‘THE LADY MEANS BUSINESS’: MARKETING TO THE ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE CONSUMER IN THE 1950s AND 60s

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‘One of the more misleading representations of the past 20 years’, explained advertiser and newspaper columnist RR Walker, is ‘THE QUAIN'T notion that on one side there are producers and on the other side consumers – locked into fixed positions and foresworn to mortal combat’.2

Standard feminist accounts of post-war consumerism, which present the housewife as the victim of marketers’ deception and high-pressure selling techniques, have often been based on a casual observance of advertising. Unlike many studies of the role of the post-war housewife this article explores the construction of the female consumer as imagined by the commercial sector and argues that ‘she’ played a major role in shaping the development of marketing. During the 1950s and 1960s, the electrical retailer and the female consumer were joined together to form a marketing partnership, which ensured the success of long-term consumerism. Marketers of electrical appliances called on retailers to take an increasingly active role in enticing ‘stubborn’ and ‘reluctant’ housewives to purchase an ever-expanding array of goods. No longer could marketers solely rely on advertising to get the customer into the store. The electrical retailer became a marketing tool himself. As he had the most contact with the housewife he was seen by marketers as the best person to employ techniques to get her to buy. Marketing men viewed the housewife with respect and developed their methods to meet her demands. As they got to know her better they realised that consumers were rarely tricked and ‘the housewife isn’t an idiot’.3

One of the most striking aspects of post-war consumerism was the emergence of a new type of consumer. This new consumer was usually pictured as female and because of her ‘stubbornness’ - her reluctance to blindly embrace consumerism - she became a powerful force in shaping both the expectations and the practices of marketers. Earlier historical accounts of post-war consumerism, which Gail Reekie has called the ‘feminist concern’, sought to reveal the alienation suffered by women in the suburbs.4 Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle highlighted gender differentiations in the ‘suburban dream’ and argued that it was based on a particular organisation of personal relationships and a distinct pattern of

1 I would like to thank the editorial collective of the Melbourne Historical Journal for comments on earlier drafts of this article. I am particularly grateful to Mary Tomsic for her suggestions.
consumption. ‘A woman’s value as a housewife and mother’, Game and Pringle suggest, is ‘reflected in her success as a consumer, filling the cupboards and fulfilling herself’. Advertising played an important role in promoting the female ideal: ‘to buy [became] … the same thing as being sexually desirable’. They also sought to show that the attitude of advertising and marketing men towards women was contemptuous and patronising. Women were victims of consumer capitalism; ‘the suburban dream created at one fell swoop the Australian housewife’s nightmare’.

Reekie argued that the housewife is portrayed in advertisements as ‘domesticated, obtuse, duplicitous, predominantly incapable of knowing her own mind or her reasons for buying’. This common perception, evident elsewhere in the historical scholarship, holds that women were represented as difficult and were necessarily the victims of the advertisers’ deception.

In contrast to these critiques, Lesley Johnson, Karen Hutchings and Gail Reekie’s later work represent a move away from the ‘feminist concern’. Reekie acknowledges the problem with viewing women at this time as the ‘victim[s] of consumer capitalism’. In her analysis of the market research industry she holds that ‘[m]arketing men neither idolised nor scorned the female consumer … but earnestly tried to understand her’. With the exception of Reekie, historians have viewed the emergence of market research during the 1950s and 1960s in terms of its relationship with advertising rather than as a profession in its own right. This is due in part to the unavailability of data and the reliance on advertising journals rather than those dedicated to market research. Most significantly it highlights advertising’s status as the bogeyman of mass consumption.

The left/liberal social analysis of advertising has dominated the historical literature. Helen Irving argues that advertising ‘is assigned the virtual role of independent causal agent’, constructed as, ‘single-handedly

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9 For an example, see Kingston, ‘“She” Will Mean “A Complaining Customer”’.


manipulating minds, telling lies undetected, intervening in our social relations, making us do things we would never otherwise do’.12 To view marketing in this way ignores post-war advertisers’ definition of marketing; ‘one whereby practically all major management decisions are made in light of the needs and preferences of the consumer’.13 In the 1950s and 60s advertising was no longer used as an isolated technique. It was increasingly used as one method amongst many integrated into the marketing routine and adopted to fit consumer behaviour.

Critiques of post-war consumerism have often been based on a casual observation of advertising in the popular press. In contrast, this paper looks at marketing journals and trade papers, those dealing with consumer durables, which did not view the female consumer in a contemptuous manner.14 While there is no single view agreed to by all, standard feminist accounts fail to account for consumer agency and resistance, and the acceptance and recognition of this by marketers. Steven Lubar, examining the United States, argues that consumers should be viewed as active shapers rather than passive victims.15

The idea of the expert ‘knowing’ housewife changed markedly during the post-war years. It was acknowledged that consumers were in part the ‘experts’ about what was best for them and understanding this highlights the continuity of female consumers’ resistance to marketers’ influences. During the inter-war period modernist ideals presented the scientist as the expert in household matters. Writers such as Kerreen Reiger, Tony Dingle and Seamus O’Hanlon have shown that during the inter-war period in Australia the ‘expert’ infiltrated the family home, showing women how to make themselves better housewives.16 Housewives were autonomous agents in so far as they were able to follow the right advice. Dingle and O’Hanlon argue that women in the post-war period fiercely rejected the modernism pushed by such experts.17 While modernism

influenced house design to a certain extent, modernism as a philosophy was abandoned. As the female consumer became more articulate, confident and demanding, she herself became the expert, embracing her own negotiated version of domesticity and becoming both a problem and an opportunity for marketers.\textsuperscript{18} Evidence of this can be seen in appliance advertising. Pope told potential buyers of their push button wringer washer: ‘With POPE “Touch’n Wash” you’re still the expert … YOU control the amount of water … how hot the water … how long the wash cycle … how much rinsing’.\textsuperscript{19}

The main object of the marketers’ attention was clearly the female consumer – not because she was more easily persuaded or manipulated, but because she was assumed to be responsible for most of the purchases made by the family.\textsuperscript{20} It is in part because this new consumer was a thinking, educated and demanding agent that the marketers of household electrical appliances strove to understand her fully. It is clear from the activities of retailers, market researchers and advertisers that the female consumer was, in many cases, viewed and treated with respect. She was not treated as if she lacked decision-making agency. I believe that the commercial sector imagined they were forming a reciprocal relationship that would help ensure the success of long-term consumerism. The post-war consumer was a knowing consumer. Beverley Kingston claims that Australian retailers had ‘little or no communication with women’, but examination of marketing professionals’ literature suggests that a partnership developed during this period which consisted of consumers who knew what they wanted and marketers who strove to work out what it was and give it to them.\textsuperscript{21} As Noel Adams explained to the readers of Rydges, Australia’s largest nationally circulating business and financial magazine, consumers were rarely tricked: ‘We must face up to the fact that in our time there is emerging a more educated and more sophisticated consumer’.\textsuperscript{22} JWT Coleman, managing director of advertising agency J Walter Thompson Australia, spelled out the dependence on the consumer: ‘our employer [is] the customer’.\textsuperscript{23} Economic prosperity depended on manufacturing and manufacturing depended on continued consumption. It was in the best interests of the commercial sector to fully understand the ‘buying situation’.

To understand post-war consumerism, one needs to understand the relationship between the retailer and the consumer, and how retailers were motivated to sell and consumers to buy. This paper focuses generally on electrical appliances, the highest selling group of all

\textsuperscript{19} Woman’s Day, 20 September 1965, 31.
\textsuperscript{20} There is a general assumption by the majority of market researchers and others that women make the majority of purchase decisions. See for example: Roy Morgan Research Archives, The Patterson Report or Wooing the Australian Woman (Sydney: George Paterson Pty Ltd, 1972); Vance Packard, The Hidden Persuaders (London: Longmans, 1957). This assumption has been transferred to the historical scholarship, see for example: Susan Sheridan \textit{et al}, Who Was That Woman?: The Australian Women’s Weekly in the Post War Years (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2002).
\textsuperscript{21} Kingston, “She” Will Mean “A Complaining Customer”!, 200.
\textsuperscript{22} Adams, ‘Is Honesty in Advertising Declining?’, 960.
consumer durable products, and specifically on refrigerators and washing machines, the highest sellers in the group during the 1950s. Previous accounts have often focused on the advertising of consumer non-durables such as food, clothing or cosmetics. While nostalgic domestic images of the housewife with her accumulation of consumer durables are commonly reproduced symbols of postwar suburbia, with the exception of Whitwell and Dingle, they have been largely ignored in the historical scholarship.

Critiques of non-durable product advertising cannot be simply transferred to consumer durables. The ‘big ticket’ items were serious purchases requiring much research, thought, and discussion. There could be serious consequences if these purchases were not made wisely. An equally important difference between these two product types is the role of the salesman who was increasingly absent in the sale of food and cosmetics. Advertising of non-durable products needed to work harder and tended to be more aggressive because it was difficult to use other ‘hard-selling’ marketing methods. When selling of food moved towards ‘self-serve’, for example, advertising became the salesman.

The commercial sector believed appliance selling to be an entirely different beast: ‘Do you have to sell a woman on buying a can of beans’? asked O F Mingay. Do ‘you demonstrate them or give her a trade in? Of course not’. Hard selling – referring to the proactive marketing methods used in addition to advertising – was the appliance way. Despite ‘hard selling’, making appliance sales remained difficult because of consumer suspicions of sellers’ intentions, market saturation, and over-abundance of products.

An examination of Mingay’s Electrical Weekly enables an insight into the role of electrical retailers during the ‘post-war consumer boom’. It also provides access to opinions of commercial professionals towards their consumers without their consumers being present and it shows how it imagined them. The Electrical Weekly was the appliance industry’s national business newspaper from 1930. It gave advice and information on all areas of the electrical industry and provided information on how to improve business and how to make better sales, and kept businesses up to date on the state of the industry. Industry professionals, including managing directors of appliance firms, used the Electrical Weekly to offer advice and to air their concerns.

In the ten years to 1955 it was widely recognised by the electrical industry that demand had been difficult to satisfy. The marketing of consumer durables had, until this period, relied solely on advertising. All the industry had to do was advertise that products were again available. Marketing of a more aggressive kind was not needed. Rydges and the Electrical Weekly sought to convince retailers of the value and necessity

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26 Humphrey, Shelf Life; Beverley Kingston, Basket, Bag and Trolley.
28 Previously known as Radio Electrical Weekly and later as Mingay’s Weekly and Mingay’s Electrical Retailer.
of advertising. One of advertising’s most important roles was to educate the consumer of the need for electrical appliances. To make appliances seem necessary would ensure increased sales when the market approached saturation. Advertising played an important role in this transition, and its use was extended to spread new messages on trade-ins of old models. Advertising of the more aggressive and persuasive kind emerged when the market became more competitive and pent-up demand had been satisfied.

During the 1950s the market changed markedly from one favouring producers to one favouring consumers. The manufacturing sector in the post-war era had shown tremendous growth in Australia, D W Finley, the Techno-Commercial Manager of ICIANZ Ltd, stated in 1962. The development of the concept of ‘marketing’ in Australia, using the United States as a guide, attempted to adapt to the rapid changes. Electrolux managing director CA Black told the press in Melbourne that ‘a big build-up of orders in post-war years misled the industry … It was only last year that the market began to return to normal. Estimates of retailers’ orders this year have been pretty drastically cut’.

Whitwell and others have argued that the active creation of the consumer market dated back to the 1920s but was disrupted by depression and war. Pre-war advertising campaigns had already persuaded the public of the value of electrical shelf appliances and most homes before the war already had an iron, a jug or kettle and a toaster. Dingle has shown that the 1920s advertising campaigns for electricity, though not centrally organised, were probably the first mass campaigns undertaken in Australia. Mingay explained that the change in the consumer market stemmed from a changing consumer and one who had new expectations:

The girl and housewife of today is much more demanding than her mother or her grandmother. Products to make life easier are increasingly available and we have to advertise those products to get them into the homes; but we have to advertise them honestly.

Pent-up demand had been satisfied by 1954. C Crome, Merchandise Sales Director for Australian General Electric, stated ‘Today’s young people have grown up with shelf appliances … [which] are now regarded as necessities in every home’.

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30 Electrical Weekly, 18 February 1955, 42.
31 Whitwell, Making the Market, 15; see also: Patricia Grimshaw et.al, Creating A Nation (Ringwood: Penguin, 1996), 239.
33 Dingle, ‘Electrifying the Kitchen in Interwar Victoria’, 120.
34 Electrical Weekly, 24 May 1957, 8.
increase in the ten years to 1955, suggesting that sales were already based on replacement purchases. It also suggests that retailers were focusing on larger lump-sum profits gained by larger appliance sales. Refrigerators showed the greatest increase in production, advertising space and demand in the first half of the 1950s, and their manufacturers voiced the loudest concerns regarding market saturation.\(^{37}\) Australian Gallup Polls and privately commissioned market research reports by Roy Morgan Research consistently show that during the first half of the 1950s consumers consistently gave their highest priority to purchasing a refrigerator before all other consumer durables, including motor cars.\(^{38}\)

By 1956-57 competition in the refrigerator industry was beginning to tighten and some manufacturers were already being forced out.\(^{39}\) The refrigerator market was threatened with overproduction by 1958 and sales dropped alarmingly. The majority of refrigerators sold in Australia were manufactured locally. During the production boom of 1953-54, 274 000 refrigerators were produced in Australia. Only seven thousand units were imported, largely to keep up with demand. By 1957-58 production dropped to 193 680, with less than one thousand units imported.\(^{40}\) The numbers of imported washing machines were negligible. For the 1956-57 period 5 146 units were imported while 143 952 units were produced locally. Production in 1957-58 rose to 164 136 with only 5 674 units imported.\(^{41}\) Pent-up demand was quickly satisfied. As the numbers of houses not equipped with refrigerators dropped considerably, so did sales.

Though initially suspicious of credit, Australian consumers dedicated a large percentage of their income to repayments. In the 1956-57 financial year period over 1.3 million new hire purchase agreements were financed for household and personal goods. Six and a half per cent of Australian wage and salary incomes were committed to hire purchase, compared with 6.3 per cent in the United States and 3 per cent in Great Britain.\(^{42}\) Leonard Barkley, secretary of the Home Laundry Manufacturers’ Association of Australia, worried about the effects on industry of shorter terms of payment and higher deposits (measures introduced to cope with the declining amount of credit available), fearing purchases would decline even further.\(^{43}\) Hire purchase was an important factor in enhancing the ability of customers to purchase expensive consumer durables.\(^{44}\) Deputy chairman of Pope Industries, Harley C. Pope, warned the industry about careless government interference in the hire purchase system. Hire purchase he stated, ‘is a very real influence in creating high level

\(^{37}\) *Australian Tariff Reports*; ‘Advertising Column Inches’, *Electrical Weekly, Australian Gallup Polls*;  


\(^{39}\) Developments in Australian Manufacturing Industry (1956-57), 44.

\(^{40}\) Tariff Board Report on Refrigerating Appliances and Parts Thereof, 3 March 1958, 1463

\(^{41}\) Tariff item 172A1, 1957-58.


\(^{43}\) Barkley, ‘Big Business Potential’, 82.

production’. Both producers and consumers were equally reliant on the availability of credit.

Despite embracing hire purchase, consumers deemed that only certain products were appropriate to finance. In 1958, 74 per cent of Australians believed that it was acceptable to buy a refrigerator, 58 per cent furniture and 55 per cent a washing or sewing machine on credit. Nineteen per cent of refrigerators and 11 per cent of washing machines were being bought in that way. Products such as lawn mowers, dishwashers and even televisions were considered inappropriate and interviewees disapproved of financing them. Only 4 per cent of all people surveyed were buying carpet on credit in 1958. The acknowledgment by marketers of consumer resistance or reluctance to purchase carpet on credit was evident in a striking advertisement for Melbourne retailer Floor Coverings (Figure 1). A young woman attempts to persuade potential buyers: ‘Shhhh … only you and your bank book know’. Buying carpet, along with electrical appliances, was gendered female. Women were recognised in marketing as holding the purse strings.

But the availability of hire purchase finance did not necessarily mean guaranteed sales. The introduction of television into Australia in 1956 raised further concerns for the manufacturers of household electrical appliances. Since its arrival coincided with the declining availability of credit, retailers needed to use better and more integrated marketing techniques. The marketer and the retailer were in a joint partnership for profit and the industry relied more on improved merchandising than bigger profit margins. With television prices falling and production and demand increasing, television became a competitor for hire purchase finance. For refrigerators the main competition lay in the replacement market, which caused major concerns because this was its main area of growth. But the replacement market was unstable as purchases of this type were the most easily postponable. The intense competition for credit finance continued for washing machines as television was introduced to all Australian states.

The industry’s fears were realised with the credit squeeze following the 1961 recession. The number of hire purchase agreements for household goods subsequently declined from 1 658 002 new agreements in 1959-60 to 815 300 new agreements in 1968-69. The HLMAA’s Leonard Barkley’s solution to the problem was a familiar one – ‘a closer tie-in with retailers and a sustained program of publicity on a national level’. National highly organised marketing campaigns emerged to locate all potential customers.

Women made the majority of purchasing decisions about household appliances; they recognised the need for a particular appliance and decided which retailer and brand offered them the best deal. Though

46 Australian Gallup Polls, 1352, 1958.
48 *Australian House and Garden*, (December 1960), 87.
49 Barkley, ‘Big Business Potential’, 82.
50 *Electrical Weekly*, 18 July 1958, 42.
husbands had to agree to sign the hire purchase agreement business believed it was women who were their main obstacle. The main area of negotiation, from the point of view of business, can be seen as one not between husband and wife, but rather between housewife and salesman. If the husband had to be persuaded to sign the agreement it was then up to the wife, rather than the salesman, to do so. It is for these reasons women were the focus of electrical appliance marketing.

‘Who decides?’ the Australian Sales Research Bureau (ASRB) asked in its 1961 study into ‘the buying habits of Australian Men and Women’. When it came to ‘purchasing and brand decisions and who does the actual buying’ ASRB concluded ‘men play a more important role to-day in the purchasing of many products than has been generally realized’. The survey included twenty products, half of which were household electrical appliances, usually regarded as ‘women’s products’. Hutchings claims that ‘no consumer survey or research done in Australia … [during the 1950s and 1960s] show that men held an important role as consumers’ and Kingston claims that women did all the shopping.

The ‘Who decides?’ study was the first of its type undertaken in Australia. It began with the premise that men and women could ‘differ about the importance of their respective roles in buying various products’ to determine which partner (husband or wife) exercised the dominant role. It was found that men’s role in the ‘buying decisions’ had been grossly underestimated. Many assumptions however were confirmed by the survey. Men, for example, made the majority of decisions for motor mowers and electric shavers – items considered men’s products. They also made the majority of decisions for bottled wines and spirits, radios, radiograms, record players and television sets. Men rarely bought their own shirts or purchased vacuum cleaners. When it came to shopping, women made the majority of purchases of reading lamps, men’s shirts, vacuum cleaners and electric stoves. Husbands and wives rarely did the shopping together – never in more than 16 per cent of cases – for any of the twenty products featured in the survey; ladies wrist watches ranked the highest. Electric shavers were never a joint decision.

Although men were slightly more likely to do the actual purchasing of a washing machine it was predominantly their wives who decided to buy and which brand. In 70 per cent of cases the purchaser knew which washing machine they were going to buy prior to purchasing; in 30 per cent they did not. But in 34 per cent of cases husbands decided alone that a washing machine was needed, though in only 25 per cent of cases did they choose the brand. Men it seems had more say in decisions about washing machines than cooking stoves (only in 11 per cent of cases for both products were decisions made jointly with their wives). It was the person who would be using the product that was most likely to make the

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54 Who Decides?, 39.
55 Ibid., 17.
56 These figures are even more pronounced for cooking stoves.
decision to purchase. But when it came to men’s shirts it was perhaps the person who was going to do the washing!

While there was a steady stream of new or improved products throughout the post-war period, replacement demand was the most important factor for good business prospects. Washers, the 1956 Department of Trade Survey on the Manufacturing Industry found, needed greater advertising and new product attractions to maintain demand. The presence of advertising, like the mere availability of credit, did not lead to a guaranteed increase in sales. Refrigerator advertising increased by 58 per cent between 1954 and 1958 and washing machine advertising increased 138 per cent during the same period. While refrigerator production was approaching saturation levels in 1954 – 75 per cent of all homes had one – only 50 per cent of homes had a washing machine. The 2 500 000 homes without washers were viewed as a large potential market. Despite the large increases in advertising, production did not increase. Refrigerator production fell from 280 632 units in 1954 to 193 680 in 1958. Washing machines production fell to 166 308 units in 1954 and 164 136 in 1958. Though the drop is only 1.3 per cent the 138 per cent increase in advertising had little impact in increasing demand. O F Mingay warned ‘I would submit that our biggest buyers – the housewives – are becoming increasingly suspicious of advertisements’.

An increasing emphasis on the ‘art of selling’ emerged amongst a climate of economic uncertainty. Advertising was losing its guaranteed influence. The consumer could not be easily manipulated, and to a certain extent resisted mass advertising campaigns and other high-pressure selling techniques. Integrated marketing techniques were needed. Market research determined when, why, and where products were required. Advertising told of a product’s availability, benefits and why one needed it. Promotion displayed it, the salesman demonstrated it and generally reinforced the advertiser’s message.

The development of new methods and the creation of the concept and profession of marketing was influenced by the fact that consumers – particularly women – resisted such techniques. But ‘MOST NEW PRODUCTS DON’T MAKE IT’ warned Mingay using the United States as a guide. The ‘buying public’ turned down 81 per cent of new goods because of a ‘lack of well-thought-out marketing programs’. Retailers were called on to do ‘their bit’. Mass promotional campaigns such as

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57 Developments in Australian Manufacturing Industry (1958-59), 47; Developments in Australian Manufacturing Industry (1957-58), 42.
59 Refrigerator advertising increased from 153 607 column inches in 1954 to 243 936 column inches in 1958; while washing machine advertising increased from 69,390 column inches in 1954 to 164,732 column inches in 1958. ‘Advertising Column Inches’, Electrical Weekly.
64 O. F. Mingay, Electrical Weekly, 26 November 1954, 6.
Hoover’s ‘Wishing Well Contest’ (see figures 6 and 7) were used to bring retailers and consumers together to increase sales.\textsuperscript{65}

The imagined relationship between the female consumer and the salesman was most pronounced in trade advertisements [see for example Figure 2, a Semak Vitamizer advertisement]. One of the most striking examples of this type of relationship came from Kelvinator. Figure 3, an advertisement that ran in the \textit{Electrical Weekly}, shows a smartly dressed woman pointing to a Kelvinator refrigerator, while the retailer with his hand on his chin, looks at the product she has chosen.\textsuperscript{66}

The statement ‘The lady means business’ appears beneath the photograph. The dual meaning of this statement is explicit: ‘business’ for the retailer means that he is ‘about to come into money’; for the customers – they mean business – ‘No shopping around for them: they know what they wanted … So they literally insisted, on Kelvinator’. This is a clear example of marketing persuasion to convince the retailer to stock Kelvinator because for the discerning customer ‘only a Kelvinator will do’. The female consumer is in control of the buying situation and knows what she wants (though the subtext here is perhaps retailer manipulation by manufacturers). To ‘come into money’ the retailer had to give the consumer what she wanted, otherwise the sale would be lost. Judith Williamson has argued that femininity geared to an observing man is signified by ‘lips parted invitingly’.\textsuperscript{67} However, in Figures 2, 3 and 5, with the salesman present, this can be read as evidence of a dialogue taking place, further emphasising the necessary (monetary) connection between the consumer and salesman. After all, in trade advertisements it is not the woman but the appliance and the sale that are the objects of desire. The salesman had to seduce the consumer to buy but the relationship is not an unequal one. The female consumer held his business success in her hands.

An advertisement for the Hoover Constellation vacuum cleaner, figure 4, which appeared in 1959, is a standard example of consumer durable advertising in the popular press. Figure 5, on the other hand, is a strikingly different \textit{Electrical Weekly} advertisement for the same product. It presents a ‘picture of a sale being made’ between the retailer and female consumer and, stresses the importance of a demonstration to sell the product. With demonstrations, advertising, a television show and store displays ‘every housewife is a prospect!’\textsuperscript{68} The product had to prove its worth to the customer by demonstrating it lived up to expectations.

Hoover ran a series of sales conventions in every state to launch their ‘Constellation’ vacuum cleaner. A dramatised screen and tape-recorded presentation, designed to tell the ‘Constellation’ story, projected cartoons of ‘typical’ housewives, husbands and retailers playing ‘typical’ questions simultaneously. Five ‘housewife’ types were introduced – an over-worked mother, a smart young modern wife, an older housewife with a large home and no servants, a wife who wanted to ‘keep up with

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Electrical Weekly}, 20 March 1959, 97.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Electrical Weekly}, 31 August 1956, 19.
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Electrical Weekly}, 12 June 1959, 25.
the Joneses’ and a typical working housewife – to outline the ‘requirements of a modern cleaner’ and to fit every major market segment. The screen also displayed the cartoons of ‘typical’ husbands asking ‘typical’ questions: ‘How long will it last?’; ‘Will it interfere with TV?’ Such questions were used to lead into technical talk, rather than as presenting the husband as a potential customer. Marketing speak directed at retailer ‘types’ followed: ‘How will it sell?’ ‘What will the stock position be?’ Rather than just trying to predict what they would do, ‘typing’ enabled the commercial sector to know the consumer better and determined what they wanted. Reekie shows that industry was using types in its characterisation of consumers during the 1920s and 1930s. Humphrey argues that there was a ‘striking continuity between pre and post-war “consumer typologies”’. Where he has drawn his conclusion from is not evident. In the earlier period the commercial sector was less concerned with analysis and market prediction and focused on particular personality types – quick-tempered, quiet, doubting, etcetera. By the mid-1950s there was a significant shift away from the mental characteristics of consumers to a focus on their lifestyles. Women were primarily conceived of as housewives by the commercial sector, but it was also acknowledged that women had many other roles that influenced their purchasing decisions.

Window displays, merchandising and competitions were all used to engage the consumer and to persuade retailers to take part in campaigns. Hoover ran a ‘Wishing Well Contest’ to bring prospects into retail stores, with £1000 as first prize.

The competition viewed every entrant as a potential washing machine buyer. Every person who wanted to make a wish was asked to complete the sentence ‘I wish I had a Hoover because …’. Retailers were encouraged to sell Hoover every time a woman dropped her wish into the well. Hoover supplied the striking promotional display material to retailers at no cost and the company paid retailers the full retail price for appliances won by customers.

[Figures 6 and 7] In 1955, housewives were asked to take part in a user test by using a Hoover washing machine in their own homes for one week. The survey was designed to find out why ‘some women still prefer to use coppers and other washing methods’ despite the ‘variety of time and labour saving washing machines on the market’. The 1960 Housewife’s Day survey found, to its surprise, that women were more likely to wash in a hand basin than in a machine.

69 “Hoover Constellation” Convention’, Electrical Weekly, 5 October 1956, 2, 47.
71 Humphrey, Shelf Life, 91.
72 This idea has been taken up by Kingston in her examination of the ‘complaining customer’, Kingston, “‘She’ Will Mean “A Complaining Customer”’.
73 Australian Sales Research Bureau, The Housewife’s Day (A Study with Advertising, Marketing, Economic and Sociological Implications), prepared for United Service Publicity Pty Ltd. (Melbourne, 1960).
74 Australian Women’s Weekly, 9 March 1955, 22.
Consumers continued to resist marketers’ claims despite high-pressure campaigns and research into consumer behaviour.77 ‘National Washer Month’ and ‘Living Better ... Electrically’ were two mass national campaigns designed to increase consumption. Retailers were provided with promotional kits to decorate their stores with merchandise that advertised their participation in the campaign. ‘National Washer Month’, first promoted in April 1957, backed by the Home Laundry Manufacturers Association of Australia, sought to curtail the decline in washer production in the latter half of 1956. The Association called for retailer support: ‘if manufacturers and retailers alike are to capitalise fully on the growth elements that lie ahead, then they must work together through creative marketing programs, to increase the demand for goods and services’.78 ‘Every Woman Deserves a Washing Machine’ – the HLMAA’s promotional slogan – featured prominently in advertising in both the popular and trade press. Harold Lightburn, President of the HLMAA and Managing Director of the Lightburn Company, introduced a special supplement in the Electrical Weekly: ‘You should actively take part in National Washing Machine Month Sales Promotion because you, of all people, believe that EVERY WOMAN DESERVES A WASHING MACHINE’.79

The key figure in the campaign was clearly the electrical retailer and its success was dependent as much on their compliance as that of the consumer.80 By 1959 the message of the National Washing Machine Month Campaign was explicit. ‘Every Woman Deserves a Washing Machine, but nobody HAS to buy one ... nobody has to buy one from YOU. It’s all up to you to sell them’.81 The warning sent was clear: campaigns could only work with active input from the electrical retailer. If he wanted to be successful he had no choice but to participate.82

Wollongong retailers Lindsay & Bruce proved the success of the 1958 National Washing Machine Month by selling 300 machines. Just as Hoover had stressed the value of demonstrations to sell its Constellation vacuum cleaner [Figure 5], Lindsay & Bruce also encouraged ‘demos’ in the home ‘before the deal is considered closed’. They also offered an incentive scheme to salesmen to participate and awarded bonus points to staff members to keep ‘them on their toes’ in an effort to handle the resisting customer.83 Although Kingston claims that home demonstrations ‘became popular as a way of involving the husband’ evidence suggests

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79 ibid., 22.
80 Electrical Weekly, 8 March 1957, 22. See also Harold Lightburn, Electrical Weekly, 8 March 1957, 40.
81 Electrical Weekly, Supplement One, 10 April 1959.
82 ibid., Supplement Four.
83 ‘Wollongong Store with Clue to Washer Sales’, Electrical Weekly, 10 April 1959, Supplement 16.
that men were not the target.\textsuperscript{84} ‘Nothing Sells a Washing Machine like a home demonstration’ declared Revesby NSW retailer Jack Mayo:

Somehow or other, shop demonstrations don’t quite take the place of those staged with a customer’s own wash in her own laundry. Some women feel that the shop display was ‘stage managed’; that the clothes weren’t really soiled, and so on. At home they are convinced!\textsuperscript{85}

The idea of the ‘home demo’ was not new - vacuum cleaners had long been sold in this way. Rather the change here is that business recognised the demand by women that the sale be negotiated on their terms. Consumers were demanding that appliances lived up to their expectations.

Jingle contests were employed to help publicise the National Washer Month and to get women into the promotional campaign and \textit{into the sale}. Lever Brothers, makers of Rinso washing powder, in conjunction with washer manufacturers, conducted the ‘RINSO “WASHER-A-DAY” JINGLE CONTEST’. The contests invited entrants to complete the last line of the following jingle:

\begin{quote}
It’s National Washing Machine Month – hey!
Here’s what all leading makers say
Use only Rinso, Rinso in your machine
To get a wash that’s sparkling clean
Those Rinso suds will work for you
\end{quote}

To make sure no customer would hold off making a purchase in anticipation of winning, the price of any washer was refunded in full. Amongst Queensland retailers, Hoover claimed that the tie-up increased sales by fifty per cent for washer month. Allan Brandt, 4BH Brisbane radio personality, produced tape recorded promotional advertisements of the jingle contest. The recordings, incorporating the punch-line ‘Make it a Hoover Washer’, were played in over forty Brisbane stores and drew big crowds. Hoover shows, ‘featuring ironing derbies, displays, demonstrations, competitions and so on’, were held twice daily in Valley stores, McWhirters and Walton-Sears. A show at the Wynnum Star picture theatre, which consisted of ‘three hours of vaudeville and demonstrations’, attracted 1,600 people.\textsuperscript{87}

October 1958 saw the first ‘LIVE BETTER ... Electrically Month’ (LBE), a centrally organised campaign backed by the Electrical and Radio Development Association which solicited the support of trade

\textsuperscript{84} Kingston, ““She” Will Mean “A Complaining Customer””, 201.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Electrical Weekly}, 8 March 1957, 13.
\textsuperscript{87} ‘Hoover-Rinso Tie-up Increases Sales 50% for May’, \textit{Electrical Weekly}, 12 September 1958, LBE 38.
associations, supply authorities, manufacturers and wholesalers. The campaign was promoted extensively in the *Australian Women's Weekly* and the *Electrical Weekly*. This was ‘a mass market development program’ which sought to increase standards of living; double the residential consumption of electricity; increase the number of power points in the home; and increase and accelerate the residential market for electrical products. The LBE theme, which had first been conceived in the US, was used in Australia into the 1970s and the slogan ‘cooking better electrically’ until the 1980s. Colin Mingay, the *Electrical Weekly*’s deputy editor, persuasively asked readers, ‘Manufacturers, wholesalers and supply authorities are already behind it. Will you, too, Mr Retailer, be in it?’ Retailers could purchase a LBE kit, which included brightly coloured merchandising to decorate their store. They were invited to contact other retailers to solicit their support, publicise their store as an LBE store in radio, press and screen advertising, and plan an LBE contest among staff. They were also provided with entry forms for the jingle contest; by getting customers to enter they had potential leads to follow up when the campaign was over. Professionals, directors of companies and experts in the industry consistently pushed the following up on orders. This would become an even more important factor when ‘servicemen’ too were called upon to make extra sales.

Coinciding with trade promotion of the LBE Campaign, the October 15 issue of the *Australian Women’s Weekly* included a ‘Live Better Electrically’ supplement, which was ‘designed to help the housewife plan all her electrical needs’. The 1958 ‘Living Better … Electrically’ campaign was one of the largest campaigns run by the magazine. The highly organised nature of this type of campaign is evidence of a changing and competitive market and a resisting consumer. The campaign included a jingle competition; entry forms were available in the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, but could only be deposited at participating retail stores. The possibility of winning £2000 worth of electrical appliances was used as bait to get people into stores.

In addition, retailers were offered an extra incentive to run the jingle contest - a Gold Coast holiday for two - if their store had supplied the entry form to the winning customer. The winning entry for the 1958 Live Better Electrically competition came from Mr and Mrs EV Harwood who won the £2000 worth of electrical appliances for their jingle:

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Servants once were for the rich
Now there’s one at every switch
It’s as easy as can be
Just Live Better … Electrically
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90. ibid., LBE Supplement Two.
As it turned out, the winning entry did not carry the retailer’s stamp. The *Electrical Weekly* was none too impressed by the ‘negligent retailers’ who failed to stamp the accompanying appliance checklist. However, the *Weekly* stated, ‘Jingle contestants, on the other hand, meticulously followed the instructions to complete the appliance checklist’. The checklist provided retailers with important information on which products customers did not *yet* own. Consumers were participating as required but, to the annoyance of the *Weekly*, it was retailers who could not be relied upon.

By examining the extent to which the electrical retail salesman was prepared to go to get the consumer into the store and into the sale, we can add a further dimension to the definition of post-war consumerism. The development of integrated marketing methods suggests that the commercial sector did not view the female consumer as one who was easily manipulated. Rather, the new consumer was one who was capable of knowing her own mind. Consumers continued to resist the ‘hard sell’ and were not easily convinced. Advertising increased but sales did not necessarily follow. While overall demand was steady and consumers generally embraced consumption, consumers held the upper hand and negotiated their own form of consumerism. With each new product marketers were faced with the same problems and sought to find ‘better’ ways to ‘sell’ them to resisting consumers. Marketing campaigns were designed to persuade the female consumer to enter the ‘buying situation.’ To meet her increasing demands made good business sense. The ‘Lady’ certainly meant business – potentially very big business. Convincing the housewife to ‘live better electrically’, by training the retailer to ‘sell better electrically’, enabled consumer demand to be maintained and made consumerism’s future more secure. Put simply, long-term consumerism depended on a long-term consumer; a consumer who is best understood as an active shaper and often demanding buyer of goods which we now regard as essentials in every home, defining the ‘good life’ that the people were encouraged to purchase.

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Figure 1 Floor Coverings, Pty. Ltd., *Australian House and Garden*, (December 1960), 87

Figure 2 Semak Vitamizer, *Electrical Weekly*, (July 16, 1954), 15
Figure 3 Kelvinator – The lady means business, *Electrical Weekly*, (August 31, 1956), 19
Figure 4 Hoover Constellation, *Australian Home Journal*, (September 1959), 4

Figure 5 Hoover Constellation, *Electrical Weekly*, (June 12, 1959), 25
Figure 6 Hoover Wishing Well, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, (March 9, 1955), 22

Figure 7 Hoover Wishing Well, *Electrical Weekly*, (March 18, 1955), 13