



## **Note to Marketers: Dad is Disappointed in You.**

John January, SVP, Executive Creative Director, Sullivan Higdon & Sink  
john.january@shscom.com

Daddy isn't happy with most marketers according to a new survey just released by Sullivan Higdon & Sink. SHS asked 320 dads across the country about a variety of topics including fatherhood, media and advertising, and how they plan to celebrate Father's Day. The results reveal men who are striving to fulfill some relatively new expectations of fatherhood while grappling with issues their own fathers faced.

### **Dads and the media**

- 75 percent of dads who took the survey couldn't name a single advertisement that spoke to them in a relevant way.
- 54 percent believe the way fathers are portrayed in media and pop culture is out of touch with reality.

While 46 percent believe advertising portrays fathers in a positive way (a surprisingly high percentage given the amount of "dumb dad" creative that's out there), only 33 percent believe advertising portrays fathers in a realistic way. Clearly, marketers are whiffing on most of their opportunities to connect.

So, what's missing? Perhaps it's a more overt reflection of how today's dads differ from their own fathers and, more important, the pipe-smoking-paper-reading-leave-me-alone-when-I-get-home Ward Cleaver stereotype.

### **Dawn of the New Balance Dad**

- 87 percent believe that being a good father is an important part of who they are.
- 63 percent of respondents believe that they spend more time with their kids than their own father did with them.
- Yet, "work" and "financial" responsibilities were the top-box villains as "obstacles to being a better father."



**Note to Marketers:  
Dad is Disappointed in You.**

The relatively new expectation to be “high touch” can be, for many dads, at opposition with the more traditional expectation to “provide.” You can’t work late every night and on Saturday and still be at all the soccer games, dance recitals and parent/teacher conferences.

- Maybe that’s why 49 percent believe that fatherhood is more difficult for them than it was for their own dads.

Then again, this “new balance” comes with obvious benefits. 40 percent believe fatherhood is more rewarding today than it was for their dad.

### **The strong and less silent type**

Although men are confident in their parenting abilities, they aren’t afraid to ask others for advice. While we suspect that she may not always believe it, a child’s mom is the leading source of advice for dad about being a better parent (50 percent), followed by other dads (40 percent). A small but passionate percentage of dads turn to books, magazines and online resources such as parenting Web sites and blogs for sage wisdom.

Dads are also an active word-of-mouth audience. When asked what topics they’re likely to converse with friends, family and colleagues about on a given day, food & dining (54 percent), technology (52 percent), media & entertainment (52 percent), automotive (43 percent) and travel (41 percent) top the list of popular topics. Financial services, shopping and retail, beverages, telecommunications and home products were also chosen as daily conversation topics. Of those who have had recent conversations about specific brands (40 percent), Ford, Sony, Coca-Cola, Apple, Pepsi, Toyota, Chevy, Dell, Microsoft and Blackberry topped the list of most talked-about brands.

### **Father’s Day respite**

Not surprisingly, the majority of dads (80 percent) plan to celebrate Father’s Day this year. The majority of dads want to keep it simple – spend the day with family at home. Maybe breakfast in bed or a BBQ in the backyard with family. Material gifts are not a priority.

- In fact, only 31 percent plan to receive gifts from their children, and only 21 percent will give a gift to their own dad.



**Note to Marketers:  
Dad is Disappointed in You.**

That said, the gift of time in the form of a respite from responsibility is popular.

- Many respondents wrote about a desire to begin the day with an indulgent solo activity such as fishing or golf before returning to spend the remainder of the day with family.

**The bottom line**

The New Balance Dad doesn't believe he is perfect by any means. He is, however, actively concerned about improving the art of fatherhood. That's not to say he doesn't respect his own father's style, but there is a clear desire to be more "involved at home." Employers and marketers who choose to recognize, acknowledge and reflect this trend have an excellent opportunity to forge lasting relationships with these new and committed family men.