

Beyond Pink Thinking Positioning Your Brand to Effectively Reach Women

Outdoor Industry Special Edition - by Lisa Johnson

Shorter, smaller and packed in a floral bag. That's the dismal pink history of many marketing campaigns designed to attract women customers in the outdoor and sporting goods industries. By simply translating products, services and sales materials into feminine or "lighter" versions of the original, companies miss the bull's eye when it comes to satisfying this ultra-savvy market who purchase 80 percent of all consumer goods. The result of pink thinking is that companies have become reluctant to focus their attention and dollars on today's largest market segment—women.

Is Gender Neutral The Answer?

The gender-neutral approach arose as a pendulum-swing response to failing pink campaigns. Brands that market in this manner assume that men and women are really not that different—and even if they were, they wouldn't want to be treated differently. Gender-neutral marketing is as extreme (and often, as ineffective) as pink marketing. Women may not want the floral bag, but there are many changes companies could make in both their products and their sales experience that would attract a significant number of women to their brand.

Visible Campaigns Are "For Women"

Some products and services demand language and imagery that's clearly directed toward women. Well executed, a visible approach can streamline the way to women's buying minds and deliver a truly customized brand experience. In just six years, Tubbs Snowshoes has nurtured an incredible 300 percent growth in their women's market. This forward-thinking company designed a snowshoe specifically for women by building the bindings around a woman's boot and changing the frame shape to accommodate her shorter stride. The result? Better fit and performance from these technically relevant changes, and more women trying the sport for the first time. In 2004 alone, Tubbs' women's market grew 17 percent, and a full 32 percent of all their SKUs are products designated specifically for women.

continues on page 2...

Six Keys To Reaching Women Transparently

Transparent marketing goes beyond telling your women customers that your product is "for them," and instead, reflects a deep understanding of their values and their goals. Here are a few keys to help you develop an effective transparent campaign:

Narrow your focus. No matter how hard you try, you can't market toward a broad spectrum of ages, life stages or cultures all at once. Focus on the women who will be your early adopters or who represent the best fit for your products or services. If you begin with a narrowly defined but important group, the passion for your brand will soon attract a wider audience.

Understand the community, intimately. As you explore the wants and needs of these women, 1) understand their daily life realities and, 2) tap into their dreams, including cherished values and aspirations.

Build feedback into your process. Include women in your process sooner and more often. Once a product or program is on the shelf, you're already too late for the most valuable feedback.

Focus on your product's context. Design your customer experience around the key scenarios or life stages of your target women customers. Do you fit into her life as she's just retiring and has time for new adventures, has a house full of kids and is looking for family fun, or has decided to abandon the gym and burn calories outside in the sun, for example?

Understand and define your own brand. Your brand should do everything possible to avoid a bland, "serve every woman everywhere," campaign. If you want to reach more women, introduce their favorite flavors instead of pushing something vanilla.

Be Authentic. Share your brand's attitude, and honestly reveal both its strengths and weaknesses. Loosen up your stiff corporate collar, invite your customers into your brand story, and introduce the key people who have made it a reality. Honesty builds trust.

Transparent Campaigns Resonate With Women

A subtle, yet more sophisticated, approach involves tailoring your brand experience to meet women's needs without labeling the product or service exclusively "for women." This is transparent marketing. Home Depot, Lowe's and other home improvement centers have started widening aisles (women like more room to browse and examine items on lower shelves) and adding a wider range of home products. Combine these changes with bathroom and kitchen vignettes and you see why these former hardware stores have been successfully transformed into nerve points for home inspiration and education.

While Home Depot and Lowe's do not label these efforts "for women" per se, their transparent campaigns acknowledge that women have the same product and service expectations as men—and then some. Women have a longer list of requirements and reward brands that make their shopping experience more streamlined and intuitive. With this knowledge in mind, these home improvement retailers developed full-service solutions, tailored services and new products to attract a specific group of female do-it-yourselfers. As a bonus, by meeting the high expectations of these women in a transparent fashion, they have built stronger relationships with their male customers who also appreciate the changes.

Transparent marketing can also be seen online. Two little words on their web site express it all: "Compare Rates." How scary was it for Progressive Insurance to be this authentic with their customers? How powerful a play, on the other hand? This savvy company understands that women do more comparison-shopping than men and rely heavily on expert and peer recommendations. They also reward products and services that help them save valuable time. On the Progressive site, customers find a one-stop-shopping tool that helps them pinpoint the best rates on the market. By redesigning their services around women's buying behavior, Progressive developed a transparent approach that satisfies women - and attracts new male customers in the process.

Hybrid Campaigns Add Relevance For Women

Another option is the hybrid marketing campaign. In this case, the overall marketing effort might remain transparent, while certain products or elements are more visibly directed toward women. Home Depot is being very visible about marketing to women with their popular Do-it-Herself educational workshops, but the brand is doing so within an overall transparent marketing strategy.

The incredibly powerful alternatives to pink -visible, hybrid and transparent marketing - will lead companies to more effectively sell their product or service, whether necessity or luxury, high price point or low, by delivering relevance and building authentic connections with women.

ReachWomen

Lisa Johnson, CEO

Phone: 541-685-9400

E-mail: lisa@reachwomen.com

Website: www.reachwomen.com

compliments of



**OUTDOOR
INDUSTRY**
FOUNDATION