North Olmsted, Ohio…Hold on tight. There is a revolutionary shift in consumer marketing on the horizon…and leading faucet manufacturer Moen Incorporated is paying attention. It turns out that women are not only the sole or primary decision-makers in all kinds of product purchases; they are also the principal home improvement “doers,” even on heretofore unexpected projects. Still, while the buying power of women is staggering, they remain a woefully unaddressed, untapped market, a fact that savvy marketers are setting out to change.

In his latest book *Re-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age*, Tom Peters describes women as “purchasing officers” for themselves and their families, even making up more than 50% of professional purchasing officers for corporations and public agencies. Alternately, Peters calls women the “instigators-in-chief” of most consumer purchases, alluding to their across-the-board buying influence:¹

- 83% of all consumer purchases
- 94% of home furnishings
- 91% of new homes
- 80% of DIY or home improvement projects

Peters goes so far as to suggest that American women constitute “Earth’s largest economy,” followed by Japan (the whole country) and then American men. This
assertion becomes all the more powerful with 66 million women working in the U.S. in 2001, with working wives earning more than their husbands in 31% of married households. Further, Peters echoes the beliefs of trend-spotters Faith Popcorn & Lys Marigold from the books *Clicking* and *EVEolution: The Eight Truths of Marketing to Women*: “Women don’t buy brands. They join them.” Evidently, purchases made by women go well beyond simple transactions; they are connections that are part of creating a (hopefully) long-term relationship.

Indeed, given the breadth and depth of their purchasing power, women are really the world’s “Chief Purchasing Officers” or CPO’s. Today, women wield their purchasing influence even in product and service categories traditionally dominated by men. One such category is the purchase of an automobile, a buying decision for which 50% of White women and 52% of African-American women have primary or joint responsibility. Another key example is the home improvement category where women bought products from almost as many categories as men, according to the Home Improvement Research Institute (HIRI).

The HIRI study finds that females were the primary product “selectors” for over 40% of home improvement projects completed in 2001. These findings do not necessarily include the additional influence women have on the purchases made by men and other family members, further driving home the economic impact of women. In the HIRI study, the top home improvement projects where the female head of household made the purchase include:

- Remodeling an existing room for a baby’s room or home office
- Landscaping of property or planting a garden
- Shampooing carpet
- Stripping or refinishing furniture
- Remodeling a bathroom
- Replacing/refinishing flooring
- Remodeling a kitchen
- Refacing cabinetry
The purchasing strengths of women are also pronounced in specific categories linked to home décor: hardware and paint & sundries. The HIRI findings indicate that the products purchased most by women include paint brushes & rollers, interior paint, wallpaper, window treatments, floor coverings, door knobs/locks, interior light fixtures and mail boxes.

Such research findings shed some light on the enormous purchasing power of women, even in a specific market segment such as home improvement. However, this is only part of the insight gained. Women are also the primary project “doers,” in fact, nearly as likely as men to be the “actual primary project installer,” according to HIRI. Yankelovich confirms the finding that women regularly or occasionally perform DIY home improvement projects (White females: 65%; Hispanic females: 57%; African-American females: 51%). This is especially true on so-called “high-incidence” projects that may require less heavy physical labor. Men tend to more frequently execute physically intense projects, while professionals are called in more often for truly heavy-duty projects or those requiring higher-level skills. Nonetheless, HIRI’s top ten home improvement projects done by female heads of household align with their project purchases, meaning that women not only buy the products, they also get the project done:

1. Shampooing carpet
2. Planting a garden
3. Landscaping property
4. Stripping/refinishing furniture
5. Painting a room
6. Remodeling existing room for baby’s room
7. Refacing cabinetry
8. Remodeling existing room for home office
9. Finishing basement
10. Remodeling a bathroom

Leading product marketers like Moen Incorporated regularly tap into broad research findings (such as Peters’ and Popcorn’s) as well as more specific data (such as HIRI
and SCOUT findings) to understand what and how much women buy, but also where they like to shop and the information that influences their purchases. When it comes to faucet purchases specifically – a category of particular interest to Moen – women have become increasingly influential in the decision to buy a faucet. Women alone or with a male partner influenced faucet style selection (63% in 2003 vs. 57% in 1995) as well as the brand choice (52% vs. 45% over the same time period). Still, while the female influence in the faucet purchase decision has grown over the last six years, female involvement in the faucet installation has remained quite constant (9% in 2001 vs. 7% in 1995).5

HIRI research also provides Moen with a perspective on where women most prefer to shop, even for very specific home improvement projects, be it warehouse home centers, discount stores, hardware stores or specialty stores. The HIRI data also provides insights on the information sources women (and men) use when planning a home improvement project, when actually buying products, and about how to do a project. Generally speaking, the HIRI findings suggest that women tend more than men to rely on information from friends and family, as well as magazines.

A point of departure in the HIRI research vs. Tom Peters’ findings surrounds Internet usage. The HIRI data suggests that men are more heavily involved with the Internet when it comes to home improvement. Yet Peters asserts that in the first quarter 2000, “six out of every ten Web users were women,” and that 83% of these “wired” women drove primary decisions about family healthcare, finances and education. It may just be that women have not yet fully embraced the Internet as a tool or “key influencer” for home improvement products and purchases.

The major indisputable point of all these findings is that the female market in general, (and for home improvement more specifically) has barely been tapped by product and service providers. Amazingly, only the most progressive companies have yet to tune in to these remarkable trends and to recognize the colossal economic power of women. Moen Incorporated strives to be one of those market leaders, closely following trends among women, working to understand what they need and expect, and to deliver
products and experiences that fit perfectly. Clearly, Moen understands never to underestimate the power of women, especially now that they’re America’s CPO’s. There is truly a revolution going on.

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**EDITOR’S NOTE:** Moen Incorporated is one of the world's largest producers of residential and commercial plumbing products. Moen is the #1 brand of faucets in North America. The company manufactures a complete line of single- and two-handle faucets in a wide assortment of styles and finishes. It is also a leading producer of residential and commercial sinks, a variety of shower accessories and bathroom accessories (sold under the brands Moen, Cleveland Faucet Group, Creative Specialties International and ShowHouse by Moen).

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