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Four industry experts give their views on getting through to men

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Michael Sheridan
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WSL Strategic Retail



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White Spirit

Which company outside beauty is selling well to men?

MS > Dyson, the UK vacuum cleaner manufacturer has been doing some interesting things, and it is a good example as it comes from a predominately female sector. Part of the company's strategy was to make a product that would appeal more to men than in the past by adding the technology aspect, such as the visible drum. This has worked incredibly well for them. Another company is Balvenie whisky, which does a joint promotion with UK tailor Gieves & Hawkes—when you get fitted for a suit you are offered a bottle of Balvenie whisky. Men respond to the type of environment where there is an entire package, and cosmetics can be part of that. Balvenie has also joined forces with other male-targeting brands, such as Dunhill, Barbour and Morgan cars. If you added a men's grooming brand to that portfolio of classic product stable, it would be very successful.

MW > US outdoor retailer REI knows how to sell to men. It's the ultimate outdoor store offering a great product mix, high-quality material, 100% satisfaction guaranteed and items can be returned with no time limit. They also have fantastic service with highly knowledgeable staff. They know that an educated response to a customer's question is probably going to mean a sale.

WL > The companies that are doing a good job are those you would expect—names like Apple and big-box electronics retailer Best Buy. The staff in their stores resemble their customers, so men feel they are in safe territory. Customers can play with the products without having to ask questions, and if they do, it's like asking help from a friend. The fundamental emotional aspect of "don't make me look foolish" is important in any territory for men. [Men are] mission

focused, but once they are in the area they want to be, they might browse and have a good time.

Men also feel comfortable shopping online. It isn't only about technology. They choose the internet to shop because it reflects their mindset; they believe it saves time, is easier than in stores and has a better selection—not necessarily more product, but 'more for me'. And there is the value offer as they believe they save money shopping online. They can also ask directions through a more community-based environment.

MG > We turned the question around to find a traditionally male category that began selling to women. The watch industry is one. Watches were traditionally a man's object—large, masculine designs. When manufacturers realized that they could also market to women, the first thing they did was to shrink men's watches, but that didn't work. So they started designing specific watches for women, with diamonds and such, that met women's wants and needs and that were more like a piece of jewelry than a time piece. Now, women are looking for watches that look like men's watches, and brands are creating women's watches with complications. So the more women's expertise grew, the more they are returning to the basics of what a watch is for a man. The result is that now there are two markets for watches. Perhaps the beauty industry should do the same thing—it should try to understand what men really want, and then men might become real beauty experts.

Where is beauty going wrong when it comes to selling to men?

MS > Beauty companies think they have moved far enough away from the women's offer to make it attractive to men, but I don't think so. We've seen a repackaging of the product to make it look more masculine, but the in-store and tester bar presentation, and the way products are advertised mimics the women's regime. Brands need to look at how wide they can go. At some BMW garages you can get your hair cut while waiting for a repair. This kind of thinking should be applied to men's grooming. We're still trapped by how we sell women's cosmetics as there is still more money [to be made] in the women's business.

Beauty sales on the internet are still untapped and a great source for men. [The market] needs to be more aggressive on sampling at big events, such as rugby and football matches, as companies such as Heineken and Guinness do. Those are the sort of places where [men's grooming] products need to be much more visible.

MW > Saying that the market is in its infancy is valid, but it doesn't mean we have to start where women's education started 40 years ago. As an informed male consumer I ask myself is the beauty industry saying that men's skin is different to women's? Are they hoodwinking women, or simply treating men with contempt? The industry is too blinkered and brainwashed to do anything different! When men buy a car they are in their element, and look how they go about buying the accessories—wheels, GPS, stereo. The beauty industry, however has painted all men with one brush.

WL > There are two categories of consumer: the older generation, and those with working mothers who often did their own shopping. Beauty companies observed this and thought "fabulous, we're going to develop lines to address that younger male consumer." What they didn't understand was that although there is a younger consumer, they still want it kept simple without too many choices. You can't take a man from basic shampoo to five kinds of moisturizer. It's not that there isn't an opportunity, but the industry did not execute it well.

MG > [Today's] shopping experience is a women's one, and not geared to men. Men and women don't shop the same way; men find what they want, buy it and leave.

Which beauty brands and/or retailers are selling well?

MS > L'Oréal's Men Expert line is definitely moving away from the mirror image of the women's market. They are trying to present the product as something that is much more male-oriented, mainly in advertising and in product names, as in the product does exactly what it says on the packaging, which is something men like.

MW > I don't think a department store with sales people hounding you and trying to get you to buy products is the right approach. However, [retail] in the wellbeing area is going to really evolve. Beauty is sometimes perceived as vanity, but wellness is about investment, [which resonates with men]. Spas are a private and more intimate environment, which is perhaps the most appropriate way to educate men. A spa is a place where men can show vulnerability.

WL > Unilever's Axe has been phenomenally successful because it's a category that men get—deodorant—and it's a usage form that they understand. It was developed in the US with a subversive, very much male in-your-face advertising. And Axe was sold in places where men are comfortable shopping and in places they trust: drugstores and supermarkets. Once they get into specialty outlets they get nervous—what am I doing here, how do I navigate? Axe understood how to do grooming and not feminize it; that's been part of its phenomenal success.

MG > Men like a problem-solution approach to beauty, but need some help to identify their problem. French website MenCorner.com is interesting as it offers everything a man could want and identifies problems such as dry skin or love handles, and recommends the right product. The site is teaching men to identify their problem and find a quick solution.

I'm not sure if any brands are getting it right. Clarins took an innovative approach and climbed up in men's skincare rankings not by targeting men, but by doing a mailing to their female customers to spread the word about the men's line. They have great CRM.

In terms of retail, I visited Bloomingdale's in New York City, and the store manager told me that the best sales were in the men's corner on the ground floor. The store had mixed men's accessories, Palm Pilots and Blackberries for example, in with ties. That's a good example of a winning strategy.

How will the men's market evolve in the coming years?

MS > My fear is that if the current strategic thinking remains in place, the market is going to plod along with steady growth, but not much more than it is right now. Nobody has been brave enough to really embrace it either from a retail or from a supplier perspective. A lot of well-known men's ranges are quite disappointed with their sales at this stage. It will take a while, but as soon as somebody comes along and starts to deliver what the male consumer is really looking for, I have no doubt that the benefits will be massive.

MW > If skincare and cosmetics companies start to approach men with the same level of intelligence and consciousness as they approach the women's market, the men's beauty market has the potential to be just as big. It's a matter of going back to our roots and thinking about what was done in order to make women feel comfortable in this environment.

Small companies who are in touch with their consumers get useful feedback from them, and those companies who manage to be more fluid in their approach will ultimately have far more success than some of the bigger companies when it comes to targeting the male consumer.

WL > I feel quite hopeful as we have a generation of men under 30, and especially 20-somethings that have grown up in a world where it's ok to have styled hair. There is a concern about great-looking skin, and the use of fragrance in deodorizing formats signal that younger men are more willing to move into some of these areas. But beauty companies have to stop complicating the message and feminizing the way they sell and where they sell. In specialty stores and perfumeries, people who sell the product have to look like those that are buying the product.

MG > The men's market has been developing strongly, but mostly in the shaving and deodorant category. Beauty is growing, but not as much as was expected. Teenage men are much more beauty-sensitive than their parents, and if those consumers are targeted, men's expertise will grow fast on this market. Men have to be taught what beauty is, and then they will move to the brand level and attain a level of expertise they don't have today. ■