

## Reprint

### Becoming Woman Wise: Marketing Healthcare to Women

By Michael Bramwell

"In 92% of households, women are the number one decision makers for most if not all purchases," said Daria Blackwell, President and CEO, Knowledge Clinic, Inc. She was speaking at the Women's Health and Wellness Conference held July 15-16 in Iselin, New Jersey. "More than 80% of healthcare purchasing decisions are made by women. Women account for more than half of the population in the United States and it makes absolute sense to market to women where, when, and how they choose," she continued.

#### Women vs. Men vs. Other Women

Women obviously differ from men in many respects. "In terms of health care issues, heart disease develops ten years later in women than in men. It is treated less aggressively than in men. Heart disease is also associated with higher mortality in women than men," said Blackwell.

"Another example is drug metabolism. Women metabolize pain medications differently and they have a greater dose-response with certain drugs," she added.

Blackwell stressed that it is important for marketers to recognize that women not only differ from men but also from each other. "Professional executive women live life in sound bites and need access to information at their will. African-American women center

life around family, church, and faith. Hispanic women believe first in the power of alternative medicine. Asian women tend to faithfully follow instructions of their healthcare practitioners but

then combine them with spiritual and holistic approaches," she said.

"There is tremendous diversity among women. It's critical to remember that it's not just about the language. It's about culture, age, gender, education, and life stage," Blackwell explained.

#### Audience Segmentation

The right message strategy is critical to any successful marketing campaign. "Segmentation can help deliver the most effective messages most efficiently," said Blackwell. "When you consider the stages of women's lives, such as menarche, child-bearing years, perimenopause, and menopause and beyond, you suddenly have a way of stratifying your marketing to specific population

segments with specific needs. A woman experiencing menarche might be concerned with issues such as eating disorders, acne, migraine, and PMS. Conversely, a woman experiencing perimenopause may be more concerned with issues related to cancer, heart disease, and incontinence," she continued.

When planning marketing strategy, it is vital to consider that women in general are living longer, more prosperously, and more independently than ever before. "Women are more demanding and involved in their health-

care decisions and are more vocal about their experiences and opinions. Marketers need to provide desired information and ask for continued communication to develop a relationship of trust,"

#### Eight strategic approaches to women's health marketing.

1. Segment by lifecycle and lifestyle variables
2. Quantify each segment's value
3. Stratify messages to needs of valuable segments
4. Speak to the segment from their point of view and with respect
5. Empower women with the information they are interested in
6. Develop a trusted relationship with permission
7. Integrate all communications
8. Include diverse representation on your team to save time

said Blackwell. She cautioned that the preferred media and means of appeal may differ among specific segments of women and should be given great attention when planning any campaign.

Blackwell added that women are also working harder and have less available time than ever before. Their lifestyles are increasingly associated with health risk factors such as stress, smoking, and sedentary behavior, which engender a spectrum of serious health concerns. "This translates into a need for education and communications to audience segments that are receptive to both," she said.

And just who are some of the women in these audiences? Many are healthcare providers themselves. "Female healthcare providers are both patients and influentials. Their numbers are on the rise. It is estimated that women will make up more than half of medical students by 2010. Female nurses and nurse practitioners already account for majority of educational encounters. Women also make up a large segment of the decision makers for employer healthcare plans and HMO formularies," said Blackwell. "These women can be the most powerful and influential advocates of women's health issues," she added.

### **Give Women What They Want**

The pretext for any successful campaign towards women is communications that speak to their needs and is respectful of their viewpoints. Blackwell suggested that marketing teams embrace a diversity of women in decision-making roles to be able to more effectively reach out to women in their particular environments, understand how they access and process information, and determine the most effective manner in which they should be contacted.

"In speaking to women, you must do it on their terms and in own voice," said Blackwell. "Ultimately, women want information that will empower them. One message, delivered well, can carry a lot of weight," she concluded.

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