

# What women want from brands

*B&T* exclusively reveals the results of key new research that sheds light on the wants and needs of Australian women when it comes to making purchases with big-ticket price tags. Here, **Katie Cincotta** finds out what the modern woman wants and what influences her choices.

**W**omen have never enjoyed greater spending power. With a stronger career focus and delays in the average age of childbearing, today's female consumer has more disposable income than ever.

With the right approach, women of all ages can be an advertiser's dream target audience. The latest research from Splash, *Through Her Eyes*, revealed here exclusively to *B&T* shows changing motivations throughout a woman's life cycle – from young socialites keen to study, work and travel; independent princesses spending up big; to family-first mothers coping with 'superwoman syndrome' and young-at-heart empty nesters now rejecting old-lady stereotypes (see box next page).

Splash's report shows female consumers are increasingly online, are concerned about housing affordability and the environment, and, rank family and friends as their greatest priority.

But for the six key sectors under the spotlight – health, property, travel, finance, IT/telecommunications, and retirement – most women still feel invisible, with their needs being ignored.

Grey's *Eye On Australia* research for 2007 highlights the danger of that predicament, with evidence that women are looking for brands that understand them. "A brand that understands and meets my needs – women rate that substantially higher than men do," says Grey Melbourne planning director, Simon Rich.

Splash's chief executive, Amanda Stevens, says that with women making more decisions on electrical goods, cars, real estate and insurance, marketers can no longer afford to alienate them.

"Women aren't a niche or a minority, they're making 80% of consumer purchase decisions. If brands aren't marketing to women now they will get left behind."

Across the following pages, *B&T* drills down into six key sectors to find out what women really want from brands.

## FINANCE

When it comes to finance, most Australian women manage their own money – 64% have sole financial control. Splash's research shows what they're looking for in a bank are low fees and charges, convenient locations and a bank with a good reputation.

But across Splash's six industry surveys, finance fared among the worst – alongside property – as the sector women held in lowest esteem.

According to the Splash research, ING and Bendigo Bank are the financial institutions rated most favourably, with ING's online offering preferred by degree-educated women. Of the banks, ANZ leads the big four in popularity, followed by St George, Westpac and the Commonwealth Bank.

Communications strategist at Ikon Communications Deborah Jacobs says the smaller banks and credit unions have been more progressive in creating positive branding. She says long-term client CBA is recognising women's increasing financial independence and decision-making, especially for home loans and insurance, using advertorial campaigns with tips in women's magazines like *Notebook*.

"Our key insight was that women (both single and with partners) are very keen to increase their level of knowledge and confidence. We know that women respond to more emotive messages which relate to their actual needs rather than just the end result," says Jacobs.

Both Splash and Ikon research shows women like talking to other women about their finances, which is why CBA hires more female financial planners than any other bank.

Jacobs says that for investing, the industry continues to suffer the perception by women of not being approachable and that women are more cautious than men about their finances.

Splash discovered women are also complacent about changing financial institutions – even low customer satisfaction may not drive them to switch



**Girl power:** The Splash report *Through Her Eyes* shows that women are making more decisions on a greater range of purchases and that marketers cannot afford to alienate them.

banks. Half the women surveyed by Splash have retained the same bank account for 2-10 years, with a further quarter showing 20 years of loyalty. The report also shows the majority of women have savings accounts and credit cards, with half of them managing to pay off their credit card each month.

Jacobs says banks are recognising the importance of speaking to females, both through staffing and marketing initiatives that can make finance less intimidating.

Above all, Ikon's strategist says in the finance sector women don't want to be patronised or spoken down to.

## HEALTH

According to Splash's findings, women rank hospital waiting lists, a shortage of medical staff, the affordability of healthcare and obesity as their top health

concerns. They're also wary about the industry's transparency, especially about risks associated with products, relying on the web as a key source of information.

Bellamy Hayden's director of brand strategy and research, Paul Warwick, says GlaxoSmithKline brands like Panadol – whose key buyers are mothers – have used health information online to develop trust. He says marketing to females also allows health brands to reach men.

"With health, it's particularly true that women are the drivers and are forward-thinking in healthcare. With male-specific problems, quite often targeting through women is the best way to get it on the agenda. Blokes are either too blind, too stupid or too lazy," says Warwick.

Splash also reports that despite the web's growing popularity, women continue to trust their GPs, with 61%

of them referring to doctors for health issues.

Grey Melbourne's Simon Rich says its own research also suggests women are more comfortable with GPs than men are.

Splash finds women are now happy to talk and laugh about formerly taboo topics like menopause. Fernwood Fitness marketing manager Joanne Bradley says engaging women with humour has been part of the marketing strategy for the all-female gym.

"Women expect honesty, inspiration and engagement ... it doesn't have to be all serious or overly emotional and we've tended to take a humorous approach," says Bradley.

Rich says Grey is using honesty about weight loss to show Fernwood as a realistic brand.

"Staying fit and healthy is hard work



**Women of influence:** Splash CEO Amanda Stevens and *Through Her Eyes* author, researcher Jessica Lai, say that many women in their study felt that industries weren't in tune with their behaviour or aspirations.

and you can't pretend for it to be easy for busy working women with multiple roles. Showing understanding, empathy and how Fernwood can help, not lead ... is where we're taking the brand," says Rich.

Bradley says in healthcare, women are ultimately looking for brands that live up to promises.

"Being true to your promises is key in this sector. Women don't want to be misled or have their time wasted."

## IT AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Women are using their mobiles and the web to connect with their inner circles, moving their age-old networking skills into the digital age.

Splash reports 95% of women own a mobile phone, with nearly half using SMS at least once a day.

Being online is now an everyday activity with half of women spending two to three hours a day online for email, online shopping or catching up with friends.

Ninemsn's marketing director Tony Thomas says its own recent online studies show women are using the web to balance work and home lives more efficiently.

"They can manage their information, their entertainment, connect with their social groups and transact through online banking and shopping. In a busier more success-oriented life, it's allowed them to get a lot more done in their day," says Thomas.

For online shopping, Splash reports that accommodation is the most common purchase, followed by airfares, books and auction goods. Women with families are also more likely to purchase fashion and beauty products online.

Thomas reports that recipes and online casual gaming like sudoku are

also proving popular for female users across ninemsn.

But while most women are doing more on the web, 65% of them still prefer reading hard copy over online.

Virgin Mobile's brand general manager Rich Field says the brand doesn't target women at a product or a brand level, but does segment females with its media buying in the glossies.

"It's the old culprits, *Famous*, *NW*, *New Idea*, *Who Weekly*. We definitely skew our executions in those magazines to females, and it's the only place we do gender bias."

He says with a split gender demographic, it's too risky for a unisex brand to cater for one sex in its marketing message.



**Virgin Mobile brand GM Rich Field:** Virgin segments women with its media buying in glossy magazines.

"Generally, with slightly male-biased communications you don't alienate women, but with slightly female skews you tend to alienate males," says Field.

Splash's research shows that with high ownership of gadgets like digital cameras and mp3 players, and aspirations to upgrade to LCD televisions, mothers are more involved in tech buying.

"Despite them being less tempting from a marketer's perspective for personal goods, they're still shopping a lot, finding the money to stay up to date with technology for their kids," says the report's author Jessica Lai.

## PROPERTY

Women are entering the property market with greater confidence, with Splash's

### FOUR NEW CONSUMER GROUPS IDENTIFIED BY SPLASH

#### THE SOCIALITE (EGG)

**Women aged 18-27 years**

Single with no children

**Ambitious, driven by friends, study or career**

Early property investors but still like to travel

#### INDEPENDENT PRINCESS (CATERPILLAR)

**Women aged 28 to 49 years (single or married) with no children**

Big earners and big spenders

**They reject the 'norm'**

Their inner circle is paramount

#### FAMILY FIRST (COCOON)

**Married women aged 25 to 35 years without children**

Married or single women 36 to 49 years with children

**They resent 'superwoman syndrome' pressure**

Stress about financial stability

**Little income and time for personal indulgences**

#### EMPTY NESTER / YOUNG AT HEART (BUTTERFLY)

**Women aged 50 years+**

Rejecting 'old lady' stereotypes

**Prioritise their friends and family**

Love socialising but balance this with quiet time

Source: *Through Her Eyes* research by Splash

survey showing the average age for females to purchase their first property is 27.6.

Owning a home is still part of the Aussie dream for women, with 57% already in the real estate market. Single women in particular are driving property investment – 38% are homeowners, reflective of US trends where single women purchase twice the number of homes as men.

“In the last 10 years women have become very comfortable with property, and rely on that as their primary investment option,” says Lai.

While real estate agents and newspapers were still key sources of research, the internet is growing as the first point of reference, especially for young women who intend to buy in the future. Sam Plowman, general manager of Fairfax Digital online real estate, says 62% of its Domain.com.au users are females who use the site to research properties. “Women said they were in principal the finders and researchers of property, spending the most time on the site,” said Plowman.

When Domain relaunched its website in 2006 it took into account female feedback including better ease of use, and a request for more data such as news, listings and sale prices. “We used that as a backdrop to declutter the site and give it a positive, sharp interface. I wouldn’t go as far as to say we created it for women, but we created it with women in mind,” says Plowman. “As women get busier and are more engaged at the front end of decision making, informing them and saving time are the two ingredients to meet their needs,” adds Plowman.

While Domain’s website might have focused on targeting females, its marketing strategy still remains gender-neutral. Splash’s report also notes female marketing initiatives from brands like Wizard, which have developed a Wizard Women online community and female-focused sales training.

## RETIREMENT

According to Splash, women think the financial services industry only cares about profits, isn’t in touch with consumers and doesn’t cater to the needs of women. Splash’s results also show that despite compulsory superannuation, 40% of women believe they will rely on a government pension, especially single mothers and those earning less than \$30,000. While younger women plan to rely more on superannuation, with 54% of the so-called “socialites” planning for super to be their retirement income, property continues to be the investment darling, perceived as the safest and highest-returning investment option.

AXA’s head of marketing, Cam Cimino, says its recent super campaign tried to debunk the myth of property as the only reliable investment, using a comical approach to a rental horror story.



**Ninems marketing manager Tony Thomas: Women use the internet to balance work and home life.**

“They’re in the voice of the customer, as opposed to the corporate voice. That’s a real shift for us, and the industry,” says Cimino.

Grey Melbourne’s Rich says while most superannuation advertising has been male-oriented, AXA’s campaign struck a chord with females because of its reality and empathy.

“Most super brands are more male-oriented and adopt a dry, rational direct approach – which doesn’t really work with women. To be more effective with women you need to show more connection and more reassuring language,” says Rich.

Splash’s Lai says most women find

**“You can see from the report that some industries aren’t getting it. Companies who do focus on the female market get an immediate competitive advantage.”**

- AMANDA SEVENS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SPLASH

investing daunting, and prefer a cautious, low-risk approach. She says super isn’t on their radar, with few actively planning for retirement. And despite being aware they can choose their own superannuation fund, only one in 10 switched funds in the past year. “The knowledge about super is really low and quite scary considering how much work the industry is doing for financial literacy,” says Lai.

Rich agrees the superannuation sector has a sizeable job ahead to market itself effectively. “The top line finding is that in general Australians are confused about superannuation. They understand the need to plan for the future but they’re under-prepared,” he says.

Cimino says AXA’s research shows females who haven’t experienced financial advice feel intimidated, which has led the brand to release a pre-interview CD featuring questions to ask a financial advisor. “That CD has doubled the number of leads because it’s putting people in a position of power and has lifted the level of comfort about financial advice,” says Cimino.



**Grey Melbourne planning director Simon Rich: Women really need to connect with the brand.**

## TRAVEL

Among the six industries surveyed by Splash, travel got top billing from women as the sector with the best advertising.

Last year the average Australian woman took 1.6 holidays, favouring travel in Australia and less popular tourists spots. What they seek above all is “relaxation”. While Splash’s study shows half of travel is local and most favoured by women with families, Europe remains the ‘dream’ destination for one in four females.

Derry Simpson, head of strategic planning for Perth-based agency Marketforce, says women now have a

more casual view of domestic travel.

“Domestic travel isn’t seen as holidaying anymore, it’s about short breaks – a destination where they can relax and escape. True travel is regarded as four to five weeks once every few years to Europe, or places like South America, which are becoming more appealing for women,” says Simpson.

Marketforce’s head planner says Tourism WA is currently marketing the State’s short break destinations with women in mind.

“They (WA) recently did a Margaret River campaign around the short break mentality. When it comes to the quick indulgent time-out stuff it’s usually the woman who makes the decision and drags the guy along,” says Simpson.

While Splash’s research notes that friends are a main source of holiday inspiration, the internet is growing in popularity for research, booking efficiency and discounts – with accommodation now ranking as the most common online purchase for women.

Initiative’s media and consumer



**AXA marketing manager Cam Cimino: Targeted information influences women’s final decisions.**

research executive Jess Jarvin confirms the online travel trend, with their research showing 83.6% of women research flight options online, with the web now ranking as the most useful source of information for overseas travel.

Tourism WA has acknowledged the web’s dominance for travel with a dedicated online marketing team that apportions just under half of the company’s total advertising budget to the internet.

*Travel + Leisure* publisher Peter Bakker says the magazine’s website has just launched new search functionality to meet the growing needs of web-savvy travellers, and is looking at partnering with accommodation booking sites to offer travellers the complete travel resource.

He says mums still dictate where the family goes for a holiday, which is why they consider female behaviour in their marketing. “For subscription renewal, females respond better to a direct approach like telemarketing. Males prefer non-human interaction like email.”

## CONCLUSION

While many brands still see it as risky to market by gender, Splash’s report shows many women feel industries aren’t in tune with their behaviour or aspirations. Splash’s Amanda Stevens says those marketers who play into the female psyche gain an immediate advantage.

“Organisations are really waking up to the opportunity, but you can see from the report that some industries aren’t getting it. Companies who do focus on the female market get an immediate competitive advantage.”

Stevens says the biggest misconception is that if you’re marketing to women, you’re not marketing to men.

“It’s not an either/or proposition. There’s a great saying that ‘if you meet the expectations of women, you exceed the expectations of men’. We’re earning more, we’re growing in confidence as consumers and we haven’t traditionally been spoken to in a way that builds empathy and rapport.” ■