

What Men Don't Know... Marketing and Selling to Women

By John Fox

*I recently attempted to coach a client whose stated goal was marketing to women. It's easy, right? Wrong! Simply put, most men do not understand women! If that is true, what makes this male author qualified on marketing and selling to women? To badly quote Sergeant Joe Friday from *Dragnet*, "Just the facts, Ma'am (or Sir)."*¹

One of the purposes of my articles involves a responsibility to share best practice ideas that readers can profit from instantly. Another benefit is having access to fairly fresh marketing data from primary and secondary research. Finally, this author seeks to pass on practical ethical tips, so readers can avoid the ditches on their path to success.

Female and Other Facts

With 300+ million inhabitants, America's population is 50 percent female. Better than 50 percent of American workers are female. With the advent of anti-discrimination legislation and access to education, women now hold roughly 43 percent of America's wealth.²

Today's female consumer is more cautious, wary and frankly skeptical of male professionals. (See Exhibit 1)

Thanks to the pioneering work of two women, Katharine Briggs and Isabel Meyers, we can gain additional insight on conducting business in today's world. (See Exhibit 2)

It is vital that male readers understand challenges posed in marketing and selling to an increasingly sophisticated and expanding female audience.³ (See Exhibit 3)

The Real Issue

While the majority of my 160+ clients weathered the perfect financial storm of 2008, all females did, but one male did not. Facing a steep decline and without seeking my input, he bought the sales pitch from a branding vendor who sold him expensive brochures as a "fix." Given my client's negative communication style and abrasive attitude, and his historic roller coaster sales pattern, I knew he was heading for the ditch.

However, he needed counseling more than coaching. Needing advice, I turned to a female peer — a former life coach — seeking input to help me help him. I also sought counsel from my wife. Ironically, both gave similar advice: "He should ask his best female clients what they like and dislike about doing business with him." DUH! As a marketing coach, I knew that.

So I called my client to pass on the advice. To my dismay, he refused! Why?! He already "knew" all he needed. My input was *not* welcomed! For nearly one hour I continued bumping

into my client's argumentative bruised ego of all bluster and no facts. Finally, I warned that he would be unsuccessful with women unless he radically changed his marketing and selling.

Galvanized, I decided to practice what I preached: I quizzed my female clients via email, including senior female professionals of officer rank within my firm. I also included other female professionals whom I respect.⁴ The results were stunning!

First, 60 percent responded — all within *less* than eight hours. Contrast this with normal abysmal marketing response rates of **.5-1 percent** for direct or mass mail. While results for one's existing prospects can be higher, nothing comes close to targeted messages sent to active, nurtured clients and strategic center-of-influence relationships.

Next, a theme ran through all of the responses: "Men do not know how we think!" Ladies, you already knew this. Gentlemen, we should respect this.

Lessons Learned

The truth of the matter is that at best, male sellers are often woefully ignorant of the needs and wants of female buyers! At worst, a root of disrespect is the true problem. All too often, in our extraverted, sports-oriented, male driven selling culture, men sadly ignore those around them who could lead them to repeat sales, additional profits and more stable relationships. While the female selling cycle can be longer, loyalty conversely can be deeper. How? By building a service culture: a relational marketing culture. This gives buyers liberty to sell themselves.

From this experience, this male author learned four important lessons to share:

1. **Survey your female clients.** Find out what they want and need. This process can be as simple or complex as required. Patricia Harman, editor of this magazine said, "Women are



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probably more likely to respond to a survey than men would. (Apparently we don't mind telling others what we think!)⁵ Run this marketing campaign at least once annually.

2. **Don't just listen — act!** Susan Broam, the graphic artist for *C&R* wrote, "Steaks won't go over big in a vegetarian household no matter how good they are."⁶ So when you find out what people want, give it to them! For years, I have called this the *Golden Rule of Marketing*. Show those listening to you that you actually listened to them. Tangibly thank them for participating in your survey and give them something of value for their opinions — with no strings attached!
3. **Educate yourself.** As my wife Lynn says, talk is cheap. We sense that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, right? So why hold on to ego? The female market is staring you in the wallet! Their dollars will be attracted to those practicing relational marketing and selling. Cynthia Hereth, RIA's director of education and certification suggested that

all male readers should buy two books by Deborah Tannen, Ph.D., a male-female communications specialist:⁷

- *You Just Don't Understand*
- *Talking from 9 to 5 — Women and Men in the Workplace*

4. **Trust is hard won but easily lost.** As Harman opined, there can be no disconnect between words and actions.⁸ Take everything you learn and modify your marketing, selling and client fulfillment. Seek ways to augment activities, to change from selling to serving. When you goof, and we all do — narrow the potentiality for conflict by being honest and straight. This will earn you far more "points" with a female audience than will all the hype, gimmicks or "features" of the sale. When in doubt, refer back to #1.

Your Epiphany

Before closing, I want to anonymously paraphrase one female professional's email, written tongue-in-cheek: "You are going to