

Purses, Peers, Posts & the Power to Move Markets



As the dominant influencer or buyer of consumer goods, women have both the power and the responsibility to help turn the market green.

Capitalism - the Cause and the Solution for Climate Change

In "The Lexus and the Olive Tree," New York Times columnist Tom Friedman, provides a glimpse of the future through the eyes of capitalism. He calls it the "golden strait jacket - a country can choose to wear the jacket tight or loose, but eventually they will wear it." He also reminds us that the Dow Jones doesn't run the world; it's only part of 180 global markets. In 2004, money put into i-shares (the Dow Jones or Nasdaq of other countries) did better than investing in our own market. America's crown is slipping, but the good news is that the golden straight jacket is being replaced by a green one. It doesn't matter who wears that, we all win.

The world may see America as the #1 promoter of capitalism when in reality it's only the current title holder. Europe was the originator of capitalism and then free-wheeling Americans perfected the art of economic expansion via corporations and franchises. China is the next title holder and no amount of political positioning will change that; politics are only an enabler of capitalism. As much as we would like to think that we are in control, we aren't, anymore than a surfer can control the ocean, he can only ride the wave he's on to the best of his ability and hope he makes it to the beach without eating sand.

How did this happen?

It wasn't so long ago when making a living was good enough, now it seems like we can't stop until we've made a killing. In corporate-speak, that means growing and merging and expanding sometimes to the detriment of people, land, and resources. Corporations, by law, have to strive to be profitable. The good intentions of the people inside the walls are often dismissed in favor of "the profit mission". It isn't that corporations or their employees are bad; it's just that they are caught in the middle of a game which demands results. They know that they are expendable in that process and so they continue surfing their own wave for as long as it lasts. You can't blame them for doing what they have to do to keep their job.

No wonder capitalism scares and worries other nations. They don't see its good side very often. That changed when the tsunami hit Asia in December 2005. Over 160,000 people died and millions more were left without homes or livelihoods. After the waves resided, goods and services were delivered with military-like co-ordination (conceived and perfected under capitalism). Without the help of profitable companies, immediate relief could not have happened. It proved that corporations can be harnessed for social good.

Would those companies have been that generous if the world wasn't watching?

I'd like to think so, but without the Internet to turn a show of compassion into a PR event, I wonder. As cynical as that sounds, having the world watch and judge you is really a good thing especially in this emerging green market; publicity cuts both ways. Companies are working overtime to make sure that only good publicity shows up on blogs or You-Tube videos. Not only does it affect today's market, but the market 10 years from now as these postings become etched on the Internet cave wall to be forever available for generations to learn from.

Where do women fit in?

Every day I open my mail *and* see a new women's group formed to save the world through spiritual, environmental or a commercial connection. Part of this movement was started by Jean Shinoda Bolen's book, "Urgent Message from Mother: Gather the Women, Save the World." She pondered that after we hit a tipping point of 1 million circles of women formed, that those global groups will transform the world. She could be right, not just spiritually, but economically as well.

Millions of women never heard of Bolen's book and yet they are forming groups anyway. I believe that something else more primal is driving this grouping action. There are three reactions to danger: fight, flight and in a women's case, we also group. With the Internet giving us constant and instant access to the global pressures we face, women are grouping to seek safety in each other and to look for answers on how to get out of the trouble we're in. Groups may start based on the Millionth Circle premise or as a book club, but they always end up in the same place - women helping women, change their world.

Can women make a difference by simply throwing their best efforts at something that has more social than economic impact? Yes. It's not what they are doing, but how they are doing it that has captured company's attention. "Grouping" and self-organization



around a cause is replacing top down management. Blogs are an example of self-organization at work. In marketing terms, that's a serious trend to watch.

Can women change the world?

So far governments haven't been successful at improving our lives, every four years we are asked if we are better off or worse off than before the latest president took office. Arguably religion is more often the cause of war than the ending of it. We've had thousands of years to get both right and it hasn't happened. Up until recently, corporations have only added to the dehumanization of the soul while at the same time destroying resources. It's overwhelming.

What's a girl to do? How do we evoke real world change when such mega organizations couldn't? It's simple; use our purse, our peers and our posts to co-create a happier and sustainable world.

The Power of Your Purse

As consumer marketing departments will tell you, women buy or *directly influence* the purchase over 80% of consumer products and services. If you sell household items it's higher, with cars it's less, but on average women dominate all consumer group sectors and that makes them a tipping point for change. Even Best Buy, the icon of male gadgetry, knows that women are the dominate buyers of gizmos as these products become mainstream, household items. Best Buy is changing to work *with* women on their terms. Signage contains more female faces. TV ads are female-friendly. Sales staff are trained in woman-speak and woman-think (yes, we do process things differently). Services that reflect the needs of the woman buyer are being added.

Best Buy has morphed the traditional business model as well by adding clouds of women employee groups to float through the top down, traditional triangle of management form. These groups called WoLF (Women's Leadership Forum) containing 27 women and 2 men were first designed to help develop more women managers and retain them. What started as an employee mentoring program, however has added a new spirit to the organization. Anytime you put 27 women in a room and add coffee you're going to get a lot of conversation. Do that in a business setting on a regular basis and that's when titles disappear and inter-departmental discussions begin.

This is big change for a corporation the size of Best Buy. As a Fortune 50 company with 120,000 employees it will take more than clouds of women

talking before it will be as responsive as the one-person-shop, but they are trying and they are setting a new management benchmark in the process. The women's voices and values are being heard and honored and Best Buy is seeing financial rewards because of it.

That's the power of the purse in action. As consumer-based companies strive to become more likable to women, feminine values begin manifesting throughout a company. That's power, but can it change the world?

Follow the money.

As much time and effort that we put into our political system we all know what put the candidates into the race – the dollar. Donations are their lifeline. A year and a half before the 2008 primaries and both Clinton and Obama raised millions. Big or small, corporations or individuals, people were already voting with their wallet. Voting through capitalism isn't that far fetched.

Given the corporate influence, what drives corporations? Profit.

Corporations are beholden to the shareholder. It's written right into a corporate charter that its purpose is to make a profit. It's also beholden to "the market" all 180 of them. Only profit keeps stock holders and stock markets, happy. Even if a company is privately held, profit drives it.

Where does profit come from? Customers.

Go figure, eh? You actually have to sell something before you make a profit. All those mutual funds are made up of thousands of companies who are all making money because a customer bought something. Some of the customers are B2B or business to business. They sell the parts to make the things that go onto the shelf that Big Box Stores built.

Here's the tipping point.

The majority of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is made up of consumer goods and over 80% of them are purchased or influenced by women. Are you connecting the dots (or the dollars) yet?

What about the rest of the world?

Companies don't have borders. They are ruled by the law of free markets. The U.S. is still the major market for consumption, but China, India etc. are quickly surpassing us. Even Chinese companies, however, have to have a product that a free market will buy – and even in China, women are the primary buyers of consumer goods and services, we just happen to live here.



Are you beginning to feel the power?

If this was just about "Marketing to Women" and making you feel good about your new found clout in the world, I'd stop right here, it isn't. It's about using that power to transform markets and drive the world in a sustainable direction – a direction that will literally save the planet from runaway global warming while at the same time bringing about all the social changes that our million women circles want to see.

The Power of Your Peers

The little light bulb moment...

Remember that day when you finally broke down and bought not one, but ALL the compact fluorescent bulbs that your home would use and put them into place? You no longer have to give light bulbs another thought for probably seven years at which time compact fluorescents will be the *only* choice on the market. Meanwhile, you have friends who are still hedging. This is when peer pressure during one of those million circle meetings can literally make a world of difference.

I'm a perfect example of that. I saw "Inconvenient Truth" when it first came out in June. Like many, I walked away stunned and overwhelmed at the size of the problem, what could I possibly do to stop it? I was hindered in the fact that I worked in manufacturing for 10 years and knew that whatever a thousand people did could be undone in a manufacturing minute, so why try?

Eventually I bought the bulbs and replaced them. What flipped my switch? I hosted a movie party for MoveOn.org to watch *An Inconvenient Truth*. The party happened in September, three months *after* I saw the first showing. Three months and I did nothing until I knew I would be held accountable or be embarrassed in front of my peers if I hadn't taken action - me, someone who recycles, grows vegetables and drives a 40 mpg car needed a nudge.

Purse String Theory meets Self-Help Groups

Big Green Purse, a green consumer education site launched its own million women circle last year. The site's author, Diane MacEachern believes that if we turn our own purses "green," we can create the world women want. The site and book is packed with products and ideas that have been vetted by Diane, a lifelong conservationist. Her million-women-circle invites women to swap out \$1000 of brown products for \$1000 of green products. I swapped out \$625 worth over the course of a year just by buying organic raisin bran, soy milk and coffee. Diane's point is that

each of us is our own little circle of change within our household. We can get our inspiration from each other online and then take it with us into the store.

Eco Mom Alliance takes it one step further. They've initiated groups of moms, ala book club style to meet on a regular basis to inspire and hold each other accountable for environmental change. Since their story was told by the NY Times, their collective group of 9000 women has dramatically increased. Like Big Green Purse, they focus on making better product and lifestyle choices. The difference is that they encourage group formation which meets on a regular basis. It's the regular check in with others that makes change fun and also helps to permanently re-wire our lifestyles.

Garden clubs, book clubs, bowling, business...

If being accountable to others in a group works, then why not use the groups we already have formed and add a layer of green to them? Every group has one person who is greener than the rest, make her the Czarina of Change. She picks the task of the month and announces it, "This month, let's pledge swap out all the light bulbs in our house." The following month, she can get a show of hands as to how many actually followed through and then announce the next month's task. Little by little, we can hold each other accountable to a sustainable lifestyle.

The Power of Your Post

If you want to move the market quickly, the power of the pen or the keyboard is still that fastest way. If you don't vote for the president, you can't complain about how the country is run. If you don't carve your opinion into the Internet cave wall, then you can't complain when companies bow to those who do.

Do you have a blog? (weB LOG) Have you ever participated in a public forum or left a comment on an editorial page? If websites are static books of knowledge, blogs or forums inject conversation back into the system. Here's why you should care. Did you know that every written word is scanned and archived by Google and the other search engines? Does that frighten you? It shouldn't. It should make you feel empowered and ready to take on the world from your keyboard. One well worded opinion can change the way products are made and service happens. Want to see how fast a company will change its ways? Blog about something you do or don't like include the brand name. Nearly all companies have their brand names on Google Alerts. Companies hire teams of people to do nothing but watch what people are saying. Over



100 million people have a blog today. If voting is giving your opinion on who should run the country, blogging is giving your opinion of which companies deserve your green business.

*Carve it into the Internet cave wall,
"I was here and this is what I think."*

For a corporation to hold its market share, it must follow their customer's wishes. With millions of people voicing their opinions, they can no longer control advertising messages. They can't control what consumers think when consumers can compare notes. What they can do is take their pulse and then match their product to what the people want.

Do you really want to change the world, put your thoughts on a blog. It doesn't matter if you don't read blogs. It doesn't matter if you are the only person who reads yours. What's important is that the search engines will pick up your words and opinions and they will all get funneled into the big mixing bowl in the sky for corporations and governments to pick through and learn from.

You don't even have to use your real name to be "heard" you can blog anonymously. Instead of getting on the phone and telling your friends what upsets you, tell it to your blog and post it for the world to read. Make it public.

You want to feel empowered? Sign up for one of the free blogs on www.blogger.com, www.vox.com or www.wordpress.com. In five minutes you'll be able to have the same global reach as a Public Relations firm.

There's another great benefit, in writing your thoughts and posting them to the world forum:

- A) You will rediscover your backbone.
- B) You will know what you stand for.

It's better than any therapy session. What you learn about yourself by posting public writings, you'll take with you into offline discussions with friends and business. Writing focuses your thinking.

Co-creating a sustainable market

What if, everyone in your group had a blog? What if you ALL blogged once a week on whatever *cause* your group cared about? It would be like all of you having your own newspaper and putting the force of syndication behind you.

What if, the "cause" was Global Warming, and doing things to bring down CO2 emissions was the topic?

Not only would you create the peer pressure to get the bulbs changed and the shower heads replaced, but you'll create the buzz on the Internet that will force change much faster than signing your name to a petition. The government can make laws and mandate for lower emissions, but unless "the market" indicates that it will buy said cars, then don't expect big companies or little ones to make the investment to create the car.

Ultimately, "the market" is what caused Detroit to change to hybrids. Toyota created the Prius, but it was evangelist customers that turned a car model into a passion. I know seven women inside my acquaintance list who own the 60 MPG Prius. That's never happened in my life, and I lived through cheap V W bug days in college.

That's what co-creating is all about.

Arguably, women are the dominate consumer and men are the dominate manufacturer of products. Let's not make this a gender battle as much as we can make it a gender partnership. If this is a 50/50 proposition between buyers and sellers, then we owe it to each other to listen and voice our sincere opinions. Let's get out of the victim role of complaining only after a product or services has failed and take the pro-active position of helping companies create excellent, sellable and Sustainable products and services ASAP.

Viva la Revolution!

Money drives everything. I've been in some form of marketing or sales for over 35 years. At first I believed the sales training books, that if I appealed to the human side of the person sitting across the desk from me, that I'll make a sale. Wrong! They may have liked me, but if what I had made no financial sense for "the-company-that-is-programmed-to-make-money," then I didn't make a sale. That's why the Sustainable movement has been sitting there for decades since the first Earth Day in 1970. Being Sustainable was a nice thing to do, but it wasn't profitable until recently. Fighting global warming has made Sustainability profitable, and that has brought out all sorts of instant-green products. How are you to know if what you buy or post is making a difference or causing further harm? How do investors know if companies are walking the walk or just talking? How do you keep things out of the green wash marketing spin cycle? You can't, but a Sustainability Standard can.

Sustainability Standards are quickly becoming the laws of the free market.



*Women are the will, Corporations
are the way and Sustainability
Standards will keep us all honest.*

Do you buy *USDA Organic* Food? If you do, good for you, and good for us! Organic food is low in pesticides, high in nutrients, and comes in its own little compostable skin. When the food is purchased locally, it has low CO2 impact on the planet. The *USDA Organic Label* is single attribute Standard." It lets you make guilt free purchases which drives market competition and gives us more organic products to choose from.

You may have also heard about the *Energy Star* label. It lets you know how much energy a dishwasher consumes during use in your home. The more energy efficient it is, the better for your pocket and the planet. Cool, but we can be cooler.

Let's take it a step further. *What if we measured and calculated the carbon footprint and pollution footprint of every step going into the making of that dishwasher?* That means the gathering of the raw material metals, the processing of them, the production of the dishwasher, the shipping and finally the use/recycling & reuse of it. That's REALLY cool. That's also really SMaRT (Sustainable Material Rating Technology) which is a comprehensive Sustainability Standard.

SMaRT requires a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) to determine where the CO2 is coming from during manufacturing and transportation. Once the CO2 can be measured, then the management can go to work to lower its impact. SMaRT also requires third party auditors; otherwise the fox is minding the hen house and companies or governments can hide infractions. This gets dicey in less than scrupulous settings, such as a Brazilian rain forest, yet it's the only way to insure that trees are being harvested under sustainable conditions

*It will be far easier to put down the
guns of war than it will be to put
down the latte of consumerism.*

Just like Detroit didn't want to go the hybrid route until they were forced into it, manufacturing at large won't want to comply. It messes with profit margins. That said, the Sustainable market momentum is here and all that it needed to take the guess work out of green work was a Sustainability Standard. In SMaRT's

case, it took 5 years of consensus voting before it was approved. Now it's just a matter of the key consumers – women – to begin asking for Sustainable products or choose to buy nothing.

That may be the hardest part of all. We like to buy things. It's ingrained into our American souls. What if we switch to buying more services for gifts than things? That one act would keep the economy stay afloat and at the same time keep out pollution waste stream low. Who wouldn't appreciate a hair cut, massage, manicure, housecleaning, lawn mowing, etc. as a present?

In Women We Better Trust

My blog is called "In Women We Trust" for one reason. Women do trust each other. That's why we are forming these spontaneous circles. I also trust that we will make the right decisions going forward that will save the planet without throwing it into economic chaos. As the key purchasing agents and communicators of the planet, the job falls to us to make the right purchases and help companies adopt the standards that will ensure a Sustainable and happy planet.

Use your power wisely, on the other side of the "greener" pasture is a co-created and balanced world. Sound a bit idealist? Perhaps, but so was the constitution of the United States. If a few men can change history, think what a few million women buying, talking and writing together can do.

LINKS:

<http://mts.sustainableproducts.com>
www.BigGreenPurse.com
www.EcoMomsAlliance.org
<http://www.millionthcircle.org>





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