

(written for DiversityForce.com)

Home Depot's Softer Side Improves Bottom Line

Move over, men. Macho-imagined Home Depot is connecting with its female customer base. The world's leading home improvement retailer is on a revenue roll, and much of its impressive \$65 billion annual sales results from savvy marketing to women.

Several studies identify women buyers as a growing segment in the booming do-it-yourself home improvement industry. Whether they are heads of households or single homeowners, women are increasingly involved in home improvement decisions. In many cases, even when couples work on home projects together, women have equal input or call the shots on what is purchased. More importantly, they are willing to do the work themselves.

Home Depot's own 18-month analysis of its customers underscored its overmarketing to men and undermarketing to women. The company launched a simple, classic marketing strategy to leverage the female market: listen to what they want and then give it to them. A key element of the strategy was to attract women without alienating traditional male customers—contractors contribute 35 percent of Home Depot's total revenues.

Women responded enthusiastically to the study, telling Home Depot they prefer one-stop-shopping for all their project materials. When it comes to tools, female shoppers say they don't need hammers and saws designed especially for them. They want to buy tools where men do, but they are a bit more concerned with aesthetics, preferring well-labeled, brightly lit, uncluttered aisles that more closely resemble grocery stores than tool shops.

Home Depot executives acted on the information, allocating more than \$1 billion to make many of its 1,700 stores more appealing to women. The company's new tag line, "You can do it, we can help," reflects the new strategy, welcoming women and the inexperienced.

The company's revamped website is also now more lady-friendly. Women can simply point and click in the Know How section to find clearly illustrated, step-by-step instructions for over 150 home projects. When a do-it-yourselfer is ready to begin a project, she can print out a shopping list of required tools and materials and fill it at the nearest Home Depot.

When the company decided to design a series of workshops for women, it polled more than 10,000 of its female customers to determine what might interest them. Managers were surprised to learn women want to do more than change lightbulbs and patch the bathroom grout. They are serious about learning how to install crown molding, upgrade the kitchen and tackle other big projects around the house.

Home Depot stores now regularly host free Do It Herself workshops to teach women tool basics and project techniques. "We've clearly identified that women want more home

improvement project knowledge,” said John Costello, executive vice president, merchandising and marketing. “We’re taking it a step further and featuring projects women have voted as among the most important to them.”

The workshops build customer loyalty and spawn a slew of repeat customers. Once they’ve gained experience and confidence by successfully completing small project, many women move on to bigger projects. And that means more sales for Home Depot.