



## Marketing Messages

### MARY CHARLESON

## *If you're not marketing to women, you're missing a big part of the market*

We know that men and women's minds are wired differently. This realization may have come courtesy of a pricey psychologist or an insightful friend following a crash and burn in the romance department. But a funny thing happened on the way to the shrink. Business got in on the action. Many companies have finally realized that a failed romance with 50% of their potential customer base, and in most cases a whole lot more, has been costing them money. So started the courtship of the female consumer and the recent interest in marketing to women.

Relationship parallels aside, why should you care? Because women buy or influence the purchase of 85% or more of what is sold. Clearly, they are a powerful consumer group. A recent Canadian study by the Thomas Yaccato Group revealed that all industries other than food and supermarkets fell well below the 80% satisfaction level with women consumers. In fact most industries came in well under 60%. And the influence of women on purchases goes way beyond clothes, furniture and cosmetics. This influence is across the board. It's time to listen up.

Mary Lou Quinlan, author of *Just Ask a Woman, Cracking the Code of What Women Want and How They Buy*, spoke in May to the Retail Merchants Association of Vancouver. And Joanne Thomas Yaccato, President of the Thomas Yaccato Group and author of *The 80% Minority*, spoke in June to the Women's Executive Network. Both of these women shared a passion for the subject and a clear message. In short, here's 10 points you need to know:

1. **Don't question or compete with women's stress, just accept it.** Do not increase her stress level by irritating her more with poor service, unnecessary line-ups or complicated return policies. Stressed people are lousy shoppers. They frequently share their ill humour.
2. **Consider the needs of women with kids.** Shopping with kids in tow can be difficult, but it is a reality for many. Know how to make their life a little easier.
3. **Reduce or eliminate time wasting activities.** Through her stressed eyes, she has not time to spare. If your product or service promises to simplify her life, make sure it actually does.
4. **Simplicity is important. Make your offer simple to understand and simple to use.** If complexity robs her of time, the stress level goes up. Refer back to item #1.
5. **Understand that for women, decision-making takes time. It's informed and deliberate.** Give her the information she wants. Tell the truth and respect the desire to assimilate the data. Women integrate information and experiences to make decisions. This usually takes time. Men eliminate unnecessary details so an informed objective decision can be reached. This process can be seen as fast as efficient. It's not about which is right, it's about respecting the differences.
6. **Women talk. You want them to talk about you in a positive light.** This can be a source of your best or your worst advertising. You have little control once the word is out, so make sure you give her something positive to talk about.
7. **When women shop, they see everything.** Aesthetics are important. Design and service matter. Present your product or service in a way that matches her decision process. Help her envision the completed project. Exceptional service will make an impression. Refer back to item #6.
8. **Women love technology that simplifies their life.** They don't just love technology. You need to understand the difference. Are software, phone, cable and Internet service providers listening? You should to be. Research indicates that women make or influence the majority of these product decisions.
9. **Understand that women crave and escape.** If you can position your business to deliver comfort, a reward or a real benefit, women will notice and appreciate it. There is a reason why spas and coffee shops are so popular. They offer a mini holiday from the stress or mundane of everyday life.
10. **Be consistent in your marketing mix and make sure all elements of communication are integrated.** Inconsistencies will make her question your sincerity. Don't think she won't notice. She will, and she'll likely talk. Refer back to item #6.

If you meet the needs of female consumers, you will exceed the expectations of men," says Yaccato. So this is not all about increasing your sales to women, it's about increasing your sales period. Think of women as a business barometer. To be successful you need to approach both genders with intelligent marketing. It's not about making it appeal to women; it's about doing everything so that at its heart you are taking women seriously.

I recently worked with 2C Communication, a local film production company, and hit the streets of Vancouver to do a little research of our own on this subject. We interviewed leaders in the advertising industry, businesses who are doing it right, as well as countless women on the streets of Vancouver. We recorded insights and opinions and explored all 10 points listed in this article. And it's yours for free! Email me your request and address and I'll be happy to send you our DVD mini-documentary. The first 20 requests get it absolutely free!

Mary Charleson, MBA is president of Charleson Communications, a company specializing in market research, strategy and advertising development. She writes monthly and can be reached at [mary@charleson.ca](mailto:mary@charleson.ca)