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Mother's Day a triumph of marketing

What do the following have in common: flowers, jewelry, candy, perfume, brunch, lunch and dinner? For one day a year, they all converge for the extreme marketing opportunity: Mother's Day. Mother's Day is one of the most commercially successful holidays in the U.S.

Even during troubled economic times in the U.S., according to the National Restaurant Association, Mother's Day is the most popular day of the year to dine out. Americans will spend billions on flowers, jewelry, spa treatments, and greeting cards. The movement to establish a day to honor mothers goes back to a hard-working and well-meaning Methodist laywoman, Anna Jarvis.

In 1912, Ann Jarvis trademarked the phrases "second Sunday in May" and "Mother's Day." She was specific about the location of the apostrophe; it was to be a singular possessive, so that each family would honor their mother, not a plural possessive commemorating all mothers in the world.

Anna Jarvis spent the first four decades of the 1900's promoting the new holiday, especially through Sunday schools. Churches now often recognize the oldest mother and the youngest or most recent mother in their congregations, and applaud the mother with the most children attending with her. There's a practice observed in some churches, of wearing a red flower in honor of living mothers and a white flower in memory of deceased mothers. This practice began via a florist jingle, promoted by the industry in hopes of widening the variety of flowers associated with the day. The jingle ran: "White flowers for Mother's memory. Bright flowers for Mother's living."

But commercialism quickly became one of the dominant outcomes. Jarvis had envisioned Mother's Day as "a holy day," "not as a holiday" by what she called "trade vandals and pirates." She repeatedly fought the florist industry and other groups. The founding of Mother's Day in 1908 was ill-timed to avoid such commercial influences: the flower delivery system, FTD was organized in 1910; the National Association of Greeting Card Manufacturers was formed in 1914; plus the advent of new advertising media.

Nine years after the first official Mother's Day, commercialization of the U.S. holiday became so rampant that the founder became a major opponent of what the holiday had become and spent her inheritance fighting what she saw as an abuse of the celebration. She criticized the practice of purchasing greeting cards, which she saw as a sign of being too lazy to write a personal letter.

In my classes, I discuss effective Marketing as including increased awareness, interest, desire and action. Marketing means communicating to your specific target market or audience. The founder of Mother's Day urged sons and daughters not to buy any gifts at all for Mother's Day, especially not flowers and greeting cards, but she encouraged people to visit or to write their mother a long letter. I'm encouraging the same.