

M2Moms™ and M2W™ E-ssentials May Feature: Life Uninterrupted—A Look Back at M2W

By Patti Minglin

I like to live my life uninterrupted. I don't compartmentalize very well and I am often known to throw a load of laundry into the washer, pacify a screaming toddler and send invoices to my clients all within the same time period. I live a harried, crazy life—and I wouldn't want it any other way. After attending the third annual M2W Conference, I realized that I am not an anomaly—I am a typical woman. A woman, who as a consumer, looks for brands to make it easier for her to solve life's daily challenges with ease—not necessarily try and change the life she lives.

This was my first official M2W Conference and I walked into the beautiful Chicago Cultural Center wearing several different hats: media executive, female consumer, writer/editor for M2W E-ssentials. I am a mom, a wife and a part-time business owner. I am the purchaser of all things big and small for my different worlds and I can usually see through marketing strategies and sales tactics with ease (all those years of publishing have really come in handy). I sat down to record the conference details with just a little bit of good old-fashioned media skepticism—looking to find disconnect between marketing/business jargon and real world applications. However, by the end of M2W, I not only learned more about the business of women as consumers, but I learned a great deal about myself as well.

From Brains to Handbags

As Nan mentioned in her welcoming remarks, “Oh, the places you will go.” And go we did—from the inside of the female (and even male) brain to the inside of the female purse—we hit them all. We learned from the speakers and from each other ways to engage women with our brands and grow our businesses. We were encouraged to share our ideas and actively participate in the entire conference—giving us all a sense of ownership over what we would take back to our offices.

I filled up notebook page after page with all the information that was shared. From the latest research statistics and trends to unique product launches and marketing campaigns—if it was being done well, it was being talked about during M2W. While it was difficult to narrow things down into overall “themes”, here are a few of my broad “take away” ideas:

1. We need to acknowledge the differences.

As the first speaker of M2W, Stephanie Ouyoumjian, SVP, Strategic Planning, Publicis, said it best when she said “You can't change what you don't acknowledge.” Companies that try to ignore the differences between men and women are missing valuable opportunities to tap into those consumer qualities that are uniquely male or female. Women have moved beyond multi-tasking to multi-minding and not only differ in how they make purchases, but in how they consume media.

2. Women are demanding consumers.

During an onstage interview with *Fast Company's* Linda Tischler, Dennis Syracuse, SVP, Sony Style Retail, stated just that--women are a more demanding consumer. The entire Sony Style

concept was built around trying to appeal and satisfy female consumers. From store designs to customer service, women want and expect more from today's brands. And, for those companies worried about sacrificing their core, male audience in favor of pursuing the female dollar? "If you meet the needs of a woman, you will exceed the needs of a man," said Delia Passi, President, Medelia Communications.

3. Life comes in stages, not generations.

A number is just a shoe size when it comes to women today and marketers looking to really build a relationship with their female consumers need to pay more attention to their life stage, not their age. "Don't make the mistake of marketing to old stereotypes," said Marti Barletta, Founder, The TrendSight Group. Most plastic surgery happens before a woman turns 50, single women are buying more than shoes and makeup and even the most financially stable of women (think Oprah) has a deep-seeded fear of becoming a "bag lady." Women connect with each other based on where they are—not how old they are. Brands need to do the same.

4. It's all about the relationship.

"It isn't as much about managing the brand as it is managing the relationship," said Mark Baynes, CMO, Kellogg Company North America. Brands cannot afford to not be relevant in the lives of their female consumers, and finding new ways to weave a product or service into her daily life will solidify the bond. Although Jergens has a larger market share, Bath & Body Works is often more top-of-mind with women. Why? "Smaller bottles," said Kelley Styring, Principal, InsightFarm, Inc, "They made their product easier to fit into a woman's purse."

A Different Kind of Conference

As a former publisher, I have been to my fair share of industry conferences, so I was intrigued when I heard someone mention during the first morning break, "This conference has a totally different feel than any other conference I have been to." As I glanced through the event program, I began to wonder how it could be different. After all, it was filled with presentations, breaks and lunch—what could possibly make this conference experience different than the others?

The first glaring difference: networking. Yes, I realize that every conference you attend has the phrase "networking opportunities" somewhere in the brochure, but with most events you barely get time to sit down and talk with people outside of the conference sessions and there always seems to be segregated "cliques" of colleagues that don't venture far from their designated tables. From the opening night reception held in a small, intimate setting to the coordinated "Speed Networking" program, event attendees were seen mingling throughout the entire conference. Speakers not only asked the audience to participate during their session, but actually stayed after their presentations, answered attendees' questions and passed out their business cards. The atmosphere was just right for active—not passive—networking opportunities.

An impressive mix of speakers and presenters kept the program flowing over the two-day period—and I really do mean "flowing." Every presentation seemed to compliment one another and you actually felt as if you continued to gain new insight and information with each one. By the end of the first day, you were not exhausted and overwhelmed, but energized and enthused—looking forward to another day of ideas and strategies to build upon what you already had

learned. The presentations were filled with practical information that could be implemented at companies large and small and were enhanced by the great “giveaways” that were available. No one left with oversized logo bags filled with unsharpened pencils and outdated calendars, but rather new marketing books authored by some of the speakers, attractive notebooks with pens you would actually use outside of the conference arena and access to the M2W E-ssentials newsletter—a way to keep attendees connected to the latest marketing-to-women trends and ideas long after the conference has ended.

As with any conference, most people enjoy commenting on the facility and the food and M2W did not disappoint on either of them. Held in the Chicago Cultural Center, the genuine beauty of the building itself made it easy to relax and settle in for a great day of learning. In between sessions, people could be found wandering around the building and taking in the charm of a true Chicago institution or just sitting in a quiet area looking over Millennium Park as they checked voicemails or e-mail. From breakfast to lunch, the food was restaurant-quality and made it easy to linger over lunchtime conversations. The atmosphere made it feel more like a retreat than just a conference.

Life Interrupted

As Nan gave her closing comments, I looked around the room to see numerous people hurriedly exchanging last minute business cards and promising to forward information to one another once they returned to the office. The networking had continued until the last possible moment and I was almost disappointed that our time together was coming to an end. I was refreshed after this two-day event and I was so glad I had the opportunity to be part of it and truly felt as if my professional and personal life benefited greatly.

Conferences are not always high on the list of priorities for many professionals, but taking the time to attend those events that help you perfect your craft or expand your knowledge-base is one of the best ways to literally grow your business. M2W gave us all a chance to take a break from the daily grind of our regular lives and really dive into the world of marketing-to-women. For just a few days, we were able to send calls directly to our voicemails, avoid endless meetings and check e-mails periodically as we gained new insights and built new relationships. Both of which are certain to help us achieve our personal business goals in the future.

I guess some of life’s interruptions are worth it.

Patti Minglin has been in the publishing industry for more than 16 years serving in senior-level management positions for Thomson Newspapers, Content That Works and The Blinder Group. She is the former associate publisher for Chicago Parent magazine and currently works as a freelance writer and editor of M2W and M2Moms E-ssentials. Minglin resides in Aurora, IL with her husband and three children.

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