

# Thinking pink won't lure the prosumer

When South African women came together to celebrate National Women's Day recently, they looked back on seven decades of struggle for equality. Strange then, that marketers would have us believe South African women will purchase an item, such as a razor, because it is pink.

Fiona Ross, Brand strategist and co-founder of the marketing consultancy imagineNATION Alliance, says: "Marketing to today's woman requires more than pink packaging if it is to successfully target the diverse consumer base of South African women. Many advertisers and marketers have been slow to recognise the purchasing power as well as the complexity of the new female 'prosumer' or female professional consumer."

That's dangerous ground for any marketer, when you consider that women make up 41% of South Africa's working population and that they own about 70% of informal businesses in the country. Add to that the fact that 40% of black households are run by women, and you can understand why marketing guru Tom Peters refers to women as "priority number one for any company wanting to succeed in today's competitive business environment".

Ross and fellow imagineNATION Alliance co-founder Amanda Reekie, who collectively have over 25 years of marketing experience working with leading brands including Unilever, Colgate Palmolive, Edgars, Woolworths, Virgin and Media24, have developed a research product called womenNATION to provide insight into urban South African women.

Reekie says: "While it is widely accepted internationally that women are an economic force to be reckoned with, it is also universally acknowledged that women relate differently to men, on virtually everything. Generally speaking, women are frustrated by the inability of companies to truly understand their lives and provide innovative services and products that really meet their needs.

"There have been attempts, sure, but very few have hit the mark."

As an example, Ross and Reekie quote the slow uptake of online grocery shopping: "Online shopping was supposed to ease the burden of modern working women - especially those with children. But the reality is that it simply takes too long to set up the lists. To successfully shop online, you need an hour or so of quiet, uninterrupted time, and that's simply a luxury most working moms don't have."

Reekie adds that this basic misunderstanding of women and their daily needs is compounded by the difficulty of modern South African society: "We live in an extremely diverse society, and it's important to understand the different cultural backgrounds from which women come when you're creating products or services with them in mind."

On top of all that, the duo say it's very important to recognise that women seldom fit into one marketing pigeonhole: "Women have a tendency to play many different roles at the same time - mother, wife, lover, business exec - and marketers typically create products and communication that appeal to one of these roles. It's time they started integrating."

One example of simple integration would be for financial institutions and clothing store accounts to offer cheap linked accounts or bulk purchase accounts, in recognition of the fact that so many South African women have a huge number of financial dependents. Cellular companies have cottoned onto this with the "call me" and "call sponsor" services.

"Marketers need to let go of their preconceived stereotypes when it comes to creating communication that speaks to South African women. They need to make a real effort to understand what makes these women tick, what excites them, what bores them, and what plain frustrates them. Only then will they gain their loyalty, and their share of purse. Pink packaging alone simply won't cut it anymore," says Ross.

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