

Using 'the science of shopping' to track-and-target



By John Ginsberg

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LONDON, UK: Environmental psychologist Paco Underhill firmly believes that our environment influences our behaviour. He found a powerful (and profitable) application for his theories in the retail environment and founded what is now known simply as "The Science of Shopping."



If retailers want people to shop, he said, they need to create environments (or, as he called it, 'spaces') that are conducive to shopping. Underhill's book ["Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping"](#) (2000) remains a bestseller, especially in its updated form, implementing the same principles in [online shopping](#).

Underhill took an overview

Underhill saw himself as a retail-anthropologist, using his field-based observations to expand knowledge and experience within the science of shopping. He used cameras, mapping devices and field-workers to follow shoppers around in retail outlets, from the moment they left the parking lot until they returned to it. How they moved along the aisles, to which section they went first, which items they picked and which they rejected. Underhill and his team watched each shopper going through the various stages of the shopping journey.

Not surprisingly, [Envirosell](#), the international behavioural research and consultancy Underhill founded in 1977, has been implementing the same principles to online shopping. Others followed suit - amazon.com's deep, meticulous observations of shoppers is both a known-fact, and a trendsetting example.

Where everyone knows your name

In a [recent interview](#) Amazon.com's founder and CEO Jeff Bezos discussed a few tracking and targeting techniques used by his company: "We have always made personal shopping recommendations - for 15 years - and we greet you by name when you come to the website... The way we design our website sort of clues people into the fact that we have information about your past purchases and that we're using that information to try to do something for you...If you go to a detail page on Amazon of product you already bought, it will tell you, 'You bought this on December 20th 1998.'"

Amazon.com's concept of personal shopping recommendations has been adopted by the likes of Microsoft's Bing search engine, who teamed up with Facebook and will integrate the social site's 'Like' feature with its own search results.

Tracking shoppers assists marketers in identifying failure points and reacting to them

For example, users who 'Liked' items, from a new Lady Gaga album to iPad2 and from Mother's/Father's/Secretary's Day gifts to the support of social events or causes - will find these items surfacing in [Bing's search results](#).

Tracking shoppers assists marketers also in identifying failure points and reacting to them. According to a Forrester report, published in May 2011, [online shopping cart abandonment](#) stands at 71% - which costs internet retailers an approximate US\$18 billion dollar (source: fortune3.com).

Targeting users who aborted shopping online can be done, for example, through an automated email message, sent immediately to the customer, as well as through cookies-based retargeting, whereby relevant ads are served on the browser of those customers. These examples show how tracking and targeting can be used across channels - web, email and display adverts.

A seamless transition

How does Underhill's concept of brick-and-mortar retail spaces translate to online locations? Seamlessly, as one can see from the variety of retailers (from an online seller like amazon.com and social site like Facebook to a search engine like Bing) who track and target users: each location is uniquely defined through customers' experience - from click-in to click-out.

As Underhill observed customers' behavioural patterns, he argued that well-defined spaces, where customers' needs and expectations are fully reflected in the physical shopping environment they experience, usually lead to an increase in purchases done. The same applies to online locations, as long as one tracks, targets and affects the environmental changes required.

ABOUT JOHN GINSBERG

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