



In the pink

Christina Ioannidis, founder and CEO of London-based marketing to women consulting firm Aquitude, tells brands how to grab women's loyalty

Can male marketers understand the female psyche? This question immediately evokes images of Mel Gibson's fruitless attempts to understand "What Women Want". The truth is that as a consumer demographic, women are the hardest market to sell to: their decision-making processes are complex, and capable of baffling the most sophisticated marketing communications professionals.

HARD GROWTH. The end of the last century and the beginning of the 21st century has seen the booming of the fastest growth demographic – women. In a 2009 piece entitled 'The Female Economy', the *Harvard Business Review* claimed that "Women now drive the world economy. Globally, they control about \$20 trillion in annual consumer spending, and that figure could climb as high as \$28 trillion in the next five years. Their \$13 trillion in total yearly earnings could reach \$18 trillion in the same period. In aggregate, women represent a growth market bigger than China and India combined, more than twice as big, in fact."

However, business owners and marketers have been challenged to cater to this highly discerning demographic. According to the Boston Consulting Group, over 91 percent of women state they are misunderstood by marketers; and 81 percent of our global "Marketing to Women" survey respondents

agreed that marketing professionals in every sector should recognize that women have multiple roles and adapt their communications accordingly. Moreover, a similar percentage of our panel agrees that male and female consumers are different and should be marketed to in different ways.

DEAL BREAKERS. While marketers have made attempts to cater for their female demographic, they have often failed. The reason? Stereotyping women with what would be perceived "feminine" approaches:

- Thinking pink is a strategy. Women are particularly sensitive to par-boiled attempts to cater to their needs, based on a stereotypical basis – either the color of the product or a "female" feature. The telecommunications industry has been a recent culprit in "Shrink it and Pink it" attitude. Launching pink mobile phones or laptops does not guarantee increased share of the women's wallet. In the automotive world, engineers at Nissan perceived the female market would swoon over the "handbag holder" in the Nissan Micra Ti.

- Being a woman equates with motherhood. Not all women are mothers: brands must not badge women as such and ensure all marketing communications reflect their multiple roles. Single women spurn being badged as "failed mothers"; mothers appreciate brands which understand their

multiple mindsets as CEO of the home and, just as importantly, CEO of their own business.

PERCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES. Women and men are biologically wired differently in many ways. For example, there is a gender split in the wiring of the eye. The retina of the eye is comprised of cones and rods. Cones provide depth of perception; rods are sensitive to light and detect the slightest movement, giving peripheral vision. Men have a greater concentration of cones; women have a greater number of rods. Consequently, women take in, literally, "the bigger picture" in life. They will focus on more than the black and white elements of marketing communications. Subtle signals such as the ambience – lighting, lay-out, cleanliness, color schemes, add or even subtract from the ideal experience. Add to this the female penchant for identifying and interpreting "signals", non-verbal communication, then the devil is indeed in the detail.

Additionally, women go through more complex life transformations and career changes than men. This is largely driven by the "N" word – nurturing. As they progress through their life, women are impacted by either maternity or the caring of elderly family members. At the same time, they are more likely than men to work part-time or to even venture into entrepreneurship. Whatever

the life-stage or scenario, their needs are much more complex to market to than the average man.

BEING 'GENDERSAVVY'. Aquitude's global survey found that the two most important factors influencing a brand's perception are the way it communicated to its female market and the way it delivers its services. The first relates to what a brand or business says, another is what it does. Women yearn for brands who literally "walk the talk".

Aquitude developed a 4-part 'GenderSavvy' model to redress any gender blindspots.

ENGAGE HER HEART. A woman's key drivers to choose a brand over the competition are based around engaging her heart, something that she cares about. Her fundamental purchasing motivation may be a practical one, such as needing to get from A to B for a car, but it is the emotive safety elements for ensuring the safety of her loved ones (family, parents, friends) which will drive her purchase decision. How does your brand help her tap into and deliver against that emotive need?

Additionally, how engaging is your sales process? Does each of your customer touch-points communicate the passion for what they do to customers? How precisely do they do that? What signals are they exuding to make that passion palpable?

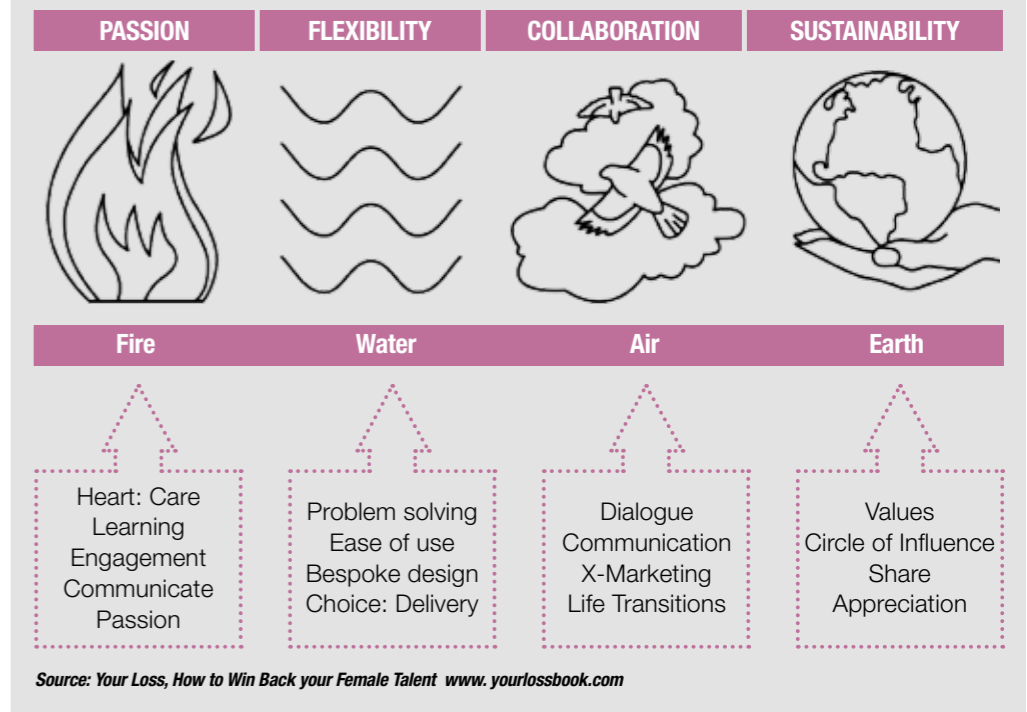
GO THE EXTRA MILE. Women are natural multitaskers. Consequently, a woman is always on the lookout for products and services that save time in her busy schedule. How does your product or service do that for her?

As her schedule is crammed, how far are your service delivery platforms synched up – web, mobile, telephone? Are you using them appropriately to offer pre- and post-sales services required? Put her in the driver's seat and make it the easiest possible for her to interact with you; deliver the service with the utmost flexibility.

WORK WITH HER IN MIND. She is looking for the brand that will demonstrate it is listening to her needs. Consider involving her in the design process. Women appreciate not only having their views heard, but also determining the shape the product takes and the opportunity to develop the brand's service proposition in a way that is relevant to them.

In a changing lifespan, how does your product extend its relevance into a woman's needs through her life transitions? If, for example, you are providing financial services, how are you taking into consideration the fact that her salary levels may fluctuate as she goes through the maternity phase (where her income level may falter)? Alternatively, how do you support that career-driven professional who chooses the entrepreneurial track, where her income may take a dive in the first few years? In her mind, she does not separate those differing life stages – they fall as part of the natural progression of life. She will remember your brand for not

GENDER-SAVVY MARKETING



blacklisting her and providing on-going support for her in times of major change.

BUILD A SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH HER.

In the times of the social media boom, it is critical to ensure she can have a direct say in what you are offering her. Engage with her in a direct dialogue on Facebook, or Twitter. Move beyond focus groups – actually give her the opportunity to roadtest your product; get her to try out novel concepts you want to bring to the market and then get her to act as your spokesperson to her circle of influence. Empower her to give you direct testimonials or even dedicate blogs to your service excellence; arrange special events for her business or personal network (remember, she is multi-faceted). It is imperative to be creative in – and not just replicate what the competition does.

Aquitude's panel revealed that women's referral economy is extremely powerful, with more than 83 percent of respondents having recently recommended a product or service to a female friend. How can her contacts also benefit from the product/service or part of the sales process? How can she share the outcome of her experiences with you with her friends and family? What are you going to offer her as a token of appreciation in return for doing that?

The estimated wealth of women in the GCC is approximately \$385 billion. The success of brands catering to this enormous market relies on delighting this key segment in the most 'GenderSavvy' way possible. Understanding the female psyche is complex – but the rewards can make the difference between reigning supreme in your brand's category or failure. ■



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