

Ten Years After

BY DORI MOLITOR

WOMANWISE

Gap, the apparel retailer, definitely recognizes the huge number of boomer women and their buying power. Through research, they clearly have done their best to understand what this shopper wants.

Gap obviously knows that boomer women like to shop in stores with a lot of variety, and that they are less interested in fads than they are in clothes that will last more than one season. They also understand the changes in women's bodies as they age, and have designed clothes accordingly.

Building on that kind of knowledge, Gap last year launched a chain of stores, called Forth & Towne, designed specifically for boomer women.

But after an 18-month pilot run, it was all over for Gap and Forth & Towne.

For all its well-intentioned research, Gap missed the mark. Their attempt to tap into a very lucrative market failed because they didn't understand one of the most important things about boomer women.

What Gap didn't understand is that a boomer woman perceives herself as being about 17 years younger than she actually is. No way is a woman who sees herself as being in her thirties going to shop at a store for old ladies.

American Airlines encountered similar problems

but for different reasons. When American decided it was going to try to appeal to women travelers, the first thing they did was create a snappy new tagline — “We Know Why You Fly.” As part of this new initiative, they also launched a fancy, lavender-hued website, www.aa.com/women.

Unfortunately, just about everything American Airlines put on the website contradicted its clever tagline. For example, they offered travel tips — including one where a flight attendant offered advice on how to dress and pack — as if women didn't already know how to travel.

The message seemed to be that American Airlines actually had no idea why women fly — and the result was not a happy one. They were pelted with outrage from women who found the website condescending and rife with stereotypes.

The prevailing complaint was that women simply wanted the same thing men wanted — clean airplanes, courteous service and comfortable seats. In other words, the primary reasons women fly really are not gender-based, and in any case, American wasn't even in the game.

American Airlines made the fundamental mistake of failing to understand that what women really want is a better airline travel experience, and not a better advertising slogan.

Then there's the tale of Camel No. 9 — a cigarette launched by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco. Personally, I don't think we should be marketing cigarettes at all. But setting that aside for the moment, the story here is that R.J. Reynolds wanted to come out with a cigarette with specific appeal to women.

So, R.J. Reynolds launched Camel No. 9 in a shiny black package that's bordered in fuchsia and

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teal. They chose the name presumably because it sounds trendy and fashionable, perhaps recalling Chanel No. 19 (as if there's any logical link between cigarette smoke and fine perfume). Their advertising slogan — "Light and Luscious" — was equally mindless.

Camel No. 9 just launched in February, but my bet is that it won't be successful.

As I sit and think about this attempt at marketing to women, it feels like we've gone backwards. I'm thinking back to the Virginia Slims, "You've Come a Long Way, Baby!" campaign in 1968. Those ads carried so much more power, relevance and connection to women who were just coming into their own at the time. They had so much more meaning than this "luscious" cigarette.

None of these marketers — Gap, American Airlines or Camel — has managed to rise above the level of superficiality and clichés about women. It's not as though they haven't had plenty of time to sort it out, either.

OF PETERS & POPCORN

It's been nearly ten years since Tom Peters declared women to be the "most powerful economic force on the planet" and Faith Popcorn's *EVEolution* defined the marketing-to-women movement as an all-out business revolution.

This was good news for brands and corporate marketers who had their backs to the wall a decade ago — facing plummeting brand loyalty because of increasingly undifferentiated brands and product parity. The opportunity to serve the women's market was there for the taking.

But the reality is that 85 percent of women today claim brands still don't understand them; most are actually *annoyed* by brand messages. Think about it: \$1.6 trillion in women's spending is up for grabs annually.

Today, store brands account for one of five items sold in supermarkets, drug chains and mass merchandisers. That totals \$65 billion of current business at retail this year! Yet, corporations continue to expect cost-cutting and traditional marketing practices to drive sustainable corporate profits.

What is the clinical term for those who repeat the same behavior and expect a different result?

Whatever it is — they're crazy. Sustainable growth and profits are impossible without brands creating a more intense, personal relationship with women — beyond product, price, packaging and promotions.

Were Tom Peters and Faith Popcorn wrong? Or did marketers fail to take the kind of bold actions needed to realize the full potential of women's economic clout?

The answers are obvious. Most marketers have not found the courage to take the radical actions required in revolutionary times. Very little has evolved in the past decade compared to the economic opportunity the women's market offers corporations.

The fact is, marketing to women is a *business* opportunity, not just an *ad-hoc* initiative. It's not about marketing to women; *it's about serving the women's market.*

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It's easy to come up with a clever theme, ad campaign or website that seems like something women will like. But because it's trite and phony, that kind of approach won't get to the core of the market opportunity. Not even close.

AT THE CORE

The good news is, a handful of brands — including Kimpton Hotels, Eileen Fischer and Wachovia Bank — are leading the way by putting women's interests first.

Kimpton Hotels. From the very first moment of the first time I walked into a Kimpton Hotel, it just felt different. There's a certain warmth and friendliness that's hard to put into words, but that makes all the difference. It's all very nuanced, but adds up to a very different kind of hotel stay.

For example, like many other hotels, Kimpton gives its guests a certificate for a free drink. But at the Kimpton, it's written in such a warm, invitational way that you actually feel compelled to take them up on their offer.

During my most recent stay, I checked in at around six or seven, and there were all of these women in the lounge who looked like they were having a great time

together. I assumed they had arrived as a group and all knew each other. I was exhausted, but I went up, changed, and came back down to see what was going on.

As it turned out, none of the women had ever met before, but they seemed like a bunch of long-time girlfriends, just sitting around talking. To my surprise, the hotel's manager was part of the group — visiting, talking and having a good time. The feeling was very different than the usual “come and get a free drink” at our bar.

When I returned to my room, I found a handwritten welcoming note, and someone had taken the time to dim the lights so that the room had a warm feel to it. Even the bathrobes were special, with an unusual, leopard-patterned fabric. And there was this beautiful basket of bath salts — almost like what you would find at a spa.

Of course there *was* a cost associated with the bath salts but the presentation was so subtle that it seemed more about making my stay as relaxing, pleasant and comfortable as possible than it was about trying to sell me something. The overall sensibility was more like that of a retreat than the usual hotel stay.

All of these touches clearly were put in place for women, but plenty of men stay at the hotel as well. Women do tend to have higher expectations than men and are more aware of little details. But the point is, if you can make women happy, you are likely to exceed the expectations of most men.

It's worth noting, by the way, that Kimpton's CEO is a man, as is the majority of its management team. Clearly, Kimpton is listening to women and serving the market versus just marketing to it.

Eileen Fisher. Many women see Eileen Fisher, the fashion designer, as someone who isn't selling apparel so much as she's selling a lifestyle. That's because Eileen Fisher is truly a nurturing, genuine, human being.

She cares about her employees and where her products are made. She visits the factories that manufacture her clothes and gives a \$1,000 wellness allowance to every employee each year.

It's not like this is part of a marketing strategy, *per se*, because it all goes right down to the core of who Eileen Fisher is as a person. In fact, she doesn't talk about her employee practices in her marketing. It's just the way she runs her business.

What Eileen Fisher understands is that serving

Nike Does It

Shortly after Don Imus's infamous comments about the Rutgers women's basketball team, Nike ran a simple, text-only ad, which read as follows:

Thank you, ignorance.

Thank you for starting the conversation.

Thank you for making an entire nation listen to the Rutgers team story. And for making us wonder what other great stories we've missed.

Thank you for reminding us to think before we speak.

Thank you for showing us how strong and poised 18 and 20-year-old women can be.

Thank you for reminding us that another basketball tournament goes on in March.

Thank you for showing us that sport includes more than the time spent on the court.

Thank you for unintentionally moving women's sport forward.

And thank you for making all of us realize that we still have a long way to go.

Next season starts 11.16.07.

the women's market is about building trust with her customers and not just about selling clothes. She also realizes that women care about how other women are treated inside the companies they buy from.

Wachovia. Given what I said earlier about advertising taglines, I am a little reluctant to start by citing Wachovia's. But the difference is that Wachovia's tagline—"Shared Success"—actually means something.

It means something because it goes right to the core of Wachovia's promise to its customers—particularly its female customers. Their basic proposition is built upon the idea that if women succeed, Wachovia succeeds.

As a part of its approach to the women's market, Wachovia recently gave away a beautiful journal. Wachovia's logo does not appear anywhere on the journal. Actually, other than a stylish bamboo pattern, the only thing on the journal's cover is the word, "gratitude."

When you open the first page, it says that "gratitude" is about stopping and appreciating the small moments and what you have. Wachovia wants you to use the journal as your day-to-day guide, to stop for a moment and think about the things that really matter in your life.

Every page of the journal features an inspiring quotation. I actually keep one beside my bed, and every time I write in it I know it's a gift from Wachovia.

In fact, I liked my journal so much that I requested one to give to every member of my staff. It's more than just a feel-good. It's a recognition that women are looking for a higher purpose, a higher meaning in life and that brands can help facilitate that.

IT'S ALL ABOUT HER

It's time we re-think the intensity of the relationship we have with women. It's about a shift from focusing on selling—marketers are too focused on simply getting as much as they can of the women's pocketbook.

We need to shift instead toward building *trust*. It all starts with trust—with making your customers feel valued and listened to, and that the brand truly cares about them. If you do that, the sales will follow.

It's also about recognizing that it's about discovering that single, subconscious *emotional truth* that is relevant to your brand and fits in the context of her world. The more relevant that *emotional truth*, the more intense her response will be.

The insight you need to accomplish that kind of connection requires less reliance on data and more on intuition. Too much of traditional research relies on

women to articulate why they do what they do. But we can't expect women to articulate what they're not consciously aware of.

We need to get at the collective impact of gender, cultural, sociological and psychological factors that influence her subconscious motivators, and that requires non-traditional insight approaches.

WINNERS RULE

The magnitude and urgency of the women's market is staggering. Women's unfulfilled needs are everywhere, but for most brands, differentiation is nowhere.

The velocity of today's consumer loyalty shift—from name brands to store brands—is accelerating. As we all know, when everything else is equal, price wins. But ultimately your brand loses.

Kimpton Hotels, Eileen Fischer and Wachovia understand what it takes. They have developed breakthrough insights into women and stand to

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dominate their markets. It's inevitable that others will, too.

Others will see the \$1.6 trillion opportunity in a new way: As a business opportunity, not an ad-hoc marketing initiative; as serving the women's market, not just marketing to women; and that by putting women's interests first, profits will follow.

When they do, the floodgates will open because they will have changed the rules of the game by competing on a higher-level playing field. They will win with entrepreneurial ideas that spark emotions, elicit involvement and make a woman feel as though she's connected with her brands through a higher purpose—a purpose larger than just another sterile financial transaction.

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