

Gender sensitivity

Empowering staff to increase L2L opportunities

As I discussed in my previous article, women have a unique relationship with their local pharmacy. This phenomenon, known as L2L or ‘licence to linger’, is unique to retail pharmacy but has gone virtually unnoticed by many male owners and operators of independent and chain pharmacies. Considering women spend 85% of the dollars in a pharmacy and make 95% of the purchasing decisions, Canadian pharmacies have a huge opportunity to develop merchandising



and customer service plans to encourage and create L2L opportunities for their largest customer base.

In one case, a typical male pharmacist in his late 50s who owned a successful, family community-based pharmacy, held a customer meeting with his staff – something we recommend all pharmacy owners do weekly. He sat quietly and took notes while his daughter and part-owner of the business conducted a discussion with frontshop and dispensary

staff about how they have been pleasing their female customers. Many great successes were discussed, but near the end of the meeting the owner asked why no one had said anything about successes in feminine hygiene, an important “L2L product category that influences as many as one in four store visits.” The answer shocked him.

“We wouldn’t discuss that with men present,” said one frontshop associate, referring to the owner and the two other men present at the staff meeting. The other women in the room agreed. The owner wondered, if this was the case with staff members, what effect was the presence of men having on the store’s female customers?

The owner spent a few hours reviewing store security tapes of the feminine hygiene aisle and found his female customers were inhibited by the presence of men. When men were in the aisle, women kept walking and returned later when there were no men present. Even when men asked for help to find specific hygiene products for their female partners, the female customers who helped them frequently left the section and returned for their own products once the man had left.

When the owner shared these insights with his daughter, she said, “Do you think I want you knowing which products I use? Have you ever wondered why we never have to restock the top shelf in feminine hygiene? Because half the customers can’t even reach it and they’ll go over to the grocery store to buy it before they’ll ask you or any man to bring down a box of super pads.”

The daughter met with the female frontshop manager and decided to eliminate the top shelf for the feminine hygiene section and place heavy female categories on the rest of the aisle to reduce male traffic.

After a few months of experimentation, the pharmacy created a blend of impulse linger product categories, including gifts, hosiery and hair accessories in the feminine hygiene aisle. They reported that sales of all three categories increased, and follow-up observations showed that most customers who picked up feminine hygiene products stopped at one or more of the linger categories. Observations of the uncomfortable encounters with men in that aisle diminished.

The owner reported two important lessons from his experience. For areas in the frontshop that require gender sensitivity, female managers and staff should be empowered to merchandise the sections and make

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changes without having to explain themselves to male bosses. And secondly, highly gender-specific licence products should be adjacent to equally gender-specific linger products to generate add-on sales, and much more relaxed customers. **FS**

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