



Salespeople Should Tune In To TV Buyer Traits, New Research Shows

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DURHAM, N.H. - As the official end of the age of analog television nears, many Americans will be shopping for new digital televisions this year. New research from the University of New Hampshire shows that salespeople would be wise to tune in to certain cognitive skills of shoppers so that they don't turn them off.

"Observable Cognitive Function in the Purchasing Process of TVs, High-end Electronics" was conducted by students in adjunct professor Chuck Martin's class at the UNH Whittemore School of Business and Economics.

"The research is particularly timely since next February television stations nationwide will stop transmitting analog television signals and begin broadcasting exclusively in a digital format. Millions of households risk losing reception unless they replace older analog television sets with newer digital television sets," Martin said. "As a result, in the next year there is potential for a surge in digital television sales."

The researchers sought to determine if their research about shopper behavior could benefit sellers of digital televisions and other high-end (more than \$500) electronics. They built upon previous research conducted by Martin's class in fall 2007 that assessed shoppers based on two cognitive skills often considered important executive skills: flexibility and self-restraint.

Flexible people are able to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information, or mistakes. They are highly adaptable to changing conditions. People with high levels of self-restraint have the natural ability to think before they act. They can resist the urge to say or do something to allow time to evaluate the situation and how a behavior might affect it.

Through observation, the students identified shoppers who exhibited these skills. They concluded that salespeople could improve their ability to help customers and increase sales by identifying shoppers with these skills.

Forty-one students divided into six teams visited Portsmouth-area retail stores that sold television sets and other high-end electronics, including Circuit City, Target, Sears, Best Buy, Wal-Mart, and Tweeter. The students watched consumers throughout the purchasing process, from the time they entered the store to when a purchase was or was not made. The research consisted of observations of shopping behavior, followed by a short survey designed to validate the observed behavior after they left the store. In 97 percent of the cases, the

observed behavior was validated by the survey results.

The students determined that highly self-restrained shoppers exhibit distinct body language and know exactly what they want to purchase. These consumers walk at a face pace and are open to suggestions from sales associates. However, they usually will not change their minds about what they want to purchase. These consumers do not respond well to sales or gimmicks, and are usually not worth pursuing for long periods of time.

On the other hand, shoppers exhibiting low self-restraint are ideal for marketers to target because they are easily persuaded, make quick decisions and buy on impulse. These shoppers can be spotted picking up additional items in the check-out lane, gravitating toward sale areas, and being easily sidetracked by other not-so-high-end electronics. Unsure of their purchases, they tend to browse.

Shoppers who are highly flexible are highly interactive with sales staff. They are open to suggestions, ask a lot of questions of the sales staff and are the most likely to take advice from salespeople. They are not loyal to one particular brand and will consider a variety of alternatives if the item they intended to purchase is out of stock.

For example, the students observed a woman enter the entertainment section of Sears and browse the TVs. She quickly found a sales associate and explained that she was looking for a 40-inch Toshiba Super Narrow LCD. When told the television was out of stock, the woman decided to purchase a different television, which the sales associate recommended.

Low-flexibility shoppers, on the other hand, are brand loyal and not interested in purchasing any product other than the one they want. If they product is unavailable, they will leave without making a purchase. Possibly the most difficult of customers, they are not interested in listening to salespeople, period, and reject their help. When approached by sales staff, they often say they are "just looking" or "just browsing."

