

ENTER THE AGE OF INCLUSION

My first job was with one of the remarkable business-woman of the sixties, Mary Quant. She was the beating heart of London. Mary made the mini-skirt a global event. And legs the sexiest part of any woman. Quant was larger and faster than life. Waterproof lipstick, waterproof mascara. Make-up to make love in. And the first make-up for men.

All my bosses at Quant were women. Restless. Passionate. Inspirational. Unstoppable. They saw a future where women would be the force of global business. That future is now.

Look back. Telco and dot.com cluster bombs. Enron. Parmalat. Iraq. Male models of command and control have filled people with fear, distrust, and uncertainty. In war rooms, congresses and boardrooms combined, there have been more cover ups, cross stitches and let downs than in a Milan fashion house. Meantime, market power has shifted. In the 80s manufacturers had the power. As product differentiation eroded in the 90s, power shifted to the retailers. Three or four years ago power shifted permanently to consumers. Commodification, product proliferation and the Internet have changed the game. Technology has given consumers digital sight and, en masse, lightening veto of exclusive practices.

Is this good news? You bet. Consumers are now in charge and guess who's calling the shots? Women. Women are now the most powerful social group on the planet. They make around 80% of purchasing decisions. Everything from health care and financial services through to cars, computers, socks and power drills.

Women aren't just making more decisions. They are making more money. Single, educated women are now a driving force in the global economy. With more earning potential than their mothers. And with their own investments, they have huge economic clout.

The power and reach of the Internet is changing commerce. Women increasingly search and shop for stuff at home. Time-crunched, multi-tasking women are finding they can manage life on-line. Fact, fun, gossip and shopping are instant and global.

A recent US Yahoo survey found that news, weather, shopping, games and finance top the list of sites visited. It showed

women's online spending habits are increasing and they are using web sites extensively to make decisions before purchasing in the offline world. On a desert island with one choice of media, 65% of women chose the Internet, 22% TV, 7% radio, and 3% magazines and newspapers. The Internet was the 4th most time-intensive activity behind work, sleep and time spent with the family.

Women are also scaling the supply-side. Women today control just under half of all the small businesses in the US. There, they start 424 new enterprises every day, more than twice as many as men do. It's a powerful broadening trend. As one woman reported to Fortune magazine: "The way lots of women think about this is, instead of complaining about the 'glass ceiling,' I'm just going to build my own house."

Smart businesses shatter glass ceilings, bust up gender barriers, expose toxic male attitudes and create conditions for women to excel and be rewarded for it. Diversity is not about being PC. It's strategy. It's competitive advantage. Companies that include and promote women are better able to appeal to female consumers. Today, ideas are the primary drivers of value and they come from everywhere. Diversity of gender, age, nationality and culture will always stimulate better ideas and greater returns than following a homogenous approach.

Beneath all this is cultural change. Life, and business, is getting tougher - not easier. Command and control can't meet the new expectations of responsiveness and speed. Everyday we have to think faster and more flexibly. We need to juggle more stuff. We have to become experts at judging people fast and making personal connections. Value is in relationships not transactions. Networks not silos. All this screams women to me.

In this fragile age, women's subtle understanding of life is massively undervalued. Soft power matters. What women go for will turn out to be what everyone goes for. The emerging consumer mind-set will be led by women. Who cares about safety? Women do. Who holds families and friends together? Women. Who are the intimacy experts? Women of course.

This is a new era for women and every enterprise has got to be up for it. People are abandoning testosterone-run institutions. They are looking to the market for relationships, for intimacy, for meaning. As mass-marketing fragments, the breakthroughs aren't in more analysis and hunting of fugitive audiences (see

discussion by Enrico Pedemonte in L'Espresso 29 July 2004). They are in creating, deep emotional connections in spaces that people are drawn to.

Science has proved that emotion leads us and moves us. Neurologist Donald Calne summed it up brilliantly: "The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action, while reason leads to conclusions."

The most powerful connections are built by love, Lovemarks, brands that take loyalty beyond reason. Lovemarks aren't owned by companies or marketers. They are owned by the people who love them. Anything, anywhere can be a Lovemark. From Benetton to illy, these are experiences that change lives. Take a brand away and people will find a replacement. Take a Lovemark away and people protest its absence.

The ground has shifted. The more companies inspire love, the more they will be rewarded. The more they command it, the less relevant they will become. Sterile, controlling, corporate experiences will be shown the door - and they can close it on the way out. Intimate, real, experience is where value is at. Loving, enterprising families that deliver a promise of mystery, sensuality and intimacy will enjoy increasing returns to scale.

I believe women are super-smart when it comes to love and to emotion. They're way ahead of advertising. The day you take them for granted is the day they leave. Niche them, segment them, debase them as sex or fluffy objects, and they'll make you obsolete. They don't want cut-down versions or simplistic explanations. They won't tolerate Male-lite. Women want mystery, sensuality and intimacy. They want truth, joy, care and laughter. All the stuff that matters.

This year, beauty care - a 170 billion dollar market - helped Procter & Gamble become a \$50 billion company for the first time. Olay skincare, which invites women to "love the skin you're in" exemplifies why. Women are sick of nonsense claims by cosmetic companies. Granny on the catwalk is horror fiction. Olay winding back the clock in the context of a women's own skin? That's real. And it's the best thing women have heard.

Marketing to women better is a small piece in a huge picture. We're living in a time where everything connects with everything. Organic, holistic, viral, emotional. Culture is becoming intuitive and networked, and women are empowered

to shape this. They will. By demanding a return on involvement. Men can follow, join, or get out of the way.

The M words – malevolence, malfeasance, manipulation, malfunction – have had their day. The I.E. words will dawn an Age of Inclusion. ‘I’ for Intuition, Inclusion, Ideas and Inspiration. E for Enchantment, Excitement, Empathy, Edge and Emotion.

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Websites: www.lovemarks.com; www.saatchikevin.com

Book: Lovemarks: the Future Beyond Brands (powerhouse Books, New York, May 2004)