



The many minds of EVE

In the second of a series of articles on the science of female shopping, **Neil Osborne** explains how women are as different psychologically as they are biologically from men, which directly affects their 'how' and 'why' of shopping.

WOMEN AND MEN are different; that's obvious. But it's the minutiae that counts.

As Faith Popcorn famously put it, "they're as different shop-ologically as they are biologically." With that simple statement in 2000, the world awoke to a savvy marketer's golden opportunity. When the renowned author and futurist's third ground-breaking book was published, it threw a spotlight on the need for gender-specific marketing. Even today, the book's basic logic remains valid: "Women are different and they have money. So what do I do?"

As consumers, women have evolved faster and more powerfully than men. They're responsible for up to nine out of every ten spending decisions, yet for decades, the marketing of most big-name brands has been driven by men, using male-drawn stereotypes and top-level decisions. Logically, given the gender differences, that was always unlikely to work. And yet, many of those stereotypes remain.

The marketing rules they're built on are rooted in a corporate era when women weren't economically powerful, unlike now. A man might well say there's nothing really wrong with that, except for one thing. Most men don't understand women.

"EVEolution," as Popcorn's book was called, heralded a change.

At the time, women across the globe thanked Ms Popcorn for publically pointing out that "Women process information differently. Women articulate their feelings more easily, and see themselves as links, not loners. Men do one thing at a time, while women do many things at the same time." And importantly, as I've found out first-hand, "if she has to ask you to do something, it's already too late."

Let's see if we can change that, just a little...

PART TWO: Females Think Differently

Are the genders *really* different? In some contexts, that's a fair question. Much time and effort was spent during the 60s, 70s, and 80s, insisting we were the same. Those cries, from women's liberationists, were driven by an effort to break the conventional wisdom of the day – that men were workers and providers and women were the nurturers. And thanks to those feminists new doors have since opened.

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However, to successfully market to women, it's not enough to just understand they're as capable and intelligent as men. Or that they're the principal shoppers and influencers. You need to recognise the nuanced differences and see them for what they are – opportunities – that are wide open for commercial success stories to be born.

Gender is the most powerful determinant of how a person views the world, and everything in it. It's more powerful than age, income, race or geography. However, we mostly ignore biological differences when examining our customer base, mainly because we've never been taught about them. And I'm sorry, but being a female doesn't automatically give you a golden ticket to success. Most women have either been taught or have absorbed that same conventional business wisdom men originally created. According to Bec Brideson, author of "Blind Spots," and a pioneer and innovator in the marketing-to-women space in Australia:

"Those marketers who grew up with Phillip Kotler's take on market segmentation were taught to see gender as a 'lo-val' subset of demographics. Marketing-to-women (M2W), today, is way more valuable and important than that. M2W is not some 'niche' – it's mainstream. But don't be fooled into thinking M2W is only about 'for women only' products and services. And that gender statements are the only way to attract the loyal and lucrative female audience. It is my belief almost every brand and product category can benefit from a M2W leverage point and an appeal to women. You just need to know how, where, and why to build one."

So why haven't more brands done it?

The metamorphosis begins

In 1982 Rena Bartos, then senior VP at the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson, and a pioneering qualitative researcher, noticed something.

Her ground-breaking insights captured the idea that a new woman was emerging – albeit in a nascent stage compared to today – and she called her, 'The Moving Target'. In her book by the same name, she dubbed the American woman's metamorphosis as a 'quiet revolution,' with lasting implications for career, family, society and more. She said, "Women have moved from defining themselves in terms of derived status. They are moving towards wanting a sense of personal identity beyond those private domestic roles."

That 'moving target' profile depicted a person who was different to the accepted gender stereotype of a wife at home, with kids. Instead, this woman worked, she had money and she had growing power. Fast forward a few decades, and Bartos' initial profile has reinvented itself many times over. Yet the stereotypes of females haven't kept pace. Nor has the gender-specific knowledge of brands and businesses.

Thankfully, science has. It's even captured hard data that proves what women have always known – that they're different to men – and shouldn't be thought of or approached, in the same way.

So let's throw out everything we 'think' we know and start afresh.

Differences defined

Literally thousands of studies across anthropology, biochemistry, neuroscience, human development, psychology and sociolinguistics have proven there



are differences, in many areas other than just reproduction. Boiling it down, each gender has its own set of attitudes, abilities, priorities and preferences, which impacts their behaviour, both inside and out, of shops. It's almost as if we're living in our own gender-specific realities.

Most consumer-driven brands and businesses need to master an understanding of the gender differences, and how female psychology works. Why? Because women are the driving force of the global economy. And when it comes to spending, women are the sex determining if a brand lives or dies.

Faith Popcorn said of the differences: "Companies think they're marketing to women – but they're not. They're not talking to women. They don't know how to talk to women. They really don't understand that women have a separate language and a separate way of being."

Roll forward a few years and Marti Barletta noted in her book, "Marketing to Women," how women make purchasing decisions in a different way to men. "Men and women don't communicate in the same way, and they don't buy for the same reasons," she stresses. "He simply wants

the transaction to take place. She's interested in creating a relationship. Every place women go they make connections ... 91 per cent of women say 'advertisers don't understand us.'

The gender realities

So, what are the gender-specific differences? They come down to evolution, biology, and brains.

1. Evolutionary survival instincts

Men's survival strategy is to make the maximum number of kids. For women, it's helping the kids she has, to survive. Men focus on targets (tracking and hunting), have strong spatial skills (sizing up and killing) and navigation (getting home) abilities. That's translated into men still enjoying challenge, rewards and competition. Meanwhile, females needed survival savvy – the ability to collaborate with neighbours, share resources and a selfless drive to nurture the young to maturity. Those habits have embedded patience, relationship building and gatekeeping skills in today's women.

2. Biological differences

The male hormone, testosterone, is the main driver of personality characteristics like aggressiveness, self-assertiveness, dominance, competitiveness, risk-taking and thrill-seeking. It also drives a number of male-linked aptitudes normally thought to be learned – spatial, mechanical and maths abilities. The key female hormone, estrogen, encourages nesting and nurturing, while it suppresses the dominant effects of testosterone. That's why mature women are more assertive as customers, once their estrogen levels drop.

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3. Brain wiring

Now we're down to the nitty-gritty. Male brain usage is more localised to the right side and they're highly efficient at focussing, whereas female usage is distributed across both sides, with better connections and integration. This accounts for a women's ability to multitask and think holistically, preferring to view each interaction in context, as part of a bigger picture. It may also account for their legendary intuition, by being able to pull together details from separate and disparate sources – sight, speech and emotions – and emerge with a conclusion. Both the emotional bonding and memory centres are bigger in females, accounting for their relationship skills and uncanny ability to remember every word of an argument or special event.

Minutiae of a woman

It's these tiny biological, evolutionary and brain differences that play out when each of us interacts, talks, listens, thinks and responds. First, we both see things differently. Literally. In the words of Marti Barletta, "Men are better at focused, sharp vision (think spotlight), while women have better peripheral vision (think floodlight)." Of the four remaining senses, women's responses are more acute and detect subtleties missed by most men. They're more sensitive to odour and fragrance, and prefer sounds about half as loud as men.

Next, there's the emotional stuff. Women experience the entire range of emotions with greater intensity and more volatility than men, and they express them more often. They also have tighter connections between their emotional and verbal centres, so women articulate their emotions better and empathise more strongly with others.

This one is no surprise. Generally speaking, women are better at 'social perception' than men. Study after study highlights that men only notice and care about the big important things, while women notice and care about the both the big things and the small details. Because they have greater brain

usage, women pick up and absorb nuances missed by men and they're more sensitive to interpersonal details such as tone of voice, facial expressions and body language.

In short, women are into details. They notice, care about, and act on all the same things as men... amplified, times ten.

Holistic people-focused responses

Women are people-focused, that's well known. But why? It seems their brains recognise them more strongly. In studies where male and female participants were simultaneously shown an object (one eye) and a person (other eye), the females more frequently reported seeing the 'person,' while males saw the 'object.'

And how do women make decisions? Psychologists found that women think more contextually and holistically, placing things in relation to one another (as they do with people) and integrating them into a bigger picture – a whole.

That said, women have difficulty separating things from their context or background, and can take extra time in decision making when buying – in order to find the 'perfect answer.' A woman's spiralling buying pattern, (unlike a man's linear one that searches for a 'good solution') has her adding options into the buying selection criteria along the way – not discarding them, as men do. These additions cause her to return to the initial stages of the pattern to further sort, refine and progress. This can happen multiple times...all in the search for 'perfect.' It's frustrating for men to witness, but it makes perfect sense to every woman.

Marti Barletta simplified this trait by saying that, "men are the analysts (they take things apart), and women are the synthesisers (they put things together)."

Where to start?

As you can see, it's the small details that make the difference when you're maximising the Female Economy opportunity. But with so much to cover, it can be overwhelming, even for women. Faith Popcorn codified her "EVEvolution" ideas into the Eight Truths of Marketing to Women:

1. Connecting female consumers to each other connects them to your brand.
2. If you're marketing to one of her lives, you're missing all the others.
3. If she has to ask, it's too late.
4. Market to her peripheral visions, and she will see you in a whole new light.
5. Walk, run, go to her; secure her loyalty forever.
6. This generation of women consumers will lead you to the next.
7. Co-parenting is the best way to raise a brand.
8. Everything matters – you can't hide behind your logo.

Women we see you

Some may think that gender-specific marketing is sexist. It's not. It's smart.

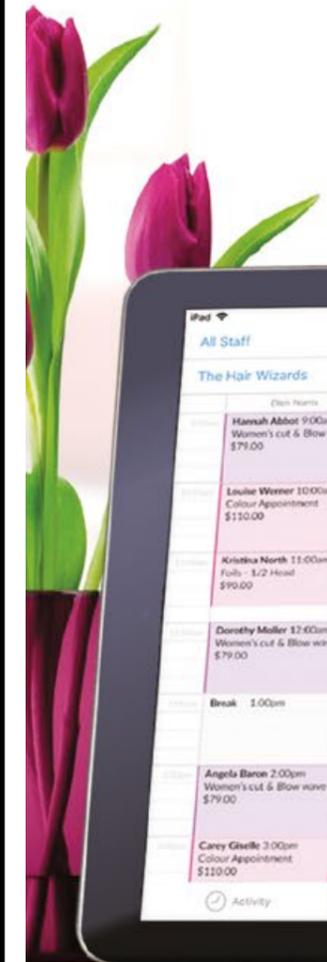
In his book, "Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping," retail expert Paco Underhill makes this point with a simple story. A man and woman go shopping in a hardware store. They need a hammer. While the man is buying a hammer, the woman is buying a living-room wall, covered in memories.

What's the story mean? It's a wake-up call to reconsider what you're doing to talk to, delight, and keep your female customers. ■



Neil Osborne is an elite sales trainer and brand coach who has devoted more than 30 years of his working life to the salon industry. He has been responsible for dramatically growing brands and businesses by helping them launch, develop and change their sales results with his salon-specific, results driven methods. Contact him at The SALES CATALYST, 1300 302 859 or go to www.thesalescatalyst.com.au

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