

Coupon Clippers Have Cause to Celebrate by Dave Willems

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Don't know if you're a member of the "coupon clippers anonymous" club or not, but the practice is alive and well, according to new Nielsen Company research. This is not only good news for those of us who appreciate a good coupon (don't you LOVE the half-offs and the BOGOs?), but also for many businesses who drive everything from awareness to loyalty with their offers.

I know I'm not alone when it comes to being a fan of couponing. We've got a handful of folks in our office, often the ones with children, who really appreciate them. Erin notes that she and her family celebrate the official start of the weekend each Friday by visiting a local eatery – and always use a coupon to lighten the impact a bit. They have two growing appetites of the four and, as she appropriately puts it, one kid's meal no longer yields an entire box of leftovers. So, it's coupons to the rescue.

She notes that the added convenience of online coupons has made it all the more workable to have a coupon in hand most everywhere they go. Yes, they still keep the handy stash of coupons organized neatly by category in envelopes, but now they have the luxury of checking online – even last-minute – to find something that fits the craving.

Certainly, with couponing, it's a brave new world in many ways. And it's becoming braver everyday thanks to mobile marketing, texting opportunities, and smart phone capabilities in general.

The Nielsen Company survey shows that coupon clipping is making a big comeback and has become a habit many American households have adopted these days. Obviously, big factors include the economy and the media's stronger attention on showcasing thrifty consumers.

Peaking in 1999 with 4.6 billion coupons redeemed annually, the use of coupons dropped significantly in the last decade, with reports showing only 2.6 billion redemptions in 2008. But since the recession started last year, that number is starting to climb again, with coupon usage up nearly 27% (numbers courtesy of Inmar).

While inserts in the Sunday paper continue to be the main source consumers turn to and grocery stores top the list of places coupons are redeemed, the means for how coupons are distributed and where they are used keeps expanding. An example: coupon redemption on the Internet grew 263% in 2009!

Now that coupons are no longer in fear of extinction, we're seeing them pop up everywhere, in all different formats – from direct mailers and in-store displays to frequent shopper cards and online savings codes. And food is just the start of where we can save. Look hard enough and you can find coupons for just about every kind of product and service – low-ticket items to high.

So is the resurgence of coupons only temporary? According to Nielsen and its numbers, the answer is no. With the economy just starting to bounce back and new jobs still at a minimum, it's expected that Americans will continue looking for ways to stretch their dollars. Plus, the variety of options and convenience to consumers makes it even likelier the coupon movement will continue gaining momentum. It's something for marketers to keep in mind as they develop their programs and a good thing for those of us coupon-clippers to know so we can keep the scissors sharp.

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