

The New Women's Market

In the United States today, women handle 75% of family finances, control \$14 trillion (51%) of private wealth, and account for at least \$2 trillion in consumer spending each year. Women make or influence 80% of consumer purchases, buying 81% of electronics, 75% of over-the-counter drugs, and 65% of new cars. As a result, marketers are now finally wooing women in nearly every consumer category, even those that have traditionally targeted men (such as automotive, financial services and home improvement).

Women not only make the lion's share of consumer purchasing decisions, they also constitute a majority of corporate purchasing agents and managers. In addition, female entrepreneurs account for 70% of new business startups. In other words, companies that pay attention to women prosper.

In a special report on marketing to women, author Emily Fromm explores five ways companies are reaching out to women consumers:

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

The number of women homebuyers has more than doubled in the past decade. Women make 80% of the home-buying decisions. Single women now account for 21% of home sales, making them the second-largest segment of homebuyers after married couples, who buy 59% of homes. Home designers and builders have taken notice of these facts and are taking women's unique desires and concerns into consideration.

IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE

The National Association of Realtors now emphasizes the particular needs and desires of female homebuyers in its sales training. In the home improvement sector, both Home Depot and Lowe's offer do-it-yourself workshops that have attracted tens of thousands of women. In fact, Lowe's purposely designs its stores to be spacious, bright, colorful and well-organized in order to appeal to women customers, who initiate 80% of home-improvement projects.

MARKETING PARTNERSHIPS

Women buy 68% of all new cars and 53% of used cars, influence 80% of car purchases, and make 65% of service and repair decisions. Automakers are ramping up their marketing efforts towards women by entering marketing partnerships.

THOUGHTFUL ADVERTISING CREATIVE

The efforts cited above have been accompanied by advertising which is much more friendly to women in both content and tone. In commercials you see a lot of women on both sides of the transaction. Advertisements for electronics products pursue female consumers by emphasizing aesthetics and usefulness, not just technical specs.

A NEW FOCUS ON WOMEN'S MEDIA

Women are powerful consumers of media. Magazine readership among women increased 6.1% from 1998 to 2002, compared with an increase of 4.3% among men. There are 110 million TV-watching women in the US, compared with 101 million men, and 52% of cable TV subscribers are women. Women and girls make up 50.4% of the US Web audience, and 85% of women shop online.

Advertisers are starting to take advantage of these numbers. Women's Entertainment, another cable TV network geared toward females, has opened a sales office in Detroit to go after automotive advertisers. Panasonic has advertised in Self, ElleGirl and other women's titles. And Citigroup targets women with at least \$100,000 in investment assets by advertising on the wedding pages of The New York Times.