

## Marketing Messages



### MARY CHARLESON

#### *Savvy marketers know how to sell to women*

It's January and you're no doubt reflecting on some of the decisions you made in December. Does the world really look better on a new flat screen TV? Did the kids really need all that plastic? And speaking of plastic, just what happened to your credit card anyway? Buyer's remorse meets income reality. Add these seasonal factors to an already collectively stressed population, and it becomes nasty territory for a marketer to navigate. Women in particular view themselves as a stressed lot. **Statistics Canada** reports that 1/3 of married women employed full time with children at home reported high levels of stress. Women in the sandwich generation caring for children and aging parents, report spending twice as much time on these activities compared to men. And working women without kids still report higher levels of stress than working men without kids. Even those under 25, including high school kids reported fairly high levels of stress, with young women being twice as likely as young men to be severely time stressed.

Why should you care about the stressed out female consumer? Because women buy or influence the purchase of 85% or more of what is sold. They are a powerful group. And in addition to the stresses that women feel are thrust upon them, they tend to be masters of self induced stress. As marketers, you need to understand what that means to your business.

Here's what you need to know:

1. **Don't question or compete with her stress. Accept it.** You can not effectively connect with female consumers if stress is in the way. No connection, no sale. If your product or service contributes to her stress because it is undependable, complicated or requires unavailable time on her part, she will go to a competitor. Are your assembly or product use instructions complex or missing? Do you have phone advice readily available with no waiting? If there is a problem, are your sales people knowledgeable, and empowered to handle it promptly? The last thing you want to do is create more stress. Remember, not all women love to shop. It's a task that needs doing for many.

2. **Consider the needs of stressed out women with kids.** If you become a burden, she will shut you out. Shopping with kids in tow is reality for many women. Do you have a public washroom available? If she has to leave your store she likely won't be back. Is your business kid friendly? Play areas for kids while women shop for clothes can turn a "bolt and buy" mission into a more pleasurable shopping experience. Hint: this likely means she'll spend more money. Is your business a minefield waiting for a toddler's attack? Low lying breakables, gadgets and sugary food items may be desirable for the kids, but will require management and energy just to navigate your store. Mom won't be coming back. **Shell's** "Speed Pass" pay at the pump key chain is brilliant. It saves time and caters to Moms. The kids stay in the car, and a purchase is quick and easy.

3. **Look at your product or service with stressed eyes.** Focus on the reality of her life, not your version of it. You need to solve her problems. Save her time and keep it simple. Make any stress associated with dealing with you, your product or service, go away. A complicated return procedure wastes time. Line ups at check out waste time. Not being able to find something quickly, or get knowledgeable advice complicates matters. And if you have to make her on wait, do it with caution. Try pressing \*555 next time you're on hold with **Westjet**. "It doesn't do anything, but it makes you feel better", you'll be cheerfully informed later. What it does do is make you laugh. And during that time, they have bought a minute of your time graciously. Mr. Lube gives customers coffee and a paper in their car while getting their oil changed. They have recognized that the wait time can actually be turned into break time. Stress meets opportunity. It doesn't cost them much and it works. What could you do to turn a visit to your business into a short escape?

4. **Simplify your product or service.** Just because it's easier for you to do something one way, doesn't make it the best way for your customer. Look at all processes in your business through the customer's eyes. What is involved to return something? Just because you can invent a new product feature doesn't mean consumers will want it. Let's hope software and electronics manufacturers are listening. Step back and assess. Will it require time to learn how to use or install it? Is the benefit worth the effort?

A savvy marketer makes a customers stress go away by anticipating their needs, respecting their time, exceeding their expectations, and connecting with them on an emotional level. If you think like your customer they will have reason to be loyal to you. And by addressing what stresses women out, I guarantee you'll sell a whole lot more to men too.

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