

The Electronics Market – Only A Man’s World?

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Last week I ventured out to purchase satellite TV. The month before I purchased a new cell phone that is “loaded for bear” as the saying goes and I just converted from dial-up to a cable modem for my home computer. I am an electronics company’s dream target – so why am I also so frustrated.

In each instance I was “sold “ the item by a young, tech savvy sales person. His pitch was short, sweet, and to his point, but not mine. I wanted, no I demanded to be shown how the items work, to learn what I had to know to install and get my “newest and greatest” up and running and lastly to be assured that I was making the right decision.

Like most women shoppers, I had done my on-line research, I was armed with knowledge, but now I wanted more...I wanted to see the products in action.

Why am I sharing this story with you today? Because, in all three cases, the companies failed to meet my needs.

Unusual, unfortunately not, but in lieu of the newest data on women and the impact they have on the electronics industry’s bottom line; it was totally unacceptable customer service.

The Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) released the findings of its annual study in January of 2004 - for those of you developing and selling home electronics the report should be a wake-up call. Here are just a few of the highlights of this report.

- Women are involved in 89% of all consumer electronics purchase decision
- 84% believe that the new technologies improve their lives
- 59 % of online women are interested in DVD players
- 52% are interested in DVD audio
- And, its not all younger women doing the buying - more than 76% of all seniors age 55 and up have made a consumer electronics purchase in the past 12 months. (For those of you not up on the demographics of the aging market, more than half of the senior market is women.)
- And the percentage of female early adopters continues to grow, 35% of women online will usually purchase a new product when it first debuts (for those of you who read my last column on women and the Internet you know that we now exceed the numbers of men on line).

Now the bad news:

- Nearly 75% of women surveyed complained about being ignored, patronized or offended by sales people when shopping for electronics
- 40% of the women said they were treated better when accompanied by a man
- More than 50% said advertising for electronics was confusing (by the way, 50% of the men surveyed said the same thing).
- A meager 1% of the women surveyed thought manufacturers had them in mind when creating products

So, what’s a retailer or manufacturer to do? The second day of CEA’s annual conference addressed the mistakes the industry has made and offered suggestions for change. Marketers, take heed:

- Engage the female consumer on her terms
- Provide point-of-purchase product and service demonstrations to assure a complete understanding of how your product works before she leaves your store
- Create customer hotlines
- Simplify training and instruction materials so the female customer can get up and running quickly
- And most importantly, retailers and manufacturers must work together to develop easier to use products

Does this sound logical, if you are a woman, it's restating the obvious, but back to my story. My cell phone is in my purse- after two trips back to the store and making an exchange for a different model ("sorry about that, I thought it had a speaker phone built into?"). I am still wading through my 178 page manual and 14 page *Welcome Manual*— I'll let you know when I figure out how to turn the volume up. My satellite TV...after the purchase and assurance that I had all I needed, I was told by the installation crew that I needed phone jacks near each TV location "you don't have phone jacks near each TV, well we can install them for you or you can buy a converter for \$89— per TV"...I returned the product to the store, ("I am sorry about that, our salesperson should have told you that you needed a phone jack near each TV."). Lastly, the cable modem... after 2 weeks, 4 service calls to my cable folks, my ISP provider, Microsoft and my security software provider the finger pointing has ended and the system is up and running. I think I will ask CEA to send complimentary tickets to the manufacturers and retailers where I shop to their next *Technology is a Girl's Best Friend* conference.



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