

Two types of couponers discovered: The Smart Family Shopper and  
The Game Player

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## **Abstract**

In 2011, 3.5 billion coupons were redeemed, which is up 6.1% from 2010. Even with coupon redemption on the rise, coupon distribution is down, average coupon values are lower, and average usable time before expiration has been shortened. Coupon users, or couponers, are also fighting a bad reputation and stricter store coupon policies.

Despite all the issues facing couponers, couponing has become more popular in recent years. Some of this popularity may be due to the thousands of coupon blogs that aide couponers in matching coupons to available deals. Couponers no longer have to search all sale ads and keep up with all available coupons; the blogs are an easy to use resource that does that work for them.

This study examines the ways that couponers use coupon blogs. The major finding from the interviews conducted was that couponers fall into two types: The Smart Family Shopper and The Game Player. These two couponing types have some major differences including how often they use blogs, which blogs they use, and what they look for on the blogs.

The Smart Family Shopper shops primarily for her immediate family and tries to save approximately 30% on their grocery purchases. She does major shopping trips every ten days to two weeks and usually shops at one or two stores weekly. She uses blogs to assist her in making grocery lists and to determine available coupons.

The Game Player shops for her family, friends, and other groups she donates to, with the goal of saving over 50% on grocery shopping. She shops multiple times a week, shopping at multiple stores in a week in order to get all the best available deals. She visits a variety of blogs daily, keeping up with the latest posts on great deals, coupons and freebies.

Marketers looking to promote their products using coupons or pairing up with coupon bloggers should recognize the two types of couponers. Depending on their target audience, different tactics should be used to reach each type of couponer.

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## **Two types of couponers discovered: The Smart Family Shopper and The Game Player**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Introduction and General Information**

An Internet search for “coupon blogs” produces 213,000,000 web pages. These blogs help coupon shoppers find the best deals, matching sale prices with coupons. Coupon blogs keep archives of available coupons including free standing inserts (FSI’s) from Sunday newspapers, online coupons, and other coupons available such as tear-off pads and on-package coupons. Coupon blogs can be used as a reference for shoppers to find the best available price on items they shop for. With the large number of coupon blogs available, it appears that couponing is a topic that consumers are interested in learning about. This is also seen in the growth of coupon usage in recent years.

In the 1990s, coupons were used by marketers to help their brands survive during the recession times. Once the economy recovered, marketers had a difficult time moving away from couponing because their consumers had come to look for and expect coupons. In an effort to move away from coupons, marketers tried offering everyday low pricing. Even still, consumers continued to look for and demand coupons (Neff, 2011).

Now, back in recession times, consumers are looking to couponing again for economic relief. In 2011, 3.5 billion coupons were redeemed, up 6.1% from 2010

(Joyner-Payne, 2012). A 2010 Nielsen survey found that coupon redeeming households are on the rise with 13% being “enthusiasts,” purchasing 188 or more items a year with coupons (Neff, 2011).

Coupon inserts have seen many changes in recent years. The number of coupons in distribution dropped by 7.5% in 2011 to 311 billion coupons. This decrease in inserts follows two years of increases in distribution. In 2011, the average value of coupons dropped as well as seeing tighter expiration dates. Values were down 1.3% to an average of \$1.57. Average usable time for coupons was 2.4 months, which is down 4% from 2010. Despite these changes, coupon redemption was still up (Joyner-Payne, 2012).

Coupons have been around for over 100 years. The recent increase in coupon usage may be related to the latest technologies allowing for easier access to coupons. Blogs about couponing also make it easy for consumers by identifying available coupons and proposing ways to match coupons with retail sales. The popularity of blogging in recent years has led to blogs focused on couponing and smart shopping. This paper will examine how couponers use these coupon blogs.

### **Coupon Growth**

The first coupon was created in 1887 by Asa Candler of the Coca-Cola Company. The paper ticket was given the name “coupon” derived from the French word “couper” meaning “to cut”. The offer was for a free Coca-Cola and 8,500,000 were redeemed between 1894 and 1913, which was redemption by 1 in 9 Americans (Coupon Sherpa, 2010).

In the 1930s, coupons helped families struggling during the Great Depression to save money. In the 1940s, grocery supermarkets used coupons to draw customers away from smaller, local markets. By 1965, half of all U.S. households were clipping coupons and by 1975, 2/3 of all households reported using coupons (Coupon Sherpa, 2010).

In 1972, Valassis Communications changed the coupon industry by launching its product, Co-op Free Standing Insert, the first national reaching FSI program (Valassis, 2011). In 1983, Catalina Marketing began offering coupons that print at retail registers and use consumer insights, such as items purchased during the shopping trip or on previous shopping trips, to provide targeted coupons (Catalina, 2011). The 1990s brought the first online, printable coupons and in 2008, the first coupons scannable on mobile phones were introduced (Coupon Sherpa, 2010).

At their height, 4.6 billion coupons were redeemed in one year, 1999 (Hale, T. 2010). In 2006, 286 billion coupons were issued with only 2.6 billion redeemed (less than 1%). The average value of these issued coupons was \$1.16 (Musalem, Bradlow, & Raju, 2008). The average value of a coupon in 2011 was \$1.57. Coupon redemption is up 34.6% from 2006 to 311 billion in 2011 (Joyner-Payne, 2012). Coupon enthusiasts have also increased to 13% of all coupon users in 2010, from 11% in 2009 (Neff, 2011).

Today, Americans are using the Internet for price comparisons (as reported by 67%) and for coupons (reported by 40%) (Rainie, 2009). Almost 60% of consumers search for online coupons monthly (Koegel, 2011). Online coupons saw a 263% growth in 2009 over 2008, although newspaper coupons still have the highest distribution and redemption levels (Hale, 2010). Coupons.com, the top digital coupons website, was

launched in 2001 and has grown to the 43<sup>rd</sup> largest website in the country today (Coupons.com, 2011).

Marketers are moving away from traditional free-standing inserts in exchange for other new couponing efforts. Marketers are partnering with retailers such as Target, Wal-Mart, CVS, and Walgreens to run special promotions. Brands are also offering digital coupons on their websites as well as on retailer websites (Ives, 2011).

Facebook has also become a destination for coupons. Although most fans of a page are current consumers, many are using Facebook as a place to search for coupons. “Liking” a brand on Facebook means coupons to the coupon conscious consumer and according to an Advertising Age survey, 65% of consumers want brands to offer coupons online with 41% listing Facebook as their preferred platform for receiving communication (Carmichael, 2011). Valassis found that in exchange for savings, 60% of consumers would be willing to “like” a Facebook page or tweet a deal (Zmuda, 2011).

Consumers have recently been given a new way to electronically use coupons: load-to-card coupons. These coupons are paperless and can be loaded onto a store’s loyalty card for consumers to have scanned at checkout. While this is a relatively new technology, it’s expected that by the end of 2011 15,000 stores will accept these paperless coupons (Koegel, 2011).

Blogs about couponing have also become popular in recent years with blogs like CouponMom.com and TheKrazyCouponLady.com named in the top five sites driving traffic to popular couponing website, Coupons.com, in June 2011. They offer tips on saving money using coupons combined with retail sales and are bringing about “a new

awareness” of savings to consumers (Patel, 2011). A March 2009 report showed an increase in traffic of up to 250% for sites like MoneySavingMom.com, TheFrugalMom.com, and CouponCravings.com, in just 4 weeks (Johansen, 2009).

### **Coupon Blog Model**

There are hundreds of blogs focused on couponing. Blogs by nature are written by someone who normally includes an autobiography on the blog to allow readers some insight on their reason for blogging. Many coupon blogs are created by moms who began couponing when they had children. Bloggers are paid by allowing advertising on their sites, although not all bloggers allow advertising or receive payment.

Coupon users can review the information about the blogger and about the blog to determine the best blog or blogs for them. Some blogs are focused on a specific geographic region and help local shoppers in that area find the best deals ([www.SouthernSavers.com](http://www.SouthernSavers.com)). Some blogs are focused on a specific retailer, helping shoppers determine the lowest prices available for that store ([www.IHeartCVS.com](http://www.IHeartCVS.com)). There are other blogs that are focused on a specific mission such as saving money to be used for a family vacation ([www.CouponingToDisney.com](http://www.CouponingToDisney.com)) or donating to a charity ([www.CouponsForTheCommunity.org](http://www.CouponsForTheCommunity.org)). Finally, some coupon blogs are focused on the user of the site, like moms or dads ([www.CouponMom.com](http://www.CouponMom.com), [www.CouponDad.net](http://www.CouponDad.net)).

Coupon blogs differ from blog to blog but many include similar information. One feature that seems to be included on almost all coupon blogs is a coupon database with links to available online coupons. Many blogs also include retail sale information and

some even match available coupons with store sales to help their followers find the lowest prices. Many coupon blogs also offer giveaways to their followers. These giveaways are typically sponsored by a company who donates the giveaway item in exchange for promotion on the blog.

While some coupon bloggers consider blogging their job, others consider it a hobby or a service they provide. Either way, the followers of the sites use the blogs as a tool to save money. This research paper examines exactly how that relationship between bloggers and couponers works.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Coupon Research**

While coupons have been around for over 100 years, research about coupons has only fairly recently been conducted. A 1978 study tested how coupons affected a consumer's likelihood to repurchase without a coupon, finding they are not as likely as instances without a coupon in the beginning (Dodson, Tybout, & Sternthal). It was also found that consumers who have used coupons in the past are likely to do so again and those who have not used them in the past are not likely to in the future (Bagozzi, Baumgartner, & Yi, 1992). Another important finding was that price is not always the most important factor in shopping, but rather one of many factors that make up a purchase decision. Consumers often are loyal to a brand and will purchase that brand at a range of prices and it may be difficult to get them to alter that shopping behavior simply based on a price cut or coupon (Ehrenberg, Scriven, & Barnard, 1997).

Research exists to help marketers determine how best to design, place, and plan coupons. This includes the importance of audience motivations to purchase: emotional versus rational (Rochm Jr. & Rochm, 2007). Consumers who receive unexpected coupons (in-store, on pack, etc.) spend more and buy more than those shoppers who do not receive unexpected coupons. This is possibly because coupons can lead to a perception of extra money in a consumers shopping budget (Heilman, Nakamoto, & Rao, 2002). Models for determining coupon redemption have been proposed as well as

strategies for use by customer data intermediaries, such as Catalina Marketing (Musalem, Bradlow, & Raju, 2008; Pancras, & Sudhir, 2007).

Research has been done on the many ways a consumer can save money at retail. Price cuts are good for consumers but could be seen as a negative for the businesses because all consumers have an equal opportunity to save (Fogel & Thornton, 2008). Promotions have associated hassles including cognitive hassles of remembering to bring coupons to the store and remembering to use them as well as physical hassles of clipping and organizing coupons (Fogel & Thornton, 2008). Despite these hassles, consumers can save by doing a little work on their own and using coupons or rebates. While redemption rates of both promotional tactics are relatively low, it is seen by marketers as a positive when looking at rebates but a negative in discussions on coupons (Lu & Moorthy, 2007). In a study ranking consumers' favored method of promotion, "buy one, get one free" offers were the most attractive promotion, followed by FSI and peel-off coupons (Fogel & Thornton, 2008). Consumers in a 2008 study preferred coupons to price cuts, supporting smart-shopper feelings research previously done and showing that consumers enjoy being active in deciding the price they are willing to pay (Fogel & Thornton, 2008).

When the hassle cost to consumers is moderate, there is a benefit to lowering prices in conjunction with coupons for a savings event (Anderson & Song, 2004). Coupon and sale conscious shoppers benefit from their involvement with coupons and sales by seeing more savings than those shoppers who are not as aware of sales or coupons (Garretson & Burton, 2003). In order to save big, consumers need to pair coupons with sale prices.

These coupon conscious shoppers also seem to have more enjoyment during shopping trips because of their high involvement and willingness to invest time in order to save money. These shoppers are less skeptical about the shopping environment and see themselves as being smart shoppers (Garretson & Burton, 2003). Shopping for a bargain can lead to “smart-shopper feelings” in which consumers feel responsible for the discounts they find. These consumers conduct price searches and price evaluations to find the best deal. Consumers who are social individuals are more likely to be deal prone (Schindler, 1989).

Older research describes coupon shoppers as “market mavens”. These shoppers are interested in the marketplace, enjoy shopping, and have influence over other consumers (Price, Feick, Federouch, 1988). This description of market mavens, seems to also describe today’s “coupon blogger” although no research exists on the power and influence that these bloggers have on shopper decision making.

### **Research About Blogs**

Blogs are one form of consumer-generated media (CGM) that also includes social networks, online videos, and photos. Blogs, first referred to as “web logs”, began in 1998 as online filters. These web logs sorted online information and contained links to information on a particular topic online. Over time, weblogs changed from being simply a web filter into incorporating aspects of an online diary and into a true web format today. Blogs showcase information in reverse chronological order, making the most recent information the most prominent information on the page (Siles, 2011).

A 2010 study looked at consumers' motivations for using blogs. The top five reported reasons for using blogs included: "for links to information sources", "for information I can't get from traditional media", "because blogs are interesting", "to access information at any time", and "blogs are independent of traditional media". This study found nine categories of motivational factors: convenient information seeking, antitraditional media sentiment, expression/affiliation, guidance/opinion seeking, blog ambiance, personal fulfillment, political debate, variety of opinion, specific inquiry (Kaye, 2010). Consumer needs such as excitement, entertainment and relaxation, are all met by interacting with blogs (Kaye, 2005).

Blog credibility is important for blog sustainability. Blog users evaluate blog credibility differently depending on the type of blog (Kaye & Johnson, 2011). When consumers have high involvement with a blog, they view that blog as an important information source. Information credibility is based on positive experiences by consumers (Hsu & Tsou, 2011).

Blogs can be corporate or personal. Corporate blogs and social networks allow consumers the opportunity to hold companies accountable (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Corporate promotional blogs are divided into four types within a hierarchy from informational blogs to image blogs, experience blogs to relationship blogs (Padmanabhan, 2008).

Personal blogs also play an important role. Blogs offer a sense of belonging to followers (Kaye, 2005). For example, shopping is often a social action and the influence

of consumer reviews online continues the social aspect of shopping (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Existing research on blogs lacks much information on personal blogs.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research**

#### **Research Question**

There are thousands of blogs about coupons and smart shopping. Shoppers can visit these websites to see weekly supermarket, drug store, and mass merchandise sales paired with available coupons to aid in maximizing savings. Despite the growing popularity of couponing and blogging about savings, there is no scholarly research on the topic.

Research is needed to understand how coupon users are influenced, if at all, by coupon blogs. To begin this research the following research question is proposed:

RQ: What role do coupon blogs play in coupon shoppers' planning and purchase decisions?

#### **Methodology**

To understand the role that coupon blogs play in the planning and purchase decisions of coupon users, it is important to first understand the coupon users. To best gain insight into the coupon users, interviews were conducted. Coupon users were recruited from a local coupon swap group, followed by snowball recruiting to their friends. In all, nine interviews were conducted with heavy coupon users.

The couponers who were interviewed ranged in age from about 30 – 50. Eight females and one male were interviewed, all were the main shopper in their household,

and all were the main couponer in their household. Six participants were married with both spouses working and three participants were single and lived alone. Four participants had children who they also shopped for. In the case of the married participants, their spouses appreciated the work that they did to save money but none of the spouses was involved in the coupon clipping, coupon organizing, or grocery shopping.

Table 1: Interview Participants

| Participant | Couponer Type        | Marital Status | Children | Age   | Gender |
|-------------|----------------------|----------------|----------|-------|--------|
| 1           | Game Player          | Single         | 0        | 47    | Female |
| 2           | Smart Family Shopper | Married        | 3        | 40    | Male   |
| 3           | Game Player          | Single         | 0        | 40    | Female |
| 4           | Smart Family Shopper | Single         | 0        | 30    | Female |
| 5           | Smart Family Shopper | Married        | 0        | 34    | Female |
| 6           | Game Player          | Married        | 0        | 50ish | Female |
| 7           | Game Player          | Married        | 1        | 45ish | Female |
| 8           | Game Player          | Married        | 3        | 45ish | Female |
| 9           | Smart Family Shopper | Married        | 2        | 45ish | Female |

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

#### **Defining the Couponer**

Although this study identified two types of heavy coupon users, or couponers, they have many similar traits. Couponers are very knowledgeable of store prices and coupon policies, such as doubling coupons and coupon limits. Because of their awareness of these two items, most research participants listed Kroger as their primary retailer due to better sale prices and coupon policies, like unlimited double coupons. Couponers, regardless of how long they have been couponing, recognize that couponing policies have changed in recent years. This is attributed in part to the TLC show, “Extreme Couponing,” which is disliked among couponers because of its exploitation of their money saving tactics. “It’s not real,” said Participant #1 and Participant #7 described it as “manipulated.” Many participants mentioned negative side effects of the show including fraudulent coupons, dirty coupon tactics, and the clearing of shelves when a good deal is available. Participant #6 says, “I don’t want to break the rules because that spoils it for everybody.” Overall, the present study found couponers who were honest with their coupons and just wanted to use their coupons to legally save money.

Couponers compare weekly store sales with available coupons in order to get the best overall deal. Many participants mentioned creating a list to keep up with available sale and coupon match-ups. Couponers use blogs as a tool that takes much of the time out of the equation by already matching store sales with available coupons. In the region

where the present study was conducted, SouthernSavers.com was often cited as a good resource for its thorough coverage of retail stores in the area. As participant #7 said, “Southern Savers is the most consistent.”

During the interview process, many differences were also seen and it became clear that couponers fall into two distinct categories of users: The Smart Family Shopper and The Game Player.

### The Smart Family Shopper

The Smart Family Shopper has very practical reasons for her coupon usage. Participant #9 started couponing because, “I noticed food prices were going up, gas prices were going up, and my pay at work went down.” The Smart Family Shopper is shopping only for her immediate family. The Smart Family Shopper shops at one or two stores weekly and does major shopping trips once every ten days to two weeks. Participant #2 said, “I try to stick with the same place because we don’t have a lot of time.” Participant #5 said after reviewing sales from a few stores she would ask herself, “who won this week?” stating that “if I’m driving everywhere around, then I’m defeating the purpose of saving money.”

These shoppers are not stockpilers but may keep multiples of a few items, enough to last six weeks to two months. Participant #2 said, “I do keep the things that we do go through quite a bit. If I can get a good price on that I’ll stock up on it at that point.” Participant #4 said, “I just try to buy enough for me to get through a month or two months.” Participant #5 pointed out the drawback of having a stockpile, “You’d have to sacrifice some other aspect of your life to do that and it’s not that important.”

The Smart Family Shopper does not have an elaborate coupon organization system, but has some way of keeping up with coupons that works for her. Participant #4 mentioned, “a lot of people have huge binders...all that origami folding, I just don’t have time for it. I’d rather spend 2 seconds flipping through my thing than to spend hours folding all those coupons.”

The skills of this type of shopper are used for smart shopping, saving her family approximately 30% on groceries. She tries to save money at the grocery store to offset high costs in other areas or to use her money on more enjoyable things. Participant #5 uses coupons “to save money wherever I can.” Participant #4 described a different reason for couponing. “Couponing affords me the opportunity to spend less money at the grocery store and more money on the things I really enjoy.”

For The Smart Family Shopper, coupon blogs are tools to make couponing easier and cut planning time tremendously. She visits the blogs weekly. Although she uses blogs, she doesn’t use them as often or as thoroughly as The Game Player. Participant #4 had this to say about coupon blogs, “I find that the blogs are more for the serious couponers.”

The main reason for these shoppers to visit coupon blogs is the “match-ups”. Match-ups match retailer sale ads with available coupons giving couponers their final price after coupon savings. This tool is helpful to save time and energy so that couponers don’t have to go through all the retail ads themselves and sort through their coupons to see which coupons match to the sales they find. As participant #5 said, “it tells you exactly which coupons to use”. Participant #4, who has been couponing for 15 years

said, “I used to say I wish there was somewhere you could go that would say, “Use this coupon with this item and this would be the rock bottom price.” and 15 years ago, that really wasn’t the case.”

The other reason for some of The Smart Family Shoppers to use blogs is to find available coupons. Whether it’s looking for online coupons that are available or doing coupon swaps through the blog forums, couponers are always on the hunt for more coupons. Participant #2 mentioned the great savings he has seen from “getting coupons from as many sources as you can.”

The blogs mentioned in interviews with The Smart Family Shoppers tended to be blogs that were focused on match-ups and finding coupons. Most of these blogs offered match-ups for stores in the local area as well as some major national chains. Many of the blogs had a coupon database or coupon finder on their page to assist couponers in finding all available coupons, both online and paper. These shoppers tended to be loyal to just a few blogs that they visited once or a few times a week.

#### The Game Player

The Game Player has very strategic reasons for their coupon usage. She not only shops for her immediate family, but she also shops for extended family, friends, charities, churches, schools, and other organizations. Participant #1 is single and lives alone, when asked if she shopped only for herself she replied, “Oh no! Everybody. All the time.” As participant #3 said, “If I’m getting it for free somebody can use it.”

The Game Player shops at multiple stores a week and shops multiple times a week. She buys grocery items at both grocery stores and drug stores. When asked if she

would buy food at a drug store, participant #8 responded, “If that’s the deal.” While most Game Players listed Kroger as their main store for grocery items, many said they also shop weekly at drug stores. “I go to CVS, Walgreens, usually every week.” said participant #1. Participant #8 said, “I’ll do CVS maybe 3 of the 4 weeks. Walgreens maybe every other week. I used to go every week but I’m a little choosier now about which deals I will go out for.”

The Game Player keeps a stockpile of items that she uses regularly as well as other items she is able to get for free or very cheaply. Participant #3 told of how her stockpile was in “two different areas” of her house because she “ran out of room” in her original location. Participant #6 said she keeps an inventory of her stockpile, which includes “enough laundry detergent for a year and a half.” Other items named as stockpile staples included hygiene products like toothpaste, shampoos and body washes, household items like toilet paper and paper towels, and food items like canned goods and cereal. Participants are proud of their stockpiles. Participant #1 said, “I’d say I spend more time on my stockpile than I do in my house.” Participant #6 describes how her stockpile changes the way she shops saying, “Because I have a stocked pantry, I’m usually just replenishing based on what happens to be seasonally on sale.”

The Game Player carries a big binder that has coupons organized by categories and sometimes even by store layout. When participant #3 was asked how she keeps her coupons organized she replied, “Oh, my big binder!...it’s in my car now.” She went on to tell about how she needed to get a new binder because she has worn hers out, but this is

not the first time – “I went from the really small one to the big one to the really big one to the really, really big one that zips...it’s a progression.”

The Game Player saves over 50% on her groceries. She likes to talk about trips where she saved big. Participant #6 told of a time she saved 106% at Kroger and how a CVS store manager once told her, “We can no longer pay you to shop here.” When participant #3 was asked if she brags about her savings she said, “Oh heck yeah! I’m very excited about it.” A good description of how The Game Player shops came from participant #6 who said her shopping trips “are very planned for and very calculated...I wait until a sale happens and I have a coupon.”

She is proud of her skills and is often asked by family and friends to provide tips on how to shop using coupons. Some Game Players have taught classes or taught friends in a one-on-one setting. Participant #3 told a story of a recent visit to a coupon event where people started asking her questions. “Next thing I know, I’m sitting there and I’m a part of the whole thing!” Participant #7 told of how she had been using coupons to buy things to donate to her church. “Then other people wanted me to teach them and finally the pastor’s wife asked me, “Why don’t you have a couponing workshop?” While these shoppers are willing to help others get started into couponing, they don’t think badly of those who don’t coupon. As participant #6 said, “If everyone did it the manufacturing company would have no incentive to continue to do it.”

Some Game Players have taken teaching others to the next level by starting their own blogs. “Mine’s just basically telling you how to (coupon).” said participant #3. Participant #8 described how she started couponing when her husband lost his job. She

said it was harder than she had thought it would be. “I wanted to blog about life happening with coupons. And also I wanted to come from the point of view of someone who had never really had to coupon and never had to save money. I was doing ok and all the sudden, I was like, wow, I’m really watching my bottom line.” The interviewed Game Players with blogs did not regularly update their blogs, but rather posted when they saw a major deal or change that they felt needed to be shared with others.

For The Game Player, blogs are a very important game piece. She visits the blogs multiple times in a day to be able to see the latest deals as soon as they are available. While she, too, uses the blogs to create a list using match-ups, her daily visits to the blogs are more focused on the hottest deals. She wants to be the first one to know about new coupons coming out or deal scenarios that the bloggers have found. Participant #6 described a recent trip to Target that was “strictly based on a coupon”. She described how a “hot coupon” had been listed on all the blogs and when matched with an advertised deal at Target, she would be able to buy boxes of cereal at very low prices. Participant #6 said, “Every blog that I mentioned had that on their post yesterday and so I went, you know, if I don’t go do this right now, Target’s not gonna have any of this cereal left.” She was competing with other area Game Players and knew that timing was key when a new deal was posted on the blogs. In order to always know the latest deals The Game Players visit blogs much more frequently than The Smart Family Shoppers.

The Game Player also visits more blogs and different blogs than The Smart Family Shopper. Many of the blogs listed by The Game Players post very frequently, sometimes even hourly, to keep The Game Player always plugged into the game.

Participant #7 listed a few favorite blogs saying, “I like that they post very frequently.”

The Game Player also visits blogs that show more tips and scenarios than the blogs visited by The Smart Family Shopper. This may be because The Game Player is more involved with couponing and therefore is willing to spend more time focused on it. The Game Player also visits blogs focused on free items, either free samples that are available or how to use coupons to get items for free or at an extremely low cost. Part of the game is getting the best deal and free is about the best deal available. When participant #1 was asked, “Can you pass up free?” she answered, “No, I can’t.”

Table 2: Comparison of The Smart Family Shopper and The Game Player

| <b>The Smart Family Shopper</b>    | <b>The Game Player</b>                                   |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Shops for their immediate family   | Shops for family, friends, organizations, charities, etc |
| Shops at 1 or 2 stores weekly      | Shops at multiple stores in a week                       |
| Shops every 10 days to 2 weeks     | Shops multiple times in a week                           |
| May keep multiples of some items   | Keeps a stockpile of multiple items                      |
| Average weekly savings – about 30% | Average weekly savings - over 50%                        |
| Minimal coupon organization        | Carries a big binder of organized coupons                |
| Uses skills to shop smartly        | Teaches skills to others, gives tips and advice          |
| Visits blogs weekly                | Visits blogs daily, hourly, sometimes has their own      |

### **Additional Findings**

It is important to note a few other findings that were not specific to either type of couponer, nor were they consistent among all couponers. Four participants mentioned financial hardships in their family as being reasons they began couponing or as ways couponing had helped them. Three of these participants listed lost jobs and one listed a

decrease in pay. Participant #8 said her husband lost his job during a rough economic time. She described that time as “lack of control and the coupons gave me that control. It gave me something I could do on limited spending. It was something I could contribute to an uncertain situation.” Participant #6 had been couponing and stockpiling her whole life when her husband lost his job. “I didn’t have to worry, I knew we were gonna be able to do laundry. I knew we were gonna have coffee. I knew that we were gonna have all those things.” For the couponers who have suffered hardships, couponing provided a comfort during those times.

Only two couponers interviewed had come from families that used coupons. Participant #2 remembered “doing coupons with my mom as a kid.” He stopped couponing for years and recently returned after seeing the high cost of groceries. Participant #6 described her mother in a way that would fit her into The Game Player description. “She believed that it was just ridiculous to have to run to the grocery every time you were gonna make dinner or make a recipe or something.” She went on to say, “She would shop at multiple stores. I do exactly what she did.” For these two couponers, they remembered their mothers couponing and it had an impact on them later in life.

While six of the interviewed couponers are married, none of their spouses are interested in couponing. “I try to get my husband excited about it,” said participant #5 whose husband sometimes accompanies her on shopping trips. She involves him by making him “the official holder” of the coupons they have already found the items for. Participant #2 does the coupon clipping and sorting in his family. He described himself

as “the nerd in the family” and said that if his wife was going grocery shopping, he would send her with coupons.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Implications and Further Research**

For marketers, many bloggers offer the opportunity to advertise on their blog or to donate free items to be promoted and given away to the readership of the blog. This study has shown that there are different types of couponers. Specifically this research found two types, although further research could identify other segments within these two types. Using the two types of couponers identified in this study, marketers should recognize they need different approaches to reach these shoppers.

The Smart Family Shopper is very purpose driven in her visits to blogs. Advertising or giveaways on a blog may not be seen by them. In order to reach The Smart Family Shopper, marketers should offer good coupons in conjunction with retail sales. This would make them viewable on the match-ups.

On the flip side, The Game Player is always interested in free or very low cost deals. They are returning to blogs often and scanning all new information to see what applies to them. Offering a free sample or trial of a product would be well received by these couponers. Partnering with bloggers to offer a freebie would be a great way to get product information in front of The Game Player.

Understanding that couponers are not usually brand loyal may make these shoppers less appealing to marketers. Marketers should be careful not to disregard these shoppers though because they do have many friends and family members who turn to them for shopping advice. Some interview participants mentioned stores that they do not

go to due to their strict and limiting coupon policies. Participant #7 said of Kroger, “I shop there a lot less since they changed their coupon policy. It’s not as good of a deal as it once was.” She then added that because of what she has heard about their great coupon policies, “When they open Publix across town, I see my shopping changing. I’ll be probably going shopping once or twice (a month) at Publix.” Participant #9 described a new test that CVS is trying that would change the types of deals they offer. “I wouldn’t shop there anymore,” she said, if this new test becomes a reality. If these shoppers have an influence on their peers, negative impacts on couponers could have negative impacts on business.

Further research with couponers from either couponing type could lead to more specific learnings on how marketers can reach them. Research with just one of the types could also identify other segments that may exist within the two types identified in this paper. As marketers are able to learn more about couponers and what influences their purchases, strategies can be created to reach these couponers or use them as opinion leaders among their peers.

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## **Appendix A**

### Interview Overview Questions

Ice breaker: Tell me about your most recent grocery shopping experience.

Who do you shop for?

How do you plan your shopping trips? How do you decide what goes on your shopping list?

Which blogs do you use? Can you tell me a little about them?

How often do you visit blogs?

What do you look for on the blogs?

How long have you been using blogs?

How long have you been using coupons?

Do you feel the blogs have made couponing easier?

How do you choose which store to go to? Which store has the lowest price? How do you know?

Are you willing to travel for a deal?

Do you have a certain savings goal?

What is the main reason you coupon?

Are you familiar with the TLC show, “Extreme Couponing”? What are your thoughts?

Is there anything else you want to tell me about couponing?

## Appendix B

### Sample Interview – Participant #6

- Int: Okay, just to get started, can you tell me about a recent grocery shopping experience that you've had?
- Part: Okay, from a...just in general? It can be anything?
- Int: It can be about anything.
- Part: I actually had a grocery shopping experience, a brief one, yesterday at Target. And it was strictly based on a coupon that I went there. I don't usually shop that way but I don't live far from a Target so it wasn't unrealistic to spend the gas. But they were having a sale on Kellogg's cereal, and it was buy 5 boxes of Kellogg's cereal that was on sale for \$2.75 a box and then they gave you a \$5 gift card. So  $\$2.75 \times 5$  is \$13 and something...Kellogg's issued a coupon yesterday that was \$5 off 4 boxes of cereal.
- Int: Oh wow.
- Part: Ok, so I had that coupon. Target also had a coupon for \$1 off of 3 boxes of Kellogg's cereal...
- Int: Oh my goodness.
- Part: And then for the 5<sup>th</sup> box, there was a...it's a new Honey Nut, some kind of Kellogg's cereal...I've never really heard of it...there was a 70 cent coupon on that so, when the total was all said and done, I paid \$8.03. I got \$5 back.
- Int: Wow, for 5 boxes of cereal.
- Part: Right.
- Int: Wow, that's wonderful.
- Part: Yeah, it is.
- Int: So you said this shopping trip was really driven by your coupons, how do you typically shop?
- Part: Typically, I really shop around sales, um, I don't...because I have a stocked pantry, I'm usually just replenishing based on what happens to be seasonally on

sale. Um, here's a good example, last week...well let me back up...we buy a side of beef so I don't buy any meat in the grocery store so we don't have that expense. And we buy some chicken and we don't eat that much pork, so I don't have that much meat expenses. So our typical grocery list is fresh vegetables and fruit which sometimes we'll have to make another, like today I've got to stop for bananas again. So we'll make mini trips. But other than that, staple items, are very planned for and very calculated so I wait until a sale happens and I have a coupon. So I average...on average spend about \$40 a week on groceries.

Int: Wow. And that is for...who all are you shopping for?

Part: Myself and my husband.

Int: Okay.

Part: So usually, very unusual to go over \$200 a month. Very unusual. But it's because we don't buy any meats which is, it's a huge expense and we lay that out at the beginning of the year and then we're done so...

Int: Okay, so I know you said you try to match sales with your coupons, how do you plan that?

Part: Um, you kinda, in some ways you can plan for it but in other ways you can. But I typically know that some things go on sale in certain months so...depending on which store I'm shopping at. Usually, I'm not loyal to any particular store, I'm more loyal to brands we like. So I don't care if it's at Food City. Like for example, Food City frozen foods is the month of March so I know if I'm gonna stock up on a certain thing, I'll wait until the bigger sales. Now unfortunately that doesn't always coincide with coupons. So...um, I keep an inventory, not a good one. I'd love to tell you it's much better than it is but...like we have enough laundry detergent for a year and a half, so it's gotta be a really smoking deal for me to buy laundry detergent.

Int: Ok.

Part: You know, I know what my price point is and there's gotta be a great coupon, otherwise I'm not gonna go buy it.

Int: Okay.

Part: Does that answer your question?

Int: Yeah. Do you know of the sales because...

Part: Oh! You use a blog, through blogging. Usually, A Cup Full, I don't know if you're familiar with that. A Full Cup...A Cup Full...A Full Cup, I think it is. A Full Cup – They usually post the actual circulars for CVS and Walgreens sometimes 3 weeks in advance.

Int: Oh wow.

Part: And so if I've got pretty good access to that information, it makes it a lot easier to plan. There are some things I rarely buy at the grocery store. I rarely buy laundry detergent at the grocery store because I feel like I get a better, usually a better buy through CVS because I'm also getting Extra Care Bucks and the quarterly return on things so it makes the price point less. Um, so I read a variety of different blogs. Southern Savers is a big one. I Heart Krogers and I Heart CVS are good but they're not great, unfortunately you don't find grocery store flyers in advance of much more than a week.

Int: Okay.

Part: So it's tough. Saturdays, I usually scope out the blogs and see what the bloggers are saying and kinda match it up to my list. And then Saturdays the new ad comes out for Kroger so I'll say ok is there anything on last weeks thing that was a better price point or a better sale than this weeks. Because I don't need shop very often, if it's not on sale, I kinda don't buy it.

Int: Okay. So you go to the blogs and you see what they've got and I know you mentioned here specifically, are there other blogs that you go to or are these typically...

Part: There's about 5. I go to Wild for Wags. Totally Target. And I'm not a big Target shopper. First time I'd been to Target was yesterday since November or December. I just, I don't go to Target that often. If we lived closer to a Super Target that had the groceries I probably would because they have a...I don't know

it's a toss up...do you go to Target or Ingles where they'll double your coupons or kinda do the math on that. Totally Target, Wild for Wags, Southern Savers. I used to use Gabe's website cause I would find things, when she was doing it more regularly. Keeping Cents and Common Cents with Money. Common Cents with Money I don't find a lot but sometimes she'll post coupons that nobody else mentions so I use her as a good coupon source.

Int: Okay, how often do you go to the blogs?

Part: Every day.

Int: Every day?

Part: Every day. Most of the time, twice a day. Once in the morning and then once in the afternoon or evening.

Int: And do you hit all of them?

Part: I hit all of them and I don't necessarily do it in any order. When I get up in the morning, I go through my routine...and when I say I'm on there, maybe...unless somebody...Fridays and Saturdays I'll spend more time matching coupons and what the sales ads are. During the week, if I'm on there 5 minutes in the morning and 5 minutes in the evening.

Int: Just scan real quick?

Part: If it's not anything I'm interested in...I'm not buying dog food because we don't have a dog. So...you know...

Int: What kinds of things are you looking for on the blogs?

Part: Primarily coupon links. And somebody that goes Ah, there's a Hot!, Hot's the big word. Yesterday that was the deal on cereal; it was like it's a HOT Kellogg's coupon. So I look for the key words like that and if it's...I kinda don't read the middle stuff...I see what the item is and go ok we buy that and then kinda scroll to the coupons and say yeah I have this coupon or I have access to this coupon and then look at the rebates and then look at the bottom line price. If the bottom line price is in my price range I'll say, oh this might be something worth considering.

Int: Right.

Part: Um, if it's a hot item like the Kellogg's cereal was yesterday, I knew that everyone...every blog that I mentioned had that on their post yesterday, and so I went, you know if I don't go do this right now, Target's not gonna have any of this cereal left and they're not gonna have...they're not like CVS where its gonna honor their rain checks forever so if I want this, I need to act on this.

Int: Okay. How long have you been using the blogs?

Part: Um, about 2 years.

Int: Okay. How long have you been using coupons?

Part: I was born into a coupon family.

Int: Alright!

Part: I don't know what year coupons really started but my mother was a couponer and my mother was also a stockpile, so...you know, I'm over 50 so my whole life...my mother believed, cause we lived, kinda far away from the grocery stores. She believed that it was just ridiculous to have to run to the grocery every time you were gonna make dinner or make a recipe or something. So she planned menus so...she would usually do 2 weeks at a time and then she would shop accordingly and then she would...she would shop at multiple stores. I do exactly what she did.

Int: Okay.

Part: I just have the knowledge of blogging sites that she didn't have. I mean she had to wait until the day the things came out and then figured it out.

Int: Yeah, do you feel like blogs made it easier?

Part: Yes! A ton. I mean I don't...I really don't understand how they do all of their research. I realize that they get access to the ad information long before a consumer ever sees it so they've got time to do their research but...I'm glad somebody's doing it.

Int: Yeah, it's helpful to have that. Okay, so you've kinda mentioned that you aren't loyal to any one store, is there any that maybe you more use than others?

Part: You know, I think it's been cyclical. There was awhile that I didn't go to CVS at all, a couple of years ago, I'd occasionally go there. Walgreens, I got soured on because they would often times run a promotion and it would be gone by the time, after church on Sunday by the time I got there, there was none of the products left so I was like ok...I either need to get smarter about this game or not shop there. I almost don't shop at Food City at all anymore because they don't double their coupons. I went, I did go there this week because they had bell peppers on sale for \$1, the orange ones and the yellow ones, the ones that are more expensive usually. But that's the first time I've been there since December. I'm very excited that Publix is coming because I think it's gonna shake up things with Kroger.

Int: Yeah. Okay.

Part: Of the two, I probably do kinda equal 50% between Ingles and Kroger just depending on what the ads...

Int: I know that you mentioned that Target's close to your house, are you willing to drive far for a deal?

Part: It has to be pretty sweet.

Int: Yeah.

Part: Here, here's a good example, I happened to be in CVS a week and a half ago to buy something else and it was CVS on Merchants and Clinton Hwy. It was a fluke that...my husband and I donate, I also coupon for donation so if I can get things free I donate it. That's also a big part of...that's the fun part of it for me. Anyway, Gabe and I had known that there was a need in the community for people that couldn't afford Depends, like adult undergarments. It was a fluke that I walked down that aisle and there was no reason it was just at the pharmacy for vitamins and I just shot up this aisle and I just happened to look over and they had Depends marked down 75%!

Int: Oh wow!

Part: Yeah. And I'm like what is this all about. And I knew we'd talked about it but I couldn't reach her, so I just bought them. And I happened to have coupons at

home, that were in the paper, that I knew it was like \$2 off of a bag. It was already marked down to \$2.47.

Int: Oh wow.

Part: And so I was like, you know what, and so I called her and I was like you're gonna think I'm nuts but I am now going to every CVS in Knoxville. And she was like, are you really? And I was like well, maybe not every one but I'm gonna go hit a bunch. I went to 4 CVS's and the back of my car is filled with Depends. I said it looks like I hijacked the Depends truck.

Int: (laughs)

Part: Um, I went to Clinton Hwy, Western Ave, Kingston Pike, 2 different CVS's on Kingston Pike. They all had the same thing, all marked down and I had coupons. I bought, I think it's the equivalent of \$260 of Depends, for a little over \$66 and that includes tax...what I paid in tax, I didn't add the tax to the retail. And so I did drive all over town and it's not even for me. It's just...

Int: Do you see it...I know you mentioned earlier, the game...do you see it as a game?

Part: Kinda, yeah. It's like, I was gonna bring a receipt and I forgot to bring it. Kroger does, if you transfer a prescription they'll give you \$25. And actually I learned that through Gabe's website and I was like oh well I'm not loyal to whatever...and it was a prescription my husband had and it was at CVS and I thought, I wonder how many times you can really do this? So I was like...so I transferred the prescription to Kroger, I got a \$50 gift card and I really had forgotten about it, they loaded it onto my Kroger card and I had bought groceries, I had given them my stack of coupons and she said, oh do you wanna use your \$50 gift card and I was like, oh yeah. I saved 106% and she said I would normally be giving you money back but she said, we can't do that. And I'm like, yeah ok I get it. And she said you have to pay tax.

Int: Yeah

Part: So she said, I'll leave some money on your gift card and you just owe me \$5.34 so it's like, ok.

Int: Wow.

Part: The CVS on Kingston Pike by Cedar Bluff, one day they said, “Miss XX, we can no longer pay you to shop here.” Cause I would go in week after week and you know I’d owe them 3 cents or whatever.

Int: Right.

Part: Yeah, it’s kinda a game.

Int: Do you have a certain percentage in mind that you want to save?

Part: Yes. That’s a good point. If I don’t save at least 50% I’m bummed. Like, my husband’s like, oh for crying out loud it’s 48%.

Int: Right.

Part: But because we don’t buy that much, I don’t know, I just feel – Oh my gosh my husband went to Ingles for some lunch meat and some cheese last week for something, a recipe we needed to make and I looked at the receipt and it had no savings on it and I was like, oh Lord!

Int: (laughs) Take it out of the house!

Part: Right. But you know there are times like that where there aren’t coupons for lunch meat and things like that and things in the deli case and I think, ok well I saved \$50 last week. I think of all the money I saved and it’s not like we’re going broke but if I saved on some things I can justify buying some things that aren’t on sale.

Int: Right. Do you think it’s a hobby?

Part: (pause) I never thought about it as a hobby. I’ll have to think about that. I mean it’s something I do every week, it’s just part of my life.

Int: So it’s almost more habit?

Part: Yeah, I guess it could be a hobby. I can’t imagine not doing it because I don’t understand...my mother in law wanted me to teach her how to do this so I bought her a binder and I bought her all the stuff and she’s like, I just can’t do this. And I’m like ok but why would you not want to? And she’s like I want to I just can’t

do it. And I'm like you want to but you don't want to enough so you won't do it. So I guess it is a hobby – I never thought about it as a hobby.

Int: So for you, since you've always been doing it, do you look at people who don't use coupons and just wonder why?

Part: Yeah, I do. Cause even if you just don't...well there are some weeks I may only have just a couple coupons for a couple things. But I can't imagine just...like if I had forgotten them at home which I never do, well I have before but...if they're in the car and I have to run back out. I just can't imagine not doing it. I mean I don't look down on people for not doing it but...you know if everyone did it the manufacturing company would have no incentive to continue to do it. So for all the people who want to pay full retail, have at it. It gives more coupons for me.

Int: Right, right. So if someone were to ask you why you coupon, what's your reason?

Part: I coupon because...really I've done this my whole life but there have been times when really we needed to, my husband was out of work for like a year and a half and I didn't have to worry about...I knew we were gonna be able to do laundry, I knew we were gonna have coffee, I knew that we were gonna have all those things. But I think it also affords us to put more money aside into savings or to take a nice vacation or for something else so I kinda look at it as a tradeoff. I'm gonna get this for less money so I'm gonna put that money towards something else.

Int: Do you think it takes a lot of time?

Part: I could see if a person was just starting out. I don't really think about that anymore. On big ad days, on Saturday night sometimes, the most time I will ever sit down with my big organized binder of all the coupons and stuff I think maybe an hour. So I think, oh gosh, and I mean I can have the TV on while I'm doing it so it's not like I have to be locked in a dark room with no other distractions.

Int: Yeah. Um, so I've been asking people, have you seen the show, Extreme Couponing show, what do you think?

Part: Oh yes. I think it's just wrong. I think it's died off now but I think it really ruined things for couponers. For people who have been couponing for a long time and are coupon legitimate. First of all, the reality of someone saving that way week in and week out is just ludicrous and it's just not realistic. And...I mean I compare it to The Biggest Loser. People are not going to lose 17 lbs in one week and then lose 11 lbs, it just doesn't happen every week. And, I mean, how many jars of mustard do you really need. I mean I understand the guy that donated stuff, cause I do that too but...I think in reality, as my husband and I have become more health conscious and we've changed the way that we coupon, even now. We don't eat a lot of the stuff that we used to eat and unfortunately the stuff that's got all the bad stuff...the high fructose corn syrup, that's the stuff that's readily available and has good coupons and is on sale on a regular basis. But anyway, I think that show is very misleading and I hate it. I don't know if it's still...I guess it's still on...

Int: You know, I don't know...

Part: If, I haven't seen it...I've watched a few episodes just cause it makes me mad and I think, oh, that's just not true. And then I know there were people that we legally abusing it. And there have been lawsuits from it and it's changed the whole...the coupon that you print now, it's changed the whole barcodes so it won't let you do what one lady was doing, that the first 5 digits of the barcode were identified with the manufacturer so you may not buy Oscar Meyer hot dogs, you may buy Oscar Meyer something else and they were just pushing the coupons through. I don't remember all the details about that. Cause I said to Gabe, do you understand how this works and she was like no because it's not right so I just never paid attention to it. So I was like...if I don't have a coupon for the right product and if a cashier calls me out and says, you know what did you get this and I'll say, yeah, I got that. But you know, sometimes you'll see it's for 2 and I only bought 1 and you know what, I don't wanna break the rules because that spoils it for everybody and I think that the couponing...taking expired coupons and...

Int: Yeah. Not the way you wanna do it.

Part: So yes, I think it's a horrible show. And I understand why it draws...people like to see other people...I think especially in this economy, people in general are angry about the cost of gas and people being out of jobs and all kinds of things and they wanna feel like they can get somebody.

Int: Right.

Part: And so I think that this is like, oh these people are really screwing over...who are they really screwing over? We're ultimately paying for it one way or another.

Int: Right.

Part: That was my long answer for that question.

Int: Oh, no. Alright, well is there anything else you want to tell me about coupons?

Part: I think it's...couponing has changed a lot. I mean I remember when you were first beginning to be able to print your coupons and stores were like really looking at...I think that we're seeing more coupons become a higher than 50 cent value so they can't be doubled. So I think that there are ways that manufacturers have gotten in bed with the stores to make it less advantageous. I actually had one of the managers from a CVS in town say that they have seen less riff raff couponers since the beginning of the year, since they did last year when the show was really big. Um, so I don't know, I think things are changing and then there's the threat of Kroger not doing double coupons anymore and...

Int: Right.

Part: So I don't know what is..what's it gonna look like in a couple of years. I don't know. But I keep thinking I'll just ride this ride till it doesn't ride anymore then I don't know what we'll do.

Int: Do you get the Sunday paper?

Part: Yes. I get 2 Sunday papers.

Int: Okay. Do you get coupons from other places?

Part: I do them online. I also set up a separate website...a separate email account that just is nothing but offers and coupons. Cause it would make you insane. After

awhile I was just like, uh! I get great coupons from manufacturers directly. And yeah I get quite a bit of free coupons in the mail. Cause as much as I hate people knowing my address is out there, I get free coupons for decent stuff. I got a coupon for Smart Milk that runs at Ingles \$4.44 a carton which is just a half gallon which is just absurd. I just got a...they sent me a free coupon...I wrote them a letter and said how much I like their milk, which was true, I don't do that for products I don't like. And they sent me a thank you and they sent me a coupon for a free carton of milk.

Int: Nice.

Part: Well, which is nice, cause I'm gonna buy their milk anyway. Well when Ingles puts it buy one get one free, I end up getting 2 free things of milk.

Int: Wow.

Part: So I get it in the mail, Internet, I've bought coupons before from a coupon clipping service but ok, well I'm not interested. Because you have to buy a minimum and unless the item goes on sale at exactly the right time and I'm not paying someone to Federal Express coupons to me so I was like ok, did that once, not gonna do that anymore.

Int: Alright, well I guess...

Part: Thank you!

Int: Thank you!

### **Vita**

Alana Stephenson Phillips was born in Birmingham, AL to parents Ron and Jan Stephenson. Alana attended The University of Alabama where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication with a major in Advertising in May 2002. Upon graduation, Alana moved to Birmingham, AL and took a job at local advertising agency, Martin Advertising. After a year and a half at Martin Advertising, Alana took a position as a Print Production Assistant at Luckie & Company. In May 2005, Alana moved to New Orleans, LA and became an Account Executive at Keating Magee Momentum Marketing but the position was short lived as Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in August 2005 and Keating Magee suffered great losses. In January 2006, Alana moved to Chattanooga, TN and became an Account Executive at The Johnson Group. In June 2008, Alana married Joe Robson Phillips. Alana made a decision in 2010 to leave her professional career to return to school, enrolling in the Master's program at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August 2010. She took a graduate assistantship during her Master's studies in the School of Advertising and Public Relations working with Dr. Ronald Taylor. In May 2011, Alana gave birth to Owens Luke Phillips. Following graduation in May 2012, Alana plans to work as a freelance advertising and marketing consultant.