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Reaching Consumers at Work Could Be Next Great Frontier

New Study Says 93% of Americans Consult Colleagues Before Buying

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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Before they make a purchase, 93% of Americans consult their co-workers for advice, according to a new study from BIGresearch on socializing in the workplace.

The study from the independent consumer-research firm was conducted via WorkPlace Media's "proprietary permission-based network" of over 920,000 U.S. companies across a variety of industries. WorkPlace is a media company that helps brands reach consumers at work.

The survey offered some interesting insight into how much people socialize at work. Of the 3,389 U.S. employees surveyed in the study, 68% admitted socializing with co-workers during work breaks, and another 42% said they phoned, texted or e-mailed friends and family from the office during the work day.

Not absolute

"It's a traditionally advertising-free and uncluttered environment," said Stephanie Molnar, CEO of WorkPlace Media, who quite naturally considers marketing to at-work consumers an effective way to build brand awareness.

But "the fact that you talk to people does not necessarily mean that it's effective in terms of brand engagement or ability to shift beliefs or to shift attitudes," said Robert Passikoff, founder and president of Brand Keys. "It doesn't work as an absolute, and it doesn't work as an absolute for all categories."

In an August Brand Keys Brand-to-Media Engagement Assessment, a study that measures what percent various media contribute to a particular product's or product category's engagement, Mr. Passikoff said that of about 30 different media, word of mouth -- whether at work, home or elsewhere -- had the highest contribution for automobiles. But for financial services, broadcast TV played the biggest role, and for computers, online was most important.

Still in beginning stages

Ms. Molnar recognizes that marketing to at-work consumers is in its infancy stages. She estimates that less than 10% of U.S. companies partake in it, but she thinks it's a growing field. Ms. Molnar said the WorkPlace network reaches seven out of every 10 working Americans, which is more than the combined circulation of daily newspapers in the U. S.

"We're finding that marketers we talk to are extremely intrigued by this opportunity," she said.

The BIGresearch data was released in mid-October, although the results are from a larger At-Work Consumer Media & Shopping Behavior survey conducted in December 2007.