

QUARTERLY OF THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA **SPRING 2016**

INNOVATION

Women in Design

FRICTION ■ PIONEERS ■ SWAINSON





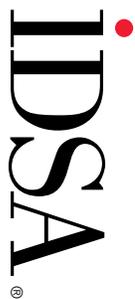
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INNOVATION[®]



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The quarterly publication of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), INNOVATION provides in-depth coverage of design issues and long-term trends while communicating the value of design to business and society at large.

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Cover: Eva Zeisel holding "Talisman" mug, 2004, Lomonosov Porcelain, St Petersburg, Russia. Photo ©TalismanPHOTO. See page 45.

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By Marti Barletta

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Marti Barletta is the world's foremost expert on marketing to women. Her books, *Marketing to Women: How to Win Your Share of the World's Largest Market* and *Marketing to PrimeTime Women: How to Attract, Convert and Keep Boomer Big Spenders*, are now available in 21 languages, and her presentations have garnered rave reviews on every continent (except Antarctica!). She delights in helping B2C and B2B designers, marketers and retailers enjoy more business success by better catering to their primary buyers—women.

Insights that Lead to Customer Love

DESIGNING WITH A DIFFERENCE

Twentieth Century Fox just released a movie about one of the most successful designers in history. The role of the designer is played by Jennifer Lawrence, no less, one of today's hottest stars. Her sidekicks are Robert De Niro, Bradley Cooper (of course!) and Isabella Rossellini. And yet I bet you don't know this designer's name.

The Most Successful Designer You've Never Heard Of

She focuses on the housewares sector and, happily for us, sells all her products via the home shopping channels HSN and QVC, one of the few retail formats that can provide consolidated, immediate feedback on customer response and business success.

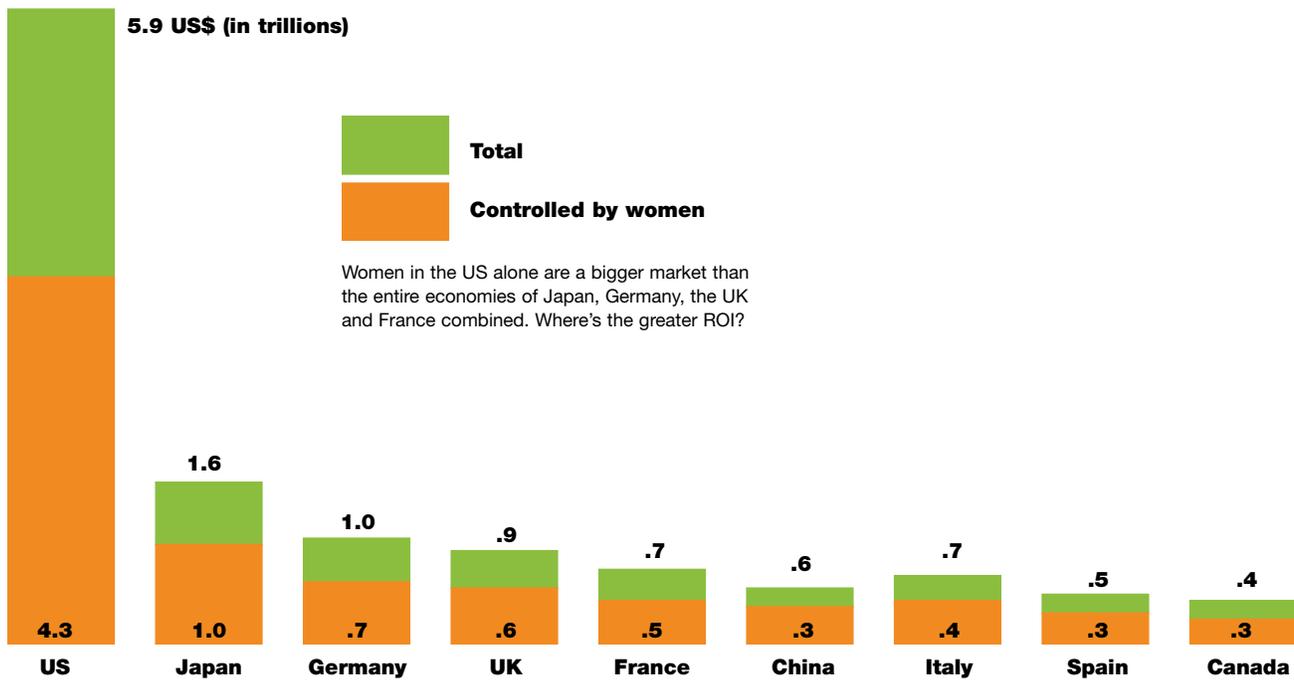
- Her first product sold over 18,000 items in 20 minutes. And to show that's not a fluke, another of her designs sold 150,000 in six hours.
- She holds the record for the best-selling product in electronic retailing history—678 million sold, all told.
- She has been known to generate sales of \$10 million in a single day—extraordinary for this format.
- To date, over the past 23 years her designs have generated revenues of over \$3 billion.

The designer's name is Joy Mangano, and the movie title is *Joy*. Her phenomenal success can point the way to several specific strategies that can and should blow open your design thinking and accelerate your business success.

Joy's most important insight is that **she roots her design thinking in solving end-user problems in day-to-day life, not in seeking innovation for innovation's sake.** She looks for end users who are exasperated or annoyed by some aspect of a product with a gap between what they want and what's available.



The second insight is that changes that seem small can have very big business impact indeed. Joy's best-selling design, the Huggable Hanger, may seem mundane. (OK, so naming might not be her forte.) But this blockbuster product was the first to solve three closet-management problems. First, it's velvet-flocked, so clothes don't slip off onto the floor. Second, it's strong but flat, unlike heavy-duty wood or plastic hangers, meaning less crowding on the closet bar. Third, the shoulder edges are rounded, so there are no poky little puckers ruining the lines of a lovely blouse or sweater. The hangers come in 19 colors, including pink. And she's sold \$678 million of them so far.



It just so happens that Joy's category, housewares, automatically focused her on the consumers who buy most of everything—women. In this article, you'll discover how women as buyers drive the brand choice in almost every category (this means you, too, auto and consumer electronics); women as end users are the research resource who best notice and articulate design problems that need solving; and women as design colleagues contribute even more than their valuable guidance as the voice of the customer.

In a nutshell, centering your research and product development around more input from women will deliver better innovation, stronger sales, greater career success and more customer love in every sector of industrial design.

Want to Sell More?

Design for the People Who Spend More

In the US, while women comprise only 51 percent of the population, they account for fully 80 percent of consumer spending and about 55 percent of business buying decisions. (Listen up, B2B!) According to Michael Silverstein of the Boston Consulting Group (hbr.org/2009/09/the-female-economy), "Women make the decision in purchases of 94% of home furnishings... 92% of vacations... 91% of homes... 60% of automobiles... and 51% of consumer electronics."

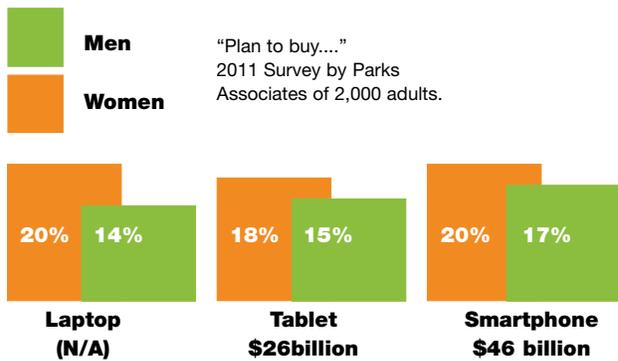
How can women really be *that* dominant in spending power? If you work in a B2C sector, keep in mind the buying dynamics that tend to evolve in most multiperson households:

- For day-to-day purchases, the woman of the house tends to take on the chief purchasing officer role for the household, meaning she's shopping not only for herself but also for everyone else who eats, bathes, cleans the house, goes to school, drinks beer, etc. as well.
- For big-ticket purchases (say, anything over \$200, like a new car, laptop, home entertainment system, college, family vacation), not only do women buy on their own behalf, they generally lead four of the five stages of a couple's decision process as well.

Regarding the B2B side, it's worth noting that according to the US Bureau of Labor statistics, women comprise over half of wholesale and retail buyers (think retail inventory), purchasing agents and managers (cost of goods), administrative assistants and managers (business equipment and services), and HR employees and managers (employee benefit plans). In other words, except for real estate and new building construction, women place the purchase order. And even if she's a recommender rather than the final decision-maker, if you don't make her short list, you have no shot at the contract.

WOMEN IN DESIGN





The Crucial Insight: It's All About Competitive Advantage

So if women already buy most of almost everything, how are we going to get them to buy more? That's not the point. The question is: Wouldn't you rather they bought your brand instead of your competitor's?

Marketing to women is about protecting and building market share. It's about offering women something they care about enough to choose one brand over another, and it doesn't have to be anything revolutionary. As you'll see in a moment, little things can and do move the needle significantly.

In the automotive industry, with US retail sales of over \$400 billion, where a single share point is worth more than \$4 billion, wouldn't you think that women, who buy, own and drive at least 50 percent of consumer vehicles, would warrant a lot of attention?

In the consumer electronics industry, itself worth \$200 billion, a study conducted in 2010 by Parks Associates (<http://mashable.com/2012/01/09/women-and-technology/>) reported that while men bought an average of 4.2 consumer electronics products, women bought an average of 4.7. And whereas tech-related items were bought by 83 percent of men, they were bought by 88 percent of women. The same study noted that women expressed more interest than men in buying laptops, tablets and smartphones—three of the top-selling consumer electronics categories. With that kind of spending power, wouldn't you think that wooing women would be not just on your radar screen, but *your number-one, A-plus, star-star* priority? And yet it's not.

Mind the Gap

How do we know that companies are not adequately including women in their design thinking? In many categories, women report a continuing gap between what they want and what they're offered. By large majorities, they feel manufacturers, marketers and designers aren't paying attention to what they want.

In the automotive industry, for example, a 2014 Frost & Sullivan study of car buyers revealed that globally 50 percent of women are dissatisfied with their vehicles, which probably explains why fully 74 percent say they feel misun-

derstood by car manufacturers. I've seen similarly shocking numbers from studies in other big-ticket categories, including consumer electronics, financial services and healthcare, so I'd be comfortable guessing that this pattern would hold in just about any of them.

Design firms love to say that their process is customer centric. But the marketplace is telling us that either they're focusing on the wrong customer—at the very minimum, they're not including the right customer—or they aren't doing a great job figuring out what she wants. Women are different. They aren't built like men. They have different lifestyles and roles than men. They perceive, prioritize and shop differently than men do. And as far as women can tell, designers and marketers don't care.

Women are far more likely than men to recognize and respond to the second-tier features and improvements that all brands rely on to differentiate themselves from competitors. Women's perceptual abilities allow them to register and retain details better than men do. Moreover, because women shop differently from men, they pay more attention to features that men—and researchers—tend to classify as unimportant.

Men are more likely to believe that little things make little difference. Women believe that little things make *all* the difference. In their search for the perfect answer, women seek out more options and compare their trade-offs down to the last detail. As we saw with Joy's Huggable Hangers, the right small changes can have a huge market impact.

Women in Industrial Design

Women's differences—and the industrial design opportunities they spell out in big neon letters—haven't gotten much attention because, unfortunately for you, women aren't well-represented at the decision table. The general consensus is that only about 10-15 percent of industrial designers are women (www.good.is/articles/women-in-industrial-design-where-my-ladies-at). In many of the major sectors—automotive, consumer electronics, appliances and home furnishings, for example—even the marketers are mostly men. Since women account for 61 percent of marketing and promotions managers in the US (www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/qf-laborforce-10.htm), that's a notable anomaly. I say “unfortunately for you” because including more women on



Courtesy of Volvo Car Group

the team improves the product, the process and the business results for everyone.

Can men design for women? Absolutely. I bet there are lots of male designers in the housewares industry, and that category is a fountain of clever innovation and customer-responsive design. The advantage that housewares has is that everyone knows women matter. In automotive, consumer electronics and medical appliances, not so much. In the absence of female input, male designers focus, not surprisingly, on what seems important and valuable—which they *assume* holds true for all their customers.

Without a strong voice of the customer in the room, research is asking the wrong questions the wrong way. Designers are scratching for the same techno tweaks that every other company is working on. And marketers, mostly men themselves, are waxing eloquent about elements men consider cool and women consider hardly relevant.

#You'reDoingItWrong

Looking at the big news from CES, research for big-screen TVs seems to ask just one question: "Which would you prefer?":

- Reducing the screen thickness by a fraction of a millimeter?
- Doubling up on the number of pixels so it's ultra-HD?
- How about 3D, so you can all watch with funny glasses on?
- Coming soon—VR. You still get the funny glasses, but instead of relaxing on the couch while you watch TV, wouldn't it be fun to stand in the middle of the room and rotate, all the while moving your head up and down like Stevie Wonder?
- All of the above? No problem. Really expensive but definitely cool.
- None of the above? What's wrong with you?

Meanwhile, until recently all indicators were that nobody had taken a second look at remote controls since literally the last millennium. Because we bought a new home entertainment system last year, I have four remotes that disperse themselves around the room, never at arm's length. They're all confusing and disgracefully poorly designed: unreliable signal transmission, inconsistent navigation processes, illogical button placement, unexplained icons.

So what was everyone crowing about at CES this year—again?! How thin their screens are. Good grief—what good does *that* do me? Converting TVs from cathode ray monster trucks for your living room to sleek frames on your wall? Fantastic. Paring the frame thickness from 4 millimeters to 3 millimeters? Pointless.

Or look at cars. For some reason, men's first thought about what a woman wants is a place to put her purse. And then, he's stuck. But look what happens when a Volvo team of women designers and engineers asks hundreds of women drivers what they really want—and uses those insights to build the YCC concept car (left). (See the YouTube video posted by Men and Motors.)

A place for her purse? Sure. Also, pedal and seat positions for shorter people; cinema-style back seats that fold up to allow storage of large items, say a set of golf clubs; and a race-car style gas tank entry so caps don't touch clothes or get lost. These design innovations are things that male drivers probably wouldn't have come up with, male designers probably wouldn't have prioritized and that benefit everyone who uses the car, male or female.

What About Pink?

Past attempts to design for women often have not turned out well. Initial inclinations in the '80s when brands were tripping over themselves to acknowledge the new liberated woman and her wallet were to pink it and shrink it. Some companies are slow learners and are still on that strategy. Most recently, Bic for Her, "elegantly designed pens, more comfortable for women," were roundly and rightly ridiculed on Amazon, where you can still see the hilariously snarky reviews.

Lately, pink has been showing up in places you wouldn't expect. Do a Google search for pink tractors, for example—not as scarce as you might have thought. Much less prevalent are pink chainsaws—don't miss the Hello Kitty one with "I love you" on the blade.



What's wrong with pink? Lots of women like pink. Why do women get so upset about being offered a color they like?

In the first place, women find insulting the implication that all it takes to get them to buy something is an option in pink. Actually, women care about *all* the same things as men do (primary features) and then a lot more, including color (secondary features). Don't get me wrong—color can be the deciding factor in choosing one brand over another; in the world of market share, color can move the needle.

But historically, for a lot of products, particularly in technology, the *only* color on offer has been pink—black, white, chrome and pink. That comes across as the "girls' option," which in these categories comes across as condescending. The work-around is simple: In addition to neutrals, offer several colors instead of just one. That way your intent comes across as interesting color options, including one that's pink.

Secondly—and this is important too—women have been burned by pink in the past. In fact, it's still not at all unusual for the women's version of identical products to cost more than the male version (see "Women Really Do Pay More," *Washington Post*, Dec. 22, 2015). So naturally women are suspicious about being taken advantage of. Is it a cheaper build? Is it too small to be useful?

Women these days are super-sophisticated shoppers because they have all the resources of the Internet at their disposal, and if you offer any product "for women," you'd better be ready for some heightened scrutiny. Make sure your designs deliver value and your benefits are real.

Return to Joy

Let's look back at Joy Mangano for a minute. Joy Mangano has made millions of dollars—no, billions of dollars—designing for women. She looks at opportunity from the perspective of finding problems to solve—from a woman's-eye view, not only as the end user but just as importantly as the buyer who is comparing across similar options before choosing a brand. **Because women have a longer list of considerations than men, when you meet the expectations of women, you generally exceed those of men.**

In the world of industrial design, thousands of products are annoying millions of women every day. And for designers, that's called opportunity. Listening to women—as end users, as buyers and as designers—is a sure and certain path to better innovation, stronger sales and greater career success. And anyone can find the joy in that! ■

Designed in Austin, Texas



