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Reaching Men Not as Simple as We Think

Males' Complicated Lives Demand That Marketers Rethink Delivery of Messages

By Mark Dominiak

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With the new season's start, it's hard to miss the full-fledged onslaught of male-biased properties. There's plenty of football to go around, from college matchups to "Football Night in America" and "Friday Night Lights." Throw in the playoff chase in Major League Baseball, and plenty of wives probably find themselves in testosterone hell.

For marketers, many of these properties have great value in contact plans when the objective is reaching men. But it isn't enough to simply run messages in these visible properties and expect men to flock to your brand. There's quite a bit more behind male life and shopping behavior than meets the eye.

Understanding the basis for what drives behaviors can help planners identify quality properties for reaching men and understand how to feature brands within that environment. Behavioral drivers also provide a good roadmap for how various properties fit into life and shopping rituals. If planners know what role a property plays, they can better leverage it to drive marketplace impact for brands.

Behaviors also vary, sometimes significantly, among males of different life stages. Given the bulk of spending power lies with those men 30-plus who are currently or soon to be dads or husbands, a deeper dive into their behavioral drivers may be beneficial to consider.

Life Behavior Drivers

Regardless of what other specific attributes a planner considers in a brand's male profile, a first step is usually to dive into quantitative information like MRI or segmentation studies that may be on hand. A planner can gain good understanding from quantitative information by piecing together a pretty worthwhile picture of life stage, media behaviors and activity preferences. Unfortunately, quantitative information cannot tell a planner why the behaviors exist.

To understand why, the best thing a planner can do is to go out and talk with the core male target one on one, preferably in their life environments. If you have not yet talked to groups of dads and husbands, you should; there are interesting things you will learn about what drives their behaviors. Here's a preview of what you could expect to learn.

Daily Patterns

Once life happens, an inevitable list of to-dos ensues. Significant amounts of industry commentary have been devoted to the soccer mom and her complicated, busy life. Less time has been invested in exploring Dad's list. While activities that make up the lists are different, one thing is clear when soccer moms and their counterparts are compared: Both lives are equally crammed with scheduled activity.

One result of these schedules is routine. Whether it's the time of day slotted for scanning the local paper or the specific walking route to arrive at the Starbucks two blocks from work, patterns and routines fill the day. The challenge for planners is to study behaviors deeply and identify which patterns result from necessity and which result from the search for islands of comfort in a busy day.

Brand messages will fit better into some media contact points associated with patterns than others. Planners who have a grasp of how the brand fills needs for necessity or comfort will have a good idea of which contact points make the best sense.

Attention Deficit

Another natural outgrowth of busy schedules is attention deficit. When there's a lot to do, a lot to concentrate on, it's hard to devote proper attention to everything. This circumstance is important for planners to account for in media plans.

If men are so busy that they find it difficult to concentrate on the many tasks at hand, it follows that marketing communications will have little priority. They will either choose to ignore messages or will pay scant attention to those that they do have time for. Whichever the case, planners must pay special attention to ratcheting up the attention quotient whenever possible.

Quick Updates

Men can't escape their hunter-gatherer roots. They know that even amid busy life routines, they still need to keep on top of what's going on in the world, and they know where to quickly find information they need. Stock and sports tickers or traffic and weather on the 8s are examples of places men go for quick information. Environments that provide quick updates many get the attention lacking in other communication environments.

When men are faced with problems, one strategy they happily employ is to reach out to their "guy." Men always have a guy they can rely on with knowledge in an area beyond their experience. Their network of connections becomes invaluable in a busy life environment where they don't have the time to dive in and solve problems themselves.

The "my guy" phenomenon has two implications for planners. First, if there's a chance their brand can fill the "my guy" role for men in the target, planners should jump at the opportunity provided. Second, a brand may not be able to become the "guy," but there is significant opportunity in the form of word of mouth and trust inherent in "my guy" status. If a brand can do a good job of convincing opinion leaders of its value, it can have tremendous implications as opinion leaders share their knowledge down the line.

Noteworthy Events

Men make time for things that are important and focus their attention on them. Contrary to popular belief, many men indeed remember pending anniversaries and birthdays and will be sure to include appropriate planning in their schedules. Men, of course, are men, and they will also make time for the big game, whether it's on the weekend or during the week.

Big purchases also fall into this bucket. From autos to plasma screens to riding lawnmowers, men identify a priority need and carve out time needed to assess options and make a choice. The implication for planners: Connection of a brand's message to important events can help the message stand out from the clutter.

Men enjoy fulfilling the role of provider. It's why they hate to ask for directions. How can they succeed as a provider if someone else is consulted for directions? It's also why they'll show off that new grill or pull up the hood and recount to a neighbor the benefits of a hemi engine. It's a way for them to find validation.

Shopping Behaviors

Many of the life behaviors also manifest themselves in men's shopping behaviors. Men don't look at shopping the same way as women. They view it as more of a task to be completed versus a pleasurable pursuit. As such, shopping is somewhat of an expedition for men: Get in, find the item sought and get out.

The reason men are able to be effective at this is that they use their information-gathering skills to essentially complete part of the shopping process before they ever arrive at the retail portion of the task. Once armed with knowledge, they will visit brick-and-mortar locations, confident they can carry on a cogent conversation with salespeople. Since men like to bask in the provider role, being able to ask intelligent questions of salespeople or having newly learned information confirmed as accurate is important to them.

Men will talk to their key "guy" as part of the process.

Other Media Implications

If a planner has no clear indication of when the brand may be on the target's radar screen, it would be wise to maintain as much weekly presence as affordable. Presence in more weeks maximizes odds that brand messages will be out there when men happen to need them.

Conventionality is likely to get lost in the clutter. Simply running spots on-air may not be enough to capture attention in busy life circumstances. Planners should look for ways to add a twist to the placement selection to help it stand out from familiarity.

Clearly, men rely on those they believe to be authorities, whether it's their "guy" or a sports ticker. Planners should strive to ensure that messages appear in vehicles that reflect the stature the brand is seeking to achieve.

Men also demonstrate that relationships are important to them. It's important to them to have a network of friends they can call on for help. They rely on trusted information sources to navigate their lives.

Planners should acknowledge this understanding in plans, leveraging environments that provide service or engender relationships. When brands are connected to these contact points, planners demonstrate real understanding of consumer behavior and go a long way toward creating impact for their brand in the marketplace.

Mark Dominiak is principal strategist of marketing, communication and context for Insight Garden.

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