

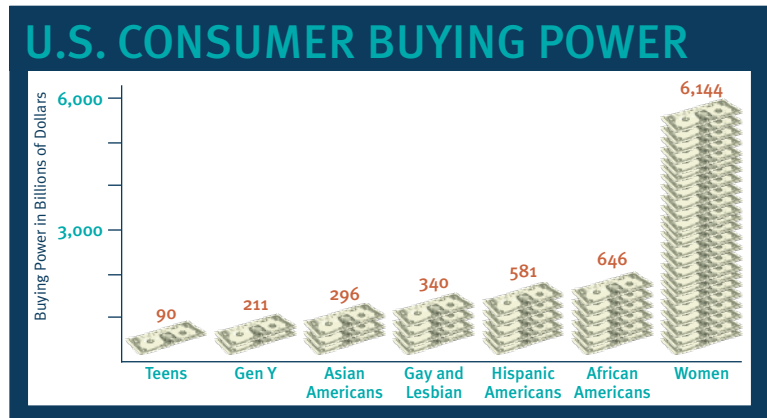
TO WALK A MILE IN HER PUMPS: AN OVERVIEW OF MARKETING TO WOMEN

by Melissa Thoma

For the past few years I've been struck by the number of clients for whom research reveals that the primary target audience is women. After coming across a compelling article in the Wall Street Journal about the considerable power women have in driving purchases, I decided to compile the state-of-the-art thinking in marketing to women. What follows is a summary of findings from several excellent books: "Don't Think Pink," by Johnson and Learned, "Marketing To Women," by Barletta, "The Power Of The Purse," by Warner and Faith Popcorn's "EVEolution."

Shhh...listen quietly; you may hear the tapping of millions of high heels as women become the driving force behind successful products and services. There's a revolution afoot.

Make that an EVEolution, in the words of trend-reader Faith Popcorn. Women are the purchase power brokers today responsible for generating or influencing a whopping 85% of consumer purchases.



This shift in spending power is predicted to grow, driven largely to the number of women receiving advanced education and the requisite jobs. By 2020 if the trend continues, women will out-earn men.



T H O M A T H O M A

brand power • smart creative

Popcorn believes that the shift in the playing field toward marketing efforts that attract women will change the way businesses will succeed in the marketplace. Businesses will have to retool and adjust their marketing approaches to encompass the way women think, work and live.

Marketing to women is an altogether more holistic effort, and the bottom line in our opinion is that building a strong brand is the key to success. In fact, the authors of *Trading Up* called women the “uber consumers” of brands. Following are some tips for a more EVEolutionary marketing approach.

WHAT WOMEN WANT

First understand that women really do think differently than men — their brains are different with larger areas related to emotions and senses, and more connectivity between sides of the brain and cells themselves. This means that women are multisensory and big-picture oriented and more holistic in their decision-making.



Women are also highly interdependent, valuing teamwork over one-upsmanship. And they take responsibility for others around them, friends, family and co-workers.

Messages should be unified across all communications channels as a result. Women notice inconsistencies in style, voice and behavior. Remember our mantra, Live Your Brand? Women are very sensitive to advertising messages that don't align with their customer experience, or with larger ethical concerns such as environmental impact or treatment of workers.

Dissonance in their brand experience is like a fingernail on a chalkboard or a sour note in the symphony. So your marketing effectiveness will hinge on your ability to prove your worth in the larger community and in the customer experience.

Multisensory perception means that women are aware of the little nuances as well as the big punches. A brand should present itself in the periphery as well as on the main stage. The tiniest detail of the customer experience or purchase process will be noted, so pay attention to the details.

Men go to buy a product and do in-store research, utilizing the products themselves and the sales clerk for decision-making. Women utilize a complete network of research pathways, first seeking the opinion of friends, then perhaps the Internet or other data, and then shopping a number of stores before deciding on the “perfect” product. Women love to research, get the full picture and educate themselves, so provide lots of information for discovery on your website, or choose an educational format to sell your service.

You might say that women understand the big picture, but demand the details. Don’t think that pretty pictures are enough. Women do research the features and products, but determine how those features equate to benefits. The RAM of a computer is important if it means faster processing and time savings. So give her plenty to chew on, but don’t forget to tie the features to real-life benefits for her.



JOIN THE CLUB

Women, according to Popcorn, won’t just buy a brand, they will join one. If a brand can connect her to other women or improve her life, she will be a fan for life.

No one has less time than a woman in today’s world. Save her time and win her repeat business. Website load times, transaction time, flexible business hours and home delivery are a few very important factors to consider.

Tell a story, connect to her family or friends, and appeal to her emotions. This is the messaging that has pull for women today.

We always say that a brand is more than an image advertisement. It is the sum of all associations the consumer has with your product or service. Marketing successfully will require a top-to-bottom approach to living the brand and communicating. Companies should be sensitive to not only the needs of this vast market, but to the subtle differences in race and age among this group.

ARE YOU LISTENING?

Listening to your female customers is a must. Research indicates that women-only talking groups provide the most honest feedback. Male/female groups tend to adopt masculine

preferences and communication styles, so get women together and get them talking to one another for insights in how to respond to the market.

Interestingly, appealing to women should not alienate your male audience. Tested campaigns and approaches that appealed to women appealed to men as well. The reverse cannot be said of “masculine” advertising messaging. So listen to women and the men will follow.



This is not about “feminine” looking or feeling approaches. This is about providing information and communication in a way that more deeply resonates with the female psyche and lifestyle.

Where should you begin? We suggest that you begin by engaging all areas of management within your company. Successfully marketing to women will require that the product, service,

IT and communications be aligned toward this initiative. Next you should listen...deeply. Engage in research that draws heavily on friendship groups for insight. Allow women to advise you top to bottom, from product creation to service delivery.

Build a strong brand! Apply the principles of brand navigation to create genuine brand equity. As you listen to and engage the largest spending segment in the nation, the investments you make should return several-fold!

Follow that march of high heels! You won't be disappointed.

Melissa Thoma is principal with Thoma Thoma — a brand growth consulting firm serving clients in the consumer products, financial services, professional services, healthcare, manufacturing and hospitality industries — where she leads a special practice area focused on marketing to women.