

# What women (really) want

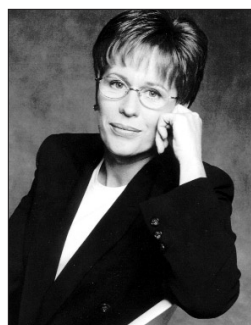
Hint: It's not that "gotta be a thin, beautiful, married, mother and corporate executive in order to be taken seriously" crap

BY JOANNE THOMAS YACCATO

"What a woman wants is one of the great questions which I have not been able to answer," Sigmund Freud once said tellingly. Today, companies spend an astonishing amount in an attempt to answer Freud's question, with pallid results.

For purposes of research for a book I wrote on this subject, my company, with the able expertise of **Thompson Lightstone**, conducted a gender-based national consumer study in August of this year. We asked both women and men about the general state of Canadian companies marketing efforts. The results weren't pretty.

We found that women control 80% of the consumer dollar spent, yet the majority of women consumers surveyed felt they weren't taken nearly as seriously as men. What was particularly fascinating was that 50%



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of women and 53% of men said reaching and understanding the female consumer should be a company's top priority and that companies needed to seriously improve their selling approach to women.

Our research showed the vast majority of Canadian industries lack an "evolved and authentic gender lens" when doing market research, product development, sales training, advertising and media buying. However, the few who did look at their business processes through this gender lens saw stunning results.

- The *Globe and Mail* readership, amongst women in major markets, moved from 39% to 46% during the newspaper wars.
- W Network saw a 19% growth in weekly reach amongst women 18-49.
- Holiday Inn on King in Toronto saw a 400% rise in occupancy rates amongst women business travellers.
- Aero experienced a 42% increase in sales, moving from number eight to number two in the highly competitive chocolate bar industry.

- RBC Financial Group gained a 12-point market share lead in the Small/Medium Enterprise share of women's market.

- Toyota customers rated overall performance of Access salespersons almost double that of those at a national level. Market share increased half a point in one region – which amounts to \$175 million in extra revenue.

- Rona witnessed an annual growth rate of 39% after implementing women's initiatives.

- BMO Financial Group saw women scored significantly higher than men on both of the key "customer loyalty" indices.

- Lean Cuisine's "real women" TV campaign resulted in a 10% unit sales increase against a category that was flat at 0%.

- Mountain Equipment Co-op watched sales on gendered fleece increase by 50% and gendered organic T-shirts by 100% – and saw their customer profile move from 70/30 male to an even 50/50 gender split.

Having spent the last 10 years providing corporate Canada with that much-needed gender lens, I can say without equivocation that these particular companies are in the throes of morphing into gender intelligent companies. This happens when you cast every conceivable business process through a gender lens.

Through exhaustive research, we have narrowed down and focused in on four simple concepts to put front and centre in everything you do to better meet the needs of Canadian women consumers.

## Be intelligent about gender differences

Here is where most get into deep trouble. This doesn't mean you elevate pink from colour to marketing strategy. Women resent any kind of gender-specific marketing that isn't appropriate.

Intelligent interpretation and proper use of unbiased market research and gender differences



Toyota's no-haggle Access program helped increase market share

research can translate not only into products and services that meet the needs of women, but also goes considerable distance in ensuring that an unbiased service, sales and marketing experience actually exists. It can assure that media buyers get the right message into the right medium for the right target. If it's women entrepreneurs that you're after, understanding their professional and life realities would ensure that an ad is placed not only in *Chatelaine* or *Canadian Living*, but also in the *Globe and Mail*.

Having an authentic understanding of what women want is no small task. Toronto's **Zig** is one agency that seems to have captured the essence of how to do it right. Get a load of what Zig did for their client the W Network.

Zig's challenge was to generate a buzz around the relaunch of W. It wanted to create top-of-mind awareness throughout key planning and buying times by reminding the media community that no network understands women better than W.

Their target was media planners and buyers both in advertising agencies and media buying companies. In order to demonstrate W's understanding of women, Zig went into the offices of each of the agencies and redecorated one stall in both the men's and women's washrooms.

Feminine touches like fresh towels, hand lotion, cozy bathroom mats, framed photos, magazines, three-ply toilet paper and potpourri were used to transform the stalls. At the back of the stall was a framed card that read "W was here."

The results? W received a slew of spontaneous calls from media planners and buyers praising the idea. "I didn't want to use any other stall,"

## What women want continued

they said, "I've been in media for 20 years and I thought I saw it all," and "Now this is insightful. It's the kind of thing we always talk about doing but never do." As the all-women team from Zig says, "Mission accomplished."

### Get through with gender intelligent communication

Women are avid consumers of advice and information and will consult a variety of sources, from advisors to the Internet. An "educational" foundation to any marketing or media buying strategy will resonate especially well with women. The key is to go where women go, so if you are a media buyer, look seriously at information or education-based mediums. TLC, the Discovery Channel and the Internet are but a few examples.

But companies need to understand the critical difference between providing information on a Web site or in a brochure, and the art and method of communication. Information is "giving out,"

you market, your delivery channels, the hours you are open, customer support and whether or not you make house calls.

The second is far tougher but of equal importance. Women's lives are incredibly multi-dimensional but there are some "universal" realities that hold true throughout almost every woman's life. Most women are busy, health-conscious, society's small "I" liberals and holistic in their consumer approach. Research shows that women are at the centre of the family's "soul, food and health life."

If you create a personal *health* connection – whether it be physical, mental, spiritual, financial or physical – you'll stand a better chance of connecting with women consumers. Going back to the concept of going where women live, this is a wonderful map for media planners. When buying media, go beyond the traditional women's media ghetto. Think Vision TV and anything health-related. Sponsor personal finance seminars. Think organic, and think alternative.

### Live what your marketing says

Women rank corporate citizenship as high as customer service when ranking the companies they

for also includes taking a responsible position on how a company relates to and portrays women. It doesn't pander to the "gotta be a thin, beautiful, married, mother and corporate executive in order to be taken seriously" crap. It doesn't promote the profoundly irresponsible message that "women can have/do/be it all." It doesn't include "guilt" marketing and advertising.

Instead of sexual stereotypes, women need heroines that deliver images of integrity, intelligence, strength, humour and character, not just beautiful, bitchy, powerful or powerless.

Herein lies an opportunity for media planners to consider non-traditional sponsorship opportunities that again go where women live, but are less cluttered than the traditional venues. Consider sponsoring "Spirituality in the Workplace" or "Work/Family Balance" conferences and workshops to create media-savvy children.

Something compelling happens when you integrate these four principles into all of your business practices. You'll discover that not only have you managed to garner the respect and loyalty of the country's largest economic influence, but your outreach to the gay and lesbian market, Aboriginal



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*The Globe and Mail's* female readership rose from 39% to 46% in major markets during the newspaper wars

but communication is "getting through." Nothing will stop a successful sales and marketing experience in its tracks faster than the disconnect that can occur due to the different communication styles of women and men. We watch this happen in stores, dealerships and banker's offices all over the country every day.

### Market multi-dimensionally

A staggering half of all Canadian women in our study indicated that companies didn't understand how dynamic and busy their life is today. One third said companies are out of touch with them and their life and don't understand the needs of women today.

Statistics Canada reports that women in the paid labour force perform 2.5 hours daily of child and home care over their male counterparts. This has profound marketing ramifications, and the first is easy to get: Do *anything* and *everything* to make women's lives simpler. This applies to product engineering and development, how and where

want to deal with. In our study, 75% of the women said that a company must care about the community and its employees and be a good corporate citizen.

However, corporate soul isn't just about cutting cheques. It's about matching your inside to your outside. It ensures the sales experience and the internal company culture actually correlate and support what the marketing promises.

What you promise in your value proposition is experienced at the "floor-of-the-store." You can't say, "At Speedy you're a somebody," and then have the muffler shop manager ignore questions just because the customer happens to be a woman. To do it right, one needs to create, transform and nurture an internal culture where employees, including all customer points of contact, not only understand and believe, but actually *live* what the marketing is saying. It creates a place where women are part of the company hierarchy – from the mailroom to the executives suites.

The variety of corporate soul that women look

and Asian markets, the youth market, virtually every other market segment has dramatically improved. Getting it right with women consumers means you ultimately raise the bar for everyone.

Think about it. Women have been society's "shoppers" forever. This has created savvy consumers who are highly suspect of branding that doesn't ring true. Stir in women's enormous consumer influence. Add in the evolving trend of global consumer cynicism, and what you now have is a very clear business imperative to become a company that doesn't ignore women's consumer needs.

*Joanne Thomas Yaccato is founder and principal of The Thomas Yaccato Group, a consulting and training company specializing in providing corporate Canada with a gender lens. She is also the author of The 80% Minority: Reaching the Real World of Women Consumers, slated to hit bookstores in March. She can be reached at: joanne@womenand-moneyinc.com.*