

Enticing female customers

L2L frontshop strategies increase basket size

Canadian pharmacies are in a position to take advantage of a unique psychological gender phenomenon known as L2L or 'licence to linger'.

Some 15 years of qualitative research and observations of the purchasing habits of consumers have shown that the licence to linger effect is unique to retail pharmacies.

Anyone who has been in the pharmacy business will know that retail channels have blurred dramatically in recent years as general merchandisers and



grocery stores offer a wider range of pharmaceutical products, and pharmacies offer a greater variety of general consumer categories in their frontshops.

For female customers in particular, pharmacies provide a comforting environment where they can browse through magazines, read greeting cards, sniff a fresh new shampoo scent or try a new shade of lipstick. While grocery stores sell these product cat-

egories as well, women consistently associate the grocery store shopping experience with an obligation to buy rather than a reward. In sharp contrast, women perceive a trip to the pharmacy as a rejuvenating break from their daily routine that extends their time in the store, encourages more visits and, possibly, leads to a larger shopping basket.

The road to the discovery of the licence to linger effect began about 15 years ago when some retail pharmacies in Canada and the United States commissioned CustomerLAB to study the relationship between the front and back shops. The research revealed that this unique relationship between women and the local pharmacy dates back at least a generation.

Male pharmacists knew that women spend 85% of the dollars in a pharmacy and make 95% of the purchasing decisions, but they didn't understand the significant competitive advantage that pharmacies hold over grocery stores.

Women still require a substantial reason or 'licence' to go to a pharmacy. Prescriptions, deodorant, toothpaste and other household items comprise typical licences to visit the pharmacy, but once inside the store, they may choose to use their visit to 'linger' and browse.

While similar in some ways to the way men browse and linger in a hardware or electronics store, a woman's linger occasion is more complex and is linked to growing belief or perception among many modern women that they have little or no time to themselves.

Lingering by women is most common in the fragrance, cosmetics, hair care, greeting card, gifts and magazine categories. There is no direct correlation between the length of the linger and the number of SKUs or categories to an actual purchase. The linger experience may never be activated, but there still is a benefit in creating a sympathetic environment that nurtures the licence to linger and keeps the shopper in the store and coming back to it.

There also are no distinct demographic differentiators regarding the licence to linger phenomenon. The pharmacy continues to be a rite of passage for many young females to experience the feeling of being a woman. It's a sisterhood that continues to be a mystery for many men.

Despite a growing body of research on this phenomenon, few Canadian pharmacies have integrated merchandising and customer service plans that encourage the licence to linger.

Store designers and planogrammers may try to force traffic flows in certain directions, but observations reveal that most women have

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dozens of motivations for a visit to the pharmacy and routinely vary their routes around the store, circuitous or straight, based on their desires on each visit.

Ultimately, however, the 'linger' effect is not just about merchandise but about an integrated blend of empathy and environment. **FS**

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