

# *The* SOCCER MOM MYTH

Today's Female Consumer:

Who She *Really* Is,  
Why She *Really* Buys

**Michele Miller & Holly Buchanan**



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*For Ron, who has always encouraged me  
to fly high enough to touch the moon.*

—Michele

*To Buck Buchanan,  
“the last honest man in advertising”*

—Holly

# CONTENTS

	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<b>PART I</b>	<b>How to Market to Women</b>	<b>1</b>
	The Soccer Mom Myth: <i>Why Women Aren't Responding</i>	3
	Victory Lady Fitness: <i>A Success Story</i>	11
<b>PART II</b>	<b>Marketing to Women: The New Mainstream</b>	<b>19</b>
	The Third Wave: <i>The Real-Life Challenge of Marketing to Women</i>	23
	Mass Adoption of the Internet: <i>The New Force That Empowers Female Consumers</i>	29
<b>PART III</b>	<b>Understanding Gender Differences: Nature Versus Nurture</b>	<b>35</b>
	Language of the Brain: <i>Women's Perspective on Life and Shopping</i>	39
	The Nurture Side of Gender Difference: <i>How Society Plays a Role</i>	47
	Gender-Based Communication Styles: <i>How They Differ and How They Affect Marketing</i>	51
<b>PART IV</b>	<b>The Power of Marketing to Women as Individuals</b>	<b>61</b>
	Shattering Stereotypes: <i>What They Are and Why They're Harmful</i>	65
	Maslow's Hierarchy: <i>The Foundation of Understanding How to Market to Women</i>	79

	Personas: <i>The Key to Marketing to Women</i>	87
	The Three Dimensions of Personas: <i>How Motivation, Questions and Objections Make a Persona Who She Is</i>	95
	Scenarios: <i>Planning Pathways for Your Personas</i>	109
<b>PART V</b>	<b>The Inside Out of Your Customers . . . And Your Business</b>	<b>117</b>
	Third Wave Research: <i>Effective Methods for Understanding Women From the Inside Out</i>	119
	Finding Your Voice: <i>Connecting With Her Deeper Motivations Through Authenticity and Language</i>	135
	The Power of Words: <i>Connecting With Her Through Effective Copywriting</i>	147
	The World Inside Your Door: <i>How Personas Help Create Powerful Customer Experiences</i>	157
<b>PART VI</b>	<b>The Future of Marketing to Women</b>	<b>173</b>
	Customer Empowerment: <i>The Importance of Staying Ahead of the Curve</i>	175
	Word-of-Mouth Advertising: <i>More Powerful Than Ever</i>	181
	Blogs: <i>The Deeper Connection</i>	195
	Websites for Women: <i>How to Create a Website for Your Female Customers</i>	201
	Gender Savvy: <i>How to Market to Women Without Alienating Men</i>	211
	Putting Your Plan Into Action	221
	<i>Final Thoughts</i>	229

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A large portion of this book is focused on marketing to women online. We discuss the techniques of uncovering, creating personas and planning scenarios, which are all part of Future Now Inc.’s methodology known as Persuasion Architecture™. We also discuss the four buying modes used in Persuasion Architecture™. To learn more about Persuasion Architecture™ or Future Now Inc., visit [www.futurenowinc.com](http://www.futurenowinc.com).

## *Michele’s Personal Acknowledgements:*

I never understood the author who thanks their significant other at the *end* of the acknowledgements, often saying something like, “Last but not least, I want to thank my husband/wife for all they’ve done, for their great sacrifice and support.” What’s with the “last but not least” business? If they’re so great, why not thank them *first*? So, here we go: To my husband, Ron, for showing me a level of support I never knew existed, for the freedom to let my beagle roam wherever it wishes, and the empathy that can only come from another creative type. You are my inspiration to fly.

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# 1

## **The Soccer Mom Myth:** *Why Women Aren't Responding*

**T**he room was a marketer's dream filled with educated, savvy women with money and the urge to spend it. Our *Marketing to Women* seminars attract professional women who, in their rather *spare* spare time, are also enthusiastic shoppers.

We hadn't launched into our dance routine yet (long sordid story for later), so we still enjoyed some respect from the audience. Holly asked a pointed question: "How many of you in the room consider yourself a Soccer Mom?" The silence reached a crescendo and nary a hand rose.

At most of our seminars, about 60 percent of the audience are women. Yet every time Holly asks that question, usually only one or two women raise their hands. So, Holly qualifies by saying, "How many of you are moms?" Usually a great many hands go into the air.

Now, we're not so bold as to ask actual ages, but by eyeballing the crowd, it's obvious that the vast majority of these moms fall into the twenty-five to forty-five-year-old Soccer Mom range. (Yes, there could be some older women who don't look their age. You know what they say: fifty is the new forty, forty is the new thirty.)

But even taking that into account, the numbers never change. Usually only 1 to 2 percent of the crowd identifies themselves as a Soccer Mom. If you listen to marketers and politicians, there are millions upon millions of Soccer Moms out there, yet in our seminars we've found only about *seven*.

What's going on here? Why aren't more women identifying themselves as Soccer Moms? Come on, there's nothing wrong with being a Soccer Mom, right? *Right?*

If women don't consider themselves Soccer Moms, what does that say about the effectiveness (or *ineffectiveness*) of billions of dollars of advertising aimed at this group?

### **Women Aren't Responding**

Seventy percent of all women say marketing doesn't speak to them. Twenty years ago, even ten years ago, this wouldn't have been surprising. But now? Advertisers have finally woken up and realized women are responsible for 80 percent of all purchasing decisions. They're making a concerted effort to reach out to this "niche." They're conducting specialized research; they're creating specialized "women-focused" marketing teams; they're doing their best to try to speak to and understand this audience.

So why the disconnect? Why are so many of their efforts failing? Some people point to advertising creatives and corporate executives and say, "Because men are making the decisions. Men don't understand women." We have one word for that, *horse hooley*. (OK, it was two words.) You can't blame it all on men. Women are responsible as well. Yes, there are still more men than women in decision-making positions in companies, marketing departments, and advertising agencies. But women hold such positions, too, in ever-increasing numbers. They are a part of the decision-making process.

The truth is, both women and men have biases, and both believe in many of the same stereotypes. Both women and men are gathering all sorts of marketing data and coming to the same flawed conclusions. We're not here to place blame, but we are here to point a finger. That finger is pointed at the customer, because at the end of the day, all the answers lie with her. She's the one we're focusing our attention on.

## Frequently Asked Questions

When we tell someone we specialize in marketing to women, the words are barely out of our mouths before the listener starts blurting out questions. We've gathered together some of the most pressing questions we get from business owners and marketers and used them as the basis for writing this book.

You're probably asking some of these questions yourself:

- *What do women really want?*
- *What can you say to them to get them to buy your product or service?*
- *How can you get inside their heads to find out what their true motivations are?*
- *How can you create and market products that are remarkable?*
- *How can you create messages that not only get their attention but also get them to act?*
- *Do women process advertising messages differently than men do?*
- *How do you market to women without turning off men?*
- *If stereotyping helps you better understand your audience (Soccer Mom is a stereotype) why is it so harmful to your marketing efforts?*
- *What are the factors you need to take into consideration to make sure you generate a positive response, and that women associate that response with your brand?*
- *Which marketing mediums are most effective for reaching women? Are you better off sticking with traditional marketing mediums (television, radio, print)?*
- *Men are traditionally the early adopters of new technology. Since women are supposedly not technically savvy, should you even be considering more high-tech mediums like the Internet, blogs, podcasting, etc.? Which marketing mediums consistently deliver the highest return on investment (ROI)?*
- *Should a man or a woman create your marketing campaign? Should a man or a woman design your website?*
- *How do you transfer your offline marketing skills to your online marketing strategy? How can you take the success of traditional media—radio, print, television, etc.—and apply it to your website?*

Maslow saw that a human being's needs must be met from the bottom up. The most basic needs, *physiological*, are those required to sustain life like oxygen, food, and water, for example. Next are the *safety* needs like security, shelter, etc. These are followed by *belonging* needs including love and acceptance, and *self-esteem* needs like confidence and self-worth.

A human can only rise to a new level of need when the current level has been satisfied. She can (and will), however, descend to a lower level depending on a sense of deprivation. Maslow compared it to a furnace thermostat—when it gets too cold, the thermostat turns the heat on; when it's too hot, it turns the heat off. Needs change all the time and human beings are self-regulating.

At the very top of the pyramid is the “being need” of *self-actualization*, that small percentage of humans (about 2 percent of the population) that focuses on the world outside itself. This is the woman who has a clear sense of who she is yet is still very connected to the world. She experiences peak moments of love, understanding, happiness, and feeling alive. She has a strong connection to truth, justice, and brotherly love. This is the ultimate state of being, that level that Maslow believed many of us dream of but few actually achieve on a consistent basis.

With a simple yet profound theory of human behavior, Maslow showed it's nearly impossible to split a population into demographic categories for marketing purposes. Generalizations about graying grannies and Soccer Moms just won't work because there are too many variables, the most important being an individual woman's need at any given moment. Take a group of Soccer Moms and try placing them on Maslow's pyramid. They'll be scattered from top to bottom. Each mother, depending on the life experience stamped into the right side of her brain and the environment in which she lives, is going to have a separate, individual need to fulfill.

### **Volvo Listens to Women**

A highlight of the 2004 European auto expos was the unveiling of Volvo's YCC (Your Concept Car), a prototype created by an all-female design team. Rather than focusing on one specific target group, Volvo set out to discover and meet the needs of individual women drivers. The elegantly futuristic vehicle

boasts gull-wing doors and an electric-hybrid engine that needs an oil change only after thirty-two thousand miles. It has run-flat tires, allowing the driver to get the car to a garage after a puncture rather than be stuck on the side of the road. The interior has extra storage, removable textile panels to change color schemes, and headrests with indentations to accommodate ponytails.

Executives at BMW and General Motors pooh-poohed the concept, but Volvo CEO Hans-Olov Olsson claims they missed the point. It was never Volvo's intention to build this car for mass consumption, he claims; rather, it was to find out what women wanted and incorporate those solutions into future Volvo vehicles. Olsson added, "We learned that if you meet women's needs and expectations, you also exceed those for men."

## **Maslow and Business**

Maslow knew his hierarchy of needs could be applied to many areas beyond psychology, including business. He saw its importance in every aspect of enterprise, from determining the goals of the business owner, to hiring, training, and nurturing staff, to building relationships with customers. Maslow believed that, using the hierarchy of needs, there are some simple steps a business could take to propel itself toward greater profitability:

### **1. Build your business to outlive you.**

Maslow gauged the character of a business owner or manager by asking, "Do you want this company to grow even after you're dead?" Ask yourself the same question. Whether you retire, die, or even sell your company, do you give a damn whether it thrives without you? Passion and caring for something outside yourself is a characteristic of self-actualization and provides a rock-solid foundation for building a profitable business.

**MICHELE:** Everything you do should be done with the idea that the show will go on even if you're not around. I remember an important lesson learned from Robert C. Jones, a vice president of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. I was working at Sirius Satellite Radio and found myself in the middle of a heavy-duty negotiation with the Kennedy Center for exclusive