

Sex Appeal – 4 Tips for Marketing Men’s Products

SKIM

Although men, in general, can be cut-throat competitive, goal-oriented, interested in power and, frankly, wired very differently from their female counterparts, marketers must focus first on aptly targeted emotional marketing and the relevant benefits that products can provide before focusing on who is making the actual purchase, whether that be the man in question or a woman in his life.

SKIM has performed message testing across categories, markets, and genders. Through meta-analyses of the messages tested across studies, we continuously learn more about what makes for effective communication. In this article, we will share four tips to keep in mind when creating claims and communications messages for men . . . and the women who buy for them.

Avoid extensions of feminine benefits; make benefits relevant to men

Jill Avery, a senior lecturer at Harvard Business School, found that most men fear being interpreted as feminine, and more so than women fear being interpreted as masculine. This finding is very much in line with SKIM’s research on how to market to men through well-articulated messaging.

Men like to hear benefits that are functional and relevant to them – body wash to wash away the dirt, or face wash to cleanse pores. Women generally prefer more descriptive articulations that bring the products to life – with moisturization, supple skin, nourishment, and other aspirational adjectives. Even when women buy for their men, they look for a promise of efficacy that produces a desirable result. “Leaves hair smooth and shiny” or “leaves skin lightly scented” are claims that can appeal to women for themselves, or bring to life how they would like their men to look or smell. Men would vouch for “flake-free hair”, as it addresses a more relevant problem. Given the dynamics of shopping behaviour in households with couples, the balance between these is critical to determining the motivation to buy.

Touch the emotional nerve behind the machismo persona

Across studies, we see that men focus on functional elements. A razor must be rust-proof; an aftershave must be cooling and eliminate razor burn. The common theme is a mandate that marketers leverage an emotional connection to preventing a negative, such as men’s fear of balding, razor burn, or dandruff on their shoulders. A deeply emotional insight lies within their pursuit of the functional, and it can be tapped by showcasing how to avoid such negatives with claims that specifically target them.

Even with sensitive topics such as hair loss, men perceive that products should “correct”, again implying a fix or alternative to a negative. Women seek products to revitalise and strengthen hair, and when they buy for their men, they continue to look for something that can be visualised. “A fuller scalp” would appeal to a woman, because she can envisage this on her man. It brings the benefit to life better than “Clinically proven to stop hair fall”, which would negate the fear better if a man was buying the same product for himself.

Give men proof, validation in numbers

It is critical to be crystal clear to men, as they are not browsers, which is why men’s products tend to feature stark contrasting colours so that benefits can be viewed clearly and immediately: Nivea’s white packs with blue font, or L’Oréal’s grey or black packs with neon accents. Men also prefer facts and figures over the lengthy descriptions of benefits; they are more inclined to purchase a product that cites clinical proof versus simply a promise of “softness”.

However, marketers should keep in mind that the numbers need to be relevant and credible. Extreme numbers, such as 100% blockage of a negative, dampen believability. To the other extreme, saying that the product prevents 25% of something seems inconsequential. It is a balancing act, but our research has shown that men

are noticeably more driven by numbers than women.

A key distinction with women is that speed drives differentiation when they buy for their men. Women know that men spend less time than themselves on grooming, and immediacy of benefit and convenience of use are larger factors in searching for male grooming products. They want to be sure the product actually delivers what it promises with minimal hassle and a quick application process.

Men focus on specific attainable long-term benefits, not immediate and implausible gratification

Men generally tend to prefer a long-lasting benefit. For example, with hairstyling products, a 24-hour delivery of benefits is most motivating, as it conveys a notion of being hassle-free. Women, however, regardless of whether they are buying for themselves or for men in their lives, are inclined to seek out the “right look”. They would rather invest in perfection as opposed to long-term “hold” and “staying power”, even for their men. In fact, the long-lasting element is so assumed that they are often even turned off if the longevity of a beauty product is mentioned. Take “Stronger hair for up to two weeks” versus simply “Stronger hair”, women would likely prefer the latter, as it implies timelessness.

On the topic of perfection, men are more likely to respond to healthy grooming messages than are women, who seem to prefer products that amplify the beauty quotient. Case in point: a woman is likely to prefer a body wash product that claims to “Nourish your skin with a rich lather and gentle cleansers”, while an identical men’s product is likely to claim “Fights skin dryness to help maintain skin balance”.

Naturally, this research does not indicate that men are unemotional, just the fact that men and women emote differently, and that women look for more aspirational gratification, while men exhibit their emotions in overcoming a negative in their life. This is why it is so important to understand what matters to your target group and to adjust your communication accordingly: Does your target group consist mainly of men, or of women? And do you know which message resonates best with them?

