

# Mind the (gender) gap

In Cold War America, we were advised there was a 'space' gap when Russia shocked the world (or, at least, the US) with the first Sputnik launch.

This was followed by the 'missile' gap when our leaders convinced us that Russia had more ICBMs than we had and that we had better all learn to protect ourselves from nuclear attack by sitting under our desks at school and putting newspaper over our heads, or by building fall-out shelters in our backyards.

I have a gap between my two front teeth, even though I spent three years wearing braces.

Now we, like Londoners, are being warned to mind the gap between train and platform.

Lots of gaps.

I want to talk about a 'creative gap'. That is the idea behind a growing niche in marketing and advertising start-ups. These are companies which have recognised that, while women control 85 per cent of the purchasing power in the US, advertising creative departments are still dominated by men.

Now, any woman will tell you that men don't know anything about women. (For those men out there who haven't been told this or don't believe it, my advice is simple: Get married).

So, how can male advertising and marketing creative types cater to a largely female buying audience?

It's a very good question.

One new company trying to do more than just focus on

female consumer behaviour is called Womenkind.

The concept is to pool the creative knowledge and experience of about 60 women, or 'female creative types' as they call them.

Interestingly, many will be utilised as freelancers working on a project basis. This certainly benefits the company, as having fewer full-time employees saves a lot of money. I am hoping it also benefits the women who may prefer this type of arrangement to better fit their lifestyles. But that's beyond the scope of this discussion.

## The female buyer

The concept appears sound. If women are ultimately responsible for the vast majority of consumer purchases, than they need to be approached effectively and efficiently.

And since no man knows anything about women, then women 'creatives' catering to the female buyer makes a lot of sense. Womenkind has commissioned research called Womentuition, which is to investigate the gender differences in how men and women look at, and respond to, marketing and advertising. I tried but failed to find this on the Internet.

Ironically, or perhaps typically, the person interviewed in the *Wall Street Journal* for this article was a man, one of four people leading the new company.

He claims there remains something of a men's club atmosphere in

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advertising/marketing. I was not aware of this, but will take his word for it and I wish them luck.

The numbers shown below certainly reflect a need to cater to the female buyer almost exclusively - aside from selling beer and pick-up trucks. While this is hardly new, the way it is being done may be.

Along with Lisa Johnson, Andrea Learned co-authored, *'Don't Think Pink: What Really Makes Women Buy and How to Increase Your Share of this Crucial Market'*. (Visit [www.learnedonwomen.com](http://www.learnedonwomen.com))

The book's thesis is that marketers cannot and should not rely on stereotypes and old data when trying to sell to women.

Making minor changes to copy and creative in order to reach a predominantly female buying audience is not going to work. Marketers need to dig deeper and learn to market transparently to female audiences.

Presentation must be relevant and in context with their lives. Learned also stresses staying authentic: women have built-in radar that identifies superficial and old-fashioned 'pink' approaches to selling.

## Personal connection

Learned agrees there are distinct gender differences between men and women in the way they evaluate and ultimately purchase goods and services. Men tend to be more linear; women look for a personal connection.

Men look for companies and

Creative companies are at last recognising that it's women who make the majority of buying decisions, notes **DOUG SACKS**.

brands that fit into their overall view of life.

Women consider what a brand stands for and how their purchasing decisions affect their daily lives.

For more on this, take a look at a book called *'Balanced Brand'* by John Foley and Julie Kendrick, which states that trusted long-term relationships with customers come about only via aligned principles and values.

Martha Baletta in *'Marketing to Women'* (2002) cited eye-opening statistics. When this research was carried out - more than five years ago - women:

- Handled 75 per cent of family finances
- Controlled \$14 trillion (51 per cent) of private wealth
- Accounted for at least \$2 trillion in consumer spending each year
- Made or influenced 80 per cent of consumer purchases
- Bought 81 per cent of electronics
- Bought 75 per cent of over-the-counter drugs
- Bought 65 per cent of new cars

## Cultural shift

Mary Clare Hunt's *'In Women We Trust'* (2006) shows a cultural shift is needed to better tap into the growing influence of female buyers and business owners. Statistics cited in what many consider male-orientated purchase domains are surprising, women affect decisions made on:

- 83 per cent of all consumer products and services
- 50-60 per cent of all auto purchases

- 51 per cent of consumer electronics (this figure is from 2003 - I think it is increasing)
- 81 per cent of riding lawn mowers.
- Women own 45 per cent of all US companies with + 1.2 trillion in sales

## Nuclear and extended family

As mentioned previously, what I'm saying here is certainly not new. Not even news.

Marketers have known these things for years.

But maybe now, a cultural shift is taking place in the type of messages being created that focus on the needs and expectations of female consumers.

Women are making the buying decisions, not just for themselves but for an entire household.

So, by reaching them, you reach the entire nuclear (there's that word again) family and often the extended family.

Me, I just want a well-crafted beer, I'm easy.

But then, I'm a man.

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