



[TREND]

HEY, LADY! WOMEN AND THE ART OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT By Melissa Korn

"IS THE LADY OF THE HOUSE AVAILABLE? We've got a brand-new product just for her." This isn't a door-to-door salesman out of the 1950s talking. Major consumer-products companies are now the ones trying to get their foot in the door with women. In 2001, 3.6% of all new products were specifically tailored to women. That number has more than doubled to 7.9% in the first half of 2005 alone, according to Datamonitor's Productscan Online new-product database.

What's driving this increase isn't more "women's products"—makeup or sports bras, say. It's wine, chocolate, laptops, and cell phones, things that until recently were gender neutral. Successfully launching a new product is hard; tens of thousands fail each year. It doesn't get any easier when manufacturers' worst instincts about women get in the way.

The problem starts with pink. Samsung, for example, released its SGH-E530 mobile phone in Europe earlier this year, available only in "lavender pink." Can it come as any surprise that its "woman friendly" features include a calorie counter, fragrance coordinator, and menstrual-cycle calendar?

Even if there is more to offer, leading with the most "girly" color is a handicap. A new magazine about women in business, *Pink*, launched earlier this year. In its second issue, one letter writer commented, "The content looks good, your intro letter references intelligent, professional, influential women making important decisions . . . and then you call the magazine PINK? It's bringing back a stereotype that we finally got rid of." Replies founding editor Cynthia Good on the magazine's Web site: "Why

PINK? Why not! What if we could flip the word "pink" on its ear to give it and us a metamorphosis?" By contrast, when Gillette developed its Venus line of women's razors, it focused on molding the razor to shave a woman's ankle, knee, and underarm and offered it only in turquoise. "We really wanted something that women wouldn't think was offensive," says Michele Szyal, Gillette's director of global communications. After Venus proved its utility, Gillette then rolled out a pink one.

Marketing sheen, in other words, is a lot less meaningful than product attributes that appeal to a modern woman. Consider two new wines for women. Foster's Wine Estate's White Lie Early Season Chardonnay, which launched late last spring, plays up its lower calories and lighter alcohol content. On the other hand, Seduction wine, which launched in February, relies on sex appeal. Its alluring burgundy packaging uses words such as "sensual" and "romance." "Because there's no tangible reason for Seduction to be woman-oriented," says Marti Barletta, author of *Marketing to Women* (Dearborn, 2005), "true wine lovers are going to be offended by the effort." Seduction stereotypes what women want from alcohol; White Lie delivers what women are asking for from a wine.

You say it's obvious that a new product must have a *raison d'être* as opposed to just a marketing hook if it's going to have a chance at success? Maybe so. But given how often companies targeting women forget that notion, perhaps it's a lesson that should be engraved in stone for every executive. As long as it's not pink marble.

[BEST BLOGS]

Cool Runnings

By Jena McGregor



Cool hunters are more than just streetwise fad spotters. Here are three blogs from arbiters of cool that offer insights and inspiration for innovation.

BLOG: PSFK (www.psfk.com)

WHO WRITES IT: Brand consultant Piers Fawkes, creative director Simon King, and their trend-watching entourage

WHY YOU SHOULD READ IT:

While it rarely identifies original trends on its own, PSFK does a good job of rounding up global cool news and cool businesses, spotlighting trends such as photo-flirting (teens swapping mobile-phone photos) and hair graffiti (shaved and dyed hair designs). Check out its Cool Hunt group on Flickr, which asks readers to photograph their versions of cool.

BLOG: Cool Hunting

(www.coolhunting.com)

WHO WRITES IT: Josh Rubin, a former user-interface designer for Motorola, and his band of 10 contributors

WHY YOU SHOULD READ IT:

Because drinking Pabst with hipsters at after-hours Brooklyn bars is exhausting. Instead, tap into the cool-kid consciousness by reading Rubin and his cohorts—classic cool hunters obsessed with gadgets, T-shirts, and of course, Puma and Nike. Although perhaps best suited for those in the fashion biz, Rubin's blog helps anyone tap into maven culture.

BLOG: Ypulse

(www.ypulse.com)

WHO WRITES IT: Anastasia Goodstein, manager of viewer-created content at the new cable channel Current, of which Al Gore is the chairman

WHY YOU SHOULD READ IT: Goodstein, who has been involved with youth content at Oxygen and AOL (she hasn't always worked for the guy who created the Internet), uses her youth-oriented eye to round up news on what's cool with teens. She does have some help: Julia and Katie, two Silicon Valley teenagers, chime in with their finds.