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trends and other interesting things from around the world

Hearts & Minds

Apparently, wait for it.., men and women are different! Yeah, maybe you should sit down and let the shock wear off. Furthermore this difference is more than just all the mechanical bits and pieces that we use to sell cars with. These mechanical bits may feature later so don't switch off yet. The differences are partly in the way that Men and Women sense their environment.

Their sensory acuity often has a different hierarchy of importance and often the link between these senses and the interpretation and interrogation that goes on in the brain, follows a slightly different route.

There are numerous medical statistics that people throw out to account for these differences. Women are less likely to be colour blind, women tend to use both sides of the brain more efficiently, men are more likely to be better with spatial awareness and interpretation. So, multi-tasking for women and map reading for men. So far nothing all that insightful. Lets think about some of the more general marketing behaviours that tend to get attributed to the sexes and let's see if we can bend some of those gender rules. Firstly, men like black and chrome, men interrogate visually and physically, men don't like to browse or



even to shop, but do like gadgets. Women love to shop, women like browsing, women interrogate with more of their senses, women don't understand technology or gadgets and as for colour, love it but do you have it in pink or lilac. These are obviously stereotypes and as such rarely link to any individual with any degree of accuracy.

Times they are a changing

The power and influence of women in society is nothing new. This was once referred to as the 'power behind the throne'. Not anymore, women are now well out front and as for that throne, they checked it over and thanks but no thanks.

This change in roles is continuing to evolve and with it the tags that marketers have used to label the



different social profiles. In the past it seemed enough to specify socio economic differences. Marketers would speak of age and A, B, C1, C2, D or E categories. This spoke vaguely of income level and to some degree aspiration levels. The obvious weaknesses lead to another system one which looked to the motivational drivers within different categories or tribes.

Looking for DINKS with GSOH

Most of this segmentation was designed to sketch an image of your customer and give an insight into what motivates them. These are by their very nature stereotypical even though some marketers view it differently. Stephen Greyser, of the Harvard Business School believes that “Society may form stereotypes,

but the job of effective marketing is really to avoid stereotypes and focus on analytically supportable clusters that are large enough and reachable enough to sustain a market”. Personally, I’m not sure when a stereotype becomes a cluster, possibly when it has it’s own acronym.

YUPPIES was a term concocted in 1984, the meaning varies depending on location but generally stood for ‘Young Urban Professionals’. There have been numerous additions, YIPPIES, BUPPIES, GUPPIES, DINKS and my current favourite is often used to apply to former ‘YUPPIES’ or ‘dINKS’ (double income no kids) and is ‘SITCOMs’, Single Income Two Kids Oppressive Mortgage. Perhaps this vague outline is the best definition we can expect to gain and that anything else would be too niche, although the growth of these acronyms would suggest that as the market segments farther and farther that whatever niche you’re in there’ll be an acronym getting coined especially for you.

An Eye for the Ladies

The changing role and perception of women has also driven major changes in the way that products are created, manufactured, marketed and sold. The changes in both financial and social status has led to some of these changes. There has always been specific interest in marketing to women. The fashion industry is skewed almost totally to this market. Other markets, which had previously regarded themselves as having a male audience are now waking up the fact that there are women out there, and lots of them.

Time to drag out the statistics. Women apparently 'either make or influence 85% of all purchasing decisions' - (Marketing to Women). The use of the word 'influence' is interesting in that I believe this part of the decision making process is often acknowledged but underrated, and that this influence isn't held in reserve for just the bigger ticket items.

Within any arena there are those people whose opinion we value, and those who appear to have an innate knowledge which they are willing to share with their close friends and family. This doesn't just apply to women but they tend to be more socially adept and therefore more likely to suggest, recommend or condemn. The flipside of this coin is that if the product doesn't ring true, perform well or if the service was poor, then the word will get round.

Now it may once have been true that if you were selling PC's, cars or a financial product that you could ignore that rare female, who was obviously lost or was going to eat up too much time without making a decision. Not anymore. Women now account for 66% of PC purchases, 65% of new cars and a whopping 89% of bank accounts. The figure for bank accounts has been related to women moving accounts more often, which happens when they feel the service is lacking, the product is poor, an alternative offer was better or they simply acted upon a recommendation .

Another long-standing misconception is that 'women don't do gadgets', which is mostly true. What's happened though is that gadgets have ceased to be as 'gadgety' as they

used to be. Most have gone soft or become 'user friendly'. Now you don't have to look far before you see what could easily have passed for a perfectly good gadget but which is now so naturally intuitive that anybody could use it. Take 'Apple', all of their products are designed to make you look beyond the wires and widgets to the possibilities of what you can use it for.



No Time to Stand and Stare

In a recent survey that looked at the roles adopted by women, a lot of the historical roles were still there. Women are still the main food shopper, cleaner and carer. When you add these roles on top of work responsibilities, it's easy to understand why the time poor complaint comes across loudest. Another survey showed that 59% of women felt their wants and needs were misunderstood by product manufacturers. For products to be compelling to women they need to get to the point and say how they deliver. Leisure shopping is not too dissimilar but there is more opportunity to be playful with both the product and it's environment.

So shopping falls into being either painful or pleasurable. The painful stuff is got over with quickly and efficiently; the more pleasurable shopping is a time indulgent pursuit of experiences. Sharing this experience with others, whether at the time or reliving it later with others reinforces the need for relationships in shopping.

An early recognition and understanding of where your product will live would result in a more focused, market friendly and successful result.

So far I've been talking traditional retail but women are also grabbing the on-line market firmly by the percentiles. Netsmart (on-line market research co.) showed that women's primary on-line activities were gathering information, e-mail and chat. The perceived benefit was that 'it saves me time and simplifies my life'.

It all comes down to relationships. You either decide you want to spend time and effort on them or they generally don't work. Putting the effort into building relationships with women is probably the most rewarding investment that most brands will ever make. ■

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If you want to join in the debate or introduce a friend to the channel then you can mail us at the newsdesk@uno.net.au



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