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Mother's Day can be hard. These companies want to make it easier

They're allowing customers to opt out of e-mails promoting a holiday that stirs grief and stress for some.

By [Janelle Nanos](#) Globe Staff, Updated May 6, 2021, 10:54 a.m.



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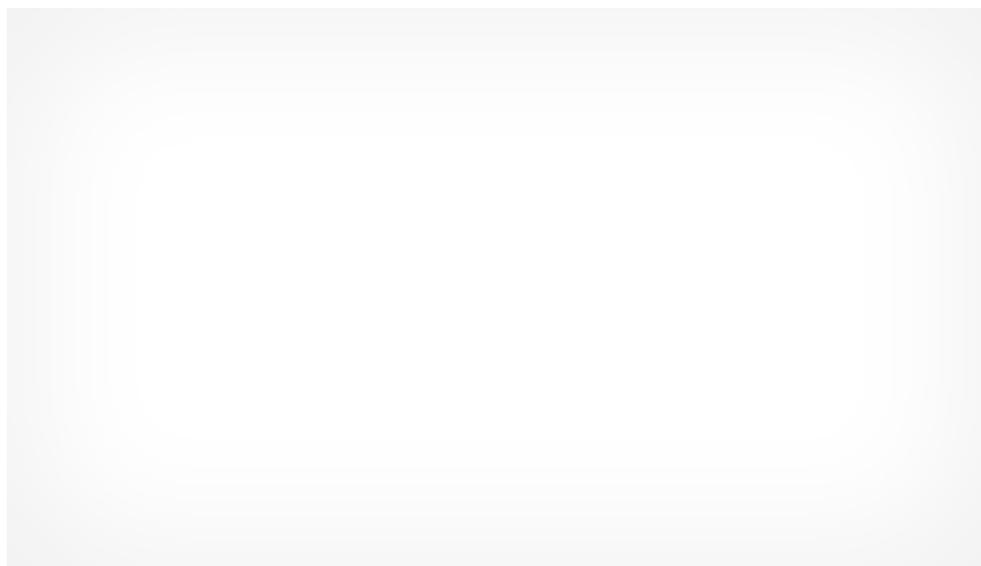
When she's not copy editing romance novels, Lynda Ryba spends a lot of time on Etsy. She's a knitter who dabbles in other crafts, and she often purchases Christmas gifts, posters, and trinkets from the site, which specializes in handmade goods. "I can't resist a good tote bag," she jokes.

But around this time each year, she'd often get a barrage of Mother's Day e-mails from Etsy that would inevitably cause her grief. Ryba lost her mother to cancer nine years ago this July, she said, and each e-mail "was like this slap in the face ... It's a constant reminder that I'll never speak to my mother again."

So Ryba was glad to get a missive from Etsy this year asking if she'd like to opt out of Mother's Day promotions. "We understand that Mother's Day can be a difficult time for some," it said, and if she wanted, the company would spare her inbox from messages about the holiday.

"It was like, 'Oh, thank God somebody understands I don't want to see this,' " Ryba said. "It's smart to not market to me at this time of year."

ADVERTISING



Etsy is one of a growing number of brands that — partly inspired by the pandemic — have sent Mother's Day opt-out messages this year. Many, including Parachute sheets and Bloomscape plants, are direct-to-consumer brands that rely heavily on e-mail promotions. Others, like [Milk Bar desserts](#), Mercato food deliveries, Away luggage, and the Uncommon Goods gift shop, have adopted a more sensitive approach to what is often a tough time of year for those who have lost a parent or child, are in strained relationships, or are trying to conceive.

President Biden even offered an opt-out for his [Mother's Day-themed fund-raising messages](#).

"Our team is made up of passionate people and over the past year we've done our best to be in tune with what our customers have been going through," Parachute founder and chief executive

Ariel Kaye wrote in an e-mail about the effort. “The opt-out e-mail came about because in a year when so many of us lost loved ones, we wanted to be especially sensitive.”

More than 2,000 people have opted out so far, and the response to the option has been overwhelmingly positive. “The gesture made a big impact on this group,” Kaye wrote. “The e-mails and social media messages we’ve received over the past few weeks have been really touching.”

Etsy, for its part, cited the grief associated with the pandemic as inspiration for why it chose to offer a Mother’s Day opt-out for the first time. It plans to do the same for Father’s Day. “Etsy’s mission is to ‘keep commerce human’ and we consider that the lens for everything we do, including our marketing,” a representative said. “This decision felt like a true extension of who we are as a brand.”

The trend also caught the eye of Angela Crocker, executive director of the Parmenter Foundation, a charitable nonprofit in Wayland that supports compassionate end-of-life care and bereavement support for families. “This time of year always becomes a time when we’re really homing in on how can we support those for whom this is not a celebratory day,” she said. “Sometimes it’s hard to find a hopeful message.”

So Parmenter is working to help create opportunities for brands to offer more compassionate marketing. This week, it launched an [“Empathy in eCommerce” campaign](#), encouraging those who’ve lost someone to ask retailers to consider letting consumers opt out of e-mails that “exacerbate grief.”

“Were not asking retailers to change anything about their stores,” Crocker said. “But the inbox is a personal place. And if you have the opportunity to be respectful in their personal space, wouldn’t it be great to be able to honor that?”

Garrett Johnson, an assistant professor of marketing at Boston University’s Questrom School of Business, said brands that offer opt-outs may earn more affection from their customers. “It’s a great example of customer centricity,” he said. “And it could be good for brand loyalty. You’ve seen so much social media chatter, and it really is compelling.”

The opt-out messages are also appreciated by those who are not experiencing grief. Mikell Taylor, a mother of two young children in Acton, said she’s been inundated by Mother’s Day missives for weeks leading up to the holiday. She finds it bewildering.

“The commercial onslaught makes me think that there’s something not right about me because I don’t want these things that are being marketed for moms,” Taylor said. “It’s stuff and I don’t want more stuff. Stuff is the only way that any of us have been able to treat ourselves over this past year.”

What Taylor wants is a sense of balance, she said, and a national support system that values moms and the work that they do.

“I don’t want to buy any more things or to have anyone buy things for me,” she added. “I want time to be able to relax.”

Janelle Nanos can be reached at janelle.nanos@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@janellenanos](https://twitter.com/janellenanos).

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