

Mom knows best: Insights on marketing to mothers from a leading value retailer

Issued by [Ackermans](#)

29 Aug 2017

If retailers want to truly add value to the lives of mothers, they need to forget their preconceptions of 'what moms want'. A genuine understanding of the priorities and challenges faced by mothers within their target market is critical - and if this is not taken to heart, retailers run the risk of alienating this powerful group.

So says Karin Lombard-de Kock, mom of two and Customer Insights Manager at leading value retailer, Ackermans. "We conduct focus groups and a lot of other research to gain an in-depth understanding of our customers' evolving needs, explains Lombard-de Kock. "It's a regular exercise to ensure that we're not guilty of making assumptions about shoppers based on misinformed notions.

"We identified that the majority of our customers are mothers who are often the sole or main breadwinners in their families, and are thus under extreme financial pressure as well as being time poor. What became evident to us during these sessions is that many marketers are guilty of tailoring their communication to mothers based on outdated ideas about what it means to be a mom."

Lombard-de Kock shares a couple of insights gained during these sessions.

Multiple roles

While a fundamental part of a mother's life is her children, she has many other roles, and brand communication should reflect this. "Moms have careers, they look after the house; they are sociable and often leaders within their communities. They want to look and feel good, even if they're on a tight budget.

"We considered how we could add value to her life; from clothing specials, to competitions, to determining what type of information would help her in her various roles. We ask her questions, and the responses guide the content we publish in our magazine, blog, Facebook and other platforms. These cover a wide range of topics, including career advice, budgeting tips, family interest, fashion features and more.

"We also spend a lot of time analysing trends and best-selling colours to make sure we are delivering not only according to our customers' needs, but also their desires."

Savvy savers

A key finding for Ackermans was that financial pressure is a huge burden for many South African moms, but particularly within the retailer's target market. "However, while our customers may be cash-strapped, they are extremely savvy with money and are quick to identify clever ways they can stretch their rand further.

"Through comparison shopping, bargain hunting and longer-lead decision-making, our customer ensures she is getting the best value for her money. She's an expert at managing her income versus expenses."

With this in mind, communicating value is key, as is offering relevant financial products, such as an interest-free (for a specified period) lay-by option. "Price is important for our customers; we need to show them bang for buck," explains Lombard-de Kock.

Her child is a reflection of her values

“Through talking to our customers, we established that moms feel an immense sense of pride in their kids, and it’s very important to them that their children are well dressed and well groomed at all times. When we advertise kids’ clothing to our moms, we show them what’s trendy but also functional and practical, so that she gets maximum value for her money.”

Get to know her

While marketers may broadly classify a group as “mothers”, within this context there is nuance; mothers have different priorities based on their individual circumstances and life stage. Retailers need to be wary of sounding patronising, or making assumptions such as "motherhood is the toughest job in the world!" when many moms argue that they don't view having kids as another job.

“In short, marketers are often guilty of thinking of moms in traditional or one-dimensional roles, forgetting that they are multi-faceted individuals, says Lombard-de Kock.

“Constantly engage in a dialogue with your customers to keep pace with their evolving needs, and identify areas where you can truly make a difference in their lives.”

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