

Watch Your Elbows When Shopping This Holiday Season



The Legend of Shopping

I went out for early morning Black Friday shopping once – only once. But I don't regret it. I get to say that I participated, I see what all the fuss is about, and I have the tales I still tell to prove it. I did the whole thing – kids out hours before the sun was up, dropping off folks to get in line, driving in circles to find a parking spot, impossible sale prices, cranky folks driving shopping carts like a reaper was chasing them and checkout lines that rival a new cell phone release. At the end of a marathon day, I had saved untold money, a trunk full of presents, a scratched off a whole list of gifts, two blisters, a cracked elbow bone, and teenagers who were afraid to lose me in a store for the first time in their lives.

So, this is part of the reason we seem to be migrating to the web for our holiday shopping. But there are reasons we should not shop online as we gift. And other reasons why we should. Yes, I tend to argue with myself. But really, what is the elbow equivalent and other retail shopping clichés for the online buyer?

Online there is far less 'grabbing'. You know what I mean – grab that last item on the shelf before someone else grabs it. In a store, the risk could be that you really did not want that 'last chance' item but you took it anyway because it was your *last chance!* Websites are moving toward this same approach with the ever-appealing 'Only 4 Left!' comments attached to the product you are viewing. Does that move you as much as the wide but empty space on the retail shelf? Are you reflex buying online as much as you do in the store?

Speaking of reflex, what is the online version of endcaps and checkout impulse shelves? Are you really looking at that list of suggested items or the you-might-also-like-these lists? Are they on target for you or are they a repeat of something you already put in your cart? Do they inspire you to add to your cart or replace the item in your cart with the suggested one? Are you finding resistance to impulse buys easier with your online cart than with your retail cart? How can e-Tailers get you more relevant offerings for your impulse buys? How can that artificial intelligence algorithm generate 'similar' and 'relevant' without showing you 'identical in blue'? Or can it at least show you these inspiring products before checkout is finished rather than after?

I absolutely adore the emails from my ecommerce favorites who notice I bought X and now I should by this...and show me the same item I bought the first time. I really feel like this is the wrong list tied to the wrong email message – a simple coordination problem. If I successfully purchased a nice frame for my new Master's diploma in August, I really don't want the 7th and 8th one you keep offering me here in December. This is not a consumable and I am not likely to need a large diploma frame every 3 weeks. I'm just sayin'...

Great things come from these ecommerce merchants, however. I've not been stuck in a long checkout line with one of them yet. Even for event tickets, I'm the slow one (usually picking a seat) and the guy behind me in line isn't snorting that I'm keeping everyone waiting. No driving in circles looking for a parking place for me! Deliver to my front door? Yes, please. And finally – jammies...I can shop in my jammies (midnight big box shoppers have more guts than I do).

But there are pitfalls. I can't touch it. All of my tactile shopping skills are decaying. My fingertips are feeling left out and sometimes sorely disappointed when the product arrives and it doesn't feel like I thought it would. There are also doorstep thieves to worry about and returns to fret over. And as poor shoppers, we always want the immediacy of retail with the convenience of ecommerce, so we pout over delivery timing and the extra costs if we want it now (even an annual membership fee is an extra cost). Delivery damage is a periodic disappointment that can be impactful enough to send you scurrying back to the store, for a time at least.

So, what do we, as consumers, really want? Besides everything? We want easy returns to a local store but do not want to shop at that local store to keep it open. We want to touch and feel the items before we buy them but we don't want to go someplace to do the actual touching. We don't want the parking hassles and

checkout delays but we want it now – next day delivery is settling. We want jammies as shopping attire – never mind, we get that either way.

I believe that when we want to Shop (with a capital S), we want brick and mortar storefronts. When we just need to get an item, we want ecommerce storefronts. Shopping is an extremely satisfying event with tactile results that leave us feeling accomplished more than we will admit. With the inspiration and the purchase and the delivery so separated as they are by the ecommerce experience, we lose that sense of accomplishment. What we gain is the sense of discovery as each package is delivered and time as each shopping experience is reduced. We as the US Consumer Market need to segregate our expectations and shop in the way we want for the experience we need – Do we need a Product or do we need to Shop? Then we need to enjoy that selected experience to the fullest!

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