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Uncorking the Mommy Market: Phenomenal Facebook following has Marilé Borden contemplating the future of Moms Who Need Wine

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Sometimes clicking “Like” on Facebook is the most engagement a busy person can muster. But there’s a chance that at the other end of that news feed a business-minded marketing professional is carefully crafting messages to increase engagement and boost the value of her Facebook audience. Those likes or comments—from a strong base of Facebook followers who pay attention to posts—have value. Or do they?

Some people, like Marilé (pronounced mare-ih-LAY) Borden ’94, are banking on the belief that they must. At the forefront of the bold new frontier where there is profit to be made from Facebook pages, Borden is the founder of Moms Who Need Wine, a page that, at press time, had the interest of 425,000 people (formerly called fans).

What started as a fun experiment for an advertising professional quickly became an opportunity as the likes poured in. Almost three years later, Borden has appeared on the Gayle King Show and in the Huffington Post, among other places. Although MWNW has yet to turn much profit, she is optimistic. “I have a lot of ears and a lot of eyeballs—and that’s valuable to somebody,” she said from her living room in suburban Northborough, Mass., where she lives with her husband and two children, Jack, 8 and Lia, 5.

Much of Borden’s day is spent on her leather couch, laptop on lap, fireplace to the right, kitchen to the left. She has a home office but it’s in the basement and going there makes work feel too much like work, she says. She is surrounded by photos of the six-month world tour she took with her husband before they had children—a trip born of the same “why not” attitude that inspired MWNW. “We have people say to us, ‘Gosh, I wish I could do that,’” she said. “It’s like ‘Well, you can. Just do it.’”

Her foray into the “mommy market” began when she was adopting her daughter from China. She started reading adoption blogs and “was fascinated by this sort of subculture of the mommy blog world,” she said. “It was like ‘Gosh, I’m not the only one who just fed my kids Oreo cookies for breakfast and tried to justify it as a food group.’” She saw an opportunity and began strategizing based on having watched DailyCandy, a daily e-mail feed, sell to Comcast for $125 million.
In 2009 Borden saw that “moms were flocking to Facebook,” so she decided to start a fan page to see what happened. She knew the name was critical to attracting fans.

“I literally launched Moms Who Need Wine on a whim,” she said. At the crux are the notions that moms are busy, that they prefer reading bite-sized bits, and that many long for a community of like-minded people. Though much of the media attention paid to MWNW has been related to marketing alcohol to mothers, Borden says it’s not about that. Moms “are admitting it’s a tough job, and are looking for validation,” she said. “It’s about moms who need moms.” Or, as one Facebook mom wrote in response to a query, “It’s a community of bright modern women who balance work, kids, and life’s challenges and then raise a glass to celebrate making it through another day.” (See sidebar.)

Another wrote: “Good wine recommendations, funny blogs, excellent stories from moms just like me who aren’t the apron-wearing perfect June Cleaver-esque type.” While the Facebook page sees the most activity, MWNW is also a website with blogs from handpicked mom bloggers who tell stories about things like 3-year-olds wetting their pants and tricking kids to be well-behaved by making them think they’re being defiant.

The site includes wine reviews as well as information about the California Wine Club’s Wine Mom Series, which was created for MWNW and includes recipe cards for pairings. Still, despite this robust site, the majority of MWNW’s activity happens on Facebook. “It’s become this sort of one-stop-shop for moms,” Borden said, “like, ‘I can get great deals on Facebook because I’m linked to all my favorite brands, I can connect to my friends, I can pass some time, I can feel connected when I’m sitting home.’”

Borden has amassed a huge audience of financial decision-makers. So why aren’t companies breaking down her door? “It’s like where the mommy blog was five years ago,” said Borden. Colby trustee Betsy Morgan ’90, president of the website The Blaze, points to celebrity Kim Kardashian being paid to include brands in her tweets. But on Facebook? “I don’t think anybody’s written the playbook or the guidebook on how to do it,” Morgan said.

Borden, who spends about a third of her workweek on this venture (she runs a small advertising firm, Metal Creative, which she calls her “lifeblood”), doesn’t know of anyone who is making money in this way on Facebook. Similar entities—Facebook pages that are essentially brands in themselves, such as Fans of Being a Mom and Positively Positive—are also still trying to figure it out. “We definitely want to utilize Facebook as a way to monetize it,” said Positively Positive co-founder Eric Handler, “but we’re just exploring right now.” Positively Positive is one of a handful of pages similar to MWNW with a large audience base (1.1 million) and no product, per se, aside from a website. “It’s definitely uncharted territory, but we’re going with a leap of faith and with the number of people, and we’re going to sail the ship and see what happens.”

One of the challenges, according to Borden and Fans of Being a Mom publisher Meredith Tedford, is that Facebook restricts what page owners can and can’t do—and keeps changing the rules. There’s a rule against selling status updates, Borden said. And against hosting a brand’s application tab. “It’s going to become harder and harder...
In a world where everyone trying to be ‘perfect’; the perfect size, the perfect parent, the perfect cook, teacher, has become the ‘norm’ it’s comforting and reassuring to know that being imperfect is much more common. And getting to share in everyone’s manic crazy hair pulling days and stories makes me feel like part of a larger much happier group of perfectly Happy being imperfect ppl!

MWNW taught me that needing a little ‘mommy juice’ every now and then doesn’t make me a bad mommy ;)

The humor from all over the world - always good to have a giggle and realize you aren’t the only one going through crazy kid times.

We are moms. And we all know what that really means. Just in a typical day, we are: short order cooks, maids, sock finders, nurses, dog walkers, ATMs, chauffeurs, homework checkers, ring leaders (how many fights have you broken up just in the last 5 minutes?), managers of the pantry (someone has to throw out the empty boxes of cereal!), personal shoppers, therapists, and MY personal favorite—hostess. Over all, over worked and waaaaay under paid. How the heck do you expect to make it through the day without the thought of wine?

Raising kids is not easy and it’s nice to know that there are others who don’t have it all together also.

I love MWNW because it is a blessing to feel ok about a little chill out glass, share amongst lovely other Mums who also need a little relaxation and not feel guilty as of course motherhood brings enough guilt as it is! Xxx

MWNW are dead on about everything! No sugar coating the life of a real mama!

Therapy in a glass..... Who needs a shrink!!!!!

I think the thing I most enjoy at MWNW is the time we share a thread about the lies we’ve told our children or the things we did in order to keep our sanity. I know that not only am I ‘normal’, but that there are hundreds more just like me out there who wonder if they’re scarring their offspring for life, or just really trying to pick their battles. And coming together over a glass of wine, even through a thread, is always a wonderful time.

So much nicer than discussing politics!

and harder to bring third-party advertising into our pages,” said Borden. And yet, since it hosts the primary audience, “You’re sort of at the mercy of Facebook.”

“I’m having to reevaluate where the potential is,” she said. Constantly.

But Borden continues to come up with new ways of bringing other brands into her page. Just prior to the holidays she hosted her second “Mom’s Night In” event, in which she and two other moms connected via live chat with Facebook moms to talk, relax, and taste wines. “Think of it as MWNW meets The View (only without the fancy camera crew),” Borden wrote in a promo. Windsor Vineyards, which sells design-your-own custom labeled wines (read: holiday gifts), sponsored the event. She also promoted Windsor in status updates, with a special deal for MWNW fans.

On a smaller scale she sells some logo merchandise on the website CafePress.com, and she is considering selling wine glasses through a fulfillment house (“I am not going to spend my life packaging up wine glasses,” she said). She has experimented with a group deal concept—like a smaller, targeted Groupon—but so far that hasn’t taken off. Other revenue possibilities come through the website (momswhoneedwine.com), with links from the Facebook page to the specific blog post.

Key to building and maintaining a successful page is keeping readers engaged and interested. For Borden that means coming up with fun, clever things to post, in addition to links to momswhoneedwine.com. The more likes and comments, the better. Posting simple questions that don’t require thoughtful responses has proven successful, Borden says. Perhaps the best so far? “Sweet or salty?” Nothing to do with wine—just a fun question on which most people have an opinion. Recently Wednesdays became confession days. One favorite: “My husband likes to wear a shirt/pant combo that I find appalling ... so I make sure that the two items are never clean at the same time.”

But neither the initiatives nor the loyal readers have yet to bring in the kind of revenue that would allow Borden to give up her other day job. “It’s so funny,” she said. “People are like, ‘You’re so successful,’ and I’m like, ‘Yes, I do have a lot of fans.’” She laughs. “But I still haven’t quite figured out what to do with them.”

Still, her new expertise has allowed her to broaden her advertising business, and she’s open to—and eager for—new opportunities. “I’m segueing the ad business more into the mommy market and more into social media, which has been fun.”

Ultimately fun is what has kept MWNW alive. Moms have fun posting wine jokes on the Facebook page and reading humorous blog posts about the challenges of motherhood. Borden has fun fostering this community and showing up in the spotlight from time to time. When her name and quote appeared next to Jack Kerouac’s and Princess Diana’s in Forbes magazine’s “Thoughts on the Business of Motherhood” in May, Borden enjoyed sharing the news. “A couple of my brothers are very successful businessmen,” she said. “So I wrote to them and I was like, ‘Okay, sure you just sold your company for sixty-three-million dollars—but have you ever been quoted in Forbes?’”

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