

THE FEMALE INTERNET

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Cridon

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Women are responsible for over 80% of all consumers spending¹: they buy almost all household goods and influence every major private investment substantially. Also they are often the main earners in a household (34% of all German households² have female main earners).

Tom Peters thinks: "It is a ridiculously rare corporation that takes advantage of the women opportunity. What a costly mistake."³ For some years now, companies have tried to better address women by changing their products or their presentation. Experience is positive even if companies with many regular male customers need to make sure they keep them⁴.

We believe that most products and services in the internet world do not cover women behavior sufficiently. Women use the internet nowadays as intensively as men do, but they use it differently. Most product managers are male, however. The purpose of this white-paper is to highlight, how internet products and services should be altered to reflect needs of women over 25.

We composed a list of five requirements, which products and services in the female internet must fulfill⁵:

- strengthen community
- match life
- focus
- get personal
- give meaning

We scanned hundreds of websites to understand whether the requirements are fulfilled and what could be improved. The following is a list of some major issues:

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY

Give them a community

Women compare in order to make affinity links. It is important for them to identify a peer group, understand whether acquaintances match this peer group and value them. Three patterns are important to understand:

- communicate: The communication between women often happens within a limited number of persons and often enough with only one friend. Telephony, E-Mail and SMS are the accepted electronic communication forms.
- generate content: Women contribute when they feel it is appropriate. Many companies however are afraid of giving their customers a public voice



- contact peers: The size of these communities apparently is not too large Women not necessarily want to communicate to other customers of a brand; they want to talk to someone with the same background or problem.

The www.Tupperware.com model could be more appropriate than Facebook pages although www.Facebook.com has impressive usage figures worldwide⁶.

We are not sure about the use of “real-time” aspect of internet communities like www.Twitter.com. Further evolution could turn it into a useful tool for women.

Involve them

Women want to be involved, some say. This can be disputed. However it is proven, that involved customers are more likely to promote a company. The more promoters a company has, the more economically successful it is⁷.

The internet is well suited to involve. Not only by using contests, competitions, chargeable services or cost reduction by self-services. Promising approaches are to

- recommend: women ask friends more often for recommendations or referrals than men do. They ask their friends, because they trust their opinion
- self-disclose: women get attracted by personal reports on experience and feelings
- innovate: women could contribute to the development of new products or services, for instance by determining colors they want

Some of the leading blogs like <http://perezhilton.com> are making extensive use of comments and sharing services (for more examples see appendix ⁸). They can generate up to 1000 contributions per day which is a volume major corporations only can dream off.

Open innovation approaches are run successfully for instance by Procter & Gamble with www.vocalpoint.com or Dell with www.ideastorm.com.

MATCH LIFE

Today many women work and have a family – a “double day” – which makes time a very scarce resource: Michael J. Silverstein writes: “Women find themselves caught in an almost inescapable lack of time”⁹. Even without children or a household, woman can experience time shortage because they are more impacted by lifetime milestones than men.

They have developed certain techniques to cope with this: women like to multitask, and they use implicit to-do lists.

To-Do Lists

The female way to deal with to-do lists is fundamentally different from the male way. Men try to resolve the most important things first – given a list they are expected to deal with the number one issue most.

Women use their to-do list more like a reminder. They want to resolve every topic on this list which has duties for the job, chores, kid’s care, relatives, friends, and for herself. A woman typically will pursue the most promising resolution for any item on the list. But



looking for one thing can result in tracing another item when she stumbles upon it in the process.

A platform for women must minimize her overall search time, not just the time to close a single item on the to-do list.

www.dawanda.de or www.modcloth.com are an example for this: women can find exceptional goods, save time by directly ordering and they can trail away to get new ideas matching her to-do list.

Women's Interface

Women use natural language; in fact they are best in describing what they want, when they can talk. Men hunt - for men refined searches using Boolean expressions, endless link clouds or Google's 15 million pages found to an average keyword seem to have some use.

But how should the right interface for women look like? Every internet or telecom product manager should bear in mind, that this is not invented yet. Computers have a hard time in understanding our talk.

Apart from this appearance matters: women take pride in a warm, orderly home and their own appearance. They value beauty also with products and services helping them to achieve this.

For this reason we should take the chance to design the user experience as appealing and as easy to use as possible:

- help: focus on customer value instead of your economic performance
- reduce: discontinue all applications which appear to be technical or little used
- arrange: spend time to arrange pages with pictures and the right level of detail
- integrate: seamless end-to-end processes help to save time

The importance of this work steps can hardly be exaggerated - the easier the interface, the more work is required. Future technological trends like multi-touch should be followed closely¹⁰.

Today www.apple.com is still one of the best examples for a felicitous user interface. Interesting user tests like Amazon's www.windowshop.com are available but presumably still perform worse than traditional interfaces.

FOCUS

The Start of the search

Internet search works best if you know precisely what you need, because then you can enter specific search terms. This approach has some caveats:

- Mostly we do not precisely know what we want when we start searching. Women can spend ages to look up the latest jeans trend for the next summer using a search engine. The according Google list looks like optimized by a lot of search engine marketers.



- If women know that “boyfriend jeans” are stylish, they will find well known brands and celebrities wearing them right away. It will take a long time to understand which new one fits.

Today’s search engines are of limited use in this case. Many new concepts like bookmarks, sharing platforms or lenses are tested with no one having clearly succeeded yet. A more female approach would be to offer other keywords, not similar ones, or to recommend other websites than can help quicker.

New concepts can be very appealing for women. For instance www.etsy.com or www.dawande.de offer to search by color.

The perfect answer

Men often think, they analyze every single detail to come to the appropriate solution. In fact they are often satisfied with one solution to their problem, even when there might be a better one.

Women try to verify all requirements they have and decide only when they have assessed all information sources. Typically women look for the perfect answer and rather do not buy instead of buying an inferior solution. This includes reaching a consensus on an issue before making a decision¹¹.

Women also look for different information than men do. They are less interested in technical issues but more in practical use and aesthetics. We know women using smart phones without internet connectivity – the smart phones offer a full keyboard to type SMSs and they look good. This should have an impact on product selectors.

An interesting real-time selector is the virtual makeover of www.marykay.com.

Trust

For financial transactions¹² of a certain size women use the internet far less than men do. This is astonishing; only 5.4 million women remain unconcerned in financial matters in Germany¹³.

Women want help in financial matters as our study with ImmobilienScout24 shows¹⁴. Silverstein writes: “They want advisors and services that recognize women’s need for short-term simplicity and long-term stability”¹⁵. But in finance, health care and other areas trust in those advisors is shrinking¹⁶. Women trust their friends, and value their opinion a lot.

Companies must gain trust in order to compete with women’s new information sources. Digital media companies rarely invest in building trust. They could

- inform more proactively and more honestly instead of focusing purely on price
- offer consulting services
- focus on serving the customer instead of selling



Many of the recommendation services currently offered in the internet are not designed to build trust, generate enough traffic for a significant number of recommendations or take too much time. Certificates are often not well known.

Positive examples can be found when arranging holidays for instance at www.tripadvisor.co.uk or www.holidaycheck.de.

GET PERSONAL

Personalization is one of the most discussed subjects in the internet space for the last years. It refers to offering a visitor what he might expect based on what he had searched or bought before, and what settings he chose.

Our definition of “Get personal” is different – it refers to a major ingredient of every woman’s life: personal relationships. Women are concerned about others first and always. They try to make connections with others when they talk, and connecting points are personal information: Where they have been, what presents they received, what they bought, how they styled their home, and so on...

This has many implications. We only show some:

- look good: make your product or service look personal by using an appropriate brand name, website address, and pictures of humans, preferably women
- self-disclose: talk about others feelings and emotions; think about how your product or service helps to care for others or why it makes the world a better place
- listen and help: advice and help are appreciated – when she is ready for it. Listen more than you talk, and pay attention to nonverbal feedback. Answer every question thoroughly
- focus on your service: women do not like someone claiming credit too much, neither do they value to put down competition
- start with the detail: every advertiser or manager has learned it the other way round: make your articles short, speak to the point. Women think the other way round when they are not searching for something specific

Surprisingly few women brands have really personal websites. An example is www.kotex.com.

GIVE MEANING

Successful companies have brands with a meaning. Apple builds creative electronic devices and facilitates listening to music; Dyson offers high quality vacuum cleaners. We stick to brands when we made a good experience.

However, internet brands are often built around technology. Google is the easy to use collector of myriads of data, Microsoft offers the only office software and ebay is the largest second-hand platform. These are no emotional stories.



To be successful in a female world Google could for instance be synonymous for finding the perfect answers, Microsoft for saving time while working and ebay offering the best deals.

Frederic Malle offers a really appealing story www.editionsdeparfums.com. He asked famous perfumers to create the fragrance they find best – and he succeeds.

OUTLOOK

As mentioned initially, this white-paper discusses only some key issues. There are many more to consider like how to best support women organizing their life, help them to connect the online and the offline world or to ensure security of personal data.

Ongoing product management is required to make the internet fit customer's behavior. Tomorrow's internet applications do not consist purely of a user interface. They are tailored to the need of specific customer segments, use well defined product and service portfolios and end-to-end business processes to guarantee once-and-done problem solving.



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The Cridon Customers' Testing Center describes 15 proven tests with real customers. The Cridon D3 Innovation-Framework combines techniques for disruptive innovation.

Jürgen H. Städtner has over 15 years experience in line functions and in consulting engagements with, among others, Booz & Company und Accenture.

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