

Catch consumer planning days

By [John Bowles](#)

8 Mar 2012

From multiple surveys taken over 20 years, food and grocery shoppers continue to shop mostly on the weekend. It is however, the planning that consumers undertake that is the most intriguing for marketers.

Survey confirms weekend traffic

Roots, a retail and readership survey conducted by TNS, funded by Caxton and taken to the market by NAB, has shown weekend shopping to be the case for decades. To get a true reflection of the shopping pattern, the food and grocery shoppers need to be understood since they are the bulk of the traffic and offer a better understanding of another important implication of the 'traffic effect'.

In the last survey that covers most of urban South Africa, 65% of shoppers shop on the weekend, 17% during the week while the remainder will shop any time during the seven-day week. There is also a tendency to bulk shop once a month for food and groceries (creating massive congestion) but there is certainly abundant activity throughout the month.

Almost 90% of buyers do some sort of planning before the shop. In fact, 65% of consumers always plan their food and grocery-shopping spree before embarking on their shopping trips, even to the bigger shops. Planning for food and grocery shopping? We thought that was only for more of the durable type goods, but apparently not and it always been the case (at least since we have been doing research).

Before POS

"'They' told us most shopping decisions take place in store - at the point of purchase." Where does this come from? It is simply not true. Consumers have to have knowledge of the brand, the destination, where it is available, the price and general other information first. People shop 'spontaneously' because of previous knowledge and experience that the buyer has - this is not the decision making place! Advertising and trialling of the brands and products helps the buyer gain the knowledge - not simple random decisions in the store.

The data generated through Roots supports the stance that most shoppers plan their shopping. The survey takes this one-step further to ascertain when this type of planning takes place. Again over two decades of data show the same finding.

Buyers plan their shopping one to three days before they shop. Almost two-thirds (64%) in the latest survey plan their shop (where to source products) about a day or two before they visit the stores. This is the time when they get into the frame of mind and prepare their mental lists of brands they know, new ones they might consider, the price impact, the destination

and other associated considerations. Other independent sources support this practice. Google did a study on shopper sciences 2011 (the 'Zero moment of Truth' study) and it demonstrated that almost 40% of both spontaneous and considered purchases were thought about one to three days beforehand.

Meet the need

So, if most shopping is being planned for, what does it all really mean? I think it can help marketers plan their advertising timing better. If you consider that the whole point and goal of marketing is to be 'top of mind' in a buying situation, then this finding should be hitting home for the media communication execution.

Further to the consumer planning, retail sales (submitted by Stats SA) show a very consistent pattern of sales volumes throughout the year with little seasonal influences. From food and groceries sales to paint, hardware, appliances and clothing revenues, the contributions are very similar on a month-to-month basis besides a slight skew in November and December. Retail is open 52 weeks of the year because people shop all year round. The challenge for marketers is to be visible for as many weeks as possible in order to be thought of and considered when buyers are planning their shop. All advertising and communication is still however determined by available budget, but marketers should at least manage the budget according to this shopping behaviour.

Mid-week consciousness

If buyers mostly shop the weekend, and plan their shopping about two to three days before, you need to get your communication message out at the earliest by Tuesday (because shoppers have other things on their mind) and the latest by Friday (because the plan is done). The 'sweet spot' should be about Wednesday and Thursday. If the budget does not allow for weekly executions, advertisers should at least consider monthly communication because month end is a busier buying part of the month. Media simply needs to reach most of the buyers in the planning stage. Local newspapers, where we see a lot of loose insert advertising, are an example of how retailers use a media environment that shoppers use when planning their weekend shopping.

To sum up, reaching weekly shoppers on the right days before they plan their shopping trips is a smart move if marketers want their products thought of before they reach their shopping destination. This is when their 'shopping radar' and frame of mind is best. Moreover, if the goal is to be thought of in a buying situation, then brands, services, retailers and general advertisers can only benefit from that timing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Bowles is Joint MD of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>