

# Don't stereotype your shoppers

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“Grocery stores are discovering what women have known for years,” begins a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*. “Men shop ... different.”

The story, headlined “Supermarkets lure in male shoppers,” cites data from a Hartman Group study on men’s shopping habits and examines efforts retailers such as Lowes Foods, Hy-Vee Inc., Lucky’s Market, Kroger Co. and Colorado-based Alfalfa’s Market have made to appeal to their new male customer base.

And it interviews a couple of couples on the differences between how the wife and husband shop.

“I buy more meat than I should and too little produce,” executive creative director Jonathan Schoenberg is quoted toward the end of the article. “I’ll forget yogurt and granola. I’ll definitely remember sausage and bacon.”

I don’t doubt Schoenberg’s analysis of his own shopping habits, but the majority of the *WSJ*’s article reads like a stereotype: Emphasize meat and beer and snacks and beard oil to keep the men coming back for more (the article is even illustrated by a shopping cart filled with meat, soda, beer and a doughnut).

Where’s the room for produce in this manly meat fest?

Some of the Hartman Group info the article cites says men are less price-sensitive and health-conscious while shopping than women tend to be. A couple of other studies on men’s shopping habits I found online (one from a *Men’s Health* magazine survey, another also from Hartman) said men especially value flavor and quality.

This reminded me of recent efforts by the Produce for Better Health Foundation to increase produce consumption.

In a January webinar from the group, behavioral scientist Jason Riis suggested marketers emphasize happiness over health benefits in the produce aisle, focusing on positive emotions rather than vitamin tallies. Similarly, at PBH’s annual meeting in April, Ahold USA’s Chris Keetch said the company likes to let high-quality produce speak for itself. “We use ‘eye appeal is buy appeal,’” he said.

Toward the end of the *Journal* piece there’s some balance from researcher Stephanie Coontz of the Council on Contemporary Families. Coontz said younger shoppers, male or female, are less likely to find heavily gendered marketing relevant.

Also, most millennial women weren’t raised with the same cooking and shopping assumptions that previous generations were, Coontz said, so they are more likely to appreciate low-key,

humorous messaging that also appeals to men.

In other words, switch the sign on your asparagus display from “Packed with vitamin A” to “Steak’s best friend.” (Hey, women eat steak too.)

It’s true that more men are grocery shopping — whether for themselves or for their families — than ever before. But that doesn’t mean women are out of the picture, either. Choose messaging and product placement that’s likely to appeal to both halves of your customer base rather than alienating one to favor the other.

And remember — no shopper likes being stereotyped.

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