

Viva la (shopping) difference!

Written by Cheryl McNeil Pearson - NNPA Columnist
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Who wears the (shopping) pants in your house? Ok, I know that was a really old school kind of question, but it got your attention, right? Unless you've lived under a rock, we all know that the definition of families and households is ever-evolving (Note the success of ABC's ever-popular, multiple award-winning "Modern Family," which features the gamut of non-traditional.).

My employer, The Nielsen Company, which measures consumer trends and behaviors in almost every area of consumption around the globe, recently honed in on some major differences in the shopping "habits" of men and women. Fact is, in the United States, men are actually doing the food and household shopping more than ever before. (Now, this is really good news for someone like me who has done the grocery shopping as the head of my household for more than 20 years now. I keep hoping I'll meet a nice, eligible man in the produce section of my local grocery store. Hope springs eternal.) According to Nielsen research, women still do the majority of shopping; but men are pulling up the rear. However, shopping behavior for men and women is a bit different. Women continue to dominate shopping trips in all retail channels (grocery, super centers, warehouse clubs, dollar and drug) except convenience stores; but men have increased trip shares between 2004 and 2010 in all retail outlets but drug stores.

Nielsen research also shows that women tend to be the biggest spenders per trip, which indicates that they handle the weekly planned shopping trips for their families. At grocery stores, women's basket totals average \$44.43 per trip; a man spends an average of \$34.81 per trip. However, although women rule shopping at dollar stores and warehouse clubs (72% versus 28%), we only spend \$3 - \$5 more per trip than men.

And, there are more interesting shopping stats. Did you know that Sunday is the most important shopping day of the week for both sexes, although Saturday is almost as important at warehouse club stores? That piece of information makes me wonder if I'm the only single person on the planet who thinks it's a good idea to do the grocery shopping on a Saturday night. (I think I am going to have to switch up my routine and maybe get a life.) Well, at least I'm in line with my demographic (women under 55), who shop mostly on the weekends. Women (and men) aged 55 and over spread their trips out more evenly over the course of the week.

While Nielsen research does not predict that men will be the predominant shopper at the grocery store anytime soon, it is important for marketers to note the increase in male shopping activity. We can blame the increase in shopping on the economy. According to a February 2011 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, men face a higher unemployment rate than women (8.8% compared to 7.9%). That means more men are staying at home than in the past, and in many cases are becoming more engaged in managing the day-to-day household duties. Because of our new economic reality, manufacturers and marketers are going to have to re-evaluate traditional ads, circulars and other promotional materials. One major consumer-packaged-goods manufacturer has already developed a site targeting male homemakers. Others will surely follow suit because, as always, it's all about how and where your valuable consumer dollars are spent.

One area where the sexes are pretty much running neck and neck is in online shopping. More Nielsen research shows that almost three-fourths of women (72%) and more than two-thirds of

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men (68%) shopped online in the past 30 days. Consumers of both sexes between age 35 and 54 had the highest level of online shopping activity (74%), which makes sense because younger consumers have traditionally been the ones most on the cutting edge of technology. However, those numbers for online and mobile activity among seniors will increase as Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964), who are comfortable with technology, age. The oldest Boomers this year started turning 65 and a number of retailers are already using their websites to target senior citizens with special online promotions, clubs that offer discounts and an array of other attractive features. As for me, I have a fabulous marketing idea. How about turning the “Meat Market or Department” into the “Meet Market?” Especially on Saturday nights, say between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m.? I know of at least one single Black female who is usually there.

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