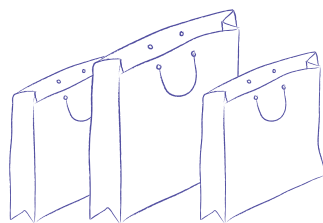




WHAT WOMEN WANT:

MARKETING TO THE MAJORITY



Understanding, acknowledging
and gaining loyalty from your
biggest demographic

BY CLAIRE SYKES

Women differ from men in many ways including the way they shop, which is why smart retailers are taking note of their preferences. From providing them with more product information to displaying merchandise within environments that inspire them to buy, focusing on the needs of women shoppers actually enhances the shopping experience for all your customers.



Women buy or influence the purchase of 80 per cent of all consumer goods.



The women's liberation movement of the 1960s and '70s ushered in pantsuits, mothers in executive positions, bra-burning and breastfeeding in public. Those fertile, factious times paved the way for the women who're continuing the revolution – with purses in hand – today.

Now, women make up the majority of consumers. They differ from men in terms of how they shop, which is why smart companies are marketing specifically to them. When they do, they enhance the shopping experience for all their customers, increase sales and gain a loyal clientele.

In her book, *Evolution: Understanding Women*, popular trend forecaster Faith Popcorn writes, "Women buy or influence the purchase of 80 per cent of all consumer goods." Add to that statistic this one from **Martha Barletta**, president of The Trendsight Group, a Chicago consulting and training firm focused on marketing to women, and the author of *Marketing to Women*. "In 55 per cent of all U.S. households, women bring in over half the total income," she says. "Their earning power has grown 63 per cent in the last 30 years, compared to an increase of only 0.6 per cent for men."

With so much purchasing power in the hands of women, you can't afford to not market to them. "As retailers have started to respond to their specific needs, women are beginning to demand that attention everywhere," says **Andrea Learned**, president of Reach Women, a marketing-to-women consultancy based in Bellingham, Wash.

Marketing to women means including their concerns in your total marketing

strategy. "It's not about getting them to buy the products that a store like yours sells," says Barletta. "They're already buying them. It's about getting them to buy from *your* store."

UNDERSTAND YOUR WOMEN CUSTOMERS

"Women are not one single monolithic group," says **Kim Gordon**, president of Florida-based National Marketing Federation. Women's shopping preferences are varied. "For instance, women business owners are less likely to go to malls and more likely to purchase from catalogues than women employees and stay-at-home moms. They also prefer to get in and out of stores more quickly."

"Know how you are already marketing to women and where you need to improve," says Learned. Get to know your women customers and what they want from your store through casual conversation, informal (anonymous) questionnaires and focus groups. Do a monthly walk through your store, noticing how women navigate the aisles and interact with other customers and sales staff. Visit your competition with an eye toward the same things.

You'll notice that women differ from men in the way they shop. There are good reasons why. Chances are they cater to more than just themselves whether they have children or not. "Unlike most men, women multitask and tend to be responsible for more people at once," says Learned. Although they may be married with kids and working 40 hours a week outside the home, most of them are still doing the bulk of the housework.

"They're busy and often thinking about others' purchasing needs while they're shopping."

Women are also more interested in researching products and services before they buy. "Men want to be seen as independent and generally won't ask for help from others," says Barletta. "Because women are more people-oriented, they're much more open to advice from friends and family, and salespeople. While they're shopping they learn even more, adding details to the decision-making process."

As a result, women often take longer to make their buying decisions. "They approach a purchase as if they're entering into a relationship," says Gordon, taking into account the entire shopping experience, from how comfortable they feel in the store to how easily they can make returns.

GIVE WOMEN WHAT THEY WANT

It's simple. Give women what they want. First and foremost, they want to be heard and perceived as important. "They want to know that you've listened to them and have made changes and that you're listening to them now," says Learned. As busy as most women are, convenience and saving time are also important to them. So is good customer service.

Just because women differ from men as consumers doesn't mean you should marginalize them in your marketing strategy. "Don't paint your store pink," as Barletta puts it. "Avoid clichés and anything that patronizes women." In other words, no flowery designs in your ads and displays or a separate women's corner in the store. That

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only condescends and insults women – and alienates men. A marketing plan that reaches women also meets men’s expectations. For instance:

Advertising

Do more than put pictures of women in your ads, include men too. “Take a story-telling approach by portraying products within the context of people’s lives in a way that’s relevant to women,” says Barletta. Focus on what’s special and interesting about your store that sets you apart from other retailers. “Give comprehensive information in your ads, so women can see whether it’s worth their time to shop your store,” says Gordon.

Promotions

Don’t bombard women with direct mail. Instead, send notice a few times a year about upcoming sales or with useful or interesting information about new products. Create a customer-loyalty program with a punch card for purchases and/or offer discounts on your customer’s birthday. (“This is particularly important for price-sensitive shoppers,” says Gordon.) And make sure your Web site includes your newest products, useful articles and a blog for the latest news about your store, along with fields for customer feedback.

Store appearance

Let your store make the best impression. Ensure that parking is convenient and well lit, and that the washroom is in a well-traveled area of the store, not in a dark corner. Store appearance matters to women. “Women are much more sensitive to how things look and smell,” says Barletta. Avoid clutter and keep things clean. Wide aisles are easier to navigate and the right lighting can showcase your products.

Product displays

Women buy things in context with how they’re going to use them, so display merchandise within environments that will inspire them to buy. For example, place vases and other decorative accessories with compatible products in dining room and bedroom displays. Pair mirrors with jewellery boxes, and place aprons with your kitchenware in attractive vignettes. Products should be easy to find and available for women to pick up and admire.

Staff

Hire people who reflect your women customers. “If they’re mostly 45-year-olds, bring in sales people she can identify with,” says Learned. Train your sales staff to understand and thoroughly present your products. Impress upon them that the conversation women enjoy with them isn’t mere chitchat, but a chance for your sales staff to gather as much information about their needs as they can. Patience is equally important, since women take longer to arrive at buying decisions.

Customer service

The cost of products matters less than other things at your store. “In general, women appreciate good customer service more than they do a discount,” says Learned. Here, continuity counts, from the first hello to product returns. “If you don’t handle returns well, your customers might just go elsewhere.” The way you deal with dissatisfied customers can also make a difference whether your women customers return to your store or not.

Sales process

Avoid the hard-sell approach. Instead, offer as much information as they want to hear. “You don’t have to tell them everything at once,” says Learned, who also encourages pointing customers toward your Web site and product brochures for more information. “Women can go into a store and think about buying, then walk out with nothing. The salesperson has to be in it for the long term, not some sales quota.”

REVEL IN THE BENEFITS

When you gear your marketing strategy toward women, they’ll speak well of your store. “Women like to share shopping stories, more than men do,” says Gordon. “Positive word of mouth is key to winning female customers.” And since women are more likely to ask for what they want, your male customers will only benefit from the improvements you make at your store, things they wouldn’t think to request.

To continue attracting women, regularly revisit your strategy. Just like your business, their needs are always changing, so remain aware of what they want. Certainly, what they don’t want is to struggle with finding the best place to buy a wedding or birthday present. ■



WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?

Here are some of their unique shopping and purchasing traits in a nutshell

- Women approach a purchase as if they’re entering into a relationship, taking into account the entire shopping experience, from how comfortable they feel in the store to how easily they can make returns.
- Convenience and saving time are important to women, so is good customer service.
- Store appearance matters to women. They’re much more sensitive to how things look and smell.
- Women buy things in context with how they’re going to use them. Display merchandise within environments that inspire them to buy.
- The cost of products matters less to women than other things. In general, women appreciate good customer service more than they do a discount.
- Women are more interested in researching products and services before they buy than men.
- Women are more people-oriented and, therefore, more open to advice from friends, family and salespeople.
- While shopping, women learn more and add details to their decision-making process.
- Women often take longer to make buying decisions.

