



Kelley Styring Purse innovations: Beverage holster.

Marketers could clean up by clearing up women's purses

by [Jessica Bylander](#)

May 03, 2007

Ladies, there's a gold mine lurking in that bulging bag hanging from your shoulder.

No, it's not the balance of your debit card, or the outstanding debt on your Visa. According to consumer strategist Kelley Styring, women's purses are one of the biggest untapped marketing tools. Once companies catch on, it could change the way women rifle through those leather labyrinths.

"It's an incredibly disorganized pile of junk," Styring explained. "It is absolutely ubiquitous in society, critical to everyday life, and yet it fails [women] everyday."

Styring founded consumer strategy consulting firm InsightFarm Inc. on a 40-acre farm in Newberg, Ore. where her husband makes Pinot Noir. Styring consults with blue chip companies in the food, beverage, apparel and medical industries.

Last August, Styring launched a study into a dark, uncharted territory: the handbag. From August to September, she interviewed 100 women, ages 18 to 64, from shopping malls in Portland and Dallas. Styring unveiled her findings this April in Chicago, at "M2W—The Marketing-to-Women Conference."

As she interviewed women and catalogued the contents of their purses, Styring found items she'd expected, others she didn't, and some she'd probably rather forget. Her intriguing inventory of 6,670 items included bachelorette party favors, one pile of \$16.38 in loose change and a friend's wallet.

But from a marketing standpoint, Styring simply found a billion-dollar opportunity.

Like toolboxes, purses hold about 30 different categories of "stuff" ranging from finance to food. Yet this "key organizational tool" is a mess, Styring found.

Expensive cosmetics that shimmer like jewels in store displays are smudged and smooshed inside a messy bag. Receipts are reduced to tissue paper, lozenges wriggle out of their packaging, and cell phones vanish in some mysterious vortex.

“Lots of things in the purse don’t start out as garbage, but turn into garbage over time,” Styring observed.

Marketers know that women are their bread and butter. Women make an estimated 70 percent of retail purchases, and influence most other major purchases in the household.

With 88 million adult women carrying a purse, savvy brands will find their way inside to meet an unmet need. Styring found that 95 percent of American women aged 18-64 carry a purse every day, and that most carry two or three purses on a regular basis. Companies should not overlook the over-50 market, she said.

“The purses carried by young, single women and the over 50s are very similar,” she noted. “Once they start to shed responsibility for the family, they start to carry these small, fashionable bags.”

In her research, Styring isn’t suggesting that companies make tiny, purse-sized versions of every product.

“How could those companies help women better organize their life?” she wonders. “What about your product uniquely delivers on the needs of women?”

To help people put the study to use, Styring came up with 20 business ideas that bring the data to life. She dreamed up a few new products for the modern purse, including Band-Aids on a roll, a receipt compactor, collapsible beverage holster and a handy purse sanitizer.

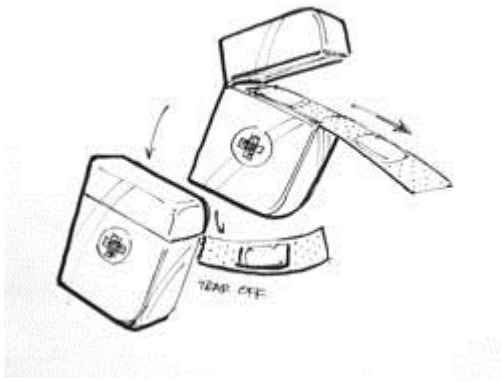
Any company that creates innovative and helpful products—anything from health care items to packets of Kleenex, Styring said—could revolutionize a woman’s rocky relationship with her purse.

In Chicago, Styring got an eager response from the women’s marketing conference.

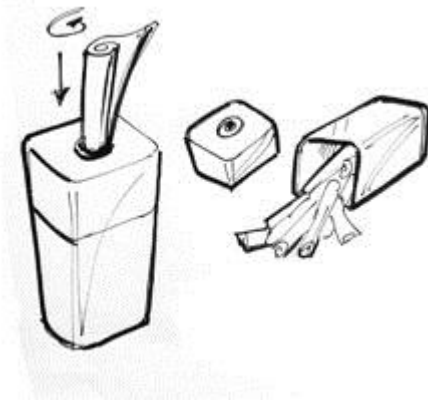
“It’s entertaining to consider the findings of this study, but when you see the magnitude of the business opportunities, jaws begin to drop,” she said.

In the upcoming weeks, Styring plans to finish the manuscript for a book based on the study, due out by the middle of July. The book will be available online through its publisher Author House, Barnes and Nobles, Amazon and directly from the Web site www.inyourpurse.com.

For more information about “In Your Purse: Archeology of the American Handbag,” email kelley.styring@insightfarm.com. Or visit <http://www.inyourpurse.com/>.



Kelley Styring Purse innovations: Band-Aids on a roll.



Kelley Styring Purse innovations: Receipts dispenser.

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