



Marketing Messages

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Savvy retailers are learning to navigate Venus and Mars

Could it be that marketers are finally figuring out the Mars Venus thing? For years the differences in men and women's behaviour towards buying products and services has been largely ignored. 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. That means that even if you are not in an industry such as beauty, health, fashion, food or family products, that have typically grasped the importance of the female decision-maker, you need to pay attention. What makes this shift in interest important is the trend by typically male dominated industries to recognize the power of the female customer, and incorporate changes to welcome her.

Home improvement is a huge consumer sector. Estimated at \$31 billion a year in Canada, it is dominated by chain retailers such as **Home Depot**, **Rona**, **Home Hardware** and **Ikea**. With knowledge that women have a hand in 75% of all home improvement decisions, these stores are making a number of changes to appeal to the female consumer. **Home Depot**, has been known as a tool mecca for males with shelves and shelves of product by category. They are now orienting one side of store inventory more towards women. They have grouped home décor items and merchandise displays to help consumers envision a completed project, something Mary Lou Quinlan in her book, *Just Ask a Women*, recommends when chasing the female consumer. Home Depot has branched out offering flooring and kitchen installation, services of particular interest to female consumers. But since do-it-yourself is still their focus, they have designed a number of in-store clinics for women only. Their web site seems to be designed with the female in mind, showcasing gifts and design accessories, and offering a number of renovation tips. Featuring women as prominently as men, new advertising portrays empowered women using power tools to complete projects on their own. The tag line, "You can do it, we can help" positions Home Depot as the source for the do-it-yourself man or woman.

What could be more intimidating than the prospect of a consumer electronics purchase? While price sensitive retailers such as **Future Shop** still don't seem to get it, some high-end electronics retailers are making inroads with women. Audio and home theatre has traditionally been a male dominated industry. However, retailers such as **Sound Plus** have long understood the influence of women on purchase decisions. Although the store traffic is skewed male, **Doug Argue**, *President of Sound Plus*, estimates that women influence up to 80% of purchases ultimately made in the store. Several years ago they renovated extensively to devote the entire upstairs to demonstration rooms designed to help customers envision the product in their own home. "A lot of guys will get jazzed up about the capabilities of the technology and how it will advance their status and power, but women typically want to know how it will enhance their lifestyle. Reliability, beauty, ease of use, and how it will work in the whole design of the home are major concerns", says **Mark Blackwood of Sound Plus' custom division**. **Carol Campbell**, *Publisher, Primedia The Connected Guide to the Digital Home* is more blunt in her assessment. "Men are in love with the technology itself. Women take technologies and turn them into appliances. They strip even the fanciest gizmo of jargon and all that is mysterious to determine its usefulness." Sound Plus has acknowledged the different ways that women approach home theatre and audio systems, and how these differences effect buying behaviour. They train their sales staff to position the product appropriately for the male or female consumer.

In a world where 81% of all products, both business and consumer, are purchased by women, there's a good chance your business could benefit by considering the needs of this influential demographic. Here's what you need to know to sell to her:

1. She's stressed, so respect her time, and if your product or service promises to simplify her life, make sure it does.
2. Keep it simple. Make it simple to understand and simple to use. If complexity robs her of spare precious minutes, the stress level goes up and your product or service will be on the way out.
3. Present your product or service in a way that matches her decision process. Help her envision the completed project. Extra effort on her part takes time. More time adds stress. You may see a pattern emerging here!
4. Be consistent in your marketing mix and make sure all elements of communication are integrated. Inconsistencies will make her question your sincerity.
5. Give her the information she wants. Tell the truth, and respect her desire to assimilate the data before making a buying decision. This may take time. Then when she's ready to buy, make it easy and stress free.

Of course several of these points could apply to male consumers too, so it just makes good business sense to consider them in your marketing efforts.

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