

The Power of the Woman Rider

by Genevieve Schmitt

QUIT DREAMING...AND JUST do it! Buy that motorcycle you've been fantasizing about. This is the time to make it happen, because now more than ever we're witnessing a greater awareness of women riders. Tour companies, manufacturers, and event organizers are including women in their marketing and advertising campaigns. Why now?

Companies are recognizing the power of the woman rider demographic. Remember that shampoo commercial back in the 80s? It said "...and she'll tell two friends, and she'll tell two friends, and she'll tell two friends..." and the image of a woman with beautiful hair kept duplicating and duplicating and duplicating until little images of the woman filled the television screen. That commercial had it right about the power of one woman. If she loves a product or service, she'll tell her friends—it could be a brand of shampoo or brand of motorcycle jacket.

I was at the Americade rally in June staying with a friend who owns a bed and breakfast in Glens Falls, New York. My friend was talking up this brand of all-natural liquid soap and hair care products she uses to stock her bathrooms at the B&B. She couldn't say enough about how much she loved them. I used them and really liked them too. Because she told me about these products, I paid attention when I used them. Now I'm a customer. Turns out, this line of products does no advertising and has grown through word-of-mouth in 20 years and now processes up to 80,000 orders a day.

The point here is when a woman buys a motorcycle and she loves it, or she buys a motorcycle jacket and loves it, she becomes loyal to the brand and is a walking advertisement for it because she'll tell all her friends.

The circle of friends with whom women share information and advice on products and services is called a "woman's board of directors" according to Mary Lou Quinlan author of *Just Ask A Woman*. Quinlan is a marketing expert. She says a woman's board consists of her trusted advisors—the people she calls upon before making a purchasing decision. This could be her mother, friends, sisters, an expert on TV, a syndicated columnist, Oprah (we all know what Oprah has done for certain products and books), or someone in a chat room. These people are a source of comfort as well as a source of advice. Quinlan writes, "Many brands find their way onto a woman's hot list through friend's experiences and word-of-mouth endorsement. If she asks a friend what airline she likes, what hotel chain is good for the kids, or what SUV she would buy, your company's goal is to be on her board advisor's hot list." That's the power of women motorcyclists, the influence they have among their peers.



Plus, we know that women who have chosen to ride a motorcycle are often taking charge of their lives. What I've learned from my years of observing and writing about the female motorcycle market is that women who choose to ride are making a statement about themselves. Many women use motorcycling as a means of expression or to break out from some confining aspect of their lives. A woman rider is strong and dynamic and speaks her mind. You can bet if she likes something—a brand of bike, a particular dealership, or a type of jacket—she'll share it with her friends. The flipside of that is also true. If she doesn't

like something or has had a bad experience with a particular product or dealer, she'll share that, too. The message here is don't underestimate the power of one woman rider.

Here are some powerful statistics about women's wealth and influence that are forcing traditionally male-oriented industries to take notice.

- Women buy or influence 80 percent of all household spending. That includes 51 percent of consumer electronics, traditionally a male domain. Do you think motorcycles are exempt from that 80 percent influence? I think not.
- In the small business arena, women own an estimated 9.1 million small businesses generating \$3.6 trillion dollars in sales annually. What does that mean to motorcycling? Women are earning their own money and making decisions on where they want to spend it. If they want to buy a "toy" to de-stress their busy lives, they can and will. There's no reason that toy cannot be a motorcycle.
- Women are expected to acquire 94 percent of the growth in U.S. private wealth between now and 2010. Again, women have money and will spend it on the luxuries they want.

It's nice to see that the motorcycle industry is starting to recognize the influence of women riders. Other traditionally male industries have realized it and have modified the way they do business. The financial services industry, consumer electronics, and the home remodeling industries all recognize that women have become the dominant influence in these areas and the companies selling these products have started thinking like a woman does. With more women riding motorcycles and a greater awareness of this growing demographic, motorcycle companies watching from the sidelines will be forced to start reaching out to women—whether transparent or non-transparently—in an effort to gain some very loyal customers. **FZ**

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