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Selling to women: the right buttons to press

Article by Nyokabi Njuguna - CEO - Marketing Strategies & Solutions

I once walked into one of the most popular shoe shops in an upmarket mall; in the past the market typically relied on them for durable, hard wearing, reasonably priced leather shoes for the family. This time round I hoped to find a nice, decent, stylish, good quality, low heeled, closed, preferably black or brown office leather shoe and reasonably priced.

Instead they had all this synthetic shoes [some open, some closed] that were not appealing at all. I was frustrated since I had already gone round nearly most shoe shops in town and upmarket malls and I could not find my choice of shoe.

And so I asked the shop attendant why they no longer keep such shoes for women and yet they had this very fine leather shoes for men; she said and I quote “we have realized that majority of women do not want to spend too much money on shoes like men; and so we bring mass synthetic/ man made leather shoes that will appeal to their [family] budget’.

Now notice my ‘demand’ listare most women shoppers like me or am I a fussy customer?

I do not think so - part of what makes marketing to women seem so complicated is the fact that their purchase decision-making paths can be a bit winding. It may be for a home, clothes, investments, schools, fuelling at a gas station, buying gifts, etc... Generally women consider price, square footage, school systems, and all the other more traditional elements. However, their buying curves give them even more to ponder. They may have checked off everything on their list, be close to a decision, and then hear that your company sponsored the run they participated in last weekend. Boom! She’s sold.

All things equal though, the more obvious, linear, and typically bottom-line considerations of price, quality, and customer experience somehow stand.

Top journalist Fara Warner in her book -The Power of the Purse - says in the US, women now drive some 80% of all buying decisions. She gives an example of Kodak's digital camera business soaring from fourth to first for creating easy-to-download digital cameras for

technophobic women. The diamond giant maker DeBeers's bittersweet campaign to get women to buy their own diamonds instead of pining for a man to do it brought in rolling sales.

Back here at home we have the financial services sector especially, creating products that appeal to women. All have a unique story in every case - putting women at the centre of their strategies, and listening intently to what real women consumers were telling them.

Reaching female buyers requires attention to detail and a whole-company approach. Why?

'Web' thinking

Not surprisingly, a woman's more typically holistic buying characteristics are founded in the extra -connectedness of her brain. Helen Fisher wrote in her book *The First Sex*: "As women make decisions, they weigh more variables, consider more options and outcomes, recall more points of view, and see more ways to proceed." It is no wonder then that emotions may play a larger role in the way women think about everything.

The curving buying path

With their very connected, it-all-matters brains, women may be taking in a lot more information and heeding more external influences and cultural changes during their buying process. The overall challenge is to understand them, respect them and show your appreciation for them, in order to achieve the powerful connection you will continue to seek and need in order to do business with women.

Connecting with women

A more holistic, "human" approach may be needed. You can be the best builder on paper, but without tending to all the details of her full experience with your company, you won't necessarily gain her business. For women, the emotional side of their home-buying process for example - may be what draws them in, while the linear facts and figures – though still important – may come into play further into the process.

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A smart investment

Chances are, your investment in a long-term interactive relationship and allowance for a woman's more winding purchase decision-making process will pay off exponentially.

Personally I can identify with that - I previously run a very successful business whose 90% of buyers were women. Our unique selling proposition was high quality, colourful trendy toilet bags and above all - customer excellence. The business wound up 7 [seven] years ago but the KIASILI BRAND still has an emotional connection with my female clients who till today will describe the products they bought back then so emotionally and with such passion as if it were still yesterday. **The products are still 'living' in my customers' dressing tables, bathrooms, and travel cases and most importantly in their minds.**

References: Article adopted extensively from "Reaching the 'Gentler' Sex; Why Marketing to Women Requires a Holistic Approach" by Andrea Learned, founder and president of Learned On Women.



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