



## What Men Want

They shop like they drive. Here's how to make male shoppers turn into your store...

By Jonathan Russell, New Zealand head of Saatchi & Saatchi X

For many men, shopping is a painful prospect. This is not helped by the fact that many retailers have been slow to understand how they can make it a better experience. To communicate effectively with male shoppers, retailers need to consider their unique emotional and rational needs and beliefs.

Men and women differ in the way they shop. Men don't shop. They buy stuff. And they do it like they drive – go around the shop a few times, avoid asking for directions, and if they haven't found what they want quickly, they leave.

In a study by Saatchi & Saatchi X, a man and a woman were tasked with buying a pair of pants from a particular store. 'He' did it in 6 minutes, and his one item cost \$33. 'She' did it, via innumerable other shops where purchases were made, in nearly 3½ hours at a total cost of \$876.

It's well known that a change in male consumer habits is taking place as the way that men perceive themselves and their positions and roles in society change. Thirty years ago a man's identity was defined by his job – as the provider, he earned money, but did little of the spending. Today, if the clothes maketh the man it's because he picked them himself.

Commodities like cosmetics, clothing, children's products and home ware, which were once the sole domain of women, are now fair game for men. Manufacturers are recognising this, and are making products that connect with men emotionally. The mountain buggy is a great New Zealand example. Given a choice, would a man be seen dead pushing a conventional pram? If he is taking his child for a walk, wouldn't some sort of multi-terrain vehicle be more appropriate? The mountain buggy has a technical edge, and a look and feel which connects with men. It's a rugged off-roader that can easily be used around town.

But the real challenge is to empathise with male shopping behaviour.

Retailers need to ditch old prejudices about men such as having no interest in clothes or cosmetics, not using a mirror, and never, ever dieting. While some underlying traits, such as independence and ego, are still very important, many of the usual biases are simply irrelevant. When a man is shopping for non-traditional items, a good retailer will provide him with reassurance that to shop for these products is actually okay, while also making him feel in command of the situation.

Men prefer not to expose their ignorance, and they strive to confirm what they believe they already know. Often they will research a product on the internet before making a purchase, meaning they will be task-oriented if they choose to buy the product from a

retailer. They know the make, model, and price of the product, so they can buy with real confidence.

The great news for retailers is that if you can make a man comfortable about buying something in principle, price need not be a limiting factor to a quick, decisive purchasing decision. Shopping research guru Paco Underhill found that only 72% of men look at price tags when they shop, compared to 86% of women. He found that ignoring the price tag is almost a measure of male virility, and that as a result men are far more easily upgraded.

Speed and decisiveness in the purchasing decision do not mean that today's man is not brand conscious. But if a particular brand cannot give a man some emotional security, he will invariably play it safe and stick with the status quo.

Shopping for clothes is a good example. Men will often be comfortable with a particular brand, and may even go as far as unfolding a shirt to see what it looks like. But they will rarely go through everything on the table, and almost never put the shirt up against their body to see the cut and fit. Men are more likely to take something out of the pile or off the rack, and either buy it, or put it back as fast as possible. Underhill's research showed that 25% of the women bought what they had tried on. For men that figure balloons to 65%.

Put simply, men don't try on clothes – they try on sizes. Often they will buy clothing without having tried it on simply because they find the fitting process so awful. And after it all, there is relief when the shopping 'experience' is finally over.

The average man is unlikely to ever spend \$876 in a quest for a pair of pants, but retailers that take steps to make men feel at home will open up their business to a growing market. Men identify with, and are more than willing to purchase products their fathers never would have dreamed of. The challenge is to turn shopping into an experience they can buy. •

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