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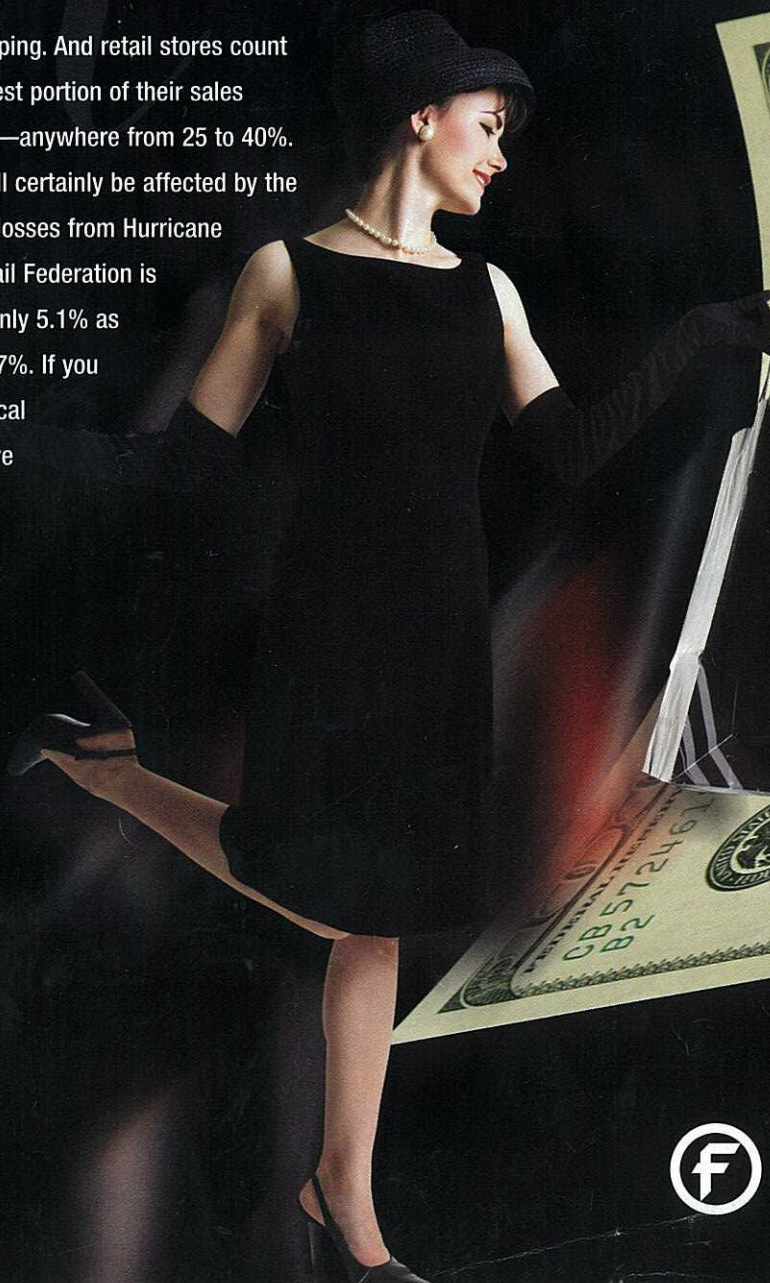
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The Retailers' Science

THEIR SUBTLE SCHEMES OF STIMULATING YOU TO **SPEND, SPEND, SPEND**

'Tis the season to go shopping. And retail stores count on it! They obtain the largest portion of their sales during the holiday season—anywhere from 25 to 40%. This year, holiday sales will certainly be affected by the higher gas prices and job losses from Hurricane Katrina—the National Retail Federation is predicting sales gains of only 5.1% as compared to last year's 6.7%. If you have ventured into your local mall recently, you may have already seen shopping incentives of "special" sales, coupons, buy one get ones (BOGOs), and more. But what of those subtle, yet scientifically based methods stores use to get your business?

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RETAIL ANTHROPOLOGY

Given that the economy depends so much on consumers' spending habits, is it surprising that there is an established branch of social science dedicated to getting you to spend your hard-earned dollars? Called "retail anthropology," this science evolved from urban anthropology. In 1974, a young Columbia undergraduate named Paco Underhill attended a lecture about the methodologies of urban anthropologist William Whyte. Whyte studied public spaces in a particular way—he placed cameras in Manhattan parks and plazas, and recorded people's habits in and in reference to that public space. He examined the data and tried to determine why one public space was more successful, or had more traffic, than another. Inspired by Whyte's work, Underhill filmed peoples' behavior in a Poughkeepsie pedestrian mall, and soon was offered a job at Whyte's "Project for Public Spaces" advocacy group. Underhill then theorized that Whyte's methods could be used to determine why a retail space worked or didn't work. Hence retail anthropology, and eventually Underhill's company Envirosell, were born.

THE SET-UP

Traditional department stores continue to overwhelm the modern shopper; apparel layouts are still designed for the mid-20th-century women who had loads of time to shop. But many well-known retail chains have asked Envirosell to study their stores and discover why they haven't achieved the sales they expect. Underhill simply sets up a handful of cameras, along with a couple of on-floor observers (staffer-trackers), to record consumer habits. Underhill's data and subsequent suggestions over the past 30 years are legendary—next time you are in a retail establishment, observe your surroundings to find the Underhill fingerprint...

Store Placement

People miss key details when walking at a fast pace; therefore, they must (or will) walk at a slower pace to register that they are approaching a potentially interesting store. Underhill observed that the "human downshift"

is between 12 and 25 feet. Retail stores try to avoid being placed next door to a bank because of this downshift—people speed up when they walk past a bank because banks are visually boring. By the time they have walked past the bank and downshifted, they have walked right past the appealing store.

Decompression Zone

The human downshift also comes into play when shoppers go into a store. People need to walk into a store about 5 to 15 paces before they fully switch to "shopper/browser" mode and adjust to the store's atmosphere. A well-designed store that follows Underhill's suggestions never places anything of value in the decompression zone. Shopping baskets or big promotional displays are placed farther inside so people will see them.

Product Placement and the "Destination Item"

Stores very strategically place their products to achieve the maximum dollar spent per shopping visit. The chance that a person will turn into a shopper depends on how long they spend in a store. How long they spend in a store depends on how deep they walk into a store. Basic items or staples that people need, buy most often, or buy a lot of like jeans or milk and bread are considered "destination items" and are placed at the back of the store. Shoppers will visit a store specifically for these items, yet must walk past all the other aisles of unnecessary, yet tempting, items. Also, many stores will position the cash registers and/or the fitting rooms at the rear of the store to force people to walk past more products.

Invariant Right

In the ideally laid-out retail establishment, the latest, greatest, or most fashionable merchandise is placed 5 to 15 paces inside and to the right of the front entrance. Attractive displays are also placed at or near the right of the store. Why? Shoppers will invariably turn to the right side of the store after entering. Some, like famous designer Joseph Weishar, theorize that people automatically walk to the right because of the way we use the left and right sides of our brains to assimilate information.

Underhill thinks it's simply because most people are right handed.

Le Facteur Bousculade

Le facteur bousculade, translated as the bustle or crush factor, takes into account that women don't like to be crowded from behind. Therefore, if a woman is disturbed from behind while shopping (brushed, bumped, etc.), she will stop her browsing and leave. To make women shoppers feel as comfortable as possible and invite them to stay, many stores have wide aisles, especially for those that feature merchandise needing close examination.

Pet-ability

People use all of their senses when shopping, and because humans are tactile, the sense of touch is used a lot. Many stores place their shirts and sweaters on tables to invite people to touch the merchandise—to connect with the item.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SHOPPING

As in other aspects of life, there are measurable and distinct differences the genders exhibit while shopping. Of course, there are exceptions. In general, men tend to be impulse driven and are distracted easier than women. Most men do not shop with a list, are less likely to use coupons, and spend a shorter time in stores. Men have a lower tolerance level for confusion, which is why men's apparel stores will place the ties near or with the matching shirts—a teaching aid that helps men understand what goes with what.

Women are still the main spenders in American retail establishments; therefore, many stores continue to have a women-friendly design. Women are more patient, shop longer, like variety, and compare merchandise. Most women don't need to be told what accessory goes with what, and turn shopping into a social, entertainment, and emotional experience.

THE FUTURE OF RETAIL MARKETING

With less profit per square foot, retail chains are beginning to use cutting-edge techniques to stay competitive. A new, controversial method of "getting into shoppers' heads" is

just that! **Neuromarketing** studies the brain's responses to ads and product images, then uses the information to create successful marketing campaigns and branding techniques. The science began in the 1990s during the imaging technology boom and incorporates the theories that most human cognition takes place unconsciously—about 95%—and that we use both the emotional and the rational parts of the brain when making decisions. In neuromarketing, researchers use functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to map the brain's blood flow patterns of volunteers to reveal their basic, subconscious response to a certain ad or product image. According to neuromarketers, the act of deciding to make a purchase lasts 2½ seconds.

Some groups are concerned about the application of neuromarketing—could companies eventually use the knowledge to completely manipulate shoppers? Others don't like the idea of using medical equipment in commercial design. However, neuromarketing is in its infancy stages, and neuromarketers still don't fully understand and know how to apply their data.

Advertisers can try to build a campaign that hits emotional triggers using theories and research results, but brain behavior can't be easily modified. No matter what retailers do scientifically to influence people to buy, ultimately everyone has free will. People are complicated and diverse, and are becoming increasingly retail savvy. To remain in charge this holiday season, follow a budget; make a list (maybe even ask people what gifts they would love to get!); do pricing research by using newspaper ads or the Internet; and, if possible, shop during off hours to avoid overcrowded stores. Follow these simple suggestions to make your next shopping excursion easier, and to avoid being subconsciously persuaded into overspending.

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