



Millennial Dads Turn to Digital in Their Moments of Need

Written by
Allison Mooney
Jennifer Fernandez

Published
June 2015

Good news for moms and marketers: The new generation of millennial dads is playing a big role at home. They strive to be perfect fathers, influence purchase decisions, and turn to the web and their devices for help. The opportunity for brands is to be there in these micro-moments.

think with Google™

If there's one thing that drives Tom Brantman crazy, it's the "babysitter" comment. He hears it all the time, things like: "So nice to see a dad babysitting his kids" from a store clerk or a passerby on the street. "I understand they are trying to be nice, but the comment stings a little," says the 35-year-old from Kansas City. "It's not a job because I'm a father."

Across the U.S., men like Tom are becoming much more involved in raising their children. In fact, fathers have nearly tripled their time with children since 1965, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). And a [Pew analysis](#) of U.S. Census Bureau data shows that the number of stay-at-home dads has nearly doubled in the past two decades.

"Millennial dads are more involved in the day-to-day of childcare than any generation before them," says Julie Michaelson, head of global sales at BabyCenter, a site for new and expecting parents. We dug into research conducted by BabyCenter, which surveyed millennial dads ages 18 to 34 who are expecting or have a child under the age of six (this is how we'll define "millennial dads" here), and our own search data. We also spoke with a few dads around the country to figure out how dads are using the internet and mobile in their expanded roles at home.

"88% of millennial dads feel it's at least somewhat important to be the 'perfect dad,' a higher percentage than millennial moms."

Rising expectations lead millennial dads online

As the roles of fathers grow, so do expectations and the gap between what they know and what they think they're supposed to know. "There's so much to do, so much to buy," says Duncan Snowden, a 35-year-old expectant dad from Brooklyn. "It feels insurmountable."

These rising expectations are leading to a lot of anxiety for new dads. BabyCenter's research revealed that 88% of millennial dads feel it's at least somewhat important to be "the perfect dad," a higher percentage than millennial moms who feel that way about their own role.¹

To help them get there, young dads are doing what they always do when they need information: They're turning to the web. Seven in ten millennial dads seek parenting information online.¹ They're finding it in stolen moments throughout the day (and night), and they're using whatever screen is at hand, often a smartphone. Research further reveals that 59% of millennial dads looking for parenting information online use their smartphones the *most* when searching for that info—more than desktop, tablet, or laptop.¹ Google data shows that searches for baby-related terms on mobile have grown 52% year over year (YoY).²

As dads increasingly have mobile moments—we refer to these moments of need as I-want-to-know moments, [I-want-to-go moments](#), [I-want-to-do moments](#), and [I-want-to-buy moments](#)—what are they looking for? And how are they finding it? *Are* they finding it?

I-want-to-know moments

No matter what stage of fatherhood they're in, men have questions, and they aren't necessarily relying on traditional sources for answers. ("Ask my dad for help? Oh, God no, far too awkward a conversation," Duncan laughs.) Forty-five percent of millennial dads are most reliant on search for parenting information, more than any other digital resource.¹

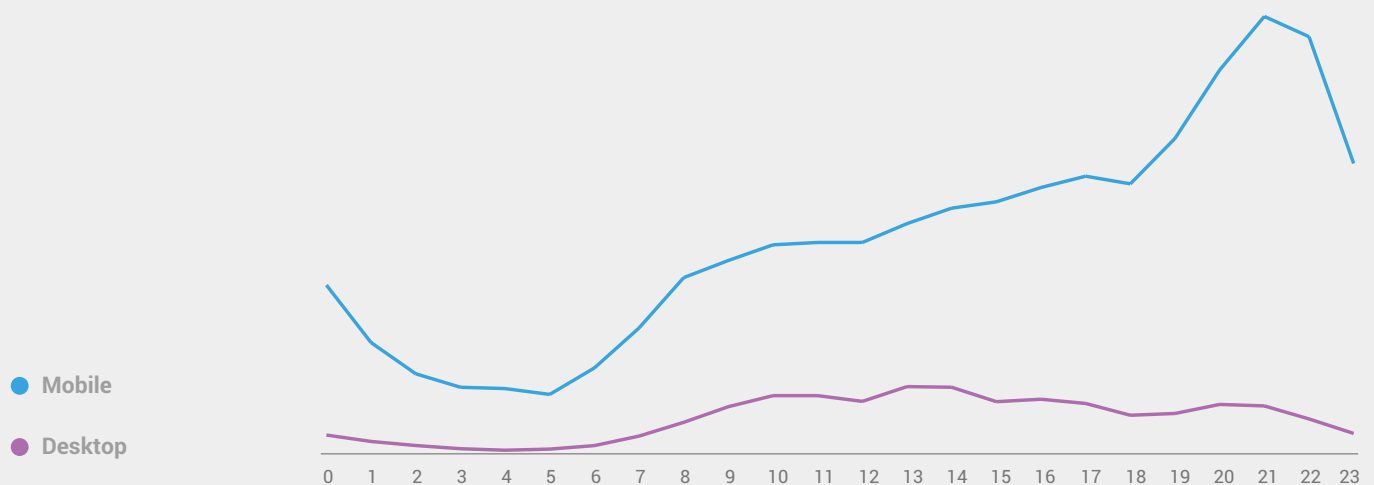
Duncan's "anxiety-fueled" searches started as soon as he heard about his wife's pregnancy. He read up on everything from birth plans to financial plans. Meanwhile, when Tom's first child was born, he "questioned everything" and strove to learn as much as he possibly could.

"The hospital was great with providing all of the basic stuff such as how to change a diaper, how to swaddle a baby, different ways to burp your child," he says. "But I had questions that don't have easy answers. How do I make my baby smile? Will my kids know that dad is holding them? Where is the checklist for 'world's greatest dad' and does it have an extra-credit second page?"

Once the baby comes home, I-want-to-know moments often strike in the middle of the night. Dain Van Schoyck, a new dad from Brooklyn, describes searching in "off hours"—early in the morning or middle of the night—about his baby's health and development. He'd type in queries like "Why is he crying in the middle of the night?" and "Is he getting enough food?"

And he's clearly not alone; we see that mobile peaks in the evenings for baby-related feeding and sleeping questions. After all, if baby doesn't sleep, neither does dad.

How-To Searches Related to Baby Feeding and Sleeping



Source: Google Data, April 2015, United States.

And then comes the time when dads have even more questions—when their child learns the word “why?” More than half of millennial dads say they’ve used a phone to find out the answer to a question asked by their children.³

How much do you know about I-want-to-know moments? Learn more about them in our [latest research and insights on micro-moments](#).

I-want-to-go moments

One reason they’re using mobile so often is because new dads are constantly on the go and looking for nearby activities and baby products. Thirty-three-year-old Zack Yorke uses his phone to answer immediate questions when he’s strapped for time, which is most of the time. A typical day with his 22-month-old is spent hustling from one activity to another around New York, and he relies on his phone to plan his next move. “I’m looking for store hours, when is the YMCA pool open, what are the family-friendly food options nearby, are there activities at the Brooklyn library or museum, things like that,” he says.

I-want-to-go moments happen even before the baby comes. Adam G. from Boston recently used his smartphone to find the chocolate-covered, peanut butter-filled pretzels his pregnant wife was craving. “I did a quick search on the phone to see where I could get them relatively close by,” he said in the moment. “Ultimately I found out Trader Joe’s has them. They got pretty good reviews, so I’m on my way right now to buy them.”

This isn’t just a dad thing. More and more, people are using local search to find things nearby. Google search interest in “near me” has increased 34X since 2011 and nearly doubled since last year.⁴ The vast majority come from mobile—80% in Q4 2014.⁵

How can you be there when dads are looking for your business location? Are you delivering useful local information? Read more about how to win [I-want-to-go moments](#).

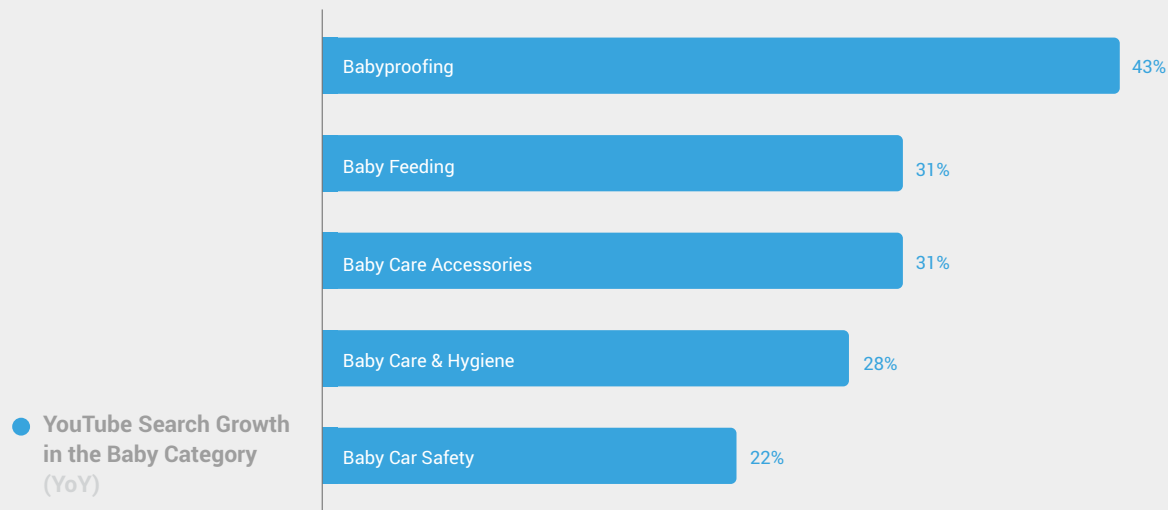
I-want-to-do moments

From the moment a man learns he's going to be a dad, he has to do many things he's never done—or even thought about—before. Suddenly he needs to know how to babyproof a house, burp a baby, warm a bottle, and on and on. Learning how to do these kinds of things used to be time-consuming, but today, dads can find out instantly. Ninety-one percent of smartphone users turn to their devices for ideas while completing a task.⁶ And on mobile, baby-related how-to searches are growing 49% YoY.⁷

These I-want-to-do moments change over the course of fatherhood. For example, when Tom found out his wife was pregnant, he started doing “nesting” research (“fresh coats of paint,” “new windows for a quiet room,” and “framing art” searches). Now that his kids are older, he's often searching about health issues on mobile, things like “how to clean sand out of a cut.” And for many dads, mobile has become the new instruction manual. One in three dads has used a smartphone to help install or build a product he bought for his child.⁸

Online video is especially helpful for time-strapped parents in search of quick answers. We see that baby-related searches on YouTube are growing (see chart) and watch time of parenting videos has doubled in the past year.⁹ “I'd often rather watch a quick five-minute video than read about something,” says Duncan. New dad Dain uses YouTube for step-by-step instructions to learn things like how to put on a baby carrier or swaddle a baby. Many millennial dads seek out videos about parenting tips (62%), baby health (59%), product reviews (55%), and pregnancy/baby development (46%).¹

How-To Searches Related to Baby Feeding and Sleeping



Source: YouTube Data, April 2015, United States.

What are the I-want-to-do moments in which your brand can play a role? What are the questions and concerns people have related to the types of products you sell? These are just a few things to ask yourself about [I-want-to-do moments](#).

I-want-to-buy moments

As more parents divvy up responsibilities, the shopping list is being split as well. Seven in ten millennial fathers say they help with the shopping.¹

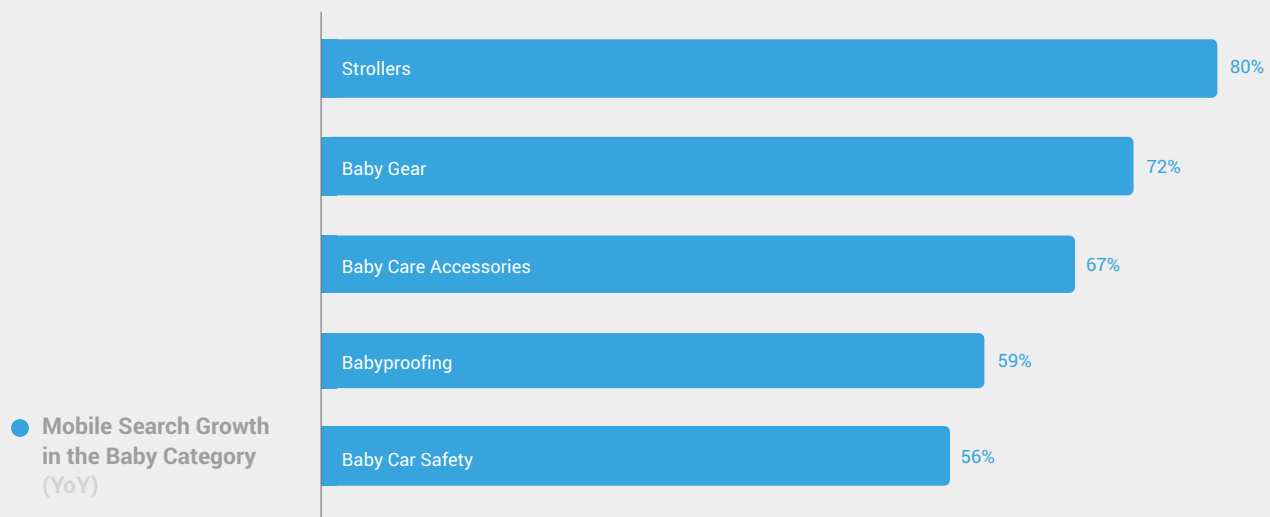
On smartphones, dads can chip away at these purchase decisions in small moments every day. For example, while waiting in line for a sandwich at lunch, expectant dad Duncan often does a search for something he needs to buy. ("Right now, that's a stroller," he says.) He's not alone; searches for "strollers" on mobile have grown 80% in the last year, while "baby gear" is up 72%.¹⁰

New dads also make online purchases once the baby comes—for everything from food to financial services. When deciding what to buy, millennial dads care most about safety, brands that provide good value, and good online product reviews.¹ Mobile gives them constant access to this information and can strongly influence what they end up buying—even if they've already bought it. Adam and his wife were a month away from having their first child when they were shopping for car seats. “We bought one, and then I found it on sale as I was looking through my phone and just checking the prices. So we decided to re-buy it,” he reports. “Just did that right now. I’m pretty happy. Saved about 30 bucks.”

In I-want-to-buy moments, make it easy for dads to make a purchase. The step from research to purchase should be simple and seamless.

[Read more tips on winning these micro-moments.](#)

Mobile Search Growth in the Baby Category (YoY)



Source: Google Data, April 2015 vs. April 2014, United States.

Not enough dad-focused content online

Despite how much they rely on the web, millennial dads aren't finding as much relevant content there as they'd like. More than half (58%) say there is not enough or barely enough dad-focused content online, and 69% say they wish there was more parenting content available for dads online.¹

When they do find content, dads we spoke with were often disappointed with the user experience on mobile. Some described switching to their desktop simply for that reason. "Some sites are not optimized for mobile, and there's a lot of detail so it's hard to read," recounts Duncan. "There's too much itty-bitty information on those comparison blogs and manufacturers' sites."

There's no doubt that the mobile experience is important for anyone trying to reach young dads. Online parenting resource [Fatherly](#) reports that 75% of its traffic is from mobile.

"Parenting media and commerce consumption is not a lean-back experience; it's generally a run-around-chasing-a-kid-with-a-phone-in-one-hand-while-trying-to-get-the-baby-in-the-room-to-stop-crying experience," says Fatherly co-founder Mike Rothman. "We need to fit into that window of opportunity or else we're doing our guys a disservice."

"59% of millennial dads use their smartphones the most when searching for parenting info—more than desktop, tablet, or laptop."

The perfect moment to win customer loyalty

Brands that understand these windows of opportunity, these micro-moments, stand to win over the hearts and minds of a highly valuable audience. Not only do millennial dads take part in household shopping, they hold the *most* influence on big purchases like consumer electronics and financial services. And since starting a family, many

of them report switching brand choices across a range of products, especially food/ beverage/groceries and household cleaners.¹

“Marketers in these sectors should think about reaching both moms and dads if they want to take advantage of this important life stage, when new products are being purchased and new brand loyalties are being won,” says BabyCenter’s Michaelson.

There’s also a larger cultural shift at play that brands can’t ignore. “I think you can look at the Super Bowl from this past year, with the sheer number of dad-focused ads, as evidence that marketers are recognizing that the American family dynamic is shifting,” says Fatherly’s Rothman.

And right now, brands still have the chance to stand out by appealing to dads. Rothman continues: “Whereas moms are awash in marketing messages and socialize many of their purchasing decisions in advance with other moms, whether online or in-person, men are now making more of the decisions or influencing these decisions with significantly less information at their fingertips. As a result, men tend to be more receptive to marketing messages as those messages naturally occupy greater mindshare.”

As for Tom, he’s realized there are “10 million ways to raise a great kid,” and he needs to find his own path. Even as he draws inspiration from everywhere—websites, TV shows, books, brands—he’s constantly going online to dig deeper, learn more, and become the “best father in the world.”

Download [BabyCenter’s full report](#) for more insights into reaching new dads online.



Allison Mooney

Editor-in-Chief, Think with Google and Head of
Trends & Insights



Jennifer Fernandez

Analytical Insights Marketing, Google

Sources

- 1 BabyCenter, Millennial Dads Study, June 2015. Based on the online population of U.S. males age 18–54 expecting a child or having at least one child age 0–5 years, n=1,250; millennial dads defined as age 18–34, n=583.
- 2 Google Data, April 2014 and April 2015, United States.
- 3 Google Consumer Survey, May 2015. Based on U.S. online population, n=1,233.
- 4 Google Trends, March 2015 vs. March 2014, United States.
- 5 Google Data, Q4 2014, United States.
- 6 “Consumers in the Micro-Moment,” Google/Ipsos, March 2015, United States. Based on internet users, n=5,398.
- 7 Google Data, April 2015, United States. Classification as a “how to” search was based on searches including “how to” and “tutorial” and may not account for every “how to” search on Google.
- 8 Google Consumer Survey, April 2015. Based on U.S. online population, n=739.
- 9 YouTube Data, January–May 2014 and January–May 2015, United States.
- 10 Google Data, April 2014 and April 2015, United States.