

GENDER AND DIGITAL FINANCIAL SERVICES

Quick Tips for Digital Financial Service Providers to Reach Women



Recognize That Your Current Offerings Do Not Always Suit Women

No one has purposely excluded women from digital financial services (DFS). Any oversights in this field are by default, as banking has traditionally been done for men and by men. Before 1974, even American banks were legally allowed to discriminate against women applying for credit.¹ The exclusionary behaviour of financial service providers exists globally for women across all income levels.² Businesses looking to leverage female participation in the economy should recognize that women wish to be engaged, and that they may participate in different ways.

For Higher Returns, Slow Down the Sale

This seems counter-intuitive, but it works. Women are more risk-aware than men and take longer to make decisions. They do make decisions though, and when they do, they tend to have not worse NPLs than men.³

Get to the Point

Women still want to know what interest rate they will receive/pay, but there are so many more questions they have. Women want to know how a service works. They need to know things like where to transact, how to transact, the fees that will be charged, and how mistakes are rectified. These issues are important.

Information should be given to them up front to help them feel ready to make their decisions.

Women talk and share. If a service provider is really helpful and easy to talk to, that may even become a reason for meeting.

If You Sell It – Make Sure It Works

If women have put in the time to understand your product and decide to give their money, they want it to work just as promised. Be sure to provide women a clear and responsive feedback point for problems.

Women Travel in Packs

Women are less likely to visit a bank branch. This is due to time constraints, the cost of travel, as well as societal and cultural norms. This does not mean that women are hidden, though. Women group together a lot. Look for a group — market sellers, mothers' groups, church choir, lending/saving associations, and neighborhood meetings.

Relieve the Burden

Women are time-poor. Quite often they have the responsibility of children, the household, and income generation. Women are looking for solutions that help them with more than one challenge. Providing solutions such as insurance, vendor discounts, health

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equal_Credit_Opportunity_Act.

2. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/b681b8e6-2705-11e6-8b18-91555f2f4fde.html?sitedition=intl#axzz4IhqGrbk4>.

3. This is a loan that is in arrears for usually more than 30 days.

information, access to like-minded networks is attractive to women.

Build the Trust

Though it is hard to hear — many women just do not trust banks. Banks are not considered part of their trusted service providers. However, this does not mean that they do not want to trust. Bank accounts, loans and automated teller machine (ATM) cards are all desired by women, as cited in aspirational surveys.

In addition, women like to discuss things with other women. Banking tends to be quite a male-dominated environment. Using women to communicate about the product may help bring more female customers into the banking network.

Learn the Language

Globally, women have received less formal education than men, resulting in lower levels of literacy and numeracy. However, this does not mean that women do not communicate about money. Words such as ‘balance’, ‘interest’, ‘transaction’, and ‘budget’ may be completely foreign to them, but the concepts behind these words are not. In this regard, it is important to find the language that local women use when discussing money and communicate to them in their language. Help them to learn from a starting point where they feel comfortable and safe.

Give them Phones

Much of the research on women’s access to DFS revolves around the fact that women are less likely to own or have access to mobile phones. Although this is still a challenge, even in 2016, it is slowly changing.

The primary hurdle to access is the cost of the handset and its usage. As a provider of services, women can be helped over this hurdle by breaking down the cost. Bundling low-cost, easy to use handsets into a sales offer may help. It could also help drive usage and product desirability.

Pink is Not Enough

Banks have argued that their products are designed to be accessible to all. Some banks have also gone a step further by ‘feminizing’ the name or brand color of the product. These sales tactics may not work for women. Women are looking for the slow sale, the plain-talking, the easing of the burden, and the sense of inclusion.

Work your Data

Most banks and financial institutions already have a lot of information on its current female clients. Institutions should spend time analysing data and talking to female customers. What, if any, are the different patterns in transacting? What trends are not yet understood? A lot of answers may already be available. Institutions need to look for them.

In developing countries, there are many organizations trying to promote access by to financial services by women using the latest technology. Developing a database about women can facilitate value-added partnerships. Women have said that they want information that helps them in their daily lives. Being of service to female customers can also help link women to many other forms of useful financial information.

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