



# Marketing » what Women » want

BY KATE BEDNARSKI



▶ LEARN HOW TO  
**CONNECT**  
WITH WOMEN SHOPPERS  
AND YOU'LL  
WIN CUSTOMERS  
FOR LIFE.

**a** while back I visited a local specialty fitness retailer to check out elliptical trainers. The one at my club gave me a good aerobic workout, but I was thinking about the time I would save and the convenience I would gain by having an elliptical in my home. Since starting my own company, I began skipping workouts because I lacked the energy to go to the club as much; there just weren't enough hours in the day.

I scanned the sea of gray steel and heavy machinery with the woman friend I'd taken along. Inside, I hoped I could remain inconspicuous to the sales staff until I could make my way to the elliptical trainers. I meandered through the maze of treadmills, stepers and rowers and finally found three ellipticals. On them were signs listing basic features, but that wasn't enough: I had a lot of questions and needed help. Once a salesman appeared, he answered my specific questions nicely enough (I had done my homework on the Internet!), and I tried out the machines.

"Are the foot platforms adjustable on these machines?" I asked. "They seem too far apart for me and aren't really comfortable."

"No," he answered. "But the mechanical guts of this model are made by the same company that supplies most of the gyms."

"Uh. Ok," I said, not sure if that meant I should be comfortable.

That started him on a technical roll and he went on and on about the features of each of the three that stood around me. Information swam around me, and I felt a bit lost. So I asked for brochures, telling him I needed time to think about all the details. We maneuvered around the gathering of other staff at the counter as he searched out some brochures with spec sheets. He stapled his card to one and encouraged me to call with other questions. "Thanks," I said, and my friend and I glanced around the store hoping to find a place to sit and look at the materials. But our only choice was on top of one of

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# THE READING ROOM

## A FEW RESOURCES TO UNDERSTAND THE FEMALE SHOPPER.

- » Johnson, L., & Learned A. (2004). Don't Think Pink: What Really Makes Women Buy—and How to Increase Your Share of This Crucial Market, Amacom.
- » Cleaver, J. (2004 February). What Women Want: The Growing Economic Power of Women Consumers is Transforming Today's Marketplace, Entrepreneur magazine.
- » Learned, A. (2002, May 21). The Six Costliest Mistakes You Can Make in Marketing to Women, www.MarketingProfes.com.
- » The Economic Power of Women (2000, April 2), www.nfib.com.
- » Gobe, M. (2001). Emotional Branding, Allworth Press.

the treadmill decks. Instead, we left the store to sit in the car and talk.

### WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

My own shopping experience truly exemplified that when it comes to spending money, all women worry about time, money and physical image. They want quality products that fit, plus personalized service, especially when making major purchases.

And for good reason. Women control 85 percent of the consumer purchases influencing 95 percent of total goods and services sold in the United States, marketing research has shown. This translates into an economic powerhouse of women's consumer spending equaling a whopping \$3.7 trillion. What's more, women purchase 50 percent, or more, in stereotypically male categories such as automobiles and computer equipment.

When it comes to fitness and sports, women have been making it their own for several decades now. And increases in sales of exercise videos and equipment for the home come from a desire to include fitness in our busy lives—something that can help with much-needed balance—despite time crunches. Whether purchasing online or in a store, 80 percent of women are the primary decision-makers when it comes to health and fitness products. Nearly a third of all American households now own and use fitness equipment, a trend that is still growing, especially among women.

### EMOTIONS: HOW WOMEN SHOP

We are labeled emotional and impulsive buyers when quite the opposite is true. A third of women use the Internet to research before buying. Be sure that your staff understands how to treat women who visit your store: We will usually have a good idea of what we want, be knowledgeable about the product—and have a lot of questions.

While women don't buy on emotion, we do prefer emotive buying experiences compared to men and there's a perfectly good reason for it—we are wired differently at birth. The field of gender neurology reveals that men's emotions and their ability to verbalize them are on opposite sides of the brain making it physiologically more challenging for men to relate to and discuss their emotions. In contrast, women's emotional response and verbal centers are integrated on the same side of the brain. Women say, "Don't tell me what a product can do; tell me how it's going

to make me feel." Men want to just get their purchase done and get out. Women want to linger and learn how it will work, how to use it, and how it will make us feel. Men make decisions by stripping away extra information. Women prefer to add information to the process, requiring a longer selling process.

But, wait, there's more: Men's brains are organized to identify and to process objects and communicate using facts and data, while women's brains seek understanding emotions and relationships. Therefore, women most often make final purchasing decisions based on the relationship with the retailer, while men respond to statistics and quantitative data, such as the features and breakdown rate of the equipment.

What does all of this mean to you? Take the time to explain to us how your equipment works and how it will make us feel without (and this is key) talking down to us. Create the right shopping experience so we buy and spread the word among friends. Don't sell us things and objects when what really moves us are emotions and feelings.

» Message: *Respect our knowledge and our process.*

### TIME AND CONVENIENCE

Women continue to have so much family and work pressure that our most precious commodity is time. Not having enough is our biggest concern. Although we are discerning customers who want to be sure we are buying right, especially for large ticket items, above all, we don't want our time wasted. For whatever it's worth, we have little patience for poor service or poor quality. We notice small things. If a sales-

clerk treats a man poorly, he thinks, "What a jerk," while a woman may think, "I hate this store. I'm leaving and never coming back. AND I'm telling all my friends."

» Message: *Respect our time.*

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

When women find a business that understands them, they spread the word among their friends. We make our buying choices based on ongoing relationships with retailers. We insist on trust and loyalty when building relationships with people, brands or retailers. We just don't have time or tolerance for relationships that don't support us fully. Treatment that says, "We're on your side," attracts us. Treatment that says, "We're the expert," repels us. We are also more price-conscious than ever, yet we seek creativity and care over discounts.

» Message: *Respect our relationship.*

### DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS

Women have an eye for detail and notice when even little things are off. To us, the small things make more of an impact. We assess a business by taking in a hundred small factors. Everything from the cleanliness of your store to the music playing, from the attitude of your staff to the design



Photo Courtesy of Spri.

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of the shopping bag gets our attention. Turn this to your advantage by investing in amenities women appreciate.

Colorado-based retailer All About Fitness (recently purchased by Busy Body Home Fitness) had invested in change after discovering that 60 percent of its foot traffic came from women. The simple environmental modifications to its stores resulted in exponential increases in sales. Enhancements that produced big results included:

- » **Toning down the environment**—Bright walls became muted colors, and the store added real plants and softer lighting..
- » **Creating “mock rooms”**—Environments that simulated attractive home settings allowed customers to visualize the equipment in their home.
- » **Adding a children’s area**—Keeping kids happy, safe and occupied kept parents fully engaged in shopping.

Smart retailers understand the huge difference these changes can make to their business and the industry as a whole.


» Message: *Respect the details.*

## HOW TO WIN WOMEN CUSTOMERS—FOR LIFE

The escalating economic power of women is one of the biggest business stories of this decade. Since women make 80 percent of the decisions when it comes to health and fitness products, fitness retailers can ill afford to ignore the demographic. But NOT ignoring us is not the same as attracting us, and simply attracting us is not the same as building a relationship with us to win our loyalty. It’s not as hard as it seems. What we want is simple:

- » Demonstrate that you understand us
- » Give us quality and personalized service
- » Pay attention to detail in product design and customer service
- » Give us choices—not endless choices, but the right choices
- » Appreciate that we prefer a longer selling process
- » Tell us the truth
- » Respect our desire to understand what we’re buying before taking it home

- » Show us some love. No, really, but not what you’re thinking. Give us something unexpected (discounts or a small gift for being a great customer)
- » Don’t waste our time

I never returned to the fitness store to purchase the elliptical trainer. And I spent very little time with the brochures. The design of the trainers didn’t grab me, so I pitched the paperwork in the recycle bin and simply vowed to stop working earlier and get to the gym or at least go for a bike ride or walk. When the rain and cold blows back in, I probably won’t return to the same retailer. Not that it was a bad experience, it just wasn’t a great one. Besides, I’m just too busy to do it all over again. 

*Kate Bednarski is founding partner of Asterix Group (www.asterixgroup.com), a creative brand strategy, design and advertising firm with a specialty serving the women’s market.*

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