

Newspapers can learn about women
from manufacturers and merchandisers

If a cereal company can market to women, why can't we?

By SARA BEDAL

Newspaper editors searching for ways to appeal to female readers might find inspiration in a series of TV commercials for Kellogg's Special K. One of the spots features men of all ages, shapes and sizes talking in a bar about their body weight. "I have my mother's thighs. I have to accept that," says one man. The quirky ad concludes, "Men don't seem to worry about these things, so why should women?"

Witty and rich with irony, the award-winning commercial meets some of the criteria that women — more than men — expect from the news media: It sparks emotion, and it captivates and ultimately cares about the viewer.

Kellogg's unconventional approach to reaching women is neither the exception nor is it the rule. But it reflects a trend for companies to do their homework on the female gender, discovering more about needs, likes and dislikes.

And so they should. After all, women make or influence the majority of purchasing decisions in most households. In his book *The Circle of Innovation*, for instance, Tom Peters states that women buy 51 percent of tires and that women make 65 percent of car-purchase decisions and three out of four health care decisions.

This kind of data, along with marketing considerations such as tone and ap-

proach, says a lot about what matters to women. It's information to which newspaper editors and circulators would be well advised to pay attention, whether they're concerned about providing content that appeals to women or reaching women with their marketing efforts.

Consumers interact

Kellogg Special K's "Look good on your own terms" ad campaign — aimed at women 25 to 59 — actually evolved from a 1996 Special K print campaign promoting positive body image to 18- to 24-year-old women.

That campaign struck such a chord that the Kellogg Canada Inc. received an unprecedented number of telephone calls and letters from appreciative consumers and health professionals. Now the company has an ongoing dialogue with its customers through its Special K Website (www.specialk.ca). Launched in October 1997, the site encourages feedback from consumers and invites comments about the brand's positioning.

This emphasis on two-way communication would not surprise Shirley Roberts, founder of Market-Driven Solutions Inc., a consumer strategy and research consulting practice.

"Women spend three times as much time in our cars as men. We eat in our cars. We do our hair in our cars. We live in our cars now."

Roberts has written a book about how marketers can profit from the new consumer. In *Harness the Future: The 9 Keys to Emerging Consumer Behavior*, she predicts that "current computer technology will merge with new communications technologies to make two-way communications with consumers a common occurrence."

To be effective, Roberts insists, communication must be in sync with the consumer psyche. "Advertising campaigns that touch the psychological side of consumers will successfully break through clutter over the next decade," she writes.

Lorraine Tao, 31, and Elspeth Lynn, 34, are experts at cutting through clutter. The Toronto-based creative team not only dreamed up Kellogg's "Look Good" campaign but also turned heads with their earlier Fruit of the Loom commercials in Canada.

Instead of showing sexy models sporting pretty panties, Tao and Lynn opted for a clothesline of skimpy underwear bobbing along to the tune "The Things I've Done for Love." The red lacy number was "for Jim," the black pair with the fringe "for Mike," the leopard skin "for Bernie." Finally, along came comfortable Fruit of the Loom "for you" — 100 percent cotton with a larger seat. The ad ended with the line: "Isn't it time you bought underwear that turns you on, not just them?"

Underwear sold off the shelves, and Tao and Lynn earned Fruit of the Loom's complete North American account.

"People like to see themselves reflected in the media — they feel an affinity, they feel connected, they feel validated," says Irene Brenner, executive director of MediaWatch, a Canadian nonprofit group that monitors sexism in the media. "That's why they're so popular," she says of the Fruit of the Loom and Special K commercials. "They are



[catering] to a market that has been alienated all these years. If anything, that's proof to other marketers that they should follow suit."

Brenner points to The Body Shop's "Ruby" campaign as another example of a female-friendly promotion. In 1997, the international skin and hair care products retailer introduced North American consumers to Ruby, a curvaceous (Rubenesque) doll. She peered out from store posters in the buff, reclining on a couch and seemingly happy with herself. In bold type, the pin-up read: "There are 3 billion women who don't look like supermodels, and only 8 who do."

"Customers bonded and linked with this message so strongly we had people coming in just to talk about it," says Sorya Ingrid Gaulin, a spokesperson for The Body Shop Canada. To pass on the message, customers could purchase Ruby postcards. A portion of sales went towards The Body Shop Charitable Foundation.

The Body Shop Canada, which eschews the term "social marketing" to describe its approach, usually promotes social awareness campaigns in its stores each year.

"Our customers are activists for the most part," says Gaulin. "They want to be involved in their own communities." On average, they're urban, university educated, between 25- and 54-years old.



Underwear flew off the shelves when Fruit of the Loom promoted comfort over sex appeal with a campaign that encouraged women to shop for themselves, not their partners.

3 billion women
like supermodels
only 8 who do.



THE BODY SHOP®
Products based in reality.

with families and an annual household income of \$40,000 (Cdn.) or more.

Last year, Gaulin met with some of these customers during a cross-Canada tour that took her to about 60 Body Shops. At each location, she led discussions that covered topics such as self-esteem, violence against women and the way women are portrayed by the media and fashion industry.

Less subtle was The Body Shop Canada's 1993 child poverty awareness campaign. The poster for the initiative, with its bleak visual and shaming message, was overwhelming. Sales slumped.

Says Gaulin: "The lesson that we learned was that we can still raise awareness of these issues, but what we need to do is provide a solution and a way for our customers to get involved." Later that year, the company launched a second child poverty campaign, this time encouraging Canadians to send an anti-poverty message to politicians running for election.

Interestingly, Gaulin echoes what Americans reported in a 1997 media usage study commissioned by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Newspaper Association of America.

Sixty-eight percent of the women surveyed rated looking for "solutions, not just problems" by the news media as

extremely or very important compared with 57 percent of the men. Likewise, more women than men showed an interest in community and neighborhood news, with 83 percent ranking it as extremely or very important compared with 69 percent of their male counterparts.

The Body Shop, Fruit of the Loom and Kellogg don't hold the monopoly on marketing to women, of course. Other companies, such as Westin Hotels & Resorts, Sears Canada Inc. and Ford Motor Company, are focusing on female customers, too.

Tom Peters mentions in his book that "women were just 1 percent of business travelers in 1970" but will account for 50 percent by the year 2000. In response, "Westin is working on attitude change," reports Peters.

Employees are made aware of the security concerns of women and, while it may seem elementary, they are also instructed not to assume a man always pays the restaurant bill. The luxury hotel chain has also added more salads and lower-calorie entrées to room-service and restaurant selections and has made hair dryers, full-length mirrors, irons and ironing boards standard to all rooms.



A WOMAN'S VALUE SHOULD NOT BE DETERMINED BY THE POUND.

Unfortunately, the more a woman weighs, the less she's perceived to be worth. Our value as human beings, however, should have nothing to do with the numbers on a scale. The fact is, we should aspire to a healthy body weight and nothing less. So exercise. Establish a healthy routine. Start with a balanced breakfast every morning and go from there. Kellogg's Special K cereal is fat free and a source of nine essential nutrients so it's a light, sensible way to start your day. After all, looking your best is about being strong and healthy. And in the end, every one of us is priceless.



Look good on your own terms.

Kellogg's and The Body Shop have both used advertisements that appeal to women to be happy with themselves as they really are rather than pressure them through portrayals of glamorous stereotypes.

Catering to women

In the case of Sears Canada, the retailer has taken steps in the last few years to dispel the notion that it's a men's store and to cater to women's wants just as much as to their needs.

A key customer segment, reads its 1997 annual report, "is a woman, 25 to 54, the CEO and CFO of the family. She is the leader who makes 80 percent of the family's buying decisions even in categories like automotive, electronics and appliances."

Sears consequently introduced a wider range of ego-intensive products, including cosmetics and fashion accessories, and more fashionable women's apparel. It also revitalized some of its mall-based department stores.

"The design was complemented by curved architecture, pastel wood finishes, new display cases and customized fixtures specifically designed to enrich the shopping experience of the often harried woman who wants a less stressful shopping environment," the annual report noted.

Ford, meanwhile, is surely aware that women influence about 80 percent of car purchases and buy at least 50 percent of cars. (The percentage of car-buy-

ing decisions varies according to the source. Other sources say as high as 65 percent.) The design team for the 1993 Probe, for example, lowered the hood so that female drivers could see the road and park more easily. And, as of mid-1997, Peters reports, 60 percent of Ford's magazine advertising targeted women, up from 40 percent in early 1997.

In the spring 1997 issue of Canadian Business Technology magazine, Mimi Vandermolten, then Ford's director of corporate color and trim, was quoted as saying: "Women spend three times as much time in our cars as men. We eat in our cars. We do our hair in our cars. We live in our cars now."

To drive home the point, the magazine reported, Vandermolten, now retired, made a male designer of the Probe's interior "wear long, fake fingernails, leaving him to get in and out of the car, click the switches, lock the doors."

Eccentric measures such as this are not always prerequisites to discovering what women expect, be it from a car, cereal, underwear or even a newspaper. What is vital, however, is a thorough understanding of how the product can enhance a woman's life, whether by making her more comfortable, saving her time or money, entertaining or enlightening her, or simply helping her be a happier person.

Sara Bedal is a writer and editor with Thomson Newspapers' communications department.

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