

Publish your content on The Drum

Awards Creative Works Drum Network Labs Subscribe

Sign In

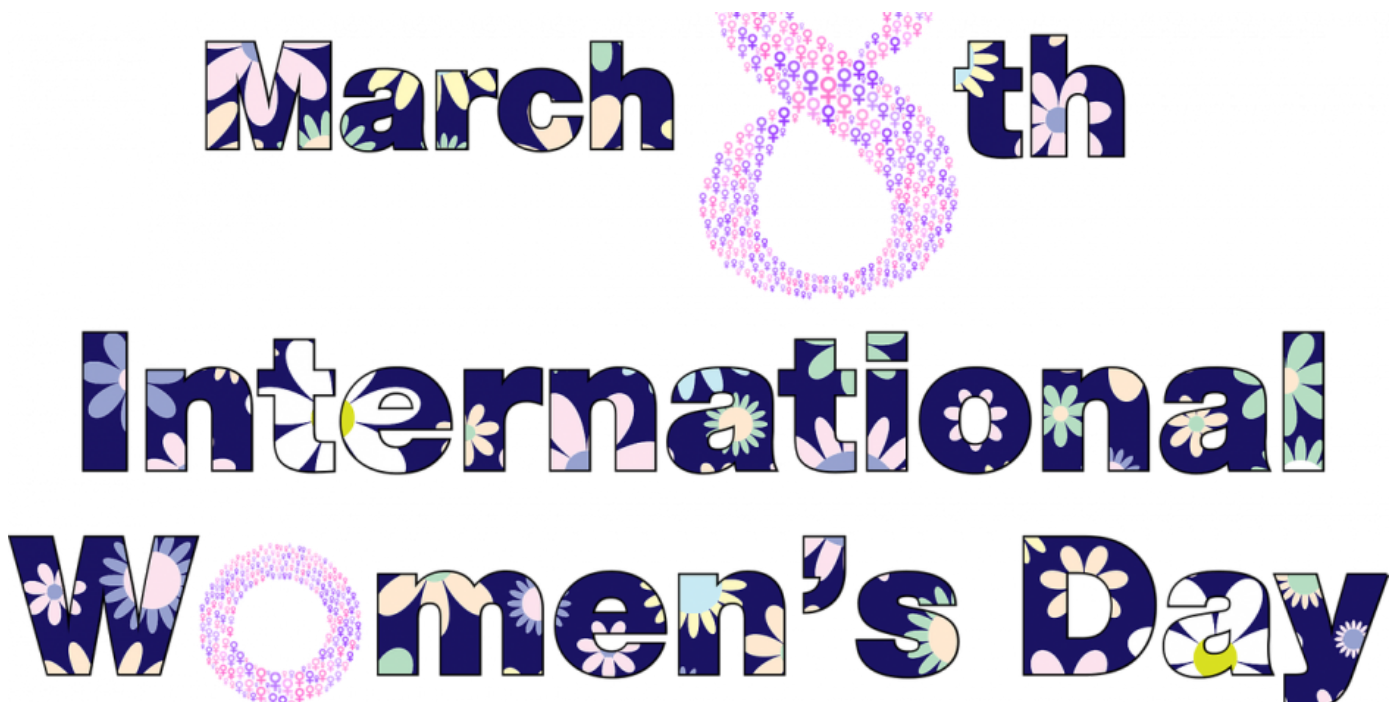

Problem solved.
[Modern Marketing](#)
[Agency Business](#)
[Creativity](#)
[Future of Media](#)
[Work & Wellbeing](#)
[Digital Transformation](#)
[Festivals](#)
[More](#)
**The Drum Awards
Digital Industries**

**The effectiveness
awards for the
digital industries**
Deadline August 5**Enter now**

NEWS

Women in advertising - how far are we down equality street?

By [Natalie Mortimer](#)
March 8, 2017



International Women's Day

As women, men, brands and businesses across the world celebrate International Women's Day, The Drum takes a look at whether coining a day in honour of women is still relevant or retrogressive.

On 28th February 1909 crowds of people assembled in the Murray Hill Lyceum, at 34th Street and Third Avenue in New York City. They were there to observe the first National Woman's Day (NWD), created by The Socialist Party of America in honour of the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York, when women protested against their working conditions.

Across the city's East River, writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman told a crowd in Brooklyn: "It is true that a woman's duty is centred in her home and motherhood, but home should mean the whole country and not be confined to three or four rooms of a city or a state." It was a statement ahead of its time in 1909, when women's oppression and inequality was entrenched in the fabric of society.

Since then, the world has undergone a substantial attitudinal shift in both women's and society's thoughts about gender equality.

By continuing to use The Drum, I accept the use of cookies as per The Drum's privacy policy

businesses. And often, they exceed and excel their male counterparts, all the while blasting stereotypes and social barriers and (usually) raising a family at the same time. Since 1909 and decades before, women have been juggling multiple roles, and yet it's still viewed as a surprise when they make it work.

One such role juggler is Jules McKeen, who was recently appointed chief revenue officer at innovation agency Redscout. She balances her role at the agency with numerous other projects, including working as a startup mentor and a columnist, and it's a trend that is becoming more commonplace in the industry as businesses begin to realise the merits of new ways of working.

TRENDING TODAY

The media consistently ignores the fact that women are just getting on with it and have been for decades.

According to Engine's 21st Century Woman report, women perform on average of five distinct roles every week. That goes up to seven roles per week when that woman is a mother. So, whether they are being parents, carers, employees, employers or everything else in between, women are constantly juggling, and smashing, multiple roles.

"In the past if someone was working part time, particularly a woman or a mother, they would be seen as making a compromise or not fully committed to the job," says McKeen. "But the narrative is changing, and has been changing over the last 10 years".

McKeen points to the trend in Silicon Valley, where often "25-year-old males with no commitments" will come on board for a project at a company such as Google but "throw [it] out not to work on a Friday because they want to work for a startup."

"That culture has started to filter across [to the UK]. I want to see my children, I want to have my head up in culture, because working on these different projects makes me a better all-round person. It gives companies a happy work force."

Other women balancing different roles include Gillian Jackson, direct youth engagement lead at youth-led creative network Livity. She works on numerous solo projects including her company events initiative Disco Dodgeball, which recently partnered with breast cancer charity Coppafeel. Jackson is also a wedding planner for those on a budget. Likewise, her colleague Shahnaz Ahmed created and launched charity Knit Aid, a social enterprise which calls for the donation of knitted items to help others in need around the world.

As McKeen points out, it's not just women who are getting in on the act of juggling multiple careers, but are women doing it better than their male counterparts?

"Any successful person, irrespective of gender, can become incredibly good at the 'time triumvirate' - that is - creating, finding and keeping time for the things that they are passionate about both professionally and personally and yet I often wonder if women actually hold a distinct advantage," says Kathleen Saxton, founder of The Lighthouse Company and Psyched Global.

"Often, due to the evolution of the antiquated gender stereotypes which saw many women as the primary caregiver, homemaker, organiser, then increasingly adding career aspirations and all round plate spinning to the list, we've seen highly prominent evidence of females meeting the monumental time challenge head on - breaking down historic preconceptions of career roles and capabilities and starting to live their dreams. As the old adage goes, 'If you want something done, give it to a busy person' and that's something we've increasingly seen over the past few decades, and is very evident with the rise of the career parent."

Sharing parental responsibility

And the career parent is certainly on the rise. Engine's 21st Century Woman report revealed that seven in ten mothers now work, with a third of working UK mothers the main earner in the family. The number of stay at home mothers is also at a 20 year low. This is thanks in part to businesses waking up to the fact that both males and females are parents, and that parts of the traditional family dynamic are increasingly rendered redundant.

Livity, which has a 62% senior management split in favour of women, has worked to implement an open culture with flexible working available to all its staff, meaning working parents feel a lot less threatened when it comes to taking up the flexible working that's offered to them.

"Businesses still tend to very much oversimplify what they offer, only focusing on the obvious demands of becoming a parent when the baby is born, but flexible working practices need to continue as the child grows - new responsibilities replace old ones," says Livity's

By continuing to use The Drum, I accept the use of cookies as per The Drum's privacy policy

head of people and culture Stacey Stollery. "Parents need to feel they are not missing out, and able to alter their working hours around school runs and other commitments. This promotes wellbeing and enables them to shift between their multiple roles comfortably."

In the UK, less than 5% of fathers took up the shared parental leave over the past 18 months, something Stollery feels "proves that there is still an issue with historical stereotypes".

"Creating work environments that support working parents, rather than just women, allowing it to be ok for a male colleague to take time off to support his family is a small step in the right direction for equality."

Similarly reflecting the dynamics of modern family life, Amsterdam agency 72andSunny has a paternity policy that deviates from the standard Dutch law of five working days off (three of which are unpaid) and offers fathers one month paid paternity leave. "as we believe

TRENDING TODAY

Do we really need International Women's Day?

While issues such as the gender pay gap still exist (it currently stands at 13.9% for full-time workers, according to the ONS), and women are still underrepresented in parliament and at board level, there is no question that women have gone through a social and political emancipation, smashing down rigid barriers and making changes unimaginable in the 1900s. So, against that backdrop, is the idea of celebrating the wide ranging, every day achievements of women one day a year on International Women's Day now redundant?

"I think we absolutely still need to have International Women's Day... but personally I think it needs to be action orientated or it becomes arbitrary. We don't need a day to raise awareness of our presence, we are women, we are here, but we need to use it to drive change," says McKeen.

Chris Pearce, chief executive at TMW Unlimited agrees, and explains that while great strides have been made in terms of pay, gender and equality within the agency, and the broader working environment, an underlying sub-conscious bias remains.

"It has taken the last 2,000 years of normalising behaviour to create the bias that holds back equality and freedom in all its forms, and we are all a part of that, because changing a deep-rooted cultural template takes years. Such profound a change can only be achieved by relentlessly raising awareness of all the subconscious and conscious bias that still exists," he continues. "Set in this context, IWD is another opportunity for positive change for that and it should be applauded."

Calling out the ad industry, OgilvyOne chief executive Jo Coombs says the industry has a responsibility to ensure it represents women in positive and culturally relevant ways.

"We need to shape the way we design tv programming, toys, books, games, sports and clothing for our children to reflect modern day values that place both genders equally beside one another," she says.

"It's tangible, inclusive actions such as this that will help us halt further development of gender bias at a grass roots level. IWD shines a light on the global issue for one day every year - and that necessity is invaluable, but what we need beyond that is to remain aware of our behaviour so that it is consistently delivered in a gender balanced context. Everyday."

Education, education, education

But change itself doesn't come from tokenism. "Sarah Vine, a columnist on the Daily Mail described last year's IWD as a 'magnificent display of smug, infantilising and patronising guff,'" says Jane Austin, founder of Persuasion Communications.

"While I loathe pretty much everything the Mail stands for - it is a newspaper aimed at women, written by women, who seemingly hate women and are determined to police, judge and preach about women and what they should and should not do - she has got a point. Brands including Barbie and Interflora all got in on the act and used IWD as a way of pushing their products."

Real change then must come from the beginning of a girl's education and how they are then steered in terms of their career development. Labour MP Stella Creasy called career advice in the UK "worse now than it was when I was at school," and argues that businesses have a large role to play in discussing and addressing the possibility and potential of women in a genuine way.

"We have a real challenge in this country around the conversation of CSR that is not about a company feeling a bit better about themselves but actually about the genuine social investment we can make in each other," she told an audience at Engine's 21st Century Woman event earlier this week (6 March).

One such company aiming to do just that is J. Walter Thompson London, which runs an initiative called Our Young Tribes, involving school girls from a dozen state, academy and private schools, focused on the importance of female role models. As part of the initiative

By continuing to use The Drum, I accept the use of cookies as per The Drum's privacy policy

"Our Female Tribes research found that 60% of women felt that women's achievements had been too often airbrushed from history, starting in the education system, where often there isn't the right representation of women," says James Whitehead, chief executive at J. Walter Thompson London.

"This can then inform unconscious bias of what an explorer, a scientist or an artist looks like and serves to limit girls' ambitions and assertiveness. The JWTeen Take Over is a culmination of a group of these girls breaking down the barriers and having the confidence to express and assert themselves."

But for all the change that still needs to come, for all the pay battles and equal representation conversations that are yet to take place, women everywhere, everyday are charging forward, says Austin.

TRENDING TODAY

roles and multiple responsibilities - jobs, childcare, meals, supporting elderly relatives and all the other things in their lives volunteering, mentoring, hobbies and interests. Every day is International Women's Day and every job is a suitable job for a woman. We shouldn't even need to talk about it anymore."

This article is about: [World](#), [International Women's Day](#), [Advertising](#), [Creativity](#), [Digital Advertising](#), [Modern Marketing](#), [Future Of Media](#), [B2B](#), [Education](#), [Marketing Services](#), [Media](#), [Politics](#)

[Share to Twitter](#)

[Share to LinkedIn](#)

[Share to Facebook](#)

Like what you see? We can email it to you

Choose from a series of great email briefings, whether that's daily news, weekly recaps or deep dives into media or creative.

[Sign Up](#)

Related

[Creative agency Dark Horses creates an open-source menopause policy](#)

[Why Intimina created a new Pantone shade of red called 'Period'](#)

Karmarama and British Army launch new female-led recruitment campaign

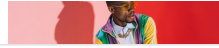
How Floradix cracked the China market with its iron tonic marketing pu...

Open Mic

Add your own content to Open Mic



How do the most successful brands get us thinking about...



Social media trends to make your brand stand out

TRENDING TODAY



Dirty words, and other advertising filth



The ads auction: optimising for the holiday season



How brands are leveraging mobile video to stay ahead...



Digital creative is set to be the new data rush

From our Network

Ambitious new agency Unrvld emerges from recent digital merger

Using the five senses to fulfil all dimensions of happiness

Reversing a decline in public trust

By continuing to use The Drum, I accept the use of cookies as per The Drum's privacy policy

Signals of change: considering the change in consumer lifestyle habits

Putting the 'i' in advertising: Why creative should be personal, purpo...

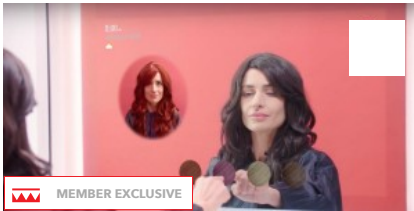
The Drum articles suggested by **bibblio**

Helping publishers increase engagement, improve monetization and drive new audiences. [Read more](#)

TRENDING TODAY

Must Watch

[On The Scene](#) [Talking Heads](#) [Drum Documentaries](#) [Everything You Need To Know](#) [Future Stars Of Digital](#) [Bi](#)



MEMBER EXCLUSIVE

VIDEO
With stores and salons closed, Coty puts a new face on innovation



MEMBER EXCLUSIVE

VIDEO
What consumers and marketers can expect from 5G



VIDEO
'Don't go dark': Ex Apple and Pepsi exec John Sculley offers pandemic brand-building tips

By continuing to use The Drum, I accept the use of cookies as per The Drum's privacy policy

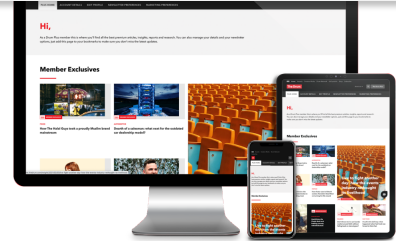
Get exclusive research and actionable insights, join **The Drum Plus**

TRENDING TODAY

- ✓ The World Creative Rankings Report 2021 - the most complete creative benchmarking tool
- ✓ Global content to keep abreast of the state of the industry
- ✓ Exclusive reports and research to support your decision making
- ✓ Member-only sessions at The Drum festivals to learn from the experts
- ✓ Monthly editorial briefings to keep up with global trends

on your first purchase

JOIN NOW



Problem Solved.

[Europe](#) [Americas](#) [Asia-Pacific](#)

[News](#) [Creative Works](#) [Awards](#) [Drum Network](#) [Research](#) [Studios](#) [Jobs](#) [The Drum Recommends](#)

[About](#) [Advertise](#) [What's On](#) [Jobs at The Drum](#) [Contact](#) [Privacy](#) [Terms & Conditions](#)

© Carnyx Group Ltd 2021 | The Drum is a Registered Trademark and property of Carnyx Group Limited. All rights reserved.

By continuing to use The Drum, I accept the use of cookies as per The Drum's privacy policy