

PROGNOSIS FOR 2010: MORE DISCOVERY, MORE COLOR

Howard Pulchin, United States

This fall, ABC introduced a critically acclaimed comedy series called "Modern Family." It looks at the lives of three interconnected families: The family patriarch, recently remarried to a much younger Latino woman with a precocious 9-year-old son; his daughter's family - three kids and a Gen X husband who thinks he's hip as he mangles Web slang; and his son - married to a man and raising their recently adopted baby girl from Vietnam.

The stuff of fiction, you may say? Nope, look around and discover the world has changed - and not just in terms of how we communicate with each other. Yes, the Internet and technology have changed our lives immeasurably (I remember having to go out to the NYC delis at 11:30 pm searching for an early edition of tomorrow's NY Times to read articles to my clients).

But as importantly, we're no longer living in stereotypical roles. We're being more discriminating. We're no longer on a simple progression from childhood to retirement. All of us are re-evaluating what's important and what our priorities are and should be.

You hear marketers talk a lot about reaching the Millennials and moms, as well they should. But is the marketing chorus as loud as it should be about men (or even Boomers or Gen X)?

A reconsideration of men and a plug for Boomers and Gen X too

In the not-too-long-ago 1970s, a pop singer named Helen Reddy had a hit song, "I am Woman" that served as a quasi-anthem for the then-emerging "women's liberation movement." The song began, "I am woman, hear me roar, in numbers too big to ignore..."

Fast forward to today and consider how marketers consider or target men in their outreach. While the good news is that we are beginning to see more brands recognize men as "an audience," it is still apparent that despite the large adult male population, men still are largely being ignored as a marketing target when it comes to many consumer household products (it was gratifying to see a diet product advertising heavily with football players during one weekend's games). It's almost as if we need to shake up the singular dimensional portrayal of today's males, in some ways dating back to the 1970s (and earlier), exemplified by another pop culture reference - the Brady household, where Mike Brady worked, while Carol Brady (with housekeeper Alice, of course) ran the home.

It's not so simple anymore.

The other day, I conducted my own simple, one off social experiment. In the 15-block span from my apartment to the office, I counted the number of adults escorting their children to school. I observed 30 sets of children being escorted. Fifteen were escorted by a female, 12 by a male and three by both a male and a female. Of course, this was too limited a view to draw significant conclusions from, but my cursory observation showed an almost even split in the childcare morning ritual by men and women.

Our own Edelman research from two years ago showed that men claimed an ever growing role in being a decision maker of household goods, and a growing importance on quality of life issues versus professional ambitions. Given the economic situation of the past 15 months, facts emerged that pointed to there being more women in the workforce than men. More women at work, more men at home represent a very changed dynamic. And naturally we cannot just look at households as being defined by "having a male and female partner".

It's time we took a wider view of adult males today - and once we do, we'll find a large population receptive to hearing messages usually targeted to women. With the possible exception of children's products, my partner and my shopping cart probably resembles the shopping carts of females: we buy milk, paper towels, toothpaste, vegetables, laundry products, olive oil, house plants, etc. We maintain our home and are responsible for buying the products that line our refrigerator, kitchen and bathroom cabinets, and closets. So do married men, single men, divorced men, single dads, straight dads, gay dads (one of the most talked about news stories at the end of 2009 concerned David Goldman, the New Jersey single father who reclaimed custody of his son in Brazil. Clearly David Goldman will be responsible for maintaining his home).

There's opportunity in us men. We go to stores and make purchases (I see just as many men as women in my local Whole Foods). But there is even greater opportunity in recognizing that not all men are the Vegas loving, sports watching, beer drinking sort. It's so easy to stereotype. And therefore it's easy to miss opportunities for brands to engage with a large population. I may hear a brand's message targeted to moms, but I probably won't be engaged. I'd probably be more loyal to a brand that recognized who I was, not just what marketers may have stereotyped my gender as.

The same applies to Boomers and Gen X. Consider what each group has experienced in their lifetimes. For the average Boomer, they watched "Hair", not in Tony-winning revival format, but in real life; they saw the first man walk on the moon and watched in horror as the Space Shuttle with female astronaut Christine McAuliffe explode; they watched the downfall of one President and the impeachment trials of another; They saw the greed of Wall Street explode in 1987 and then shatter everything in 2008; they were thrilled by Thriller and saddened by MJ's death; they witnessed crises ranging from AIDs to Darfur, and grew to accept Terrorism as a continual threat. They threw out typewriters, rolodexes, film, cassettes (even phone land lines) and welcomed in just about everything digital. They experienced change. They lived through change. And they are smarter, healthier and creating more opportunities for themselves than ever before.

We need to consider people - who they are in reality and not in fiction. Discover how different people are living today and you'll discover a whole new way of engaging with them.

Beyond reevaluating what we know/think about groups of people, let me make a couple of predictions about 2010:

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1. We'll see more a natural pull toward real experiences, live events and face-to-face interactions

Yes, I keep in touch with friends via Facebook (a bit too much, a little too few phone calls). But we're continuing to see more and more people brought together live via events and experiences.

More than a billion dollars of tickets were sold worldwide to James Cameron's *Avatar*. People are going to the movies. Late in the winter, the "Monday Night Football" game in the U.S. (on cable, not broadcast network) was the highest-ranked program that week. In the week leading up to Christmas, one could barely move on London's Oxford or Regent Streets, as shoppers mobbed the stores. Halloween 2009 was big around the world – and not just with the kids; more and more adults took part in the celebration with fanciful and imaginative costumes. Marches – either against or for an issue or cause are picking up steam and participants. I wasn't among them, but CNN showed visuals of the millions of people who welcomed in 2010 either in Times Square, along Hong Kong's waterfront or near the London Eye. And more and more people are coming together around causes and issues important to themselves personally and their communities.

2. Consumers are going to continue to be more discriminating about the products they buy

And it won't just be on price alone. We've been studying a consumer who we label the "care where it comes from" individual. She/he is the person who loves knowing the ingredients in the foods they buy. They love looking at restaurant menus to see which farms grow/raise the foods they use. They look at calorie boards/menu listings and make smarter decisions based on that. They're being more knowledgeable about what fruits and vegetables to buy per season and thinking of inventive ways to use them.

And it's just not about food. They'll flock to mass stores to buy limited edition works of the designers they love. A John Derian Target product is still a John Derian product. We'll see more collaboration between people who matter (witness John Bartlett's recent collaboration with Rogues Gallery or the upcoming Rogues Gallery collection for L.L. Bean).

We're beginning to recognize what is in our cleaning products, beauty products and even the greenness of the hotels we are staying in.

3. We'll see more re-evaluation of what's important and what our priorities should be

Let's face it: 2009 and much of 2008 deflated us. But it also forced us all to re-evaluate what's important and what's not. It only caused more people to pick up on a slowly building reality of the Personal Reset. Generation Reset spans all demographics and income levels and will only get larger. It's the Millennial who decides that the corporate path is not right for her and opts to spend a couple of years working with disadvantaged groups. It's the Gen X woman who opts to leave her job and start a

bakery. It's the Boomer who always loved wine and decides to start a vineyard.

And it's not only about careers and jobs. It's reprioritizing how we spend our days. It could be those techno-rebellers who say my Blackberry is left behind on vacation and turned off after dinner. It could be making resolutions to visit museums once a month or read more books. It could be about making real plans to see our friends and family, instead of just communicating on Facebook.

In the end, it's all about taking the time to observe and discover.

There's so much for us to see if we open our eyes more widely. The Web makes it so easy. Opening our doors and walking outside is just as easy. There are data points all around them. We gather them by connecting facts, observations and trends to build insights. Insights illuminate a fresh objective reality and do lead to new opportunities for marketers.

Put a little more discovery into 2010 – about people, about what they are experiencing and doing, what they are being more discriminating about and what their new priorities are. A new world, a more colorful, three-dimensional world will quickly come into focus.