

A New Perspective On Marketing To Women

Isn't marketing to women just good marketing? Of course. So why are so many companies, and even entire industries, missing the boat?

Perhaps executives aren't really committed to the women's market opportunity? Perhaps the whole "women's thing" is a bit daunting for some reason? Perhaps the company dipped a toe in the water in the 1980s by painting the interior of its retail outlets mauve, and darn it all if it didn't work?

Well, here's the key: learning more about your female customers and how they buy is potentially more important than the product or service you are selling. Got your attention?

"Transparent marketing" is really the future of marketing. Using this approach to reach women, in particular, can be an incredibly powerful tool for increasing sales and building loyalty.

What is transparent marketing? It is knowing your market inside and out, and then delivering products and marketing messages that are relevant to them. It involves a lot of preparatory research and continual interaction with your particular women's market.

The difference in using transparency marketing is that your company would not be just dabbling in the "women's thing." Instead, it would be truly committing to, and investing in, women as consumers. Do I need to remind you that women make or influence some 80% of consumer purchases these days?

So, how can companies revise their methods to more transparently connect with women?

First, the whole team, from executives on down the line, need to see the value in better serving women. Then, everyone needs to commit to learning more about women and how to tend to the complexity of their purchase decision-making process.

The following six keys will help companies get into the transparent marketing mindset:

1. Narrow your focus. Start with the narrowly defined but important group of the early adopters of your product or service. Get to know them and serve them well and their passion for your brand will attract a wider audience. Take the yoga movement as an example. Remember when yoga was a fitness activity only for earthy-crunchy Northern California Birkenstock types?
2. Understand your customer community intimately. You can't sit back and operate from within your industry's vacuum. You've got to understand what influences women by exploring their wants and needs. Yes, this sounds a tad touchy-feely, but the results make it worth the initial discomfort. Two elements to consider in your research are "a day in the life" and "a day in the dreams" of your women customers.
3. Build customer feedback into the process. You've got to admit that gathering customer feedback when a product is already on the shelf is a little late. However, getting their feedback on product design changes and marketing strategies before you are too far along can save huge amounts of time and money. Plus, that in-the-process connection with customers establishes your company's commitment to them and reflects the value it places on such input. Those customers who are

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involved in the early-on research will most certainly be some of your product's or service's biggest and most passionate fans. Of course, they'll spread the word.

4. Focus on your produces context. What are the key scenarios or life stages that the women in your brand's customer community experience? Are they sitting around at the doctor's office? Position your brand there in some way. Are they grocery shopping, driving on the Interstate, stopping into a coffee shop chain or going to Pilates classes? Be there as well, or figure out a way to partner with brands that are already there and are already trusted.

5. Understand and define your brand. Has it been a while since your company revisited this topic? Has the brand become diluted in trying to be everything to all people over the past 20 years? Remember transparency key No. 1 and define what your company does in order to be relevant to the very specific market you've identified. The uniqueness or specialization of your brand really appeals to a woman's sense of being "in" on a great find and it also makes them want to tell others. For example, anyone can look up "day spa" in the yellow pages. But if your spa decides to specialize in and promote a 15-minute lunch-break pedicure service, the news will spread like wildfire and there will be no need for a phonebook ad.

6. Be authentic. Women have radar for companies that say they know women, and even put smiling women in ads, but don't reflect real knowledge of which products women want (or how they want to buy them). Back up, with real effort, what your company professes. If you are in a traditionally male-dominated industry, build an advisory board of female customers. If you think your business is doing just fine but you haven't touched base with any customers lately, think again. A lot of what female consumers are looking for in products and services has changed with the times. So find out what they need and deliver it in a way your in-depth research and interest in better serving them.

Here are some examples of products or services that are relevant to women's lives and reflect transparent marketing.

- Starbucks: The coffee retailer was among the first to feature cozy chairs for lingering and good background music. Now, the retail outlets offer wireless access for getting work done in the office away from the office. No need for a sign or big sale, women find what Starbucks offers very appealing.
- Saturn: Saturn was the first, way back when, to offer a no-dicker sticker. Women everywhere breathed a sigh of relief over simplified car buying.
- Les Schwab: This Northwest-region tire chain trains salespeople to run out to customer's cars to greet them. The company also offers free tire repair. What the company realized long ago was that the easy-to-accomplish details like these would be just the extra incentive to keep customers coming in when they needed new tires.
- No Pudge Brownies: The box is on the shelf in the natural food section of the grocery store, and the copy on the package reflects exactly what we need to know: it uses terms such as "Decadent, Fudgy & Chewy," "All Natural," "Fat Free" and "Quick & Easy." In addition, the founder of the company has humanized the brand with a personal note and reference to a cause that she supports that would also be relevant for many other women.
- Reflect.com: This online-only cosmetics company invites women to develop and customize their own lotions and potions, right down to choosing a name and picking the packaging. It ain't cheap. But the service and products greatly appeal

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to a core group of women who are passionately spreading the word.

Finally, consider transparent marketing as the obvious approach for any company that is customer-centric.

For years now, business gurus have been reminding us all to go back and get to know the customer, right? If you've been doing that, your company has already formed the foundation for using transparent marketing methods.

When your company is truly making the effort—thinking more about its women customers, communicating more regularly with them about what they want and how they want to learn about your products or services—your marketing efforts are likely to be relevant and authentic in their eyes.

Since your company is already more customer-centric, then, isn't it nice to know that it is also on the road to becoming transparent with its marketing efforts? Rest assured, as you start to integrate some transparency into your company's approach, women will notice the attention you've paid to the details of better serving them.

Then, you will see how not making a big scene in your approach to women, but marketing to them transparently, is well worth the time, effort and budget.

by Andrea Learned, MarketingProfs.com, August 10, 2004