



Marketing to Women

for THE COMMON MAN

The non-planetary, bookshelf versions of “Venus” and “Mars” have conspired to make even the prospect of marketing to women a scary thing for a lot of men in business. By helping you rewind and revisit your very talented marketing brains, I hope to help change all that.

by Andrea Learned

Venus and Mars are not in this galaxy. Rather, what we've got here are a lot of amazingly economically powerful women looking for products and services that meet their criteria. In fact, studies show that women buy *or influence* the purchase of 80% of all consumer goods in the U.S. Women today are, and likely have been for many years, buying riding lawnmowers, consumer electronics and boats, for example. They make 80% of the home buying decisions in the \$180 - \$500K price range according to a recent David Power Homes study, and they are likely to play a significant role in a lot of other big ticket purchases (like autos), in addition to the usual purchases of apparel, groceries and so on. Just because women aren't directly involved in a particular consumer transaction doesn't mean they aren't strongly behind the buying decision.

So get out of the orbit where women are confusing and men just don't understand. The women you'd like to reach are your wives, daughters, mothers and friends; and the common man actually can learn to serve them better.

TWO FOR ONE

Here's the deal: Focusing on male consumers, as has been the traditional approach, will deliver a customer experience that is not likely to be up to par with women. So — your effort-to-sale ratio is just a direct one-to-one.

That's fine, and it has been pretty successful for you so far, but consider the results when you focus on women's ways of buying:

Serving women well can really become a two (or more) for one venture! All the effort you put into learning about your customers will be more likely to give you a lot more bang for your buck. When you see your brand through a woman's lens, and make changes to serve them better, you will be more likely to create a great experience *for all* customers. Plus, women are

more likely to share their experiences with others via word-of-mouth or word-of-mouse, so assuming their experience with you is positive, focusing on them will build the collateral buzz among their neighbors and friends too. (Three-for-one? Ten-for-one?)

What I called this two-for-one marketing approach in *Don't Think Pink* was “transparent marketing”. Done well, marketing approaches geared toward the way a woman makes purchasing decisions, will not be “pink” or obvious in a way that leaves men squirming. Rather, male consumers will find themselves returning to a brand that tends to a woman’s often higher buying standards, perhaps without being able to pinpoint why. A few examples of non-pink buying rules of thumb:

- **DESCRIBE FEATURES AND BENEFITS TO APPLY TO LIFESTYLE RELEVANCE**, as well as the usual “memory, speed and power”, etc. (Car companies and computer brands are doing this more now, for example.)
- **LEAVE MORE “WHITE SPACE” ON WEBSITES AND IN RETAIL STORES**. Go ahead and supply every product, model, color choice and type of background information known to man, but give people space to think, pick and choose what they need to see, for when they need to see it in their buying process.
- **MAKE RETURNS EASY**. Nordstrom built its reputation on this, and men didn’t go “oh yuck, Nordstrom is a woman’s store.” No — men got right on that bandwagon and love the store, too.
- **TRAIN SALES STAFF TO ALLOW FOR LONGER PURCHASING PROCESSES** and supply additional information, happily. “Hard sell” is an approach that has long since lost its effect, for both men and women. People know they absolutely do not have to make a decision immediately — they can always easily compare prices and features elsewhere on the Internet if they can’t get everything they need from your site or store.

REVISIT MARKETING 101

One of the many hesitations a business may have about marketing to women is that it is a whole new phenomenon. The perception may be that in order to reach women, you have to step back and start from scratch again. The reality is that marketing to women is simply good marketing — not anything earth-shatteringly new. Plus, let me remind you, doing it well will NOT alienate men.

That said, the recent increase of awareness of the women's market, thanks to buzz about the “real women” Dove campaign and Nike ads, should be reason enough to re-trench, or revisit marketing basics, such as:

1. **UPDATE YOUR CONSUMER RESEARCH, QUALITATIVELY IF NOT QUANTITATIVELY.**

What you knew about your market ten or twenty years ago when you last invested in research has significantly changed. You've got to stay on top of the developments in your marketplace, preferably with a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. If that sounds overwhelming, at least make a concerted effort to talk with the women in your market in some small way (for example: email database or in-store) to mine some interesting insights for further consideration. Perhaps the majority of your customers have been men, for years, but when you stop to check the data today — women are actually playing a larger role. Just think of the following long-time coming societal shifts as a quick example of realities that have likely affected your market:

SOLO LIVING

U.S. Census Bureau data indicated that, in 2001, there were over 17 million women living alone, which was more than double the number of women living alone twenty years before (due to lower marriage rates, divorce, and a woman's typically longer life-span). Single women are posed to become one of the most influential economic forces of this century, with the aggregate solo female income estimated to reach 199.3 billion in 2006, up 20% from 2001. This trend also means that "family" has been redefined to be less the traditional nuclear sort and more a gathering of friends, pets and even online communities.

MOTHERHOOD

Again, according to the 2000 US Census, roughly three quarters of adult women in the United States are moms. Of course, the shift here, since the last time you likely did any major research, is that a lot of women today wait longer to have children, and when they do, bring them up in a variety of family definitions (see above).

**WOMEN
AT WORK**

It is estimated that nearly 65 million women worked outside the home in 2003, a figure projected to exceed 77 million by 2012 (according to US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics). Furthermore, a greater number of working women today are entrepreneurs (Source: The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's "2004 Report on Women and Entrepreneurship" found that more than four in 10 entrepreneurs worldwide were women), reflecting even more economic influence. Women make business purchases during personal shopping trips and vice versa, according to a 1999 National Foundation for Women Business Owners study (Exact numbers: Eighty percent of women employees and 74 percent of women business owners said that they typically combine business and personal errands or tasks in a single shopping trip). This isn't your grandfather's business world.

2. BUILD AND RELY ON REGULAR CUSTOMER INTERACTION.

Doing the above research should never be a one-time shot. Consumers and the things that influence their buying behaviors are ever-changing. Whether by database interaction or in-person happenings, your female customers will tell you like it is. Ask them for their input and inspire them to stay in touch by letting customers know you actually USE the feedback. Plus, by getting into the habit of having continuous conversations with customers, you will have more opportunities to turn negative experiences into renewed brand loyalty. While women may be more likely to take the time for such interaction and delighted to be asked for their opinions, men will certainly not be alienated by the opportunity to be in touch if they desire to do so.

3. STAY TRUE TO THE BRAND, AND STAY TRUE TO CUSTOMERS.

It may be difficult over the years as your brand evolves but staying true to your guiding mission and principles and keeping the brand honest, reflects well in a woman's eyes (and doesn't look bad to a man, either). Incorporate checks and balances so you can't go off on tangents and jump on the latest marketing gimmicks but continue to stick to your original story. Women, with their multi-sensory brains may notice disconnects between brand and marketing approach sooner than men, but over time, no one will trust what comes out of your corporate offices if you don't toe the line you drew when you launched your brand. Authenticity in action, not just word, is duly rewarded by the entire marketplace, men and women alike.

Revisiting these and other Marketing 101 basics should help any brand return to relevance with customers. And, mind you — “relevance” shouldn't be the solely women's market term it seems to have become. Men don't *only* care about gigabytes or horsepower, for example, so

presenting products and services in more lifestyle relevant terms would likely be a welcome surprise and I'll get into that next.

WOMEN'S MARKET TRANSLATION

Fairly often, the “benefits and features” of a consumer product are written up as some sort of technical specification list. For the women’s market, and in a way that works for men as well, I propose thinking of the benefits as “lifestyle connectors” and not just bullet points. Translating the great attributes of a product or service to better reach women means turning gigabytes and Hemi engines into more multiple user-familiar terms. While men, with their more linear brains (as Helen Fisher so well lays out in her book, *The First Sex*, if you want to dig around on that topic), do respond to “bigger, faster, better,” women will more likely shrug their shoulders to all that specification and competitive lingo, and seek out terms or language with which they can identify.

And, yes — while there is this sort of distinction between men’s more linear and women’s more web-like brainwaves, let’s take a look at this from our “two-for-one” marketers’ mind-set: If men respond to numbers and figures more, that’s fine, but will they also find more lifestyle-oriented words relevant, as well? How might a few common, male-oriented “languages” be addressed to appeal to both men and women? See the following for a few ideas.

CAR TALK (with apologies to Tom and Ray Magliozzi)

Helen Fisher, citing a variety of studies, describes men in this way: “They more regularly sacrifice health, safety, and precious time with family and friends to win status, money and prestige.” Fisher writes that women and men do not differ with regard to “internal competitiveness,” a psychological term for the desire to meet personal goals and display excellence.

BELOW:

A screenshot of Schick Quattro for Women's site showing the shaver's four blades in detail



But, she continues, “men score much higher in ‘external competitiveness,’ the willingness to elbow others aside to get ahead.”

This may well be at the root of the male-oriented “car talk” in so many marketing efforts these days. Two examples:

1. The [web site for Schick's Quattro for Women](#) starts with a flash introduction page, asking if you want “full throttle” or the “downshifted version.” The flash screen itself is then a sort of zooming in and out razor with the appropriate car-like sounds. There is certainly humorous intent here, but it falls flat, mainly due to the overwhelming guy-like approach to a close shave. Does any woman really care how many blades there are? As the tagline puts it, “Hold on, ladies, for the shave of your life.” No woman I know thinks of shaving as a ride. They are just looking for a quick way to the task of getting smooth legs.

A few things that could be tweaked on this site to better serve women, without alienating men:

Avoid the flash introduction, and all the other flash that is on this site, altogether. It is an unnecessary “techy” element that serves no purpose. “Full throttle” or “downshifted” are just not relevant to a razor for either gender, I assume. The copy about razor details is not that bad, it’s just hard to find, and you have to wait for each separate topic to load to read up on it. Once again, tech overkill. Sexual innuendo tends to go along with “car talk” for some reason. But, what may have started with the Pirelli tire calendar girls is also a cliché in many cases for men. Right, guys? Sex simply does not automatically sell, for men or women. The sexual innuendo here, specifically, is misplaced and adds to the disconnect of the already irrelevant “tubside assistance” and the opportunity to download beefcake images of men with larger than life razors. (You’ve got to see it to believe it.)

BELOW:

A screenshot of Dodge Ram Mega Cab's Engines pane.



2. The Dodge Ram truck approach is an obvious, but good example of “car talk” that has been revised to be more relevant to women. This still very male-oriented heavy-duty truck marketing effort has integrated a woman’s voice and language in a clever way. For example, fairly recent television ads for the truck have humorously played on difference between male and female brains in regard to the “Hemi.” In one ad, a man is going on and on about the truck’s Hemi and payload to his male neighbor at a barbecue, while his wife is standing in another part of the scene talking with the neighbor women as if it’s all about the interior and roominess. Hemi Shmemi.

Also, [the website for the new mega-cab model](#) is very male-directed, yet there is more lifestyle orientation in the inclusion of information about the roomy interior, comfortable seating and DVD players (which have long since been a huge hit with women with regard to kid-chauffeuring mini-vans). It is notable that there is no “Ram Facts For Women” link on the site, as that would be ridiculous. Big ticket purchases, like automobiles and trucks, tend to be household decisions and so both men and women need to find what they need and not feel condescended.

Very male, “car talk” style on one part of the site (Go to http://www.dodge.com/mega_cab/home_flash.html?scene=interior, then select Engines.)

Still male-oriented, but a more female-friendly description of the truck’s interior on another part of the site: (Go to http://www.dodge.com/mega_cab/home_flash.html?scene=interior, then select Interiors.)

GEEK TALK

Similar to Car Talk, but one that seems to have invaded daily life even more, Geek Talk is exemplified by the way a laptop is described with numbers in a sort of better/stronger/faster approach:

Intel® Pentium® M Processor 740 (1.73 GHz/2MB Cache/533MHz FSB)

The problem, however, is unless computers are my hobby, I really don't know how those numbers apply to the way I use my laptop or how my use of it may be evolving. Just stop a minute and read the above line again. Whether you are a man or a woman, what does that really mean for you on first glance? Now, compare it to copy that hits the key lifestyle connectors for a new laptop:

“If you check your email a few times a day, occasionally type up documents, do your book-keeping online and surf the Internet a few times a week, this is the perfect laptop for you.”

As long as those numbers and tech specification are accessible, it shouldn't hurt to market products in a non-geek way, first and foremost. Lifestyle details serve as filters for women, who will then look into the tech specifics. Men, on the other hand, may filter on the technical specifications, but find it helpful to consider the lifestyle aspects as well.

Another example is the digital camera industry. The box for my fairly new model says this:

5.0 Mega Pixels. 3x optical zoom. Extra large 2.7" LCD

Fine. My comments and questions for my camera store-owning friend included these:

- “Wow. That screen is big! And there is no little box you have to look through.”
- “How does the mega pixel number translate for my life? Is it good? Will the photo files be too large to email?”

I speak in one language, but the camera features are presented in another. Only industry-insiders (or otherwise industry savvy people) call the screen “LCD” or the little box a “view-finder”. Only those same people would know that 5.0 mega pixels means that you end up with a big enough photo file to create high quality enlargements bigger than 9 x 11 (which only certain people may really need).

When it came down to all the other little accessories I would need to get the photos to and from my computer and so on, I entered a whole other world of thumb drives and memory cards. I was lucky I had a translator ...

SEX TALK

As I mentioned in the Quattro for Women example above, sex is sometimes tied to car talk, but it really seems to have taken on a life of its own lately. If a product or service can in any way be tied to sex or seduction, it is likely to be done by companies that don’t really understand their customers. In the case of marketing to women, I call it the “Male Fantasy of What Is Important To Women”, a.k.a., Sex Talk. Especially when you are focused on serving women but still want to be relevant to male customers — this can be a real trap.

1. Seduction wine was released in February 2005 to appeal to the Valentine’s Day market. Quoted by the *Los Angeles Times* that month, the wine’s creator, Bart O’Brien said that he packaged the bottles in burgundy colored organza sacks, so that people would

“have the pleasure of undressing it.” Insert eye roll, from both men and women, here. The descriptive copy on the site (www.seductionwine.com) includes all sorts of not-so-subtle allusions. Plus, the “O” in O’Brien Vineyards is very much highlighted on the bottle. Wink, wink. Too bad this wine that O’Brien is so proud to be marketing to women is actually reported to taste good. I’m not sure how many people will stick around to discover that with all the sex in the way.

Changes that could be made to better resonate with women without alienating men:

Men may buy this for their wives or girlfriends for a single occasion, but its name and approach will likely get chuckles and not be taken seriously. Ditch the organza sack and do a little work on the label so the “O” isn’t as obvious (and clichéd). Try using only humor-based sexual innuendo that you KNOW for a fact resonates with your core market (so, you will have to do the necessary research to find the right approach).

Then, think about how/when the women in your life drink wine. Book club night comes to mind, for one. Life has changed and women may be more likely to drink wine in groups, with other women and/or men, and not so much alone with their partner or spouse, beyond the requisite Valentine’s night out. Calm the sexual innuendo throughout the entire marketing approach and you will have a better chance at piquing the interest of and gaining long-term female buyers.

All this, and you end up not embarrassing men who might be considering the bottle as well. Voila! Sexual innuendo that is relevant and done well actually will mean that more people can discover how good the wine actually is! And, there is nothing gender specific about that.

Sex talk also harmed a recent and otherwise creative ad campaign for Artistic Tile. Beautifully produced photographs, using lovely male and female models and displaying tile in unexpected ways, were ruined by 8th grade innuendo. The caption for an ad featuring a beautiful female model, clad only in a tile/grout bustier, read: “Check out our overflowing selection

of alluring styles”. The surprise here is that the company is woman-owned and has a fair number of women involved in marketing efforts. But the point is — that though the images and production value may be high-style, the copy made the ads seem more like a man’s fantasy of what would be relevant to affluent women who are likely making or influencing the product’s purchase.

A few ways the Artistic Tile campaign could have been more relevant to women and still work for men: Let the images tell the story, and keep the copy direct and simple. The sexy photos, plus written innuendo were a double whammy of obviousness, for customers of either gender. Leave something to the imagination, as they say. Make sure you reflect an understanding of your customer’s lives, and your connection with them, through ad copy, website content and other customer touch points. If there is a disconnect from one aspect of your brand to another, as there seems to be from the Artistic Tile’s web site “About Us” description to this campaign, women are likely to notice more quickly than might men — but in the long run, the inconsistencies will be obvious to everyone.

THE FEMALE CONSUMER IS YOUR WIFE, SISTER, MOTHER OR FRIEND

To quote infamous ad-man David Ogilvy, “Bear in mind that the consumer is not a moron. She is your wife. Don’t insult her intelligence.” You could easily replace “she is your wife” with “he is your husband.” In either case, don’t make your consumer market a place of overwhelming mystery; think of it as a group of people about whom you already know and care.

The female consumer, specifically, is not some unknown entity, making indecipherable buying decisions — “she” is you or your wife, your friend or your sister, or your mother, just as the male consumer is your father, brother or uncle. And, you usually know what is relevant

**COMMON MAN
GUIDELINES TO WOMEN'S
MARKET RELEVANCE**

- **GET TO KNOW THEM!**
Update your consumer research frequently.
- **STAY IN TOUCH!**
Encourage and utilize customer feedback.
- **DON'T STRAY FROM THE PATH!**
Embrace and maintain brand authenticity.
- **AVOID "TALK."**
Keep car talk, sex talk and geek talk in check.

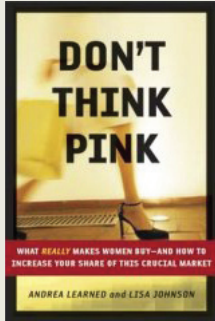
to them (by staying in touch). So — why not keep the women you know in your head as you proceed in developing your marketing efforts to better serve women everywhere? If you don't have the resources to conduct research or the time to use your database for surveying — the women in your life could serve as a sounding board to provide a layer of insight you wouldn't otherwise have.

Just as we somehow overcome the Mars and Venus phenomenon in our personal lives, so can we see beyond it in marketing. Yes — men and women are different, with brains that interpret information differently, and purchase decision-making processes that vary greatly. But, we can always find more in common over time and forge better and stronger relationships as we get to know one another better.

For the common man, the women's market cannot be learned via *Cliff Notes*, in one quick book read or seminar session, it's true. There is no "A to Z," easy, linear answer to better reaching them. But, step back for a minute and take a look at the men's market: It is exactly the same situation, and the marketing world has been doing a great job reaching them for years.

So, it actually isn't a whole new orbit after all. Marketing to women is just good marketing. Any man or woman can learn to do it well.

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**BUY THE BOOK**

For more details or to buy a copy of Andrea Learned's book, *Don't Think Pink*, click here.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea Learned is a leading women's market expert and speaker. The co-author of [Don't Think Pink: What Really Makes Women Buy — And How To Increase Your Share Of This Crucial Market](#), she writes regularly for a variety of online business publications and maintains a blog at: <http://learnedonwomen.com>.

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
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