

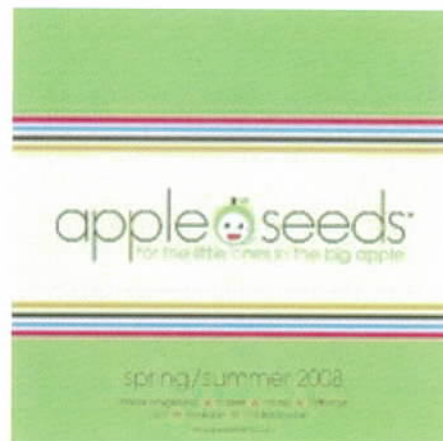
New parent marketing power

David Ward

April 07, 2008

Not only does the birth of a baby trigger a flurry of new purchases of everything from disposable diapers and toys to cars and houses, but many parents are also eager to learn about child-rearing and they actively seek out the messages marketers are looking to deliver.

There are between 4 and 4.5 million births in the US every year, and those parents are often prime targets, says Chris Hulse, president of Stamford, CT-based Madison Direct Marketing. "Between 75% and 85% of all people having kids can be identified by name and address," he says.



New parents also tend to subscribe to parenting publications and opt in on Web sites in large numbers, which means there are plenty of outside lists to acquire. However, Hulse stresses that "marketers have to be careful to screen those lists. "Make sure that [the prospects] look and act like new parents, when you compare them to a national file," he suggests.

That is partly why brands targeting parents should focus most of their efforts on their internal lists, says Tricia Robinson-Pridemore, StrongMail's VP of market and product strategy.

"Your house file is always going to [perform better than] any other list you acquire, because you have an expressed opt-in from people who want to hear more about your products," says Robinson-Pridemore, who helps clients such as eToys manage its e-mail campaigns.

Because parents tend to actively seek out information, the conventional wisdom is that online channels are currently the best way to reach them. But Allison Schlanger, co-founder of New York City-based Apple Seeds says her company has great success by combining offline and online tools. Apple Seeds offers parents of children up to age five services such as classes, an indoor playground and a hair salon. The company, she says, leverages both opt-in and acquired lists.

Schlanger recommends not focusing your messages on one parent or the other. "We aim our messages at the family as a whole and we look at various moments in their lives, such as school closings or holidays as opportunities to market to them," she explains.

apple seeds: Direct mail brochure

apple seeds used a brochure as a mailer in an ongoing campaign that combines both online and offline channels aimed at New York City parents. By leveraging seasonal opportunities such as school holidays with a narrow geographic target of parents within 30 blocks of its Manhattan location, apple seeds' campaign has not only expanded enrollment in its indoor playground and parents/kids classes but also dramatically driven its hair salon, boutique and birthday party businesses.