

## **Women Influence Travel**

Written by Debra C. Argen

Women's Influence and Power in Travel. The saying, 'Never underestimate the power of a woman' is especially true when looking at the role women play in influencing travel-making decisions.

On October 4, 2005, I attended "The Power of Women" forum and luncheon at The Yale Club in New York, sponsored by the Association of Travel Marketing Executives and Meredith Corporation.

It was an afternoon that reconfirmed the long-held opinion of many of the women in the room, who already knew that they were the real decision-makers in their families when it came to making travel decisions.

Meredith Corporation's Patti Folio, Executive Director, Direct Response & Travel, Thomas R. Troland, Senior Market Analyst, Research Group and Paula Foundeur, Director of Market Solutions, Research Group, together with Kathy Sheehan, Vice President Roper Group provided an interesting forum addressing such issues as women's roles in travel brands and buying decisions, how to increase buying and revenue share by addressing women, and the power of women in leisure travel.

Women are the core market for travel. According to their research conducted in 2004, looking at Adults age 25+ with a Bachelor degree or higher, more women graduated from college in the United States than men (138 women for every 100 men).

To fully understand how the power of women has changed, it is interesting to look at the change of women in the workforce (age 16+) in 1960 - 37.7%, 1970 - 43.3%, 1980 - 51.5%, 1990 - 57.5%, 2000 - 60.9% and a projection of 61.9% of women in the workforce in 2010.

Education and employment have not only increased women's buying power, but they also have a wider influence on their employees and colleagues decisions in the workforce.

According to their research, women have 44 "activity minutes" per 30 minutes on an average day, hence women are juggling many things in their minds. The question becomes how to market to someone who has so many things on their mind?

Tom Torland quoted from Clayton M. Christiansen's book, "Seeing What's Next", that we must remember the "most important marketing question - What are the customers trying to get done in their lives?"

Great Expectations - what women demand from travel marketers today. 95% of women are active in travel, and 1 in 3 have the primary responsibility for making travel

decisions. Women take the lead in the vacation decision-making process, and 45% of women were the ones who suggested the destination.

Putting their money where their voices are, the economic power of women is as follows: all women – 125 billion, women 40 and over - 77 billion, “moms” - 57 billion and “empty nesters” - 36 billion.

What do women look for with regards to vacations? Women look for relaxation, reconnection, escapism, freedom and adventure. How do women decide on a vacation? Women’s decisions fell into the dreaming, planning and booking stages. How do they select a vacation? Percentages of women said that magazines inspire and inform during their dreaming stage: all women – 75%, women with children – 77%, 40+ - 77%, and affluent women – 81%.

Other important resources for women in making their travel decisions included: Internet search engines – 82%, Google and Yahoo – 74%, airlines, hotels, cruises travel planning – 72%, and 66% checked Tour Boards for information.

So, what is the process time for women making travel decisions? 64% of women said that it took them 6 months to generate vacation ideas, 75% of women said that they take 6 months to research vacation options, and 72% of women said that it takes them up to 6 months to finalize and book travel.

Women as travel influencers: 78% of women said that they give travel recommendations to other people, 37% of women said that people ask them for their travel advice, and 31% of women said that people ask them for advice on hotels.

How long a vacation do women take? 65% replied they travel for 1 week or longer, 37% replied they travel for 2 –3 weeks. Also shorter, more frequent trips are growing in popularity. Multiple trips taken more frequently are favored over longer trips.

The Roper Report’s general travel trends concluded that women look for the following when planning and booking vacations: relaxation, something new and different, pampering, and water vacations.

Marketing implications? Companies must craft a compelling brand story, and create memories for her to have. Magazines help support brand efforts and build awareness at the critical point of entry. Magazines as sources are trusted, engaging and informative. Television gets your name out there. The Internet helps with research, and newspapers are informative and are great for special promotions and incentives.

All in all, women are a force to be reckoned with – don’t forget about us!

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