

Return to Gender?

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By: Erik Hauser & Sarah A. O'Leary

[A point/counterpoint on the marketing battle of the sexes]

When it comes to speaking to women, who does a better job? Other women? Men? Or a combination of the two? In this issue, Chief Marketer begins the first in a series of point/counterpoint articles, in which marketing pros get the chance to square off on a variety of topics. First up are Erik Hauser and Sarah A. O'Leary. Now, let the discussion begin!

Let me ask you a few simple questions. Do you think only Asians can market to other Asians? No. Can only cowboys market to cowboys? No. So, can only women market best to women?

Of course not.

The notion that men are not qualified to market to women and that it's only a woman's game is a faulty premise.

In fact, I find it very difficult to find this position even reasonably defensible. Having said that, any smart man or woman in an organization understands the power of collaboration and the absolute need to bring people who are representative of the campaign's intended audience into the fold. This helps make sure the team has all the proper insights to build the best campaign.

Gender Blender. However, saying that men cannot be qualified to market to women is usually pretty much simple male bashing. Want proof? Talk to the fine folks at Euro RSCG 4D Impact.

They have a case study about an experiential program built for one of the Cheer brand extensions that was intended for a "pure-play" women audience. The, dare I say, males involved—including the brand manager on the client side—put together a cross-gender team to effectively launch the new brand. Everyone was conscious enough to understand that at the last inch it was imperative that there be female-to-female interaction in the live environment. This was a program put together by intelligent males and females. Doesn't that sound like a logical scenario—men and women working together in somewhat perfect harmony?

Another point that is often raised is the idea that most agencies are built around a male team of creatives and executives and, therefore, the male mindset. Some of the most talented executives and creative people I know are women. For example, I am just getting ready to write a profile piece for the Experiential Marketing Forum on the success of Beth Ann Kaminkow, president of TracyLocke. And, not surprisingly, she and the others I know work synergistically with their male counterparts and staff to get the job done.

The final products of these collaborations are customercentric programs that relate to all consumers on both a rational and emotional level. These types of programs are built off of good, solid research. On some occasions you'll see marketing programs that don't succeed because they were built on a platform of incorrect assumptions and research.

One assumption could be that women aren't affected by the same things that drive the needle for men. For example, do you think women are above being drawn to products by sexy men or sports stars? Really? To this I offer one name: David Beckham. Or how about the Diet Coke TV spot from the '90s that excited an entire half a population by showing a construction worker guzzling soda while shirtless?

More alike than not. Face it: Both genders share many key consideration points, and these can deliver the desired results for both male and female consumers. To say this isn't true is simply irresponsible and short-sighted.

Saying that women can market best to other women isn't just feminist musing. It is a narrow point of view that clearly closes off the line of sight from the elephant that is standing in the room. Men and women working side by side can conquer anything. The roles, talents and cooperation of these individuals together on a properly constructed cross-gender, crosscultural team are what can make a dynamic marketing campaign.

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founder and executive creative director of Swivel Media.

The vast majority of consumer product marketing decisions are made by corporate and ad agency men, and the vast majority of consumer product purchase decisions are made by women. Consider this: Do we really think that men know women as well as women do? And no, this is not a feminist proposition, but a reality check.

In the '70s, marketing innovators such as McDonald's hired Hispanic- and African-American owned and operated agencies to reach their respective ethnic populations. After all, the experts surmised, who could better understand those populations than members of said populations? Yet, when dealing with the nation's largest purchasing population, women, corporate America and agencies rely on men to make most of the critical decisions. You need only look at the male-laden management rosters of agencies and consumer products corporations to see this truth.

If the job is to sell to another female, women are best equipped to figure out how to do it. That's not to say that men can't, but women are better suited for it.

Psychology experts believe that there is substantially less difference between the various male or female ethnic populations than there is between genders. Simple logic would assert that, when attempting to reach and influence a female population, those best equipped to make key marketing decisions are female. Whereas my male colleagues might not find this a great idea, given the exceedingly high number of female-driven products, it is a truly consumer-centric proposition.

Just common sense If you want to sell more to the female population, it is common sense to place women in agency and corporate management positions where they can make the final marketing decisions regarding products predominantly purchased by women. Women are less allured by the 'sexiness' of a hot ad campaign or the latest pro athlete who wants to sign a soup deal.

Recently, a male member of a major retail corporation's sales force explained in a meeting that Oprah Winfrey and Ellen DeGeneres weren't good choices for use in the company's promotional marketing campaigns. Why? They were too 'controversial.' The salesman's inability to step out of his own gender and bias to embrace the wants/needs/ desires of the target audience adversely affected his ability to be successful.

A marketer at a major automotive company made a large sponsorship and media deal with a television sports program. The research had shown that without doubt, the hefty majority of cars his company sold were to women, many of whom were single mothers. Whereas women watch baseball, it certainly wasn't the sweet spot of the target. Further, the executive didn't have a lot of money to burn on ineffective media buys. So why did he sponsor a baseball show? Because he liked baseball, and so did the guys from the ad agency who worked for him. When pressed about his rationale, he said simply, 'Oh. We think it's a growth area.'

Working on a children's marketing program in the '80s, experts guided the choice of toys that were given away as part of an added value promotional effort. If you need to choose between a premium skewed more to boys or to girls, they were instructed, choose the Hot Wheels and leave the Barbies at home. Boys wouldn't play with girl toys, but girls would cross the line and play with a 'boy toy.' Girls don't fear the masculine in the way boys fear the feminine. The program was extremely successful, in large part because expert advice guided the decision making.

The research also showed that women are generally more empathetic, making it easier for them than for men, to understand the opposite gender. Female marketers, it can be argued, are better equipped to understand the point of view of male target audiences than are men approaching female target audiences. Women are brought up to consider the wants/needs/desires of an entire family construct, whereas men are typically raised with a more male-centric, ego-centric point of view. It may not be pretty to say such things out loud but, according to psychologists, they're true.

At a large New York advertising agency, the women employees were asked to participate in focus group research. The topic? Feminine hygiene products. Several of their male colleagues who were leading a new business pitch for a feminine hygiene brand wanted the female staff to share personal, intimate experiences in a conference while the men sat on the other side of a one-way mirror listening. Not surprisingly, no woman agreed and many were offended.

Some skeptics may ask why any of this matters, or may try to write it off as feminist musings. It's actually a matter of sales. Let's say you own stock in Acme Widget Corp., and research shows women purchase 90% of Acme's widgets. Would you want the major marketing and sales decisions directly affecting this target made by a competent male or a competent female marketer?

Think about it. After all, understanding your consumer as deeply as possible and delivering against that understanding

are the keys to successful marketing and sales strategies.

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