BIZCOMMUNITY

We need to stop being suckers

By Tiffany Markman

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I'm sick of people trying to scam other people. I don't mean those poorly punctuated 'Dear Beloved' emails. Nor those irritating Amway-ers who were school friends...

I'm talking about the Dead Sea devils (*definition below) who plague our malls.

They're symptomatic of a society in which the manipulative and good-with-words are out to shamelessly steal money from the less knowledgeable and more easily led.

And I'm tired of it. We need to wise up.

Here's how:

1. First, be confident

Have the courage to reject whatever you're being offered. You don't have to listen just to be polite. It's okay to smile, say 'No thanks' and walk away. Being confident also extends to being gently sceptical. If it seems to be too good to be true, it is. No matter what the marketing says. I'm a writer and if I had R1,000 for every time I've created beautiful, believable, blatant, not-one-bit-true lies for a client, I'd retire.

2. Really listen to what's being said

Don't just hear what they're telling you. Hear what they're not telling you. Please: Look for missing info. Never assume that just because something comes in a box, is advertised in a brochure or has a bar code, it's genuine. All that stuff is easy to get; it's just marketing. And be aware that the reason so many shysters offer money-back guarantees is because research shows that *only 5% of people ever act on these*.

3. Then, ask for more info

Ask for names and contact info. Ask for benefits, not just features. Ask for details, testimonials, evidence. Get the big promise in writing. (Note: 'Evidence' is not what they pretend to see on your skin or nails after applying the product for you. Evidence is the same result the next day and the next. Get a sample to try at home. Anything that really works comes in free trial sizes.) And if you're not 100% sure...

4. Then walk away

Do you know how many times I've bought something I don't need and don't really covet because I feel obliged to a salesperson for spending time with me? Or because I don't want him/her - a total stranger - to think I'm a cheapskate? I couldn't retire with that money, but I could probably buy a new MacBook. Here's the important lesson: *You. Don't. Owe. Salespeople. Anything.* Except politeness and respect.

5. Do some research. For retail products, check Amazon

If the great deal is conditional on a buy-now-or-never, pull out your smartphone and make darn sure you really can't get that thing cheaper or better somewhere else.

Or, just try this: Say 'No thanks' and start to walk away. They'll yank you back with, 'Just come with me. Have a look at this [outrageously inflated] price on my computer. That's what I usually sell it for. But you're so nice, so I'll throw in this and this and this for free, and you know what else? I wouldn't do this for everyone but I can see you're interested, so I'll give you my personal employee discount. I'm not even making anything on this sale now. But I like you, and you deserve to have this product.'

This truly is part of the script. I know; I've been suckered. You'd think I'd know better.

6. Then, and only then, consider parting with your money

If the deal really is what they say it is, and you can afford it without flinching, buy it. Although, once again, *I've been suckered* - so I can tell you that the Dead Sea stuff costs a bucket-load, does eff-all and is not returnable. No matter what they say.

Here's an interesting (and understandable) legal explanation of your consumer rights.

In short, a lot of marketing is based on truth. But there's a growing chunk of it that's based on stinky smoke and grimy mirrors. So unless you're rolling in so much dough that you have someone reading this article to you while fanning you with a palm leaf and feeding you Chuckles, you need to start interrogating the marketing.

* *The Dead Sea devils:* These are the gorgeous-looking young Mediterraneans you see in shopping malls, who take seasonal jobs all over the world selling massively over-priced body lotions, face creams and nail products. Know this: Their bosses teach them what to do and how to sell. They use a script (I've seen it.) They memorise it word for word. Even if they know nothing about the product, if they deliver the pitch verbatim, people will buy. And those products that cost R600-R3,000? You can buy them online. For R100.

ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

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