

# HE SAID, She Said.

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## The Differences in the Way Men and Women Shop

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**H**ey, guess what? Women are different from men. It's not to say that one sex is superior or inferior to the other – we are just different. But you would never know it when shopping in most hardware stores and home centers that have traditionally catered to men.

Suffering from time poverty, today's woman has no time for hardware stores and home centers (or any store for that matter) that makes little or no attempt to make shopping easy. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of America's women work. As the number of working women continues to grow, smart retailers are rallying with services such as early and late store hours, special orders, delivery service and other conveniences to make her life easier.

It doesn't matter what you sell, the lady of the house plays an important role in your store's success, and it's a trend that will continue well into the 21st century. But if this demanding customer finds that your store is too hard to shop, or your prices are not competitive, she won't be your customer very long.

Experts tell us that during a typical conversation, women "hear" much more than the man thought he was saying.

Virtually every encounter a woman has becomes personal because women



care about the human dimension – about the person they are with. So how you sell to women can be as important as what you are selling.

Women often look for a relationship before they make a purchase, and they want to know that there will be support and personal service available after the purchase is made.

So why is an understanding of how the typical American woman thinks and shops so important to your business? Because she decides where and how the family spends money!

Let's take a look at the female shopper. To do that we have to blow away the stereotypes and look at who she really is:

- She's the Chief Operating Officer of the household making 80 percent of the

shopping decisions. Obviously, if she's single, she's making all of the decisions. When it comes to home improvement projects, it's even higher – 90 percent of women help perceive ideas and gather information for projects according to a recent Owens Corning study.

- The largest segment of female home improvement shoppers is married and employed. Close to 80 percent of America's women have a job or jobs. Pretty soon almost every able-bodied woman will work, either by necessity or because they want to. Today, even June Cleaver would have a career.

- Women control 65 percent of the net worth of the country.

- Twenty-five percent of women make more than their husbands do.

Since so many of today's households are headed by women, if she is making the purchasing decisions, then it's critical to the success of your store to make sure that she's happy when she's there.

### **MEN LIKE ONE-STOP SHOPPING ... WOMEN LIKE CHOICE**

While many girls were raised on shopping, guys were generally off doing other things. So men don't have the vast shopping "training" that women have. Therefore, guys like it when you make shopping easy. Most guys don't like to shop around, so if you have the information he needs to make a pur-

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By Rich Kizer and Georganne Bender

chasing decision, he'll love your store. Be sure to have plenty of project supply lists, "how-to" brochures and project-related endcaps.

Women, on the other hand, like choice, and they are willing to shop in a variety of stores to get what they need. In fact, a typical shopping trip could include a visit to several stores. This is where relationship-building comes in – you want her to choose your store instead of running to the nearest hardware store because it happens to be on her way home.

Women are also impulsive shoppers who can usually be enticed to purchase additional items as well. We once observed a woman shopping in a drug store. As she walked the aisles she

picked up several unrelated items such as pantyhose and cough syrup. We asked her if she needed related items – if she has a cold she might need facial tissue as well as the cough syrup. And if she's buying pantyhose, would she be in the market for razors too? Why weren't these items merchandised nearby so they would create multiple sales?

This is an example of why cross merchandising techniques are important. Whether it's on a clip strip, J-hook or on a feature endcap, all of these areas can be great tools to helping save the customer time while helping you increase sales.

If you sell gifts and other home decor items, try merchandising these products by lifestyle. In other words, set dis-

plays that let her envision how the items might look in her own home. Lifestyle merchandising involves props and a little imagination.

*(Note from Georganne: A lone woman shopping in your store is a good thing, but one shopping with her friends is even better. Women love to shop in packs and you should take advantage of classes and events that encourage her to shop with her friends. Why? Because when women shop in groups they egg each other on to buy more "stuff," that's why.)*

Men like to compare items by price. They also like to know what makes one item better than another. Make sure that your staff is up to date on the products you sell as well as each prod-

## Rich & Georganne's Five Rules of Successful 'She Commerce'

During the past several years we have done extensive research on how customers shop, and women have been a large part of that research. We've hosted focus groups and one-on-one interviews. And we have observed and shopped with ladies in all kinds of stores. What we discovered can help you become more profitable in your own store, so grab a pad and pencil and make a list of things you can do right now to attract more female shoppers.

### Create a Friendly and Comfortable Shopping Environment

Comfort to women means more than it does to men. Women like clean parking lots and a clean, organized and well-lighted store. And she likes to be able to move around the store comfortably (even with a shopping cart or a stroller) without bumping into merchandise or other customers. Right now, go get a cart and navigate your store; will this be easy for you?

She hates displays that make her reach high over her head or bend over to touch the product. To the average sized woman of 5'4", a 7' high gondola isn't shoppable unless she climbs the fixture, and squatting down to look at product on low shelves or on the floor just isn't comfortable – or flattering.

### Customer Service Means More Than Just Lip Service

You can print all the signs and brochures you want calling your customers "guests," but if your store's culture doesn't support that philosophy, your customers can tell. They enjoy interacting with your associates on a personal level, and they ask a lot of questions. Your staff needs to be consistently "up" in spirit and up-to-date on the products they sell.



Women shoppers in particular want to build relationships with store staff members, and they expect store employees to help them with their projects when they need it.

### Offer Plenty of Services

Like most people, she suffers from time poverty. Today you will more than likely compete for her time rather than her money. Sometimes she's on a mission with no time to spare; other times she'll leisurely stroll through the aisles. Your staff must understand how important her time is and must know what to do when she is out of time and in need of urgent care.

Ladies in our focus groups said that they were more likely to frequent stores that help make life easier. Do you offer special services and does she know about them? It's easy to create a list of your store's services – frequent shopper clubs, senior citizen

discounts, special orders, personal shopper service, gift wrapping – whatever is important to customers.

### Convenience is King (or in This Case Queen)

Are you open the hours she needs you to be? Can she shop before and after work? Do you offer ample (and safe) parking? If she's in a hurry, is it easy to get the things she needs quickly? Do you take advantage of her natural tendency to pick up items on impulse?

### Store Policies Must Be "No Hassle" and Competitive

Women don't always buy just what they need, and they are legendary for changing their minds. Many women opt to buy several choices and make up their mind later, perhaps after seeing the product in their own homes, so the ability to return merchandise without a hassle is critical. If your return policy is too rigid, she'll just go somewhere else.

## Top Shopping Concerns of Men and Women

(Ranked in order of importance.)

### Women's Top Concerns

1. I shop more often at stores that make shopping convenient.
2. I often look for coupons to use before going shopping.
3. Having a complete assortment of choices is important to me.
4. To save money, I shop at "discount stores" whenever I can.
5. I like to see special tags or information about products on shelves.
6. Speed at the checkout lane is important to me in deciding where to shop.
7. I often wait to buy until the item I want is on sale.
8. I'll often go out of my way to find exactly the right item.
9. I enjoy shopping at outlet or "off-price" stores.
10. If I see a product that I had not planned on buying, but it sells at a special price, I often buy it.

### Men's Top Concerns

1. I often wait to buy until the item I want is on sale.
2. I shop more often at stores that make shopping convenient.
3. I like to see special tags or information about products on shelves.
4. Having a complete assortment of choices is important to me.
5. Speed at the checkout lane is important to me in deciding where to shop.
6. I'll often go out of my way to find exactly the right item.
7. I'm willing to pay a little more to buy my favorite brand.
8. To save money, I shop at "discount stores" whenever I can.
9. I will usually drive by a store that sells similar products at similar prices to go to a store I like more.

Source: International Mass Retail Association



While women want a clean and bright salesfloor with wide aisles, men want to be able to find what they need themselves and get back to their projects. The store pictured above is the perfect blend of what both types of shoppers want.

uct's key features, advantages and benefits so they can establish value.

It's a good idea to stress to a woman how much money she's saving. Here are a few things to try in your store:

- "Compare at" signing showing the regular price and the markdown price.
- Register tapes that read "You saved \$X.XX today."

*(Note from Rich: It's not uncommon for women to comment that they've saved so much money on one purchase that they now have "money" left over to make another. I was able to relate to that reasoning when I heard it discussed in one of our focus groups because Georganne uses it all the time. She'll say, "I saved \$50 bucks on that suit. Now I have money for shoes." Go figure.)*

Men are reluctant to ask for help in your store and usually don't like to ask where things are. A man will usually dart through the store on a mission to find whatever it is he's looking for (and missing everything else along the way). Guys shop the same way they maneuver through a parking lot: one or two quick passes through and if they don't find something they like, they're out of there.

Women like to interact with sales associates. They look for help and want a lot of information. In our sales training sessions we stress the importance of "reading" the customer, and asking a lot of questions

before making a determination about what to recommend. With a female customer this step is critical because it's where trust is built between the sales associate and the customer. A woman may or may not be on unfamiliar ground in a hardware store. Either way, she wants to be taken seriously by store sales associates and be treated with respect. Remember, it's all about relationship building.

### TO MEN AND WOMEN, STORE AESTHETICS MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS

Store aesthetics and ambiance – the way a store looks and "feels" – is where men and women really differ. You only have to look at the changes in recent years in hardware stores. Almost overnight the hardware store many of us grew up with has been replaced with well-lighted stores with shiny floors where women can shop in comfort. Women need an environment where they can spend time and move comfortably throughout the store at their own pace.

Men have a tendency to find what they need, with the least amount of time looking for whatever it is, and then get out fast. Therefore, guys need a Decompression Zone.

A Decompression Zone is simply the 10-15 foot space between the front door and the merchandise inside. Some call it a vestibule. This area is important because a guy is usually on a hurried mission of some sort, and this area slows him down long enough to focus on the task at hand.

We have always said that there is no reality in retailing, only perception. You are what the customer perceives you to be, whether you like it or not. And customers – both male and female – make value judgments about your store within the first 10 seconds after entering. In

that 10 seconds they are already determining how much time they will spend in your store. While it may not be fair, we all do it.

## PARKING LOT

To many women, perceptions begin in the parking lot. Women want a clean and brightly lit parking lot. A lot more happens in the parking lot than just parking the car. To a woman juggling kids, the parking lot is a place to get organized.

Are there shopping carts nearby? Are they clean and in good repair? Will the wheels turn the way they are supposed to or will she have to fight it all the way through the store? Keep your carts in good repair. Keep them clean and dry. If it's raining, dry them off before putting them back for customer use. No one will put merchandise – or children – in a dirty or wet cart. Remember, it's all about the details of retail.

## INSIDE THE STORE

Women, more so than men, want an organized, clean, and brightly lit store.

Are the aisles free of debris? Is there enough room in the aisles to move the cart past another shopper comfortably? Since many women shop with their children, the child becomes a major factor. If she has to leave her child in the main aisle because the cart won't fit down an aisle packed with merchandise and other shoppers, she'll leave without the product before she'll leave her child alone in the aisle.

The "clean" part should be a no-brainer, but we've been in enough stores to know that it isn't. Simply put, the store has to be clean, including the floors, fixtures, windows and even the bathrooms.

If you ever invite us to visit your store, one of us, probably Georganne, would visit your bathroom before we had any conversation. That's because you can tell how well a store is run by the condition of its bathroom.

It's kind of like the shopping cart

thing. If the store takes the time to pay attention to seemingly unimportant details, such as the bathrooms, then the rest of the store must be run well.

Women also want their children to feel welcome in the store. How her kids are treated is an important factor in the store she chooses. Once inside, are her children welcome or are they greeted with "Unattended children will be sold as slaves" signs? If they like your store, children can be a boon to your business. Instead of rules, why not offer kids Cookie Credit Cards they can redeem for a free cookie each time they visit your store? If her children like your store, rest assured she'll be back to shop with you again.

With women it comes down to this: She wants a nice place to shop, she wants to be treated with respect and she seeks relationships with the people who work there. Selling to men comes down to this: How hard

do you want the guy to work? Make it easy and he's yours.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*As professional speakers, authors and consultants, Georganne Bender and Rich Kizer have more than 50 years of combined experience in the retail industry – everything from "time in the trenches" to senior management positions at national corporations. Their "Street Savvy™" marketing columns have been published in a variety of trade and business publications. Kizer and Bender's goal is to get inside customers' minds and use that information in their "Retail Adventures in the REAL World™" keynotes, seminars and customized training programs to help retailers become more effective. The result of their research is literally straight from the customers' mouths – solid, ground level intelligence that will help you in your own store to better serve and understand your customers. For more information, contact Rich and Georganne at: KB WorldWide Speaking!, 103 N. 11<sup>th</sup> Ave. Suite 206, Saint Charles, Ill. 60174; phone, (888) 215-1839; fax, (630) 513-8098; Web site, [www.KIZERandENDER.com](http://www.KIZERandENDER.com); e-mail, [KIZERnBNDR@aol.com](mailto:KIZERnBNDR@aol.com).*

## Rich & Georganne's Store Perception Exercise

Here's a good exercise to see what your store looks like from the customer's point of view. You'll need a pad of paper and something to write with, along with an open mind.

### Step 1:

Pretend that you are a customer. Stand in the front door and look around. What do you see that you don't like? Are the aisles cluttered? Are there carts nearby? Are they clean? What message does the store send?

Write down everything that you would not be thrilled with if you were a customer. And don't be afraid to "nit pick," because your customers do. After you are finished with the front of the store, move throughout the store the way a customer would. Write down things that disturb you along the way. Read the signs, stop at the service counters, the checkouts and the bathroom. Evaluate everything a customer sees and everywhere a customer goes.

### Step 2:

Ask your newest store associate to do the same exercise. Assure this person that he or she (or preferably both he and she) can write down anything and you will not get mad or hold it against them. Have this person evaluate the same areas that you evaluated. If you are brave, ask a customer.

Then compare the lists. Don't be surprised if your associate fills out six sheets and you only filled out one or two. You own/manage the store and it's easy to get what we call "Retail Tunnel Vision." This is when you spend so much time at the store that it's easy to overlook what the customer sees. Highlight the things that need to be fixed or changed right away and get busy. Do this exercise at least once a quarter or with every major seasonal change.