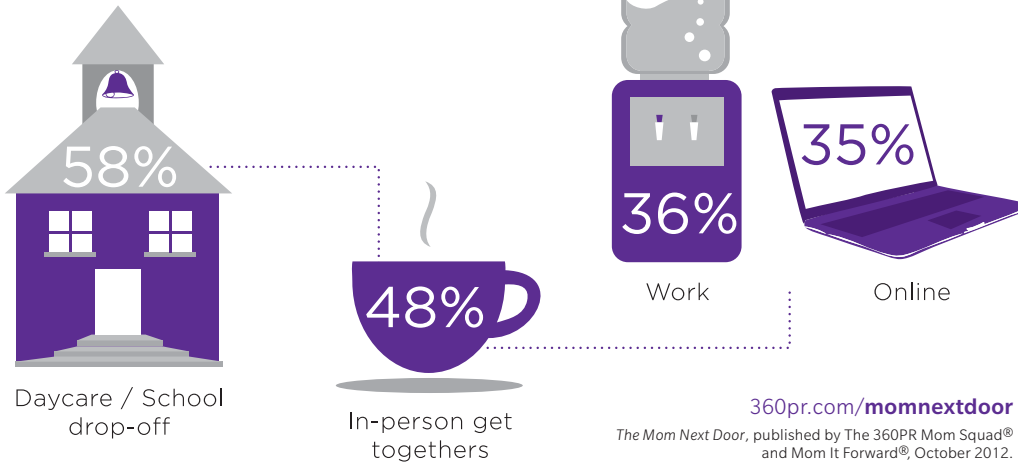
What motivates moms to make a recommendation? Not surprisingly, special offers are at the top of the list for most moms (61%). Close behind is the sense of pride (51%) and fun (54%) that comes from being the mom that others turn to for advice. Third-party reviews (32%) and causes (31%) also spur moms to make recommendations. Since discounting is not a sustainable strategy for most brands, and it can diminish brand value, marketers should focus on getting the mom message right—what will be fun for moms to engage with, and how can you empower moms to share their experience?

Not all social media moms are the same

Moms are spending less time with social media than marketers may think—less than an hour a day for 40% of the

Where Moms Meet-Up

Moms chat each other up at school drop-off and in-person get-togethers more than they do at work or online.



moms we surveyed. But if your brand is aimed at moms of younger kids (zero to three), social media plays a more important role, as moms of younger children spend two or more hours on social media networks each day.

Facebook is tops with moms by a landslide. A full 86% of the women we surveyed use Facebook, followed by YouTube (25%) and Pinterest (24%), which just edged out Twitter (21%). Notably, moms said they like using Pinterest not just as a social network, but also as an organization tool for keeping what-to-try-and-buy lists within easy reach.

The good news for brands is that 77% of moms said they like or follow a brand on one or more platforms, with four in 10 following more than six. And a third of moms said they're reading social media updates made by others, but not actively sharing their thoughts. The key for brands is to find ways to celebrate those who do

their networks. Email lists like Parent Talk Yahoo! are also popular with moms—giving them ready access to hundreds of moms in their local community and “a wealth of information,” as one mom commented.

Getting in on the mom-versation

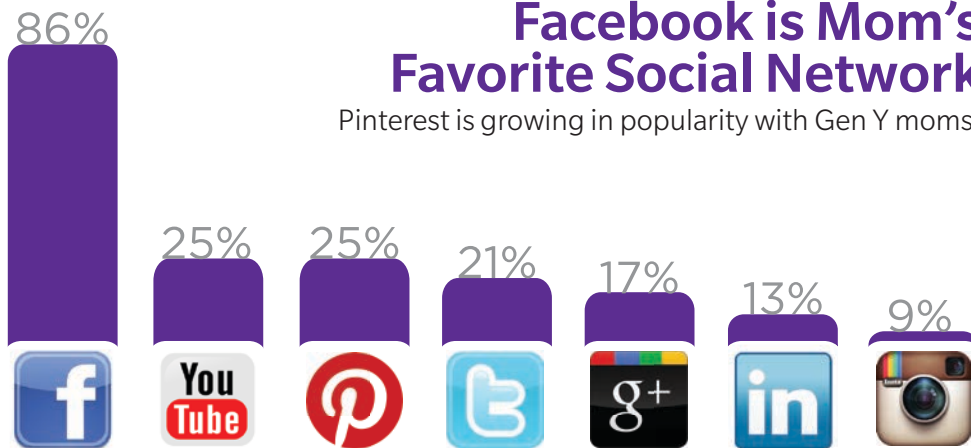
There's a lot of opportunity to become part of the frequent conversations moms engage in about brands. Moms who attended our in-home focus groups described doing their brand homework as a three-part process: They start by talking to other moms off-line, then go online to conduct research, and finally return to their mom circles off-line to double-check their research and make their purchasing decisions. For more considered, bigger-ticket purchases, moms are willing to take their time and do more research. “I would rather wait two weeks and have more opportunities to have conversations like this one,” explained a mom at one of our focus groups.

Brands can be an important resource throughout this process, offering moms access to experts on brand channels and through higher-touch communications such as in-home, retail and other events close to where moms live. From a resources standpoint, it's inconceivable for a brand to interact one-to-one with every mom, but brands can achieve scale and success by building a network of moms next door. **3**

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Facebook is Mom's Favorite Social Network

Pinterest is growing in popularity with Gen Y moms.



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