

# Will Apple Watch bridge the gender divide?

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Forget the Mickey Mouse face, the communication tricks and the steadfast timepiece, which ticks within mere milliseconds of the global standard.

Whether the new Apple Watch emerges from the smartwatch pack, analysts say, may hinge on its appeal to the 50 percent of the population who have been slower to embrace the gadgets: women.

Apple won't comment on its marketing strategy, but its promotional ads and events so far seem to target the elusive female tech market. Women,

after all, make most of the purchasing decisions and account for a huge market when it comes to jewelry and consumer goods.

Whether living out boyhood fantasies of emulating Dick Tracy or angling to expand their collections of tech toys, men have been the chief buyers of early smartwatches, driving 61 percent of sales, according to a survey of U.S. consumers conducted last year by Kantar Worldpanel ComTech, a consumer research firm. Men tend to adopt new types of tech devices sooner than women, and the heft and industrial design of early smartwatches have limited their appeal, said Carolina Milanesi, chief of research and head of U.S. business at Kantar.

But some think that Apple's timepiece, which heads to stores this month, may bridge the gender divide. The Apple Watch's sleek design, dual sizing, and potential for customization with various colors and materials will appeal to fashion-minded shoppers - many of them female - who scoff at the thought of wearing a gadget that does not reflect their personal style, Milanesi said.

The Apple Watch, which starts at \$349 and commands up to \$17,000 for luxury gold models, comes in two sizes and three collections, with an array of interchangeable bands.

"(Apple is) doing a lot things that, in my view, are needed in the market," she said. "The focus on design definitely helps open up a wider market than just the tech-savvy."

Women seem to be top of mind for Apple as it makes its pitch for the watch, its first brand-new device since the iPad. Model and entrepreneur Christy Turlington Burns strode across the stage at an event centering on the product in March, the first woman to be featured at an Apple showcase in years. To highlight the watch's fitness components, the company detailed her experiences running a half-marathon with the

gadget strapped to her wrist.

The Cupertino tech titan also has courted fashionistas in the run-up to the watch's release next month, staking out a place for the watch in the glossy pages of *Vogue* with a 12-page advertising spread.

The Apple Store will be another valuable tool as Apple tries to attract a diverse audience for the watch. Although the company has not yet revealed how it will display the gadget in stores, the retail experience will be much more akin to browsing a department store than shopping at outlets such as Best Buy, where other smartwatches have been peddled, Milanesi said. With the right ambience, the Apple Watch could be an impulse buy for both sexes: men, who succumb to tech wizardry, and women, who sometimes enjoy shopping for shopping's sake.

"It's just us that can go shopping without anything to buy," Milanesi said.

But women who buy the watch will be motivated by much more than aesthetics, said technology strategist Ellen Petry Leanse.

"Women are smart shoppers," she said. "They are not sucked in by fashion."

Apple is not the first smartwatch maker to set its sights on female shoppers. Other manufacturers have feminized their designs with pink hues and crystal accents, Milanesi noted. But Apple's emphasis on personalization, which lets the customer have the final say on design, is a smarter approach, she said.

"As a woman, I don't just wear pink, and I don't just wear jewelry covered in crystals and whatnot," she said. "I want to be able to choose the materials."

To sell the watch, Apple has touted its health and fitness tracking. That may resonate with many female customers, who have adopted fitness bands made by companies such as Fitbit faster than men, said Angela McIntyre, an analyst for Gartner.

"The activity tracker fits in without even looking like a wearable device," she said.

Despite Apple's attention to style, branding expert Allen Adamson thinks the gadget's bulky size - smaller than other smartwatches, but still large for many [women](#)'s wrists - will attract a mostly male following.

"If it didn't skew 70-30, I'd be surprised," said Adamson, who is chairman of North America for Landor Associates, a branding firm.

Based on Olivia Rawlins' reaction, Apple may have a tough sell. For starters, the 18-year-old Silicon Valley resident says she hasn't worn a watch in ages - she uses her cellphone to keep track of the time. Plus, she finds the early designs she's seen from Apple to be too "masculine."

"I wouldn't say they need his and hers" versions of the watch, said Rawlins, who works at Staples. "But it just seems like there's a lot of guy stuff on it."

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