

Chapter 13 Conclusion

Today's stay-at-home moms (SAHMs) are unlike their predecessors in many ways. They're notably at ease with technology; they're at home on the Internet and with electronic communications such as chat and e-mail. They're confident about their professional abilities, and they expect to be able to weave in and out of the workforce as it suits their needs. They're devoted to family and feel that work should adapt to fit family and lifestyle needs rather than the other way around.

To understand their sometimes contradictory attitudes, it's a good idea to look at how Gen X moms' own childhoods shaped their values. Women in this generation were the first to grow up as "latchkey" kids in large numbers; many went through the painful process of watching their parents get divorced. As young adults, they entered a workforce that didn't seem to have room for them. They're the first American generation to grow up without the expectation of being more affluent than their parents, and in many cases, they've had to borrow money from their parents or move back in with them to get established in their post-college years.

Now that they're starting their own families—much later than previous generations—they're keenly interested in quality of life, and they define that differently than their parents did. They place a high value on spending time with their children, and many SAHMs have made considerable financial sacrifices to be able to do so. Spending so much time on their own in their preteen and teen years has given them a sense of independence, and they bring this viewpoint to creating lifestyles that suit them.

Gen X (and Y) moms' approach to managing the often competing needs of work and family is very different from that of Boomer moms. Where Boomers sought to "have it all" by juggling full-time work with raising their families, many Gen X and Y moms prefer to focus on one area at a time. Others want to (or need to, for financial reasons) work while raising children, but they strive to exercise as much control as possible over how they integrate the two into their lifestyles. When their employers won't accommodate their needs by offering flexible work options, many

opt to leave and start their own businesses. Four in 10 self-employed moms count former employers among their clients, according to BSM Media.

While they describe themselves first and foremost as moms, SAHMs don't want marketers to peg them solely as maternal. They're comfortable with their bodies, and they're defining a new, sexier way to look at pregnancy and motherhood. They're just as adventurous, and in some cases, edgy, as they were before they had kids. Their generation invented "extreme sports," and they want to share their enthusiasm for skate- and snowboarding, rock climbing, and mountain biking with their kids.

Gen X (and Y) moms' core values include self-reliance and creativity, and many cherished an "outsider" status in their teens that still influences their views of themselves. It's not surprising that they love iPods; women of this generation feel a strong connection to music and relish the ability to customize every aspect of their lives.

It's a mistake to peg these moms as traditionalists, although their emphasis on the importance of family and religion can make them seem that way. The key to understanding them is to recognize that they're dedicated to structuring their lives around what they believe is important—even when that means sacrificing material gains. As shoppers, they want value for their money, and they'll do the research to ensure they get it. As women, they're interested in fashion and beauty products—as long as they're reasonably priced—they want to look good because it makes them feel good about themselves. As moms, they consider themselves the safeguards and leaders of their families—in matters both practical and emotional.

To capture their loyalty, marketers must offer them value—in terms of relevant, useful content, and/or attractive incentives and discounts. Marketing efforts must reflect SAHMs' reality by portraying moms who are believable and not too "perfect"-looking, with stories they can relate to. Companies must be straightforward in their dealings, behave as good corporate citizens (and disseminate that information through trustworthy channels), and present a human face.