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Hey, Get This Woman a Beer!

It's amazing how often opportunities to increase business are right in front of us but because they are so close, we either let them pass, or we don't even notice them.

For some time marketers have recognized that women are the key influence on many U.S. household spending decisions, especially those concerning consumer goods. As a result, companies selling anything from home improvements to healthcare do whatever they can to capture the attention of this powerful market force, and for good reason. Based on the highlights of two surveys from 2007 listed below, it is easy to see the value of pursuing the female segment of the market:

- * Women make 83% of all household purchases in the U.S.
- * Women take care of 75% of the family finances
- * Women handle 89% of checking accounts in the U.S.
- * Women, unlike men, tend to shop for other people as much as they do for themselves.
- * The Mom Market is comprised of 82.5 million women and controls \$1.7 trillion in U.S. spending annually, making them one of the most profitable and sought-after consumer segments.
- * 90% of moms will use the same products for work as they do at home.

So, as we move into 2009, and household budgets continue to tighten, we need to start selling to the people holding the purse strings. As a retailer, one of the smartest things you can do to maintain and expand your business is to focus your resources on attracting the attention of the female population in your market. Initiatives around beer, specifically, can offer your store a unique opportunity to appeal to, and retain the attention of, this much sought after market segment.

Why Women and Beer?

It is not that there is something magical about beer and women; it is more that, when considering how women make buying decisions, one can see that there is a good deal of potential to increase women's interest and consumption of beer. Currently, women make up roughly one quarter of annual beer sales, and it isn't because they don't like beer - it is more of the fact that we don't take women into consideration when we are selling beer. As a result, we haven't given women the kind of information they need or want to motivate them to choose beer.

In Martha Barletta's book *Marketing to Women*, the author writes about the differences in the way men and women make buying decisions. Not too surprisingly after reading this book, it becomes very clear that the majority of the beer sections in retail stores are predominately designed for men.

While men believe in peeling away the extraneous details and reducing the purchase decision down to the most basic elements by not complicating things (e.g., a row of glass doors displaying products with minimal descriptions, perhaps not even posting the price), female customers want details.

According to Barletta, women believe that more information adds richness and depth to the purchase process and they want to include as much information as is necessary to reach the "perfect" decision.

The explosion in the popularity of craft beer over the last five years has brought an incredible number of beer brands and beer styles to the U.S. market that previously had not been available. This expansion of beer flavors and aromas, as well as abundance of information about beer, makes it the "perfect beverage" when considering ways to entice the interest of the female consumer.

Where men tend to make decisions following a more rapid linear path (i.e., they know what they want before they get there),

women will tend to take a little more time and look for opinions and insights from the sales staff and people they know. Therefore your opportunity to influence the buying decision of your female customers with knowledgeable sales people, in-store events, or shelf talkers is excellent and will help you move brands that offer better margins and profitability for you and your store.

It's not about selling "Pink" Beer

To attract the female customer, Home Depot isn't pushing pink nail guns and Blue Cross isn't running "women only" health plans. What they are doing is taking their products and changing the way they promote them to women and providing their female consumers with the kind of information they need to make purchase decisions.

To be clear, we are not recommending running specials on light bodied, low-calorie, or sweet, fruit flavored beers. What we are talking about is using the depth and diversity of beer to attract to your store the female contingent in your local market. Work with your beer distributors and local restaurants to run initiatives that highlight the attributes of beer which are most interesting and appealing to woman.

Spend time on offering in-store beer tastings (especially for seasonal brands); hand out cooking with beer recipes or sponsor in-store cooking with beer seminars; always suggest beer and food pairings (for seasonal and year-round foods); and highlight the variety of glassware appropriate for individual beer styles. These are the kind of tactics which will gain women's interest in beer, create loyalty to your store, and change the way your customers think about beer.

Stay away from "designed for women" beers. Brewers for many years, as well as others in the alcohol industry have been fixated with the idea of creating niche' product lines for the female demographic. Selling brands that are brewed to not taste like beer, not smell like beer, and not look

like beer, only appeals to a subset of women in test groups - they won't expand your beer market. Women don't need 'girl' beer; they need to be given the chance to see what is so special about beer. I know countless women who enjoy beer and they drink anything from Bud Light Lime to Dogfish Head 90 IPA. These women love beer because they have been given the chance to discover beer.

Final points about your female consumers: first, beyond the initial sales you'll receive by giving women the type of information they need to make their purchase decisions, women tend to have long-term brand and store loyalty; second, there is no better advertising than word of

mouth and women love to share the news about great brands and great stores with their friends and family.

1. - Sources: Diversity Best Practice & Business Women's Network: Wow! Quick Facts 2006 & 2007. All About Women Consumers 2007.
2. - Barletta, Martha. *Marketing To Women*. Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2003.

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Color	Hop Taste
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