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Marketing to Women

How to include the other half of your potential customers

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In any household, the decision to purchase goods and services can be unilateral or shared, but it's the "gatekeeper"—the household's money manager, who makes sure all the bills get paid—who firmly influences all of these purchasing decisions.

Now consider the following statistics: In the United States, women sign 80 percent of all checks, spend more than \$3.7 trillion annually, and are the purchasing agents for another \$1.5 trillion. If it wasn't obvious before, it should be obvious now who the gatekeepers are.

Considering all of these statistics, and the fact that according to the U.S. Census Bureau females outnumber males, no matter the sex of your next flight school customer the odds are that the decision to invest in flight training will ultimately depend on how well you market your aviation services

to a woman—be it *his* mom, wife, partner, or to *her*, the single Ms. looking for a new challenge or adventure and willing to spend *her* income on *her* desire to fly.

Can we make any generalizations about marketing to women? A few. In *Marketing to Women*, Martha Barletta wrote that if you are *not* differentiating between men and women with your marketing and sales methods, you're not only losing women as customers but men, too. With the majority of the American population being female, doesn't it seem a little odd that women account for only 6 percent of the active pilot population? What can we do to differentiate, assuming you do want to increase your flight training revenues?

New Markets

The automobile industry discov-

ered long ago that revenues were being significantly (and adversely) affected when salesmen ignored a customer's female spouse/companion during their presentations or dismissed or patronized customers who were single women. That dismissive attitude is why, many years ago, I walked out of a car dealership instead of buying the car I wanted.

The auto industry has come to its senses since then, and J.D. Power and Associates notes that women make 51 percent of all auto purchases and that women in the household influence 85 percent of today's auto purchases. This is why you find automobile ads in women's magazines and find more females in the driver's seat of the vehicles advertised anywhere.

Perhaps you're thinking that aviation, because it's so male dominated, is different. Think again. Recently, I was taking a break from

teaching while putting the floorboards back in my Champ. My A&P-IA was sitting on my hangar couch, chatting with a pilot who'd just returned to aviation after a long hiatus. I wasn't paying much attention to their conversation until the pilot said, "I've been divorced twice, you know. It's because of my two ex-wives that I haven't been flying these past 15 years; they just didn't approve."

And just yesterday, my friend Walt dropped by. He mentioned that he had finally sold his beautifully restored Stampe biplane to the Old Rhinebeck. "But what about that other guy who wanted it so badly?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," Walt said, chuckling, "that's an interesting story. The fellow had his checkbook out, open, and was ready to write when his wife, who had climbed into the airplane's front seat, said, 'No,' she didn't like it."

Make no mistake; these are not "Oh that's nice, but they don't affect me" incidents. As small-business owners and instructors we are *missing out*. Think about the new customer base you could build by appealing to a larger market segment. Don't forget the revenue lost from male customers/pilots who need your help in justifying their flying expenses to the gatekeeper. Always remember that aviation is *not* a "necessary" product or service. For those not pursuing a career, nobody really *needs* to learn to fly. Losing customers (male or female) isn't about them going to another flight school—it's about them not investing in flying at all.

Because a decision to become a pilot, acquire a new rating, or buy an aircraft often depends on how well we market our products and services to women, and because women represent our industry's greatest growth potential, we

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should study the ways other industries are marketing their products and services for female customers.

First—and most important—SHE does *not* purchase products the same way HE does. This is nothing new; just think about how differently most women and men go shopping for anything, and you'll understand what mega-buck companies have now finally quantified. Marketing to women is much more complicated than painting your bathroom pink. Women *learn to fly* for the same reasons that men do—adventure, career, the feeling of freedom, and challenge—but they do not make the decision to start training the same way men do. In addition, the women you want to reach may be from one of several different life stages and cultures.

Adding to the complexity is the realization that marketing to the generalities of a "group" no longer works well. Instead marketers must understand specific generational

groups, such as Baby Boomer, Gen-X, and Gen-Y (also called Echo Boomers or the Millennium Generation). Shared experiences and societal trends have influenced each of these generations, and effective marketing takes them into account. This also means that marketing to all women, just like marketing to all men, isn't feasible or effective anymore.

If a woman is a Baby Boomer, her responsibilities as a mother are complete or nearly so, and she's in the process of redefining herself. If she's a young mom, read *Marketing to Moms* (Maria Bailey, BSM Media, at www.bsmedia.com). Are you marketing to Gen-Y? These 16-year-old young women use the Internet extensively, are not necessarily impressed with brand names, but they understand finances extremely well.

Rebecca Bortner, a project manager at Harley-Davidson, says that in 1985 women bought only about 600 new Harleys. In 2004, it was more than 30,000. How did Harley-Davidson attract women to its products? Harley recognized that riding motorcycles transcends sex and race, Bortner said, and that women and men ride for the same reasons: freedom, adventure, challenge, and to be part of a "family" of people enjoying the same pursuits.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

In noting the differences in their purchasing decisions, Bortner said women research their purchases (usually on the Internet) much more than men do, and their decisions are often influenced by women role models and word-of-mouth recommendations from their female friends.

Look at the Harley website, and you'll find it has incorporated women-oriented information under the heading Experience. Then click on the Riding link for access to

the following pages: Getting Started, Why Women Ride, Riding Stories, Learning to Ride, and History of Female Riders. Harley-Davidson content is exactly what women (or men) will need to know about the experience of getting started riding motorcycles along with excerpts from women sharing the experiences of riding.

Buying Research

Because women do more research in making their purchase decision, and because they make extensive use of the Internet in this effort, your website *is* your brochure. Picture your female flight instructors and students, and include short “why I fly” testimonials. Assume that women will Google you and your competitors. When a woman calls, remember that she’ll be listening to your friendliness, professionalism, and nonsexist communications, in addition to your ability to ask meaningful questions and to listen to her answers.

Women make comparisons on much more than just a product’s *features*. While a man may be interested in an aircraft engine’s horsepower for the horsepower alone, a woman (pilot or nonpilot) wants to know why that horsepower benefits her. Does it make it safer? Does it shorten the flight to see her new grandchild on the other side of the state? She wants to weigh the investment against the benefit to her lifestyle. Does it make her life easier; does it give her more time with the new grandchild? When marketing flight lessons to women, you’re missing the mark if you’re focusing your comments solely on yourself, the airplane’s gadgets, its powerful engine, or any other as-



pect of the hardware of flying.

Women are *less* easily swayed by price. They want trust, value, and loyalty. If your price is higher than your competitor, say so and substantiate why. If it’s lower, you had better have a good reason for that, too. Be honest and substantiate your service’s value. Don’t be afraid of having higher prices because you respect and pay your employees more—that’s a good reason in itself.

Women often compare the value of new services with *something* else that they can relate to in other aspects of their lives. Take haircuts, for example. How much do guys pay for one? \$10, \$15, \$25? Now how much do you think the average woman’s haircut, color, and perm cost? Try \$40 to \$90. Remember this: most women are used to paying more for one-to-one services. To put it another way, the price of getting my hair done is not cheap—how could a flight instructor possibly be cheaper?

Service quality and consistency are important to most women. Are you on time to lessons? If your trainer’s seats don’t adjust as needed, do you provide seat cushions to ensure a proper fit? Do you have clean re-

strooms with full-length mirrors and maybe lockers so she can change from work clothes to casual flying clothes? By being honest and substantiating your service’s value you will be ahead of the game.

Marketing to women requires people to unlearn what business schools have been teaching for decades, wrote Faith Popcorn, a leading authority on the subject and chairwoman of Brain Reserve, in *Advertising Age*. She called the shift from male-centric transactional selling to female-centric relational marketing “*EVEvolution*.”

Relationship marketing means women are influenced by relationships that go deeper than a handshake. Are you willing to help sponsor a child, give to the local food bank, or help fight against breast cancer by donating a dollar for every aircraft rental hour?

Fears of losing male customers by orienting your interactions and marketing efforts more toward women are unfounded. The opposite can be true, and you’ll find a good example in the paint aisle at the home-improvement store. Why do you think paint cans now have easy-to-pour rims? Because women have higher expectations for service and product design than men, so if you are fulfilling the demands of your female customers, you are more than fulfilling your male customers’ needs.

Your company’s relationship with female customers goes well beyond the flight lesson you give or the annual inspection she approves. Service is how everyone in the company, from the front desk to the flightline, treats her. If her spouse is the pilot, do you call to let her know that prices are going up? She

is after all, the financial gatekeeper. And have you offered flight lessons to her—or her daughter? Female echo boomers (baby boomers' kids) are savvy about products, and they have been empowered to believe in themselves. (For example, the subtext below the hip young model in an ad for Harley-Davidson clothing reads, "Where women are women and men are roadkill.")

Marketing consultants Lisa Johnson and Andrea Learned offer some specific marketing expertise and recommendations on their website, www.ReachWomen.com, and in their book, *Don't Think Pink*. Of note are the four key adventure categories that motivate women:

1. Skill-building adventures:

Home improvement, auto repair, shooting and creating home movies, composing music with computer software, and figuring out how to use all the features on her new digital camera.

2. Outdoor adventures: Snowshoeing, kayaking, fly-fishing, hunting, boating, and adventure travel.

3. Intellectual/cultural adventures: Wine tasting, fine dining, coffee, book clubs, gallery visits, opera tickets, Spanish lessons, and salsa dancing.

4. Spiritual adventures: Journaling, retreats, group or church membership, writing a personal memoir, yoga, meditation classes, and tai chi.

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Johnson and Learned say that young women "crave highly interactive experiences that teach, challenge, and stretch their limits." Isn't flying all of these? Marketing short-duration (weekend) aviation adventure courses to women of all ages who may or may not want to complete further pilot training may be financially rewarding in itself. That's what the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is doing with its hugely successful weekend "Becoming an Outdoors Women" (BOW) skills program. Manufacturers of outdoor equipment and sporting goods stores often provide information and BOW instructors, and tens of thousands of women of all ages from across the nation have participated. Another example is the National Football League's Football 101 classes, which it holds in a number of its franchise cities. Women

make up 40 percent of the viewing audience and, according to the League, have a significant say in the decision to buy game tickets and team merchandise.

Teaching Strategies

Accessing the power of female spending requires much more than just redesigning your brochures, ads, and website. Teaching strategies for women are different, too. You'll find that it is okay to spend more time on ground school. Ask questions—and answer them—without sounding like the macho-bozo pilot who seems more interested in listening to his own stories about how he survived some dire situation. I have walked away from far too many of these hangar-flying sessions rolling my eyes, right along with my male CFI colleagues. There is absolutely no excuse for sexist remarks, off-color jokes, inappropriate photographs, or getting "cozy" with a female customer.

When teaching co-ed ground schools, men tend to dominate discussions and women are not as likely to interrupt, but if given the opportunity, women definitely will come up with some of the most interesting and overall helpful questions. Try offering single-sex ground schools or splitting classes into smaller "teams" with group discussion and aviation scenario-based problem solving.

It is financially essential for the flight training industry to understand the economic impact women have on our daily business lives. It may even be necessary for us to change our existing products, services, and teaching methods to obtain our share of this market. Our industry is poised for growth—take this information and grow with it! ■

Helpful Resources

Faith Popcorn: www.faithpopcorn.com

U.S. Census Bureau: www.census.gov

BSM Media: www.bsmmedia.com

Advertising Age: www.adage.com

Reach Women: www.reachwomen.com

Institute for Teaching and Research on Women:
www.towson.edu/itrow