



BY STAN POHMER

WHO HAS THE POWER?

Do women really carry all of the power in this industry; if so how can we continue to make them happy?

It's time for us to make the changes necessary to earn back those consumer dollars being spent in other industries that understand the differences in marketing to women.

Let's face facts... we've been a production-driven, male-dominated industry from time immemorial. Now, I'm not suggesting that this fact, in and of itself, is problematic. My concern is that there's a wide and growing disconnect between who makes the supply decisions and what those decisions are, and who is actually driving the purchases at the retail level.

While males make most of the decisions about what we offer for sale, the majority of the decisions about what to buy are made by women. And, as my wife Rosemary constantly and habitually reminds me, men cannot think like women; there's a basic law of genetics that precludes this from happening! What drives her buying decision is very different from what drives mine. And with women making or influencing more of the purchasing decisions, maybe it's time for our industry to do a bit of re-thinking about the what's, why's and how's of what we offer and how we sell it.

Some may say that discussing and focusing on the female purchaser as a separate group is condescending. Au contraire...it's a long-neglected recognition and

realization that our industry hasn't adequately addressed this important segment of the buying population. Other industries competing for the purchasing power of the female consumer figured this out a long time ago and developed effective marketing positions focused on her.

TALK ABOUT POWER

- Studies show that in an increasingly larger number of households (over 50 percent), women not only control the household finances and budgets, but the actual spending decisions.

- Bureau of Labor Statistics findings show that 38 percent of all small business owners are women.

- 37 percent of women live in households with incomes of \$50,000-100,000, and 12 percent live in households with more than \$100,000 in annual income, according to Prudential Financial.

- 60 percent of women 16 and older are working, according to Margaret Gardner, Yankelovich.

- In nearly two thirds of households, women are the primary shoppers, but 72 percent of married women who work full time are the primary shoppers (Margaret Gardner, Yankelovich), and management guru Tom Peters, suggests that women con-

trol over 80 percent of all household purchases.

- The American Floral Endowment's *Consumer Tracking Study* compiled by Ipsos-Insight shows that in 2003, women made 73 percent of all floral purchases and 78.3 percent of the annual/garden plant purchases. (And just think about the sales potential if we did a better job of addressing the specific needs of this huge segment of purchasers!)

I initially thought there was an evolution taking place about the reasons people are buying our products, evolving from the joys and enjoyment of the activity of gardening to being embraced by consumers as an extension of their home decorating and utilizing their yards and gardens for entertainment. But after studying consumer behavior, I now believe that it's more of a revolution than an evolution...this consumer mindset shift is taking place far more rapidly than any of us anticipated, and if we want to fully take advantage of this change, we need to re-think and re-tool just as quickly.

And who in the home is most responsible for setting the direction and theme for the décor? And isn't it a logical conclusion that, if you accept my premise that the yard and garden are

becoming more of an inclusive part of the total home decorating package, that the women of the household are playing a more important role in influencing the outdoor product purchasing decisions?

WHAT WOMEN WANT...

Let's consider some of the traits and behaviors of women shoppers:

- They want attention to detail in product design, display and service.

- They want the right choices, not endless choices.

- They want a nuanced, longer selling process that respects their desire to understand what they're buying before they bring it home.

- Women develop their image of a business and their relationship with it based on a collective impression of hundreds of small factors; everything from the cleanliness of restrooms to the

cleanliness of uniforms of employees, from the shoppability of the product to creative displays that provide ideas in non-technical terms.

- Women never stop gathering information (while men tend to make their judgments based on first impressions).

- Women generally have more work and family responsibilities than most men; they're more time-starved or deprived; they don't have the time or inclination to research and ponder all of their buying decisions; they want someone to make the decision process easier for them.


- Women make final purchasing decisions based on the relationship with the seller, not on the basis of statistics and qualitative data, according to Peters. As a result, women are more loyal to the retail venue than most men, as long as the retailer can continually earn the loyalty.

- Customer service is more important; it's a matter of respecting women's need for information and socialization.

- The buying decision is based more on the end result and application of the product than just the merits of the product itself; they see it more in context of the big picture.

So what can our industry do to better capitalize on this critically important and growing segment of purchasing power? First, suppliers — breeders, growers or manufacturers — and retailers need to have women involved in the decision-making process; and at the start, not after the major decisions are made. And this applies not only to product development and selection, but to container selection, labeling, signage, presentation and display, color selection, facilities and customer service. Suppliers and retailers need to

do a better job of communicating about the consumer so that the producers can make better decisions on what to provide to the marketplace. Second, advertising and promotion needs to include creativity and end use applications, not just price. We need to start selling the sizzle, not just the steak.

There's untapped potential out there when we can do a better job of segmentation marketing. It's time for us to make the changes necessary to earn back those consumer dollars being spent in other industries that understand the differences in marketing to women. Who has the power? We do, if we're willing to think differently. 

Stan Pohmer is president of Pohmer Consulting Group, Minnetonka, Minn. He can be reached by phone at (952) 545-7943 or E-mail at spohmer@pohmer-consulting.com.