



What Women Want: Marketing to Women

“It’s not the product and its features that should drive the marketing, it’s the customer and their needs.”

The question of what women want is one that many men have struggled with over the centuries. That’s not meant as a joke, just a statement of fact. Fathers have struggled with daughters, brothers don’t understand sisters, sons have had their issues with mothers and, of course, there are the trials and tribulations that are inherent in any marriage or similar relationship between a man and a woman. Why is that? The simple truth is that men and women are different. From a biological standpoint the differences are fairly obvious, but the root of the differences lies in the mysterious area of brain chemistry and function. We’re not going to make this a scientific treatise on all those differences, but for the purposes of creating effective marketing and building a profitable cleaning business, we really need to have an understanding of what some of those differences are.

“The more you understand the buying psychology of your customer, the easier it is to sell them your service.”

Some of you may be wondering, why should I even worry about what women want? I’m just cleaning carpets? The answer is: Because woman make

up the vast majority of the customers who have their carpets cleaned. They are the ones who decide when to have them cleaned and by whom. Women are your primary customers, far more so than men. The carpet cleaning industry is a fairly male dominated industry, so what we tend to have is a bunch of guys trying to convince a bunch of women to use their services. Without some basic understanding of how women think and thus decide, we are operating in a very hit-or-miss manner.

Before we go any further, we must stress that we are speaking in generalities here. We are not saying that every woman or every man thinks and behaves in these ways. We are saying that many do. If, after reading this, you begin to observe how women come to decisions, how they interact with other women and how they determine value, we’re sure that you’ll find women who don’t fit that mold, but we’re also sure that the majority you know and observe will.

Having women as your main customer base has many advantages but one major drawback. It’s our opinion the advantages far outweigh the drawback. Let’s look at the drawback first. When marketing to women or, more precisely, when running a business that serves women, the drawback is that substance is more important than flash. You have to be detail-oriented in everything you do. Women tend to be very detail-oriented and require more information than men when making a purchase. If

you're a man, you may have experienced a good deal of frustration when shopping with a woman. While men can find a shirt within roughly ten minutes of entering a mall, women can, and will, take hours to buy a blouse. Why is that? According to Martha Barletta, a gender marketing expert who has worked for some of the country's top brands including Kraft, Kodak and Allstate and marketing firms and is the author of *Marketing To Women*, men, for the most part, are "good enough" type shoppers while women tend to be "perfect solution" shoppers. What that means is simply men tend to settle for a shirt that's good enough, not going the extra mile to find that perfect shirt. A guy may enter a store looking for a black, long sleeve cotton shirt with two pockets and head over to the shirt department. Once he gets there, he finds that this particular store doesn't have that exact shirt. So what do most men do? They look at what the store does have, and as long as they absolutely do not have to own that exact shirt, they tend to find something that's "good enough." He buys the shirt and moves on to the next thing he needs to do.

Now let's compare that shopping experience to a woman looking for

a blouse. A woman enters a store and heads over to the blouse department. She peruses the selection. If there is something that fits her ideal blouse, she tries it on. She thinks about it, she weighs out the price versus how close it is to her ideal blouse. If it's not perfect, if this blouse doesn't create a "perfect solution" in her search for a blouse, she doesn't buy it. She walks out of that store and heads to another one and repeats the process. She may spend hours looking for her solution. She may come home after four hours and announce that she couldn't find anything. This boggles men's minds. How could she not find a blouse after four hours in a mall with more than twenty stores that sell blouses? It's because women are far more discerning in their purchases. While a guy is thinking "Okay, it's not black, it's dark blue and it only has one pocket. That's fine." A woman is thinking, "Does this go with those pants I got from his sister at Christmas last year? Do I like this material? Can I wear this with my black pumps? Where was this made? Is it dry clean only?" and many more questions like that.

What that means for us in the cleaning service is that women want more information. Women want the whole story. Women crave details. When a woman shops, she thinks about finding the perfect solution: A

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solution that fits all her needs and concerns. Women want it the way they want it. Women tend not to settle for good enough. This is a good thing. Why? Because it forces anyone who wants to be successful marketing to women to put in the effort to make sure they cover the details. By details, we're not talking about the horsepower or cfm's of your truck mount unit. Women, for the most part, don't care about that. We're talking about your benefits, your story, the who, what, how and why of your company. Women want to know. And they will listen if you've got a good story.

In our opinion the ultimate upside or benefit to having women as your main customer base is that women are far more group-oriented than men. That's such a benefit because women talk; they spread the word about the things they like, such as a cleaning service that was actually on time, courteous, explained everything they were doing, talked to them about their concerns and left them with a few pairs of booties so they could walk

on their slightly damp carpet. It takes much more effort to "wow" a woman, but once you do, you have,

in the words of Steve Toburen, "created a tireless cheerleader for your company."

Because of that group orientation, women customers can become referral machines. You've probably experienced women at a social function. While men tend to interact in a somewhat superficial way, ie. "How's it going?" "Fine." "How about those Yankees?" Women usually create much more connection and conversation between people, especially between women. Women reach out and connect. Think about driving home from a party with a woman. She'll be able to tell you all kinds of in-depth information about this person and that person. Think about your families. Who keeps track of all the birthdays and special occasions? Who knows exactly the decor of your friend's house and thus, exactly the right thing to bring as a gift when you're invited to dinner? Who knows who got what last Christmas in the family grab bag? Who keeps all the social connections moving and flowing? Chances are, it's a woman. Women love to share their experiences, both good and bad with others. Men, and we are including ourselves any time we mention men, tend to think of women's conversations as gossip and/or meaningless, "Who really cares about that?" kind of stuff. The truth is that women's conver-

"Women want the full story about a product or a service. They are far more discerning shoppers than men."

sations are loaded with references and referrals. Where did you get that? Who did your hair? Have you ever gotten your carpets cleaned? Men also reach these levels of connected, information laden conversations, but it takes them much, much longer. Women are able to do it in minutes.

Another big reason women are so valuable as referral creators is that they have their ears and eyes open for others, not just themselves. A woman comes across an article about something in the paper, and she clips it out thinking how perfect it is for her friend who's going through that situation right now. Imagine that it was your brochure, ad or flyer that she came across. "This company is talking about how regular carpet cleaning can help reduce allergies: I should give this to Joyce; her daughter Anne has allergies." Again, group orientation and the strength of women's networks makes them the perfect customer base. It's also another reason to have all of your marketing benefit driven and address the concerns of your target market. As a side note it's a powerful support for making quality testimonials part of your marketing.

Another great benefit to having women as customers is that they want to be educated. Not talked down to, not made to look incompetent, stressed out or frazzled, but to be educated. Women have very little problem admitting they don't know something. Women want to meet the expert in the field. Think about the timeless cliché of asking for directions. Men want to figure it out themselves, work their way through it, before finally admitting they are lost or can't do something. Women don't have an issue with pulling into the gas station and just asking, "Where exactly is the museum?" Women don't have a problem with asking for help. This desire and willingness to be educated goes back to the whole idea of women looking for the perfect solution. This gives us a great opportunity to position ourselves as the experts and to really tell our customers about the benefits of our services. Women will listen. They want to know.

With the idea of women's willingness to ask for help in mind, let's step back a moment to the idea of the perfect solution and the process that women go through when they are buying.

Women usually begin the process of buying by asking around. That's not to say they don't check out advertisements, product ratings, brochures or web sites, because they do. It's just saying that most of the time they begin by asking friends, family and coworkers about what they are looking to buy. This is great news for us, the cleaning service. The woman customer is looking for references and referrals. The big difference here between men and women is that women prefer to get their information from other people, whereas men prefer to get their information from sources such as reports, videos and web sites. That includes salespeople. Watch a woman go into a store looking for a computer and chances are the first stop she'll make isn't at the computers themselves; it's to a salesperson in that department. Why? She wants information. She wants details. She wants to know why she should buy. The general rule here is this: Women search out as much information as they can, and they prefer to get it from other people.

The next step for women after asking around and getting input from others is the search for the perfect solution. When women are in this mode, they tend to add criteria to their list as they have learned more and are continuing to learn more

about what they want to buy. Men, on the other hand, are looking to eliminate items from the list. A woman may be leaning toward a certain cleaner, perhaps on the recommendation of a friend, when she is exposed to your marketing. If your marketing is good, that is if it concerns itself with her needs, then she may add you to the mix of considerations.

Women, contrary to popular thought, are not that impulsive when it comes to purchasing.

About 10 years ago I spent some time selling cars. It wasn't easy work as you can probably imagine. Most people don't like the process of buying a car, always fearing that they paid too much or didn't get the right car. One thing I noticed right away was that the color of the car rarely kept a man from buying it. In other words, say the green car had all the features he wanted, but he was drawn to the blue one when he first walked the lot; it wasn't an issue. Most men would take the green car and never even ask if you could get one in blue. On the other hand, a woman would find the perfect car, I would offer her a great deal and because of the color not being what she wanted, she wouldn't buy the car. Women want it the way they want it. A lot of times a woman would come in thinking about a particular type of car and then see something totally different that would send her "back to the drawing board" for more investigation and research.

That's why it takes women longer to buy that blouse; they have more considerations, and they are willing to "look around" and seek out the perfect solution.

What this means for us as cleaners is that our marketing must be full of the benefits, the reasons and the story of why she should buy from us. Bullet points work with men, paragraphs work with women. With women there is a reluctance to make the final decision because they are searching for the perfect solution. It's our marketing's job to assure and convince them that we are that solution.

In their quest for the perfect solution to their needs, the path a woman takes to her final decision is more like a spiral than the usually linear, straight ahead path of a man. This is, according to Martha Barletta, author of *Marketing to Women*, because of the "adding

to" rather than "subtracting from" nature of a woman's decision process as compared to a man's. That stems from their willingness to admit they don't know everything about it. Let's face it guys, we're much more wired into being the expert, knowing how to handle it all than the women in our lives. Think about a conversation you had with a woman about a problem. If you're like most men, you immediately begin figuring out the fastest, most efficient way to solve the issue. Women get there in a totally different way. They think about it, talk about it, think some more, talk some more, think a little

"Women love the little things, the details, the extra thought that shows you understand and care both in relationships and in business."

more, research it, read about it, ask a little more and then arrive at a solution. Recent research suggests that it's because men's and

women's brains are actually quite different. One of the results of this different wiring is that men tend to be very good at focusing while women tend to be very good at multi-tasking. It's that multi-tasking nature, the ability to look at a variety of different and sometimes shifting criteria, that creates their spiral path to the perfect solution and its purchase.

So now that we know that women have a whole different way of arriving at the purchase, what do we do to get them to choose our service?

The first thing to consider when designing marketing for women is what is important to them? This is where we go back to the basics of all marketing and define and research our target audience. What comes next is a look at some generalities that research has pointed out about women and men and what specifically that means for the cleaning service.

In general women are far less interested in "whiz bang novelty" and the inner workings/features of technology. They are for the most part much more pragmatic than men, and they are not impressed by lots of numbers and specifications. Women want to know what does your service do that makes my life easier? For the cleaner this points the way to strong benefit/solution marketing and also to the thought of diversifying into other types of cleaning services such as hard floors, wood floors, tile and grout, leather and upholstery, etc.

Due to the multi-tasking nature of their lives, women, especially working mothers, will really appreciate a service that saves them time and mini-

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mizes the hassle. If you can get her carpets cleaned and the tile in her bathroom in one visit, you are going to be a more valuable asset. Positioning yourself as just that, a valuable asset, is not a bad idea. How about a company called “Mother’s Little Helpers,” or marketing a message like, “We know you’ve got more important things to do than wait around for your carpet to dry,” or “Do you really want to spend your time like this?” with a photo of a less than pleased woman running a store rental carpet scrubber. Think about cleaning carpets on Sundays or, if you found it a benefit to your customers, in the evening on selected nights. You could even do a promotion with a local restaurant where you give the customer a dinner coupon for Wednesday night while you clean her carpets. Now you’ve given her a bonus night out along with your outstanding service. You can do all types of tie-ins with other local businesses that help save your customer time and money and make you the logical choice for her carpet cleaner, but that’s the subject of Chapter Eleven.

Women appreciate the little things. When was the last time you sent the woman in your life flowers for no apparent reason? It’s an easy thing to do. All you have to do is call a florist, give them a credit card and an address and bingo, she gets flowers. Women know how easy it is to order flowers, yet they are consistently blown away by the gesture. Why? Because of the thought. Your women customers appreciate the little things too. We’re not saying you have to send them flowers, although how much of an impact would it have if you arranged with a local florist to have a small, inexpensive bouquet sent a day or two after the cleaning? What if you presented her with a single rose at the conclusion of your business?

Beyond sending her flowers, what we’re talking about here is the little details that show her you’ve put some thought into what you’re doing. Obviously you should look as professional as you possibly can at all times, in every interaction with a customer. Courtesy and politeness go a long way too. With women, the details of everything are important and that’s a good thing, because it keeps us on our toes. A woman will notice that small stain on your shirt, a woman will notice how clean your shoes are, a woman will notice that your clipboard is a jumbled mess with scribbles all over it, and a woman will notice the cleanliness of your truck. In short, a woman will notice everything.

Why? Their sensory abilities and perceptions are much greater attuned and sensitive than a man’s. A woman’s sense of smell is much finer than a man’s so she is much more perceptive to the odor of harsh chemicals and fragrances. A woman’s sense of touch is much more sensitive, and a woman’s hearing is far more acute. So women notice things that men don’t. Is the muffler on your truck starting to make a little noise? A woman will notice that. She will also notice and be very receptive to the fact that you’re a clean shaven, shirt pressed, courteous technician who is also wearing booties while in her house. She’ll notice and respond to the company that gives her a free bottle of Spot Out and takes the time to instruct her on how to use it. She’ll notice and appreciate the fact that you’re using door guards and corner guards in her home. She’ll appreciate that everything was explained in detail to her before the work was begun. She’ll notice and appreciate that the man or men who came to her home wore uniforms and easily read name badges that identified them. She’ll notice, appreciate and feel more comfortable if there are two men instead of only one on the crew. She’ll notice and appreciate if you took the time to place the change, paperclips and her daughter’s barrette you found while cleaning her couch in a marked envelope on

the coffee table. She'll notice and appreciate the feel of the carpet if you take the time to groom it. She'll notice and appreciate that your crew is quiet when working in her home. She'll notice that when you are talking to her your body language is friendly and open and that when she asks a question you don't cross your arms. She'll notice that your company is involved in local charities and good causes, especially if you were to do something like donate three dollars from every cleaning to a specific charity. So dot your i's and cross your t's and go the extra mile to make sure you're doing the little things. Your women customers will notice.

Here's a little story about doing the little things taken from *Marketing To Women* by Martha

Barletta. Amazon.com sent out a letter to their customers that included ten one-cent stamps right after the postage went up a penny. The letter stated that, "We can't replace your refrigerator lightbulb and we can't make your tuna salad just the way you like it, but we can save you time." To the women customers it was as if Amazon.com had looked into their lifestyle, saw how busy they were; when are they going to have time to get to the post office for a book of add-on, one-cent stamps and Amazon took care of it for them. A super low cost idea that has a maximum customer impact. You can rest assured that did more for customer loyalty and retention than a coupon or special discount.

Women want to share. Women, much more so than men, want to share their good experiences. Our job is to make that easier for them. How do we do that? We give them easy ways and means of spreading the word. We give them a few referral cards, we give them two bottles of Spot Out, one for them and one for a friend, we send them a monthly newsletter, we send them reminder postcards or letters after six months and a year, and we give them outstanding customer service and cleaning. Another benefit of the networking nature of women is the opportunity to talk or present information on your services to groups of women. Women tend to belong to more of the community's social and charitable groups. We'll spend some time discussing ways and means of working with these types of groups and others in Chapter 17.

Women also value companies who listen to them.

This can be a tough one for most men. We think, why am I listening to her life story? I'm just here to clean the carpets. The hidden value in that type of communication is that along with telling you about her kids she's giving you a doorway in which you can enter her world and build rapport. You should actively listen to your customers. Pick up on the details in her life. When is your son's birthday? How old is he going to be? Yeah, I've got a boy just about that age. What kind of dog do you have? Your sister owns a hair salon? Where? Okay, yeah, I drive by that all the time. A little bit of attention to what she's saying can go a long way. Let's look at those details again. Her son's 6th birthday is this coming weekend and she's having a party (*the reason she's getting the carpet cleaned*). do you jot down the date and perhaps include a note about the event in your thank you letter? You should. What about that dog? Did you let her know you do pet odor services? She may not need them, but her friend Becky has an older cat that she has been having some trouble with. Her sister has a hair salon you drive by all the time? There's a potential gold mine of referrals. Did you ask if it would be okay

"When women say, 'I'll think about it', they actually mean just that."

for you to use her name at her sister's place if you go in to talk about some cross-

marketing or did you tell her you do a lot of cross-marketing with those types of businesses? What you're really getting in all that conversation is the opportunity for more business connections and a great chance to build rapport. Listen and take advantage of it.

Another aspect of listening to and communicating with women is the area of body language. One of those areas is facial expressions. Women tend to use a lot of smiles and expressions of empathy and understanding to show the other person they're listening. One of the classic and most misinterpreted signals given by women is the nodding of their heads. In male culture groups this means the other guy is agreeing with you, a fact that as a young guitar salesman, I had hammered into my head by my sales manager. He would say that when the buyer is nodding that is the time to close the sale. And with men he was absolutely correct. With women, however, it is a listening device, or cue, letting the speaker know that they are listening. She still may be thinking, "What an idiot!" but she wants you to know she's listening. Here's a tip; when women talk with one another, they do it face to face whereas men will talk standing slightly

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at an angle, often not even looking at each other much but instead “surveying” what’s in front of them. When talking to your women customers, do so squarely facing them and give them some facial cues or sounds so they know you’re listening.

Here’s another tip for communicating with a woman customer: Answer every question she has in the most thorough manner. Sounds simple, right? But how many times when we’re asked a question that we’ve been asked a thousand times before by customers do we dispense our typically short, canned answer? Don’t do it! Also never say or let your technicians say, “Well, that’s not really the important thing. What’s more important is...” You’ve just blown yourself up! You’ve trivialized your customer’s concern, and what’s worse is you’ve probably made her feel stupid for asking. No, take the time to be courteous and to give her full and complete answers like she was the first person who ever asked. Be prepared to discuss why she should choose your service over anyone else’s, but don’t put down the competition. Women tend to see criticisms of others, especially others who aren’t there to defend themselves, as a negative. State your advantages clearly and answer all her questions completely, looking her squarely in the eye and you’ll be doing fine. Of course, the other thing you could do is hire a woman as your field or telephone sales representative. She would come with all the advantages of having grown up inside a woman’s world of cultural and social references.

Another point to remember is that women want to minimize risk. Men are the risk takers, the hunters, and comprise a high percentage of the people who partake in such high risk activities as sky diving, bungi jumping and paragliding. Given their decision-making preferences (*that spiral path of evaluate and reevaluate*) and their search for the perfect solution, it’s really no surprise that women tend to put more value in warranties and guarantees than men, whose decision style is much more shoot from the hip. What they want is protection in case your service doesn’t do what you claim. Again, this is really a bonus to a savvy marketer. It tells us that we need a strong guarantee for our work, and because of the networked nature of women and their inclination to become referral machines for effective products and services, we need to firmly stand behind it.

What makes up a strong guarantee? Don’t just minimize the risk of doing business with you; eliminate it! Don’t just tell your customers they’ll be satisfied; promise them they’ll be thrilled. What sounds better? You’re satisfied (*sounds like good enough to me*) or you’re thrilled (*sounds like the perfect solution*). Remember this: A guarantee is a promise. Men and women both notice and appreciate people who have the integrity to keep their promises. Does a strong guarantee mean you’ll get ripped off? Well, unfortunately there will always be a few people who take advantage of a situation, but the percentage is very small when compared to all the people who may decide to use your service because of the strength of your guarantee. Don’t be afraid of a strong guarantee. Another thing that makes a strong guarantee is the absence of fine print. Keep it simple, keep it straightforward and you’ll have the beginnings of a strong guarantee. The next thing you do after developing such a guarantee is get yourself and your company busy making sure you are living up to it every single day.

Remember that women are looking for information and suggestions. Because of the way they look for information, asking other people for opinions and recommendations and their more group nature, women are far more open to suggestions than

men. Guys prefer not to be influenced by salespeople, wanting to figure it out for themselves (*remember the asking for directions cliché?*), while women actively seek out salespeople's suggestions. This is why positioning your company as the experts in the field works really well with women. You've got to be able to back up your expert claims, but if you can, women will be more than happy to talk to you about their concerns and your ideas for solutions.

It also opens the door to add-on selling. Asking a woman if you could give her a demonstration of what Scotchgard can do to protect her carpet, or perhaps even better, asking if she's interested in making her carpet easier to maintain (*saves her time!*) can work wonders. Suggestive selling is creating a need where one doesn't already exist. Most of the time it's accomplished very simply by educating customers to the types of services and their benefits that your company provides. "*You know Mrs. Cranston, I've got a product that will make that leather couch look brand new.*" or "*May I ask how long you've owned that leather couch?*" "*About three years, why?*" "*Well I was just thinking that it really is a beautiful couch and I've got a product that will really make it shine.*" "*You clean leather? I didn't even know that.*" The best thing to do is just ask. If you clean drapes or area rugs, it's quite possible your customer doesn't know. Ask her if she knows. Women are always on the lookout for a product or service that can save them time.

When a woman says, "I'll think about it," she actually means it. For men, "I'll think about it" is most often a polite way to say no. For women, it means just that. It means, you haven't convinced me yet and I need more time. It doesn't mean you're out of the running. The point is you need to follow up with women buyers. You can always call and tell her that you were thinking about her concerns and here's another reason why she should use your service. If calling isn't your forte, drop a card in the mail that day at least to thank her for the opportunity of talking with her and inviting her to ask you anything else she may have thought of regarding the service. Women appreciate this kind of follow up since it signals a level of caring about them as a customer that they can relate to.

Women love a nice surprise. Many savvy marketers are reaping the benefits of their women customers by creating little surprises for them. Like Amazon.com's ten-cent postage surprise to all-out efforts like Peapod, the

internet grocery store, adding a bouquet of a dozen red roses to every Sweetest Day order, surprises are worth their weight in gold when it comes to women spreading the word about your business. Another story from *Marketing To Women* tells of an investment banker who sends new clients a jar of homemade apricot preserves with a hand lettered label. This doesn't have to cost a fortune, just some time and effort, and it is just the kind of thing women, who pride themselves on being thoughtful, love. The investment banker reports getting tons of thank you calls from his thank you gift.

Marketing to women isn't an esoteric science, and it isn't that hard once you've got some basic information. We strongly suggest going out and buying *Marketing To Women* by Martha Barletta. It's well worth the minimal investment, and if it doesn't improve your marketing, it may at least improve your understanding of those women who are most meaningful in your life. For now, think about your women customers, talk to them and most importantly, listen to them. Perhaps you could do something like a stain and spot removal seminar at your shop and invite ten or twenty customers. Offer a free gift of quality spotter for everyone who attends. You could host a customer appreciation night at the local pizza parlor and let your customers bring the kids. Find out what your women customers want, what they need and then get busy marketing to women.

SPECIAL NOTE TO THIS SECTION: We are not experts when it comes to marketing to women. We have, however, sought out those we feel are. The thoughts and ideas expressed in this section come from three main sources: Our own personal experiences and observations and two great books on the subject. The first one we highly recommend you go out buy and then read cover to cover is Marketing To Women by Martha Barletta. It is packed with a wealth and depth of information that we can only touch on in a section like this. The other is Evolution by Faith Popcorn. Both of these authors run highly successful advertising agencies geared towards marketing to women. Our goal in writing this section was to get you thinking about the issue and to give you a snapshot of some of the ideas and techniques expressed in these two books.



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Think about it. Talk about it. Make it happen.

The most powerful marketing tool in the world is your mind. The purpose of these questions is to get you thinking about your marketing and unlocking all the good ideas that are already inside you. **Remember that when you brainstorm with either yourself or, even better, with others, there are no wrong answers or suggestions.** Nothing is too outrageous or silly or crazy when it comes to brainstorming. The whole purpose of it is to get the juices flowing and to spur ideas you otherwise wouldn't get. **One silly or crazy idea can lead to the next idea which makes you more successful! Just like anything else, the more you do it, the better you get at it!**

- 1.) Is your marketing targeted to the needs and concerns of women? If you answer no or not really, then what can you do to improve it?**
- 2.) What could you do that would improve your company's image with your women customers?**
- 3.) What could you do, if money was no object, to really "wow" your women customers?**
- 4.) What can you do for five dollars or less to really "wow" your women customers?**
- 5.) Are you really listening, gathering the information and using it that your women customers are providing you?**
- 6.) What are you doing to help your women customers become the referral machines that they are capable of becoming?**