

Women Are Making Automotive Sales Soar

By Gerry Myers

The impact women have had on the automotive industry is impressive. From the showroom to the assembly line, women are influencing the industry as never before. As buyers of nearly half the cars sold annually, women are responsible for the purchases worth more \$85 billion in sales. They influence more than 80 percent of all purchases.

This is a dramatic increase from the 23 percent of cars women bought in 1970. As women became more visible in the showroom, both as salespersons and as customers, major transformations have taken place in the manufacturing and design of the products. From the heyday when manufacturers created products "for women" such as the poorly conceived Dodge La Femme in 1955, a pink and lavender car with a floral interior, to the more sophisticated approaches used today, women have been an increasingly important component in the automotive market.

Women Have Impacted Design and Features

Women have been responsible for many changes that have occurred in the of the car. When Bobbie Koehler-Gaunt was general sales manager with the Lincoln Mercury division of Ford, she was instrumental in having male designers try the door locks, handles, and control buttons with long fingernails to make sure that their designs would work with today's well-manicured professional woman. Larger buttons and easier-to-open handles resulted. When a member of the women's committee got her heel stuck in the door track while test driving the minivan for the company prior to its production, the manufacturer was able to fix the problem for a nominal cost. Remote entry systems, illuminated entry, the lumbar back support, and a host of other enhancements to the design of vehicles were all suggestions from women.

Women Are Valued Customers

Women should be sought after by auto manufacturers and dealerships because when they are happy, satisfied customers, who tend to refer friends, business colleagues, and acquaintances more than men do. They are more loyal, and when asked, will provide valuable input to a dealer or manufacturer.

Just as manufacturers have added new features to accommodate women's needs, so have other organizations. Crash dummies now utilize female forms as well as male—even pregnant dummies are used in some testing.

Manufacturers, dealers, salespersons, and service writers all know that as more women are involved in the showroom and the manufacturing and design phase of automobiles, the industry will continue to change. Women are truly a driving force in the automotive industry.

Tips For Selling to Women

What do a woman want when then she enters a dealership? She wants a salesperson that is knowledgeable, professional and who really listens to her. While having a female salesperson is nice, it isn't mandatory. Women are more interested in the way they are treated and if they are respected and appreciated as customers, than whether the salesperson is male of female.

Salespeople should demonstrate their product knowledge, by providing clear, concise explanation of the features and benefits of the vehicle, not by using the most technical jargon they know. Women are impressed by sincerity and the desire of the salesperson to educate them and answer their questions completely and accurately, not by people who talk down to them or try to confuse them with over-complicated explanations.

Try to avoid anything that appears to be game playing. Turnovers, going back and forth with sales managers, etc. are out-of-date techniques and will result in losing sales. Instead, build trust and loyalty by operating with integrity and professionalism.