

Marketing to Men

The commonly accepted notion that men do not like to shop is simply untrue. Men love to buy things and they recognize that shopping is the way to do it. What is true is that men shop very differently than women, with a much greater sense of mission and a lower likelihood of browsing. Men enter a store knowing what they want and they seek it out and make the purchase. They are less likely to consider price (as long as the perceived value is there) and they are less inclined to compare one outlet to another. They are, in this way, more loyal shoppers, but then again, they do very little of the overall household buying. The real question is; what does this mean to marketers and how can the buying habits of men be better understood in order to generate higher sales?

Let us begin by reviewing what is already known about the buying habits of men - some of which can be said to be apparent and others that might prove a bit surprising. Men's buying habits include:

1. Men Shop at a Faster Pace – men do not view shopping as an activity unto itself and are not typically interested in browsing. While certain types of shopping, such as bookstores or electronic shops, lend themselves to a better chance men will browse, in most cases men are eager to make their purchase and get out of the store. Also, while in the store, it can be assumed that men will be less inclined to walk around, and rather will simply go to where their desired product is and go straight to the register.
2. Men Don't Like to Ask for Directions – while the brunt of jokes, it is true that men are less inclined to ask for directions and therefore may spend a short time wandering around looking for a specific item. If there is a strong need for the item, he may at some point ask for help, but if it is an item of desire, there is a high possibility that he will simply give up and leave the store. Simply stated, if he can't find it, he won't buy it.
3. Men are Easier to Upgrade – men are less price sensitive than women and can be upgraded more easily to products or versions of products that cost more money. A man makes the buy decision based on a set of considerations that includes his sense of purpose and his "right" to decide to buy a more expensive item. His considerations of value can be offset by perceived benefits that help him justify spending more money.
4. Men Have Different Ideas on Brand and Product Affinity – men are more inclined than women to have a loyalty to a particular brand, particularly if the brand image is directly engaging a perceived quality that he wishes to portray as his own. While women may jump from brand to brand based on price and special offers, men will convince themselves that their product is "the best" and be willing to pay a bit more for it.
5. Men Respond to Different Images – although the line has been blurred a bit in recent years (with men responding to some traditionally women oriented images such as youth), the male images of success, virility, and power are still the primary drivers in male targeted marketing.

Now that we have a better understanding of the male buying habits, let's take a look at what marketers can do to increase sales to men:

1. Place Impulse Buys Along Targeted Paths – because we know that men are less inclined to browse a store, we need to place impulse buy items along targeted paths that we can anticipate men will walk on their way to pick up their intended purchase. The traditional practice of impulse items by the register is insufficient as the higher ticketed items that might draw a man's attention are not appropriate for near-checkout placement. The high ticket items need to be placed along the aisles leading to the products most expected to draw male shoppers.

2. The Sales Force Needs to ID Lost Males – we know that a man is less likely to buy when he cannot find a product, and so we need to train on-floor salespeople to identify and approach “lost” males. If a man seems to be browsing it may be an indication he is not finding what he is looking for. The approach needs to be direct, as a standard “can I help you with something”, provides the man with too much room to reject assistance. A more direct “are you finding everything you need” will give the man the opportunity to ask the question he knows he needs to ask.

3. Clearly Define Upgrades – since we know men are more likely to upgrade than women we need to create in-store opportunities for men to option for an upgrade even without the assistance or recommendation of a salesperson. By clearly marking the upgrade opportunities, and communicating the benefits (added value, greater functionality, higher degree of “cool”) stores will be able to convert a higher degree of upgrades without necessarily increasing the on-floor sales force.

4. Use Women to Sell to Men – it is no secret that sex sells or that men are more likely to respond in the affirmative to a woman. The male connection between buying and power, power and success, success and virility leads us to the conclusion that men can be encouraged to buy more through the use of women as spokespersons, salespeople, and product demonstrators.

There is little chance that men will replace women as the primary buyers, but there is every reason to assume that the value of the purchases they make and the frequency with which they make them can be increased through marketing to men in ways that take into consideration their buying habits and inclinations. If marketers succeed in achieving this, overall sales will certainly increase as there is no reason to anticipate that an increase in male purchasing would result in a decrease in purchases made by women or children. With this in mind, the targeting of marketing to men, while more complicated, is a business imperative.