What Really Makes Women Buy — And How to Increase Your Share of This Critical Market

DON’T THINK PINK

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Women are making more money and more purchases than ever before and, as a result, they are an economic force that marketers need to harness. However, you can no longer “think pink” by assuming that all women are the same and all they want are pastel colored products with hearts and flowers on them. Generational experiences, lifestyle choices, transitional events, and demographic characteristics combine to define the filters through which women make buying choices. With so much money ready to be spent, marketers cannot afford to get it wrong. By examining the different ways women think and how companies can engage women with visible and transparent marketing campaigns, the authors show marketers how to stop thinking pink and start working in partnership with women to determine what they want. Women are willing and able to help you improve your products and services. You just need to get the proper information and then present it to the appropriate consumers.

What You’ll Learn In This Summary

✓ How to retrain your brain and stop thinking pink.
✓ When to use visible or transparent marketing campaigns and when to use a hybrid of the two.
✓ How the brains and minds of women work and how that affects their purchasing processes and decisions.
✓ The influencers and buying filters of different generations of American women.
✓ The influencers and buying filters of American women at different stages in their lives.
✓ The influencers and buying filters of emerging majorities and ethnicities.
✓ How to leverage learning curves and life transitions to market correctly to women’s needs when they emerge.
✓ How to work with women and make them your marketing partners as you develop and evaluate new products and services.
Beyond ‘Thinking Pink’

Women’s roles in society and their effects on the economy have shifted greatly in the last few decades, but marketers’ perceptions have not necessarily caught up. Skimming on research and working from outmoded data and stereotypes lead to pink products (pastels, flowers or “lighter” versions of the original) that don’t connect with today’s savvy and empowered women.

To connect with women today, consider the following:

1. **Earning Power.** Women now earn one trillion dollars a year due to a shrinking wage gap, earn more advanced degrees, earn a larger percentage of household income, are growing as business owners, and surprisingly, control 51 percent of the private wealth in the United States.

2. **Spending Power.** Even greater is women’s spending power, estimated at about $2 trillion a year. Women are responsible for the bulk of household purchases, and between purchasing managers and small business owners, they also control a great deal of corporate spending.

3. **Run the Numbers.** Companies who have assumed that their primary market is men may be surprised to find that women are now the majority of their customers. Establish the facts about who actually buys your products.

4. **Mainstream and Integrate.** Don’t let knowledge about women’s preferences and buying behaviors languish in the marketing department. Make sure the whole company is aware of this large and varied market.

5. **Reframe Approach.** Do not assume women are a nonproductive market because you are not marketing to them successfully. Consider whether your market desires a visible campaign that is directed unquestionably toward women, a more sophisticated transparent campaign that tailors the message for women without specifically labeling the product “for women,” or a hybrid campaign that combines the two.

6. **Go Inside Her Mind.** Understand the biological, neurological and behavioral variations between male and female brains. Women take in and retain more information when walking into a room, they are more good at articulating how a product or service might work better for them.

7. **Segment and Focus.** Today’s women have been shaped by a diverse set of experiences. Don’t be lulled into looking at the average income and spending of the whole group, or you will miss lucrative growth segments.

8. **Listen in New Ways.** Make women your marketing partners and you will discover what they want. They are good at articulating how a product or service might work better for them.

9. **Measure ROI.** If focusing on women represents a new commitment for your company, measure return on investment (ROI) to support the business case for increased budgets, staffing power, and programming tailored to women.

10. **Carpe Diem.** Companies are only beginning to understand the importance of moving away from pink thinking. Gain a competitive advantage and spur growth by leading the charge and starting now.

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**Now You See ‘Her’**

The two main approaches to marketing to consumers of either gender are visible campaigns (directly calling out “for women” or “for men”) and transparent campaigns (delivering a product that works with a gender’s information gathering and purchasing processes, but that doesn’t single it out as a special group). Plus, a third or hybrid approach combines the two. Each option

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can be highly effective in reaching women in particular. The success of one approach or another depends on the product or service, the profiles of core women customers, and how they want to be reached.

Some products just demand language and imagery that are clearly directed toward women. One example of a successful visible campaign is that of the Venus razor by the Gillette Co. Wachovia used a visible campaign when it created an online retirement calculator for women that factored in their longer lives and years outside the work force.

Hybrid Campaigns

In a hybrid campaign, the overall marketing effort might remain transparent, but certain products or elements are more visibly focused on women and their distinct needs. Home Depot’s “Do It Herself” workshops promote a visible element within an overall transparent campaign.

Rejuvenating Effects toothpaste is a product that represents the hybrid approach to marketing to women. Developed as a product within Procter & Gamble’s Crest line, it is promoted as the first toothpaste targeted specifically to women using the slogan, “For a radiant smile, today’s new beauty secret.”

Beware if a visible approach, either on its own or as part of a hybrid approach, reinforces outdated stereotypes of women and their preferences for the sake of a marketing pitch, or you will turn off both men and women alike.

When assessing the value of a visible campaign for reaching your market, consider how connected to a woman’s specific realities, such as body shape and health, your product or service may be, and how her emotions around those topics may affect her purchase. Golf clubs re-engineered for a woman’s smaller grip, swing and size is a case when a visible approach is the best choice.

Now You Don’t (See ‘Her’)

Transparent marketing requires more sophistication and in-depth knowledge of your market. It requires making changes in your product and marketing that are inspired by women, but are appreciated by everyone. Though transparent marketing takes more work, it builds brand loyalty and increases sales in a way that a visible campaign can’t. As more and more women realize that you pay attention to their preferences, there will be less need for the “for women” tag line. You will provide intuitive solutions and take the hassle out of buying for everyone. There is no need to be insincere, sappy or sexist in an effort to research or use your newly found information. Women will respond to an appropriate message.

Keys to Transparent Marketing

To create a transparent campaign, you should:

1. **Narrow your focus.** Women are so diverse that you will dilute your message by trying to appeal to everyone. Determine which segment across ages, life stages, or cultures is the best fit for your product.

2. **Understand the customer community.** Intimately know what influences your customers’ community. Consider the routines, thoughts, stresses, hopes, desires and belief structures female customers encounter daily.

3. **Build customer feedback into your process.** Don’t wait until a product is practically on the shelf to get feedback. Work from the beginning to market with women instead of to them.

4. **Focus on your product’s context.** Have your product show up in your customer’s life at key scenarios or life stages. Get it in the doctor’s office or the mailbox (continued on page 4)
Inside a Woman’s Mind

Men and women do think differently. Gender-specific brain differences have a profound effect on the way information is absorbed, processed and retained. Here are a few differences in the ways male and female brains process information:

1. A Woman’s Brain Synergy. Women have more dendritic connections than men and more connecting tissue, allowing them to transfer data between the brain’s right and left hemispheres faster. This may be why it is easier for women to compile diverse input and come to a decision. They are also more in touch with their feelings and better able to express them. Marketers must understand that every interaction matters, that women notice inconsistencies in messages, and that human connections are key to attracting them.

2. A Woman’s Observational Skills. Women can take in information on many levels, and typically absorb a much greater amount of it from their environments than men do. Give women incredible detail to absorb and digest. Your brand needs to be everywhere, including her peripheral vision and integrated marketing channels.

3. A Woman’s Sense of Discovery. Women would rather do front-end research and then go straight to the one product that meets their needs. The pre-purchase process is much more important than it is for men, because that’s when women ask their questions and eliminate potential mistakes and time wasters. Support women’s inquisitive nature, provide basic benefits and features, and plug into women’s ongoing education.

4. A Woman’s Sense of Values. Women often incorporate their values into their shopping habits. Select messages and images that speak to your customers’ values, and connect women to each other around your brand. Make improving a woman’s life your brand’s context: Simplify her life by saving her time.

5. A Woman’s Communication Style. Women communicate to build bonds and forge relationships based on mutual values and interests. Avoid over-automation, focus on relationship-building opportunities (one-on-one experiences), and facilitate story sharing.

How Women Buy

Smart marketers not only know how women think, but they also know how they buy.

First, women develop and use smart shopping skills. Create a sales culture committed to helping consumers determine the best choice, not closing the quickest sale.

Women are constituent-driven decision makers. They set priorities according to the needs of those most dear to them, so identify ways they can support family
Inside a Woman’s Mind
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members with purchases.

Women seek ongoing relationships and insider information. A woman’s first research step is to turn to a trustworthy, unbiased source who already owns and uses the product, so provide pass-along devices (online and print) to support personal networks.

Finally, women comparison shop. They gather data through reading and research, so provide comparisons of your product’s features against competitors.

Shaping The Generations

There are many ways to segment the women’s market, but a good way to start is by considering the events that have shaped the lives of the different generations that make up the market. (See chart below.)

Generation Y Women

Generation Y grew up with the personal computer and the Internet. Gen Y women are well educated and now outnumber men in college and graduate schools. Their role models are their prosperous Boomer parents, and they expect a lot from brands. The Gen Y woman’s view of your brand is influenced by her characteristics: She is optimistic, technology savvy, a doer, entitled, multicultural, individualistic, education focused, socially conscious, confused and stressed, independent yet collaborative, and entrepreneurial. She desires highly personalized offerings and appreciates opportunities for self-discovery and sharing, such as online communities.

Generation X

Though Generation Xers were once labeled slackers, they have matured and are far better described as entrepreneurial and practical. They grew up with the Vietnam War, the 1970s oil crisis, Watergate, Roe v. Wade, rising divorce rates, the release of the movie Star Wars, the PC revolution, and AIDS. Influencers that filter Gen X’s views of life include: a nontraditional upbringing, a gender-neutral outlook, a commitment to lifelong learning, technology savvy, self indulgence, putting motherhood on hold, professional careers, and financial challenges.

They respond to hip humor, truthful advertising and highly visual ads, and do research before making major purchases. They switch brands often, have environmental concerns, and prefer gender-neutral approaches.

Baby Boomers

Starting in 1996, over 4 million members of this group have turned age 50, and this will continue for the next decade. These women grew up with the Cold War, the introduction of television, the Kennedy assassination, the Beatles, “the Pill,” the Vietnam War, and Watergate. They went to college far more than the previous generation, and more Boomer women work than women of the generations on either side of them. As they approach traditional retirement age, they don’t necessarily expect to stop working. They postpone marriage and have divorced more than any previous generation.

Characteristics that affect their buying include their interests instead of their age, stress and time management, care giving, confidence and optimism, and their exercise and health. To reach them, forget senior discounts, support connectedness, promote youthful appearance, be a knowledge source, and get to the point.

Mature

Mature women span a large time frame and have diverse beliefs and experiences. Although the 81 million Americans over age 50 account for only 28 percent of the population, they represent 50 percent of total consumer demand, 65 percent of total net worth, and 70 percent of all personal financial assets. Their attitudes and lives were shaped by World War II, the rise of suburbia, the Korean War, and Elvis Presley.

Filters that affect their consumer behavior include: selective indulgence, volunteerism and activism, embracing the Internet, and being energetic and active. To reach these women, speak to their lifestyles, not their age. They look to experts and authority figures, resent age-related adjectives, build human connection via interactivity, appreciate the personalized approach, and tap into intuition and emotion.

Looking Beyond Generations

Beyond segmenting women by the generation they belong to, common cross-generational traits and roles in the course of their lives may carry even more weight.

Single Women

Greater career opportunity, higher divorce rates, and longer life expectancy have contributed to women living...
on their own for longer periods of their lives. By 2006, aggregate solo female income is estimated to reach almost $200 billion, up 20 percent from 2001. Single women are content and in control, they sometimes intentionally take on motherhood without a partner, and they have unconventional living arrangements. The filters that affect their buying include a redefinition of family, healthy lifestyles, living a spiritual journey, and empowerment. They respond to marketing messages that reflect their intelligence, honor their lifestyle choices, and affirm their self-esteem and independent spirit.

**Businesswomen**

Working women and female entrepreneurs wield mighty economic influence because they not only buy for work, but they incorporate information gathered from work purchasing in their home lives. In 2002, there were almost 4 million privately held 50 percent women-owned businesses generating $1.17 trillion in sales. Most working women juggle many responsibilities, so making their lives easier appeals to them.

Filters that affect businesswomen include brand loyalty, desire for customer service and training, efficient Web sites, combining personal and business buying, environmental and social responsibility, and hiring help to save time. To attract their business, promote the benefits of your product or service before price, develop products for both business and household use, offer product training, provide ways to speed through purchase, present full- and fast-service Web sites, integrate your retail experience, and fully utilize online channels.

**Moms**

Having children profoundly affects women’s lifestyles. Their parenting styles segment mothers more than the ages of their children or traditional demographics. An average-income family will spend approximately $165,000 on a child by the time he or she reaches 18. Moms often choose to work even when they don’t have to. Moms’ buying filters are usually affected by one of two mothering styles: either traditional roles are followed and balanced with the modern need for women to be making a living, or women who did not plan their pregnancies, are perhaps unmarried, or are raising their children in a true partnership with the father, innovate their child-rearing roles. No matter what kind of mothers they are, you must market to multi-taskers, provide information over emotion, support their practical priorities, address their sense of balance and perspective, and educate them online.

For Additional Information on what moms want in advertising, go to: http://my.summary.com

**The Female Business Traveler**

Hotel chains are making changes to attract female business travelers, a fast-growing travel segment. Here are a few of the changes hotels have made:

- **Security.** Hotels have designed brighter lobbies, more open spaces, and tighter security to discourage intruders, because security is a primary concern of women travelers.
- **Food Service.** Businesswomen actually prefer to eat in their rooms, so room layouts are more likely to accommodate meal trays, and the room service menu includes healthier and more nutritious options.
- **Design.** Hotels are being designed with a more residential feel and fewer dark and paneled decors. W Hotels hosts a “living room” instead of a lobby, with space for a single traveler to feel comfortable.
- **Extras.** From Wyndham’s Herman Miller ergonomic work chairs and in-room Internet access to the Loews Vanderbilt Plaza Hotel’s “do not forget” closet, many hotels are providing amenities for all business travelers. Others provide a technology Butler for computer-related questions, in-room massage, and pet-friendly rooms.

**Cultural Influencers**

Another way to segment women is by ethnicity. Groups that were once thought of as minorities are now becoming emerging majorities. No matter the market, an in-culture marketing approach should be the ultimate goal. Consider cultures and dialects; variable acculturation; sensitivity to religion; and the importance of family, appearance, and language barriers.

**Hispanic American Women**

Between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population grew 58 percent and its buying power grows approximately 12 percent annually. These women have emigrated from many different countries, but no matter what their acculturation level or dialectical preferences, they generally have family and household purchases in mind. Families often include a broad range of relatives and generations, and shopping is often considered a family affair. Catholic holidays and traditions are also important. To attract this market’s respect, and reflect cultural and dialectical differences, show pulled-together fashion and make-up, remember family and children, tap into local celebrations, be online, and buy cable TV time.

**Asian American Women**

Asian American women come from cultures as diverse as Japan, Indonesia and India, so they do not share the same language or religion. Their buying filters (continued on page 7)
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tend to revolve around community and children, and may reflect social status and roles of women in home cultures. The women are typically highly educated, often have their own businesses, and although they are very brand conscious, they are not necessarily brand loyal. To attract them, reflect the uniqueness of their different backgrounds, understand that images of success resonate, learn and honor culturally specific traditions, use familiar body types and skin colors, and don’t overlook the fast-growing generation that immigrated to the United States with their parents as children.

Black Women

This emerging minority covers a broad range of dark-skinned ethnicities beyond African Americans. More Black women go to college than do Black men, and college educated Black women earn more money than the median for all Black working men — and for all women. African American women handle more financial responsibility than women in general because they are less likely to be married.

Despite this, Black women adopt more than half of all children adopted by single women. Whether Black women come from Africa, the Caribbean, or the United States, and whether they lived through segregation and the Civil Rights era, affect their view when making consumer purchases. To attract these women, demonstrate your commitment to their communities and church, value their lifestyles and cultural diversity, tap into their popular cultural interests, and reflect their use of media channels.

Learning Curves and Life Stages

Life transitions provide an excellent opportunity to build brand loyalty when there is a steep learning curve, such as having a baby or investing in stocks. These are the times when many new brand decisions are made.

The consumer’s confidence level becomes a key issue in what she will choose to buy. Alienating either tentative or sophisticated buyers with the wrong level of information is a danger. Be certain to prepare several service levels to serve all the customers on your industry-confidence spectrum.

Tentative testers will ask for advice from friends and then do research on the Internet. Make sure their friends are already aware of your brand and that it will be easy for newcomers to navigate your Web site and find information. Confident consumers are more interested in ways to speed through the buying process. Remove speed bumps that challenge their patience. For example, offer a “quick buy” link on your site for regular shoppers who have already given you their profile information.

To serve both ends of the confidence spectrum, ask where customers are in the buying/education process, provide a range of education, teach related skills, map key information points, and expand online options.

Valentine’s Variations

Asians are a diverse ethnic group with different traditions and holidays of which advertisers should be aware. One example is the different variations of St. Valentine’s Day, a holiday that Americans celebrate by giving chocolates, flowers and presents to their loved ones.

In Japan, the holiday has been adapted as Giri Choco which means “obligatory chocolate.” It is a one-sided gift-giving tradition for females to buy chocolates for their boyfriend, husband, male coworkers and classmates. One month later, on White Day, men who received the gifts must reciprocate, though with jewelry, candy and flowers.

Korea observes the equivalent of White Day when women give men chocolate on Valentine’s Day and men give women candy a month later.

Many Chinese follow the American tradition of Valentine’s Day, but they also celebrate Lover’s Day to commemorate a legendary love story about a young mortal cow herder and immortal weaving fairy who could not be together. On the seventh day of the seventh lunar month — the one day of the year the lovers are reunited — the Chinese will buy loved ones flowers and other gifts.

Life Transitions

Life transitions, such as going away to college, a career change, the birth of a child, or retirement, are important moments of brand reflection, consideration and decision for customers. Therefore, they are important opportunities for marketers. People not only think about what they need, but they may re-examine how to best fulfill those needs.

Women usually make the buying decisions when navigating through change. Marketers must remember that traditional one-time events are happening more often, timelines are shifting, and “mature” transitions are more frequent. For women experiencing a life transition, everything is new, including brand names, product categories, and price ranges. Marketers should help women get up to speed, tap into human relationships, create clarity through relevant associations with old experiences, group products and information into sets, become a trusted filter, and address multiple needs at once.
The Internet-Savvy Woman

Going online has become a way of life for women. To reach them, go where they already assemble. Women are 52 percent of the U.S. at-home Web population and they are online for both community and shopping.

How Do Women Use the Internet?

Women start using the Internet by experimenting with e-mail, and quickly learn to incorporate e-mail and online research into their daily connections with family, friends and businesses — making the Internet their tool and advisor.

Though women make or influence the bulk of consumer purchases in the United States today, they do not have much time to devote to traditional shopping. They are quickly becoming quite comfortable doing that online, so Web sites have to improve functionality and customer experience. With potential customers at all levels of Internet comfort, companies should address the following areas to better reach customers: connection speed, software download alternatives, navigation and viewing options, the human touch in customer service, and meeting customer needs via e-mail.

Shaping Online Views

Women’s brand loyalty really hinges on both the product and the shopping experience. Success in serving women depends on meeting, if not exceeding, their expectations for an improved customer relationship. Women are so demanding of a good customer experience online that a bad experience will ruin their loyalty for the brand’s off-line channel as well. Because women do so much of their shopping online, it is worth it to invest some time and effort avoiding costly mistakes.

Don’t use guesswork and outdated stereotypes to decide what women want. Avoid flashy technology — women really want ease of use, solution-oriented content, and superior customer service when shopping. Don’t send useless, self-serving e-mail, and don’t ignore the integration of online and off-line customer experiences. Also, companies must not waste the customer’s time with poorly designed Web sites.

Online Research

Because so many women are already online for research and shopping, work with them to learn more about what they want as consumers. To discover their true requirements, values and preferences, you must:

• Sit back and observe. To learn about what attracts women online and keeps them there, look at popular Web sites like Dailycandy.com for ideas about hip and happening shopping and events, and Tickle.com for ideas about women’s entertainment needs.

• Ask and see (through their eyes). Companies should use online polls, quizzes, surveys, feedback, promotions and e-mail advisory boards to gather information about purchasing behaviors and customer needs.

When conducting online research, DO pose questions in a fun, conversational tone; make it simple to sign in and get started; know the incentives that will inspire responses; express appreciation for participation; keep initial surveys or interactions brief; and use e-mail addresses only for your originally stated purpose.

DON’T ask for too much personal information; make your questions stiff or clinical; use e-mail addresses for spam; or abuse respondents’ generosity by requesting feedback too often.

Enlisting Women as Your Marketing Partners

If you ask them the right questions, women have an incredible ability to help you solve brand challenges for the products and services they purchase. Ask women and then listen to them carefully in the development process of products, packaging and marketing. Instead of using traditional focus groups, try having conversations in relaxed atmospheres; use a live talk-show format; tap into existing meetings of women’s groups, such as book clubs, walking groups, or investment clubs; perform virtual listening by sharing online; ask industry insiders; get feedback; and review data.

Tips for joining conversations with women include:

• Encourage story telling. Women share vital information about the things that brands need to know in the context of stories.

• Use all your senses to listen. Pay attention to the energy level in the room and the conversation’s content.

• Support the conversation through environment and context. Fun and relevant environments can do wonders to support authentic conversations.

• Look at her holistically. Women often view products and services as part of a solution or improvement that they will incorporate into their lives.

• Use your best listeners. When conducting research and listening to women, send marketers to listen to women who understand and enjoy the market, and who are clear on the objectives of your brand.

The biggest advances in learning from the conversations of women will come as companies use streamlined internal communication systems, such as an intranet and e-mail, to make the ongoing feedback from women available throughout their organizations in real time.

For Additional Information on virtual listening, go to: http://my.summary.com