

Hidden treats yield clues in marketing to women

Dori Molitor helps companies market brands to women after uncovering the secret of the stashed SnackWells.

By Todd Nelson

Discovering why women were hiding SnackWells cookies contributed to both a successful product repositioning and a professional turning point for Dori Molitor, CEO of Minneapolis insight consulting firm WomanWise.

The discovery inspired Molitor, a consumer goods marketing veteran, to transform her general consulting firm into WomanWise, which specializes in marketing brands to women.

Molitor, during research that included in-home observation in the late 1990s, noticed women stashing SnackWells packages behind pasta and cereal boxes, hiding them from children and husbands.

This hoarding behavior, in contrast to their more typical role as nurturers, came as the women reported getting more authority and responsibility in the workplace but seeing little change at home, Molitor said. The cookies, she said, represented the women's "first step of permission to do something for herself."

From a branding perspective, Molitor recommended that SnackWells act on behalf of women through an integrated strategy that included a variety of self-esteem-boosting initiatives, a move that she said contributed to double-digit growth.

From a professional standpoint, Molitor saw her business expertise and personal passion for women's issues merge in the SnackWells project. She narrowed her firm's focus to "insight mining with women to shape and grow business" and in 1998 began operating as WomanWise. She had launched the firm in 1988 after working in marketing at General Mills.

"The opportunity was that if women were more deeply understood, they'd have far more personal fulfillment



WomanWise CEO Dori Molitor at the company's Minneapolis headquarters

from their brand relationships, and in the end our clients would win because they would have a more relevant connection and engagement with their target consumer," Molitor said.

Girlfriend Groups

WomanWise clients include Fortune 500 companies such as Land O'Lakes, Ameriprise and Pfizer, Fortune Global 500 companies such as Novartis and Nestlé and local dairy company Old Home Foods. WomanWise has seven employees, all of whom have worked there 10 years or more, and calls upon any of a dozen or so contractors to scale up for specific projects.

During this recession clients have not cut back because they increasingly realize that "women buy everything" but often feel marketers don't understand them.

The economic meltdown, however, has accelerated changes in women's attitudes, as reflected in an "American Dream" study WomanWise conducted last year. The hallmark finding? A renewed sense of responsibility in their own lives and in their expectations of businesses and government, Molitor said.

WomanWise uses proprietary methods to gain insights into the subconscious behavioral drivers that create

emotional connections between brands and women. Rather than sterile focus groups, WomanWise does this through Girlfriend Groups — social gatherings in home-like settings where small groups of women who are already friends or acquaintances who express their feelings through a variety of exercises.

The firm distills common themes that emerge from groups conducted around the country and internationally to identify opportunities for brands or companies, and works with clients' internal marketing teams or external agencies to develop strategies.

Darrell Wakefield, associate marketing director at LEO Pharma in New Jersey, said insights from WomanWise fueled a campaign that helped Femara, a breast cancer drug, gain market share a couple of years ago when he was at Novartis Pharmaceuticals. The campaign featured women breast cancer patients aspiring to regain control of their lives and their domestic leadership role.

“Their insights were unique, refreshing and extremely robust,” Wakefield said of WomanWise’s findings. “It was so refreshing and eye-opening to see how we could get patients to respond.”

Jim Maffezzoli, senior director of marketing at Pfizer headquarters in New York, said the company was very pleased with the outcome of a global research project with post-menopausal women that WomanWise recently completed. “We were able to get some insights that we were able to turn into several concepts for drug development, for developing a new medicine,” Maffezzoli said.

The expert says: James Heyman, associate professor of marketing at the University of St. Thomas’ Opus College of Business, said Molitor has succeeded in developing a way to find nuances that help brands appeal to a number of women’s higher-level motivations simultaneously. Those motivations — relational, self-esteem, self-actualization — occupy the top levels of the pyramid representing Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

“We’re in the persuasion business,” Heyman said. “The fact is, women have no persuasion defense when a

message is hitting her on so many levels. It’s kind of a foregone conclusion, what’s going to happen.”

(Of course men wouldn’t have defenses either under similar circumstances in different market segments, Heyman pointed out.)

“The reason she is finding them is she is looking for them,” Heyman said of the nuances Molitor is able to perceive. “That’s the brilliant piece, that is what is setting her apart.”

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*Darrell Wakefield, associate
marketing director at LEO Pharma*

WOMANWISE

Business: Full-service insight consulting firm specializes in marketing brands to women. Services include brand consulting, marketing strategy, consumer insight, brand platform development and marketing communications.

Founded: 1998 as WomanWise, evolved from consulting firm originally founded in 1988.

Executives: Dori Molitor, CEO

Headquarters: Minneapolis

Website: www.womanwise.com

Employees: 7, with a dozen or so contractors available.