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What women want

Are pharmacies taking into consideration the distinct differences between women's and men's shopping patterns?

When you consider that women usually constitute the majority of shoppers in a pharmacy (at least until customers reach their 60s, when the difference in customer gender evens out), it is striking to note that the majority of pharmacies are probably owned and designed by men.

Women orchestrate a family's food shopping, within and out-of-home activities, and often strongly influence or decide larger purchases outside the home.

The book, *Why She Buys* by Bridget Brennan suggests that 80 per cent of all consumer product sales in the US are either made, or strongly influenced, by women. When you think about it, gender is the strongest influence on how we think – even stronger than age, income, ethnicity etc, so at least considering this in the design and representation of your store, should be an important part of your marketing strategy.

Women tend to enjoy shopping – although this is changing as more women become time poor and actually prefer to spend their down time at home or at leisure. This makes capturing opportunity, and subsequently their dollar, when they are in store more imperative.

Recent research estimates that women can spend a full year of their life in shopping centres! Men are more like hunters – pragmatic and straight forward. Generally, they want to get into the shop, grab whatever they are after and exit as soon as possible. Or rather, more simply, men buy while women shop. Research shows if men do shop it is generally for themselves, rather than in the case of women, who are more likely to be shopping for themselves and also the family.

Obviously, this has outcomes as to how

a store should service its customers. Women seek out and react more strongly to personal interaction with sales staff, whereas men use staff to direct them to a product's location to expedite the purchase process. Women will generally feel greater loyalty to a store where they have an affinity for the staff.

Some researchers (and I want to tread carefully here as this is not necessarily my view!) believe women's shopping habits are an extension of an ancient role as a 'gatherer' (as opposed to the male's 'hunter' role), supporting the bias towards more refined shopping skills in the selection and accumulation of products. Women are generally more inclined to seek information, read labels and compare, and ultimately take pride in selecting the right item. Men are generally less rigorous in their selection process, particularly concerning everyday items from shampoo to vegetables.

From a marketing aspect, what does this mean?:

- Campaigns that recognise valued customers, such as loyalty programs, have a higher adoption with women.
- Marketing campaigns or in-store devices that educate, empower and provide reassurance (such as Pharmacist Recommends ticketing) are more likely to be successful with women.
- Women are more detailed and notice more things in their environment, in particular, cleanliness – women are more likely to notice how clean your shop is and consciously or unconsciously be affected by it.
- Women have a higher expectation of service and knowledgeable staff.
- Behavioural research by Paco Underhill shows that women are

affected by the physical space they are in – they are more likely to purchase cosmetics if the counters allow for a 'nook' that they can tuck themselves into to trial the product without fear of being bumped or hindering a traffic zone.

- The narrower the space, the less time women will spend there. Consider aisle widths – women have a particular aversion to the possibility of people brushing up against them, particularly if they have to lean over to select the products they are after (referred to as the 'butt-brush factor' by Underhill)
- Women are also more likely to have a pram or shopping trolley and will make shopping decisions based on the number of 'road blocks' they are likely to encounter.
- A clear correlation exists between reading and buying, particularly for new products. However, if the space is not conducive to reading, the environment for buying decisions is compromised.
- Women share information more, so one bad experience can be spread amongst many shoppers. Conversely, women are better at telegraphing good experiences they have had, and stores they recommend.
- Women are less likely to feel comfortable in an aggressive environment (be that colour, noise or ambience).

While I am not suggesting you rush out and make drastic changes to your store, you may benefit from considering key attributes of your pharmacy (products, category layout and traffic flow), and whether it is an enjoyable, receptive environment – one that is conducive to shopping and browsing by what is probably your most important customers – women.

(REF: *Shopping: A Consuming Passion* by Directional Insights). **RP**



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Robert Turner – Community Pharmacist and Pharmacy Catalyst Director

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