

# Women of an assertive age

Any marketer worth their salt is well aware that women make the majority of purchasing decisions, yet many brands are still alienating these core consumers with patronising or ill-thought-out campaigns. Research by publisher IPC Media reveals that 36% of women over 35 feel that advertising aimed at them is patronising, and many older women feel excluded by advertisers' enduring obsession with youth. 'It is such an important market that brands simply have no choice but to change,' says Amanda Wigginton, head of IPC Insight.

The fact that the UK population is ageing is well-documented – people are living longer and birth rates are falling. Despite this, many brands – particularly in female-dominated categories such as beauty – still baulk at using older women in campaigns. Dove has long been the exception to the



**'Many older women feel excluded by advertisers' enduring obsession with youth'**

Amanda Wigginton  
IPC Insight

rule, but there are signs that other brands are following suit. Luxury beauty brand Dior may shy away from featuring 'real women' in its ad campaigns, but it uses actress Sharon Stone, who is over 50, as its 'face'. 'One of the things that Dove has done really successfully is celebrate older women, and I don't think women will get bored of it,' says Wigginton. 'As a brand, it very effectively sets aside issues surrounding age and body-shape by celebrating confidence.'

Linda Swidenbank, publishing director of *Woman & Home*, says that as the population is ageing and people are working longer, traditional age distinctions have begun to lose their relevance. There is a clear economic rationale for targeting older consumers – not least the fact that, unlike the cash-strapped graduates of today, many of them are sitting on properties of substantial value. In line with this, brands would do well to embrace a

broader and more inclusive approach to their marketing.

'Very pointed age-led campaigns simply don't appeal anymore, and we are seeing more and more campaigns that feature more generational blending,' explains Swidenbank. 'One example is the hugely successful Marks & Spencer ad series, which combines models of different ages and diverse looks, including Twiggy and Erin O'Connor.'

While brands can never be all things to all people, taking a broader approach to marketing can pay dividends.

The research reveals a huge potential market for brands, particularly in certain sectors, such as technology, which have traditionally been weak when it comes to connecting with women.

'There is so much untapped opportunity in the technology sector,' says Swidenbank. 'Much of the advertising run by technology

## Affluent, influential and over 35

### Who are they?

They are 17.8m women – the fastest-growing section of the population, accounting for seven in 10 women.

### Why should I care about them?

There is no doubt that these women represent an audience that could prove hugely profitable for brands, due to its spending power and influence.



Source:  
IPC/The Origin Panel – a representative sample of 1604 women over 35 years old

Research reveals that advertisers are alienating older women by making them feel patronised. Brands must take note, writes *Nicola Clark*

brands remains very male-orientated, with attempts to target women restricted to unimaginative initiatives such as the introduction of pink products,' she adds.

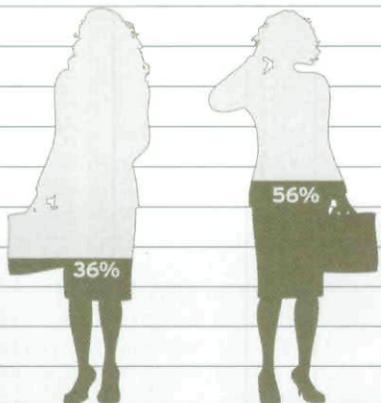
Swidenbank believes that the rewards are there for the taking, and cites recent campaigns by T-Mobile and Blackberry as examples of what can be achieved by adopting a more innovative strategy. While their activity has not necessarily focused on creating products or campaigns specifically targeting women, taking a broader approach that does not actively exclude them has paid dividends.

The recession is forcing brands to rethink their business, and while marketers must surely be tired of the old 'Rethink Pink' battle-cry, brands failing to connect with the hugely influential and affluent older women's market will pay for their oversight through their diminishing bottom line. ■



Colin Stout

**3. They don't think much of advertising**



think advertising patronises older women

would like to see more women of their age featured in ads

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