

products as we are to getting products for free? A few years ago, with Halloween drawing near, I had an idea for an experiment to probe that question. This time I wouldn't even have to leave my home to get my answers.

Early in the evening, Joey, a nine-year-old kid dressed as Spider-Man and carrying a large yellow bag, climbed the stairs of our front porch. His mother accompanied him, to ensure that no one gave her kid an apple with a razor blade inside. (By the way, there never was a case of razor blades being distributed in apples on Halloween; it is just an urban myth.) She stayed on the sidewalk, however, to give Joey the feeling that he was trick-or-treating by himself.

After the traditional query, "Trick or treat?" I asked Joey to hold open his right hand. I placed three Hershey's Kisses in his palm and asked him to hold them there for a moment. "You can also get one of these two Snickers bars," I said, showing him a small one and a large one. "In fact, if you give me one of those Hershey's Kisses I will give you this smaller Snickers bar. And if you give me two of your Hershey's Kisses, I will give you this larger Snickers bar."

Now a kid may dress up like a giant spider, but that doesn't mean he's stupid. The small Snickers bar weighed one ounce, and the large Snickers bar weighed two ounces. All Joey had to do was give me one additional Hershey's Kiss (about 0.16 ounce) and he would get an extra ounce of Snickers. This deal might have stumped a rocket scientist, but for a nine-year-old boy, the computation was easy: he'd get more than six times the return on investment (in the net weight of chocolate) if he went for the larger Snickers bar. In a flash Joey put two of his Kisses into my hand, took the two-ounce Snickers bar, and dropped it into his bag.

Joey wasn't alone in making this snap decision. All but