

it has a whiff of Zen to it—the noise of falling water or a fountain. It is a comfortable place to be for twenty minutes or longer, whether that's to read a newspaper, fiddle with a BlackBerry or feed a child.

Here's another instance where shoppers rightly confounded the narrow-minded agenda of retailers.

There's an ongoing struggle afoot between the makers of cosmetics and the users. Women want to try on certain cosmetics, lipstick especially, before buying, which is understandable considering how expensive makeup is and how it differs in appearance depending on the skin of the wearer. Cosmetics makers, on the other hand, wish that women would not sample their products quite so liberally, since even slightly used lipsticks are rarely purchased. There are many plans and systems that provide testers to shoppers, but none of these has been so flawlessly successful that it has become the industry standard. And so the game goes on.

Some years ago, a makeup maker thought it had devised a foolproof lipstick—one that couldn't be twisted open without breaking a tape seal. This, the maker thought, would allow women to peer into the tube to see the color but not actually touch the lipstick itself. The boys in packaging were certain that this was going to save the company millions. We were hired to observe how women interacted with the prototype. We watched shoppers remove the cap, look inside, and unsuccessfully attempt to twist it open—at which point they lowered their pinky fingernails into the tube and gouged out a dab to have a look. The experts were foiled again. Their mistake was in even trying to stop women from testing lipstick. The more progressive cosmetics makers recognize that testing leads to buying, and so they encourage it by making it possible without turning women into outlaws. To my mind, the best solution would be one that came with a profit motive—simply package small samples of each season's new colors of lipstick, blush and face powder, enough for two or three applications of each, and charge a dollar or two.

In Japan in 2002, I found that exact idea outside Shibuya Station in Tokyo. The store is called Three-Minute Happiness. The sign reads MISCELLANEOUS GOODS THAT MAKE OUR LIFE HAPPY AND EASY. Could anything

be simpler? Just three minutes—that's all it takes. A fleeting, serene shopping experience. Even better, it leaves you feeling happy, just as advertised. The store sells samples—of lipstick, nail polish, other beauty products and a few household items—and is organized by price: one hundred yen, two hundred yen, three hundred yen, roughly translating into one dollar, two dollars, three dollars. Off to the side is a coffee and ice cream bar where you put your money into a vending machine with a picture menu board, and out spits a coupon that you then present to the server who makes your coffee or scoops your ice cream—no fumbling with cash. I call it a three-minute retail vacation.

Not every form of improvisation requires remediation. In the heyday of the video retail boom before Netflix (remember the dark ages?), many American families made the weekend pilgrimage to Blockbuster and Hollywood Video mostly in search of new-release movies. The video-rental business made pennies on renting the latest releases but scored big time when it could get you to rent the old stuff—classics like *North by Northwest* or *The Great Escape*. Their ongoing dilemma was how to get what they called “basic inventory” out the door.

We noticed that quite a few of the truly expert searchers among their clientele headed not for the new releases section but for the returns cart, the trolley where incoming videos go before they are filed. There's no reason to attempt to alter that behavior—it actually saves some clerk a little labor, which is a good thing. We suggested spiking that return cart with a few classic films, particularly ones that had some connection to a new release. It worked.

Here's a final example of customers using stores in ways other than those intended, this time to the complete benefit of the business. More than half of all fast food in the United States is purchased at the drive-thru window, and we (along with everyone else) assumed that those diners either ate as they drove off or took the food back to their offices or elsewhere and downed it there. During a series of recent studies, though, we noticed something odd: Around 10 or more percent of drive-thru customers would get their food and then park right there in the lot and eat in their cars. Curiously, the drivers who did this tended to be in newer cars than the restaurants' average customers.

Were they elitist burger-lovers who were simply embarrassed to be seen in a humble grease pit? Or did they enjoy the luxury of eating in an environment where they could talk freely on their cell phones, listen to their own music, and sit in their own seats? Either way, it's a segment of fast-food diners that's worth accommodating—after all, these customers bring their own chairs and clean up after themselves. As a result, we now advise fast-food restaurants to make sure their parking lots are visible from the street, so that drivers can see that there's space for them. We also emphasize the importance of maintaining pleasant conditions—shade, with a view of something other than the Dumpster—for cars as well as people. (In one restaurant we studied, all the best parking spots were taken by employees, whose cars would remain in place for eight hours at a pop, a very dumb practice.) Finally, our finding affirms the overall trend among fast-food restaurants to shrink the size of the building and increase the size of the drive-thru and the parking lot, thereby allowing customers to have it their way—which, in nearly every case, is as it should be.

A final note: What I don't understand is why the fast-food business has not invented and provided a car bib. Something that allows you to eat that burger without spilling pickles and ketchup on that new tie of yours or dropping that stray french fry in between the seats. Something for one of those business-school guys to ponder.



**Men Are from Home Depot,
Women Are from Bloomingdale's:
The Demographics of Shopping**

As we've seen, the simplest aspects of humanity—our physical abilities and limitations—have quite a bit of say in how we shop. But nothing as interesting as shopping is ever quite so simple. We all move through the same environments, but no two of us respond to them exactly alike. This sign may be tastefully rendered, perfectly legible, exquisitely positioned, but you read the sign and I do not. The store flows beautifully, and all the merchandise is easily within my grasp, except that I hate buying clothing and would rather be fishing. No shopping baskets were ever more conveniently located, only you're strapped for cash right now, or you're just constitutionally incapable of buying more than two books at a time.

Certainly we're all aware of how shopping means different things to different people at different times. We use shopping as therapy, reward, bribery, pastime, an excuse to get out of the house, a way to troll for potential loved ones, entertainment, a form of education or even worship, a way to kill time. There are compulsive shoppers doing serious damage to their bank accounts and credit ratings who use shopping as

a cry for help. (Then they shop around for twelve-step programs.) And how many disreputable public figures end up arrested for shoplifting small, inexpensive items? It seems we get two or three a year, always in Florida.

In the '80s, Eastern European émigrés who came to America were awestruck by the abundance on display in a typical suburban supermarket. The stores symbolized how free-market democracy comes down to simple freedom of choice—lots and lots of choices. It was in a supermarket that I, too, had an emotionally cathartic shopping experience. This was maybe twenty years ago, a time when it began to seem as though Envirosell might succeed as an ongoing concern. Up until that point, though, it was an open question—I was borderline broke all the time, working like a dog but plowing every nickel I had back into the company. Things were tight: If I had a meeting in Florida, for instance, I would take the last flight of the day down there to get the cheapest ticket, arriving in the middle of the night. Then I'd pick up my cheap rental car, drive to my destination, curl up my six-foot-four-inch frame as best I could, doze lightly in the car, shave and brush my teeth in a gas station bathroom, and go to my appointment trying my best to impersonate a successful research firm founder. *Tight.* Anyway, on the day in question it became clear that I and my company were going to be all right. And on that day I just happened to visit the Pathmark supermarket near South Street Seaport in New York. Standing in the imported goods aisle, it suddenly hit me that I could afford to buy anything there I wanted: If, say, I wished to try some of the English ginger preserves I remembered from my youth, I could just pick up a jar and pay for it, heedless of the fact that it cost maybe *four or five* bucks. No more cheap Welch's grape jelly. At age thirty-five, I no longer had to sweat over my food budget, I realized, and at that moment, I—a six-foot-four, 220-pound, bald, bearded guy—began to cry. Right there in front of all those imported jellies, jams and preserves, I wept with relief and happiness, emotions that had come forth thanks to a supermarket. From that day on, my breakfast of choice at least 150 mornings a year consisted of obscenely expensive ginger preserves and organic peanut butter spread on an English muffin and downed with a cup of strong coffee.

But doesn't everybody cry in supermarkets? Much of our work at Envirosell has to do with identifying differences in shoppers, trying to come up with types and generalizations that might be useful to the retailers and others who control our shopping spaces. Not surprisingly, in a world where "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" is a commonplace, we pay close attention to how men and women behave differently in stores. Some of the distinctions are what you'd expect—women are better at it, men are loose cannons. But as men and women (and relations between them) change, their shopping behaviors do, too, which will have huge implications for American business.

The other great distinction we study has to do with the age of the shopper. Once upon a time, children in stores were seen but not heard. Those days are long gone, and now even the smallest among them must be considered and accommodated in the retail equation. At the other extreme, older shoppers are also more important than ever, if only because there are more of them, and they have a lot of money to spend and time to spend it. Their presence will transform how products are sold in the twenty-first century. Enormous cultural and demographic shifts are coming into play; in the four chapters that follow, we'll see how shoppers differ, and how those differences are reflected in the world of shopping.

EIGHT

Shop Like a Man

Men and women differ in just about every other way, so why shouldn't they shop differently, too? The conventional wisdom on male shoppers is that they don't especially like to do it, which is why they don't do much of it. It's a struggle just to get them to be patient company for a woman while she shops. As a result, the entire shopping experience—from packaging design to advertising to merchandising to store design and fixturing—is geared toward the female shopper.

Or so the traditional world of retail maintains. Baloney. Although women are increasingly reaching high-level business positions, we live in a world that is owned by men, designed by men and managed by men, yet somehow they expect women to participate. That they don't get women is a given; that they don't do so well with the guys either is pathetic. Here are the two basic building blocks: Guys are genetically disposed to be hunters, so they walk to the woods and are unsuccessful unless they can kill something reasonably quickly and drag it back home and through the mudroom. Women are gatherers who get immense

pleasure out of the act of looking. Thus, two women can spend the day at the mall, buy nothing and have a wonderful time.

Women do have a greater affinity for what we think of as "shopping"—walking at a relaxed pace through stores, examining merchandise, comparing products and values, interacting with sales staff, asking questions, trying things on and ultimately making purchases. Most acquisitioning traditionally falls to women, and they usually do it willingly—even when shopping for the mundane necessities, even when the experience brings no particular pleasure, women tend to do it in dependable, agreeable fashion. Historically, women were the culture's everyday purchasing agents and took pride in their ability to shop prudently and well. In a study we ran of baby products, women interviewed insisted that they knew the price of products by heart, without even having to look. (Upon further inquiry, we discovered that they were mostly wrong.) As women's roles change, so does their shopping behavior—they're becoming a lot more like men in that regard—but they're still the primary buyers in the American marketplace.

Men, in comparison, are more reckless, less poetical. We've timed enough shoppers to know that men always move faster than women through a store's aisles. Men spend less time looking, too. In many settings it's hard to get them to look at anything they hadn't intended to buy. They usually don't like asking where things are, or any other questions, for that matter. (They shop the way they drive.) If a man can't find the section he's looking for, he'll wheel about once or twice, then give up and leave the store without ever asking for help. You can see him just shut down.

You'll see a man move impatiently through a store to the section he wants, pick something up, and then, almost abruptly, he's ready to buy, having taken little apparent joy in the process of finding. A classic example was watching some older guys shopping for Dockers—the Levi Strauss line of basic khakis and chinos. The image of the guy racing to the Dockers wall, finding a pair that matched his specs—thirty-four-inch waist and thirty-two-inch inseam—and turning and almost running to the register is pretty commonplace. It's as if the sheer fact of being

in the store is a threat to his masculinity. It's funny that stores like Cabela's, REI and even the bricks-and-mortar versions of L.L.Bean make it much easier for older guys to shop for belts, pants and underwear, since they're surrounded by the trappings of fishing, hunting and outdoor exercise. Another example is the Harley-Davidson dealer, where not only do middle-aged guys shop for clothes, but you can sell them stuff for their kids, too.

But when a typical guy is shopping, you've practically got to get out of his way because otherwise he'll flatten you. When a man takes clothing into a dressing room, the only thing that stops him from buying it is if it doesn't fit. Women, on the other hand, try things on only as part of the consideration process, and garments that fit just fine may still be rejected on other grounds. In one study, we found that 65 percent of male shoppers who tried something on bought it, as opposed to 25 percent of female shoppers. This is a good argument for positioning fitting rooms nearer the men's department than the women's, if they are shared accommodations. If they are not, men's dressing rooms should be near the entrance and very clearly marked, because if he has to search for it, he may just decide it's not worth the trouble.

Here's another statistical comparison: Eighty-six percent of women look at price tags when they shop. Only 72 percent of men do. For a man, ignoring the price tag is almost a measure of his virility. As a result, men are far more easily upgraded than are women shoppers. They are also far more suggestible than women—men seem so anxious to get out of the store that they'll say yes to almost anything.

Now, a shopper such as that could be seen as more trouble than he's worth. But he could also be seen as a potential source of profits, especially given his lack of discipline. Either way, men now do more purchasing than ever before. And that figure will continue to grow. As they stay single longer than ever, they learn to shop for things their fathers never had to buy. And because many marry women who work as long and hard as they do, they will be forced to shoulder more of the burden of shopping. The manufacturers and retailers and display designers who pay attention to male ways, and are willing to adapt the shopping experience to them, will have an edge in the coming decades.

The great traditional arena for male shopping behavior has always been the supermarket. It's here, with thousands of products all within easy reach, that you can witness the carefree abandon and restless lack of discipline for which the gender is known.

In one supermarket study, we counted how many shoppers came armed with lists. Almost all of the women had them. Less than a quarter of the men did. Any wife who's watching the family budget knows better than to send her inexperienced husband to the supermarket unchaperoned. Giving him a vehicle to commandeer, even if it is just a shopping cart, only emphasizes the potential for guyness in the experience. Throw a couple of kids in with Dad and you've got a lethal combination; he's notoriously bad at saying no when there's grocery acquisitioning to be done. Part of being Daddy is being the provider, after all. It goes to the heart of a man's self-image.

I've spent hundreds of hours of my life watching men moving through supermarkets. One of my favorite video moments starred a dad carrying his little daughter on his shoulders. In the snacks aisle, the girl gestures toward the animal crackers display. Dad grabs a box off the shelf, opens it, and hands it up—without even a thought to the fact that his head and shoulders are about to be dusted with cookie crumbs. It's hard to imagine Mom in such a wanton scenario. Another great lesson in male shopping came about watching a man and his two small sons pass through the cereal aisle. When the boys plead for their favorite brand, he pulls down a box and instead of carefully opening it along the reclosable tab, he just rips the top, knowing full well that once the boys start in, there won't be any need to reclose it.

Supermarkets are places of high-impulse buying for both sexes—fully 60 to 70 percent of purchases there were unplanned, grocery industry studies have shown us. But men are particularly suggestible to the entreaties of children as well as eye-catching displays.

There's another profligate male behavior that invariably shows itself at supermarkets, something we see over and over on video we shoot at the registers: The man almost always pays. Especially when a man and woman are shopping together, he insists on whipping out his wad and forking it over, lest the cashier mistakenly think it's the

woman of the house who's bringing home the bacon. No wonder that retailers commonly call men wallet carriers, or that the conventional wisdom is sell to the woman, close to the man. Because while the man may not love the experience of shopping, he gets a definite thrill from the experience of paying. It allows him to feel in charge even when he isn't. Stores that sell prom gowns depend on this. Generally, when Dad's along, the girl will get a pricier frock than if just Mom were there with her.

One of my favorite stores is American Girl Place, which has to be one of the best engines ever invented to take money out of Daddy's pocket. For anyone who doesn't know what American Girl Place is, it's a doll store, where dolls are themed to moments in American history, with skin tone and hair color to match, as well as an era-appropriate name, like Addy or Felicity, plus a brief bio. You can buy matching outfits for both the doll and your nine-year-old. The store also features a beauty parlor where you can get your doll's hair done, a doll hospital, a café with a special seat where your doll can join you for tea, and even a theater where the story behind each doll is dramatized. Add on books and magazines, and the average visitor has dropped a couple of hundred bucks. The café has five seatings a day and most weekends are booked out six months in advance. It's the dream birthday present for many American eight- or nine-year-old girls to convince their parents to take them to American Girl Place for the weekend. There are now three stores—the original in Chicago, followed by New York and Los Angeles. The only improvement I can think of would be an American Girl Place Hotel, or maybe an American Girl Place Floor at a nearby hotel complete with doll beds and nightgowns. I love taking foreign visitors there. The question we debate is whether a French Girl Place or a Japanese Girl Place would be as successful a way of getting money out of Daddy's pocket as its U.S. counterpart.

In certain categories, men shoppers put women to shame. We ran a study for a store where 17 percent of the male customers we interviewed said they visited the place more than once a week! Almost one quarter of the men there said they had left the house that day with no intention of visiting the store—they just found themselves wandering

in and out of curiosity. The fact that it was a computer store may have had something to do with it, of course. Computer hardware and software have taken the place of cars and stereo equipment as the focus of male love of technology and gadgetry. Clearly, most of the visits to the store were information-gathering forays. On the videotape, we watched the men reading intently the software packaging and any other literature or signage available. The store was where men bought software, but it was also where they did most of their learning about it. This underscores another male shopping trait: Just as they hate to ask directions from sales staff, they like to get their information firsthand, preferably from written materials, instructional videos or computer screens.

A few years back we ran a study for a wireless phone provider that was developing a prototype retail store. And we found that men and women used the place in very different ways. Women would invariably walk right up to the sales desk and ask staffers questions about the phones and the various deals being offered. Men, however, went directly to the phone displays and the signs that explained the agreements. They then took brochures and application forms and left the store—all without ever speaking to an employee. When these men returned to the store, it was to sign up. The women, though, on average required a third visit to the store, and more consultation, before they were ready to close.

Women's and men's roles, of course, are changing. In 2008, the overwhelming majority of students attending institutions of higher learning was female. And it's not just undergraduate education, law school and medical school; women now dominate almost every graduate program except engineering and math. While income disparity is still biased toward men and the glass ceiling is still an obstacle in most professions, never have women had more money of their own than they do right now.

But for the most part, men are still the ones who take the lead when shopping for cars (though women have a big say in most new-car purchases), and men and women perform the division of labor you'd expect when buying for the home: She buys anything that goes inside, and he

buys everything that goes outside—mower and other gardening and lawn-care equipment, barbecue grill, water hose and so on.

But let's put those historic roles into some sort of demographic perspective. In the 2002 U.S. Census, only 24 percent of American households had a mother, a father and dependent children. Roughly 15 percent of households consisted of a single parent raising his or her kids. That leaves a huge 60 percent of American households with no kids (some childless, some empty nesters), and the rest nontraditional: roommates, adult kids living with their parents, singles and so on. The basic idea of what we sell to whom is still valid, but paying attention to the nontraditional buyers of everything has never been more important. Roughly half the cars on the road in North America are driven by women. Yet the car dealership remains one of the most hated destinations for women shoppers.

One of the most telling disconnects is in housing, where almost all new homes built in the past ten years have been based around the concept of the nuclear family: one master bedroom and a couple of smaller kiddie rooms. If you have a home that's configured for a nontraditional living unit—for example, with two master bedroom suites—it will sell faster and at a premium.

All across the world it takes two incomes to live a middle-class life. In 1965 when my father bought a home in Chevy Chase, Maryland, that home cost approximately his annual salary. He made forty thousand dollars a year and the house cost the same. Today if anyone lives in a house that's equal to his or her annual income, I don't know whether to be envious or sympathetic. That said, the decision-making process of where we spend our money is in flux.

Even when men aren't shopping, they figure prominently into the experience. As I mentioned earlier, we know that across the board, how much customers buy is a direct result of how much time they spend in a store. And our research has shown over and over that when a woman is in a store with a man, she'll spend less time there than when she's alone or with another woman, or even with children. Here's the actual breakdown of average shopping time from a study we performed at one branch of a national housewares chain:

Woman shopping with a female companion: 8 minutes, 15 seconds

Woman with children: 7 minutes, 19 seconds

Woman alone: 5 minutes, 2 seconds

Woman with man: 4 minutes, 41 seconds

In each case, what's happening seems clear: When two women shop together, they talk, advise, suggest and consult to their hearts' content, hence the long time in the store; with the kids, she's partly consumed with herding them along and keeping them entertained; alone, she makes efficient use of her time. But with him—well, he makes it plain that he's bored and antsy and liable at any moment to go off and sit in the car and listen to the radio or stand outside and watch girls. So the woman's comfort level plummets when he's by her side; she spends the entire trip feeling anxious and rushed. If he can somehow be occupied, though, she'll be a happier, more relaxed shopper. And she'll spend more, both time and money. There are two main strategies for coping with the presence of men in places where serious shopping is being done.

The first one is passive restraint, which is not to say handcuffs. Stores that sell mainly to women should all be figuring out some way to engage the interest of men. If I owned Chico's or Victoria's Secret, I'd have a place where a woman could check her husband like a coat. There already exists a traditional space where men have always felt comfortable waiting around—it's called the barbershop. Instead of some ratty old chairs and back issues of *Playboy* and *Boxing Illustrated*, maybe there could be comfortable seats facing a big-screen TV tuned to ESPN, or the cable channel that runs the bass-fishing program. Even something that simple would go a long way toward relieving wifely anxiety, but it's possible to imagine more: *Sports Illustrated* in-store programming, for instance—a documentary on the making of the swimsuit issue, perhaps—or highlights of last weekend's NFL action.

If I were opening a brand-new store where women could shop comfortably, I'd find a location right next to an emporium devoted to male desire—a computer store, for instance, or a car-parts supply house, somewhere he could happily kill half an hour. Likewise, if I were

opening a computer software store, I'd put it next to a women's clothing shop and guarantee myself hordes of grateful male browsers.

But you could also try to sell to your captive audience. A women's clothing store could prepare a video catalog designed especially for men buying gifts—items like scarves or robes rather than shoes or trousers. Gift certificates would sell easily there; he already knows that she likes the store. Victoria's Secret could really go to town with a video catalog for men. They could even stage a little fashion show.

The only precaution you'd need to take is in where to place such a section. You want customers to be able to find it easily, but you don't want it so near the entrance that the gaze of window shoppers falls on six lumpy guys in windbreakers slumped in Barcaloungers watching TV.

The second, and ultimately more satisfying, strategy would be to find a way to actually get the man involved in shopping. Not the easiest thing to do in certain categories, but not impossible either.

We were doing a study for Pfaltzgraff, the dinnerware maker and retailer. Their typical customer will fall in love with one particular pattern and collect the entire set—many, many pieces, everything from dinner plates and coffee cups to a mustard pot, serving platter and napkin rings. It is very time-consuming to shop the store, especially when you figure in how long it takes to ring the items up and wrap them so that they don't break. Just the kind of situation designed to drive most men nuts. But the typical sale at Pfaltzgraff outlet stores can run into the hundreds of dollars, all the more reason to find a way to get men involved.

As we watched the videotape, we noticed that for some unknown reason men were tending to wander over toward the glassware section of the store. They were steering clear of the gravy boats and the spoon rests and drifting among the tumblers and wineglasses. At one point we saw two guys meander over to the beer glasses, where one of them picked one up and with the other hand grabbed an imaginary beer tap, pulled it and tilted the glass as if to fill it. And I thought, well, of course—when company's over for dinner and the woman's cooking in the kitchen, what does the man do? He makes drinks. That's his socially acceptable role. And so he's interested in all the accoutrements, all the

tools of the bartending trade—every different type of glass and what it's for, and the corkscrew and ice tongs and knives and shakers. They're being guys about it.

My first thought was that the stores should put in fake beer taps, like props, for men to play with. We ended up advising them to pull together all the glassware into a barware section and to put up on the wall some big graphic, like a photo of a man pulling a beer or making some martinis in a nice chrome shaker. Something so that men would walk in and see that there was a section meant for them, somewhere they could shop. All the bottle openers in the different patterns, say, would be stocked there, too. And because men prefer to get their information from reading, the store could put up a chart showing what type of glass is used for what—the big balloons and the long stems and the flutes and the rocks glasses and steins.

And by doing all that, you could take the man—who had been seen as a drag on business and an inconvenience to the primary shopper—and turn him into a customer himself. Or at least an interested bystander.

We did a study for Thomasville, the furniture maker, and thought that there, too, getting the man more involved would make it easier to sell such big-ticket items. The solution was simple: Create graphic devices, like displays and posters, showing the steps that go into making the furniture, and use visuals, like cross-sections and exploded views, to prove that in addition to looking good, the pieces were well made. Emphasizing construction would do a lot toward overcoming male resistance to the cost of new furniture, but the graphics would also give men something to study while their wives examined upholstery and styling.

One product for which men consistently outshop women is beer. And that's in every type of setting—supermarket or convenience store, men buy the beer. (They also buy the junk food, the chips and pretzels and nuts and other entertainment food.) So we advised a supermarket client to hold a beer-tasting every Saturday at three P.M., right there in the beer aisle. They could feature some microbrew or a new beer from one of the major brewers, it didn't matter. The tastings would probably help sell beer, but even that wasn't the point. It would be worth it

just because it would bring more men into the store. And it would help transform the supermarket into a more male-oriented place.

But an experiment run by Envirosell Brazil for Brahma, the country's leading beer brand, teaches a different lesson. In the experiment, they focused on making the beer section more female-friendly on the premise that women buy beer for someone other than just themselves. They took out all the buxom babe stand-ups (what's the exact connection between suds and cleavage anyway?) and put up graphics of a family meal with adult men and women drinking beer. Sales went up 20 percent overnight. Here in the USA, women make up a tiny segment of beer-buying patronage, but when they do buy it, they tend to buy beer in larger quantities. Thus, while the guy is more likely to buy a six-pack, the woman is more likely to buy the twelve. Conclusion: She's buying for the party, the guy is buying for the party of one.

Smart retailers should pay attention. All aspects of business are going to have to anticipate how men's and women's social roles are changing, and the future is going to belong to whoever gets there first. A good general rule: Take any category where women now predominate and figure out how to make it appealing to men without alienating women.

Look, for instance, at what's happened to the American kitchen over the past decade or so. Once upon a time Mom did all the grocery shopping and all the cooking. Now Mom probably works as much as Dad. As a result, men also have to know how to cook, clean and do laundry—it's gone from being cute to being necessary.

Is it a coincidence that as that change took place, kitchen appliances have become so butch? Once upon a time you chose from avocado and golden harvest when selecting a refrigerator or a stove. Now the trendiest stoves are industrial-strength six-burner numbers with open gas grills, and the refrigerators are huge, featureless boxes of stainless steel, aluminum and glass. If you go into a fancy kitchenware store like Williams-Sonoma you'll see that a popular gadget is the little blowtorch used for crystallizing the top of crème brûlée. Have Americans just now fallen in love with preparing elaborate, fatty French desserts? Or does

cooking just seem more appealing to men when it involves firing up your own personal flamethrower?

(Similarly, as women stay single longer and sometimes become single more than once, the old-fashioned, boys-only hardware store is being killed off. Our Ace Hardware and True Value hardware clients have done a great job transforming their businesses to become places where female homeowners can become tool-happy do-it-yourselfers in a nurturing, non-gender-specific environment. One of the simpler ways that transformation happens is by hiring more female staff.)

Look at how microwave ovens are sold—the most prominent feature on the description sheet is the wattage. Likewise, when we interviewed men shopping for vacuum cleaners and asked which feature was most important, their (predictable) answer was: “Suck.” Read: *power*. As a result, vacuum makers now boast amperage. In both cases, home appliances have gotten more macho as men have gotten less so. They seem determined to meet somewhere in the middle.

Even washday miracles and other household products are being re-imagined with men in mind. I can't say for sure how Georgia-Pacific and Procter & Gamble came to their decisions, but why else would paper towels be called Brawny or laundry detergent be called Bold, except to make themselves respectable items for men to bring to the checkout? How many women wish they had Hefty bags? Now: how many men? The manliest monikers used to go on cars; now they go on suds. The most successful soap introduction of the '90s wasn't anything frilly or lavender. It was Lever 2000, a name that would also sound right on a computer or a new line of power tools. I'd drive a Lever 2000 any day.

Look beyond shopping to the most elemental expressions of contemporary male desire—just think of the difference between Marilyn Monroe and Angelina Jolie. Angie's biceps are probably bigger than Frank Sinatra's and Bobby Kennedy's combined. She's downright muscle-bound and hipless compared to the pinups of three decades ago.

Men have always bought their own suits and shoes, but women, traditionally, shopped for everything in between, especially men's socks and underwear. Now, though, that's changing—men are more involved in their clothing, and women have enough to do without

buying boxer shorts. In Target's menswear department, you'll still sometimes find a female-male ratio of 2:1 or even 3:1. But in expensive apparel stores, among more affluent men, males shopping for menswear now—finally—outnumber females. We caught a signal moment in the life of the modern American male on videotape. A man was browsing thoughtfully at an underwear display when he suddenly reached around, grabbed a handful of his waistband, pulled it out and craned his neck so he could learn—finally!—what size shorts he wears. Try to imagine a woman who doesn't know her underwear size. Impossible. Someday soon, we can all hope, every man will know his.

(Conversely, I am told that women frequently won't buy lingerie without trying it on—over their own, I am assured. I don't know if I'll live long enough to ever see a man take a package of Fruit of the Looms into a fitting room.)

As women stop buying men's underwear, will men begin buying women's? I met a jeweler who told me, "A lot of my business is with men trying to buy their way back inside the house." Many a husband or beau would choose fancy lingerie or jewelry at gift times, but the stores that sell it, and the merchandise itself, make it daunting. If he can't remember his own size, how can he remember hers, especially when she has bra and underpants to think about, not to mention robe, nightgown etc. And how can he be sure he's buying the ring or necklace she wants, in a color that suits her? We frequently see men tentatively enter these lairs of femininity, cast anxious glances around, maybe study an item or two, and then flee in fear and uncertainty. Sales clerks have to be trained to lure these men in like the skittish beasts they are. Making a personal shopper available for heavy-duty hand-holding isn't a bad idea, especially considering the costliness of jewelry or even lingerie.

There also must be a way to simplify apparel sizes to make such cross-buying possible. Perhaps the easiest solution would be for women to register their sizes at clothing stores of their liking, then just point their men in the right direction. The first store that tries this is going to benefit from lots of latent desire among men to buy frilly underthings. Then again, maybe they don't want to be seen walking out the door with a pink shopping bag.

Another gender-related problem that clothing retailers have to solve is this: How do you subtly tell shoppers where the men's and women's apparel is in a store that sells both? Not so long ago, it was unthinkable that men's and women's clothing would be sold side by side, from the same site. That wall was knocked down in the '60s, but some of the bugs still need to be worked out. The cuing now being used, for instance, even in dual-gender pioneers such as the Gap and J.Crew, isn't really working, as you can tell when you suddenly realize that you spent ten minutes browsing through shoes, sweaters or jeans meant for the other sex.

Go into any woman's closet and you'll find something that was made for a man. A jean jacket, a baggy sweater, a T-shirt—my significant other raids my closet and drawers freely. No threat whatsoever to her sexuality. I can't say the same for myself.

Speaking of which, where does the gay shopper fit into this increasingly blurry retail environment? And what differences might there be between what a gay guy or lesbian woman is after versus his or her straight-world counterpart?

Needless to say, most generalizations about homosexual culture are just that—generalizations. There are gay women who feel at home in flannel button-down shirts and khakis, and lesbian princesses who like nothing more than glamming it up on Saturday night. There are gay guys who ego-idealize Brando in *The Wild One*, gay guys who are slobs and gay guys who assemble their wardrobe every morning with the kind of care and attention you don't see outside a West Point plebe barracks. This same wide spectrum shows up in the straight world.

The difference is the gay community has always been a cultural weathervane, with the foresight and instincts and taste to tell us what's in and what's out, what's hot and what's yesterday's news. Where gay culture leads, the rest of us generally follow, as any chiseled, Prada-clad metrosexual would be the first to admit.

At the same time many members of the heterosexual world don't really like to acknowledge this. Straight guys shopping the underwear section come up against a series of crotch-hugging pictorials on the boxes that make them feel as though they have to sneak their new

boxer-briefs over to cash/wrap inside a brown paper bag. They feel embarrassed, but their embarrassment just may spring from the fact these sultry male gym pictures have found their target. Gay or straight, show me a teenage boy who hasn't wanted a six-pack or an aging Generation X guy who hasn't looked in the mirror at his tired-looking eyes, swelling flanks and loss of muscle mass, and I'll show you a retail world that hasn't taken into account the fact that a lot of heteros want to look as sharp and pulled together as a lot of their gay-world counterparts. Thing is, few of them want to admit it or show that they give a damn. It goes against the typical male's self-image to admit he cares.

In general, the retailing environment hasn't made allowances for this schizoid sensibility. Lesbians face the same confusion in the marketplace, except unlike their gay male counterparts, a lot of them have to cross over to the other gender's section to find what they want. The retail world generally creates less leeway for most gay women than it does for gay men. A lesbian of my acquaintance who describes herself as butch has a hard time finding even the most rudimentary clothing items and accessories. It's probably why she hates shopping and does most of it online. Most of what's on display is just too girly—coltish and pointy and designed to seduce. Pants are another big issue. There's rack after rack of low-riders, which aren't her style. Shoes? Another dead end. What she typically ends up doing is drifting over to the men's department in search of basic men's loafers—any style, so long as they're utilitarian and don't make her look like Glinda the Good Witch. Her wardrobe is mostly made up of classic casual clothes—baggy khakis, clothes created for women but designed to look like what your older brother might wear. At work, she'll suck it up by wearing one of the two black Eileen Fisher suits she owns, but if she could spend her days attired in baggy pants and a T-shirt she'd be the happiest person on earth. What I hear through her words is that even though she came out in her early twenties, when she's shopping she still finds herself living a double life.

It's worth noting that a lot of gay women can be pretty square, especially lesbian couples with kids. They're conservative, not politically but socially. Many of them don't like to make a fuss over shopping or the

latest gowns dripping from store mannequins. Like guys, they just want to get the ordeal over with.

Gay men and women already came out once, which was brave. Retailers shouldn't make them have to dive back into the closet a second time. The gay market is real—and the people who pay attention to it will reap the rewards.

But back to the traditional family guy. Remember when the only men who saw babies being born were obstetricians? Today the presence of Dad in the delivery room is almost as mandatory as Mom's. Men are going to have to be accommodated as they redefine their roles as fathers. It's a seismic change that's being felt on the shopping floor just like everywhere else.

For example, almost no man of my father's generation had the habit of loading Junior, a bottle or two and some diapers into the stroller and going out for a Saturday-morning jaunt. Today it's almost a cliché. That's why progressive men's rooms now feature baby-changing stations, and it's why McDonald's commercials invariably show Dad and the kids piling in—sans Mom, who's probably spending Saturday at the office. (Mom won't let them order Big Macs anyway.) This isn't just an American phenomenon, either—my informal Saturday observation of Milan's most fashionable districts detected that roughly half of all baby strollers were being pushed by Papa. Papa likes to drive.

We tested a prototype Levi's section at a department store in Boston, part of an effort to improve the store's appeal to men in their twenties and thirties. We caught video of a young man walking down the aisle toward the section, accompanied by his wife and baby, whose stroller he pushed. They reached the Levi's, and he clearly wanted to shop the shelves of jeans on the wall. But there were racks of clothing standing between him and the jeans, positioned so close together that he couldn't nudge the stroller past. You can see him thinking through his choice—do I leave my wife and child in the aisle just to buy jeans? He did what most people would do in that situation: He skipped the pants. You'd be amazed at how much of America's aggregate selling floor is still off-limits to anyone pushing a stroller. This is the equivalent of barring a large percentage of all shoppers in their twenties and thirties.

Two decades ago it was the rare father who ever bought clothing for the little ones; today, it's more common to see men shopping the toddler section. Clothing manufacturers haven't caught up with this yet, however, as evidenced by the fact that children's sizes are the most confusing in all of apparel—guaranteed to frustrate all but the most parental of shoppers. The day that size corresponds directly to the age of the child is when men will be able to pull even more of the weight for outfitting the kids. It'll be Dad who springs for the outrageous indulgences here, too—the velvet smoking jacket for his son or the miniature prom gown for his daughter.

And when Saturday morning rolls around and Pop goes to pack the bottles and Cheerios and Goldfish and diapers and baby powder and ointment and wipes and all the rest of that stuff, what does he put it in? Not the big pink nylon bag his wife lugs. In fact, he's probably disposed against any of the available options—even a plain black diaper bag, says Mommy. But what if he could choose a Swiss Army diaper bag? How about a nylon Nike one that looks just like his gym bag? Even better, what if he could push a studly Harley-Davidson-brand baby stroller that came with a built-in black leather diaper bag? The whole baby category needs to be reinvented.

Other traditional female strongholds can also accommodate men, but it's got to be on masculine terms. You've got to be aware of the wimp factor. There are many stores where the floors and the walls and everything hanging on them whisper loudly to the foolhardy male trespasser, "Get the hell out of here—you don't belong!" Near my office there's a store that sells dishes and glasses and such, and it's remarkable because I can actually walk in and not feel like a bull in a china shop. Whereas in Bloomingdale's Royal Doulton section, I feel as though I'm back in my grandmother's dining room—and it's the grandmother who scared me.

There are other such places that men would gladly shop—actually want and even need to shop—if only they felt just a little bit wanted. For example, there are more health and grooming products for men than ever. But if you look at how they're sold, you'll see that most men will never become avid buyers.

In the chain drugstores and supermarket sections where these products are sold, the atmosphere is overwhelmingly feminine. Shampoo, soap and other products that can be used by either sex are invariably packaged and named under the assumption that women will be doing all the buying. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The products made especially for men, like shaving cream and hair ointments and deodorant, are stocked in a dinky little section sandwiched in among all the fragrant female goods. No man's land, in other words, so how's a guy to shop it?

The traditional beauty business has always prospered by moving upmarket. Estée Lauder and L'Oréal have persuaded women that dropping a small fortune on a night cream is a worthwhile investment. Not the best approach when you're dealing with the male market. The way for male skin-care products to succeed is through better positioning and carefully chosen words and packaging. There's a huge, untapped market for moisturizing creams and sunblock among men who work outdoors—police, construction workers, cable TV and telephone line installers, road crews. But these guys aren't going to traipse through the blushers and concealers to find them. And they're not going to buy a product that presents itself as intended for women and children. If you went through your typical health and beauty section, you'd think that men don't have skin. But they do, and it needs help.

A good solution might be found, say, at a Harley-Davidson dealer. The company could call its skin-care line whatever they wanted—sun shield, windburn care or human leather conditioner. The important thing is that they give it open-road, fuss-free value, plus a name that sounds like burly shorthand. Like Goop, which gets the grease off your hands, or Lava soap, which takes care of pine sap, it should be marketed as killer guy stuff. If Harley leads, John Deere and Caterpillar might follow, and a real step toward preventing skin cancer will have been made.

Clinique makes a complete line of shaving and skin products for men. But at the very sophisticated Bergdorf Goodman department store in New York City, a man has to visit the all-female cosmetics bazaar on the ground floor to find the stuff. It's not even available at the men's store across Fifth Avenue. Who would guess that the shaving cream is

right next to the lipstick? I've no doubt that many women buy shaving products for their men, but that's the old-fashioned approach, not the way of the future. Gillette makes shaving creams for a variety of skin types, and there's no doubt that it's for men. But how is a man supposed to know which type of skin he has? A simple wall chart display would do the trick, but I've yet to see one. I recently visited a national chain's drugstore in Manhattan's Chelsea section, the epicenter of gay life here. Even this store shortchanges men—their section (which consisted only of deodorant, a few hair-grooming products, some Old Spice, a tube of Brylcreem) was jammed into a corner shelf between the film-processing booth and the disposable razors. This store would be a perfect place to create a prototype men's section. Instead, it was the same old dreariness.

Giving men their own products, and a place to buy them, would be a good start. But that still smacks of the health, beauty and cosmetics section designed for women. Someone needs to start from scratch in designing a "men's health" department, where you'd find skin products, grooming aids, shaving equipment, shampoo and conditioner, fragrance, condoms, muscle-pain treatments, over-the-counter drugs and the vitamins, supplements and herbal remedies for ailments that afflict men as well as women. There might also be some athletic wear, like socks, T-shirts, supporters, elastic bandages and so on. There should also be a display of books and magazines on health, fitness and appearance. The section itself would have a masculine feeling, from the fixtures to the package designs. And it would be merchandised with men in mind—the signs would be big and prominent, and everything would be easy to find. The number-one magazine success story of the past decade has been the amazing growth of a periodical called *Men's Health*, which sells over 1.5 million copies a month, more than *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Men's Journal* and all the others. If the magazine can thrive, why not the store section, too?

NINE

What Women Want

Before this chapter begins, may I take a moment to mark the passing of a great American institution and one of the last true bastions (if not actual hideouts) of postwar masculinity?

I'm speaking, of course, of Joe's Hardware. Or was it Jim's? Doesn't matter—you know the place. Creaky planks on the floor. Weird smell of rubber and four-in-one oil in the air. Big wooden bin of ten-penny nails. Twine. Elbow joints. Mystic tape. Spools of copper wire. Drums of waterproof sealant. Brads. *Brads?* Hell, brads, tacks, staples, washers, nuts, bolts (molly and otherwise), pins, sleeves, brackets, housings, flanges, hinges, gaskets, shims, wood screws, sheet metal screws, a calendar featuring Miss Snap-on Tools in a belly shirt brandishing killer cleavage and a power router, and over there—atop the rickety ladder, chewing a bad cheroot, rummaging blindly in an ancient box of two-prong plugs, cursing genially under his stogie breath—Joe himself. I mean Jim.

Whatever happened to him? Dead. How about his store? Dead.

Who killed them? Who do you think?

Oh, those . . . women! Too fancy to shop at Joe's, am I right? Poor guy stocked everything you could want, but it just wasn't enough. Not the right *color*. Not enough *styles*. The place stinks like *cheap cigars*.

Bye, Joe.

It's no surprise that women are capable of causing such tectonic shifts in the world of shopping. Shopping is still and always will be meant mostly for females. Shopping is female. When men shop, they are engaging in what is inherently a female activity. (When a man shops he's practically in drag.) And so, women are capable of consigning entire species of retailer or product to Darwin's dustbin, if that retailer or product is unable to adapt to what women need and want. It's like watching dinosaurs die out.

Need more evidence? Two words: sewing machine.

In the '50s, I am told, 75 percent of American households owned sewing machines. Today, it's under 5 percent. So roll over, Joe—here comes Mr. Singer. (In fact, the sewing machine giant has gone into the military weaponry business.) Women once made entire wardrobes for themselves and their families, and kept repairing garments until they had truly earned their rest. Then the past three decades of socioeconomic upheaval happened and women stopped sewing anything more ambitious than a loose button.

One last illustration?

Paper grocery store coupons.

Gone. Whoosh! In 2007, less than 3 percent of all manufacturers' coupons distributed via newspapers, magazines or in the mail were ever redeemed (in response, the coupon industry is making a valiant attempt to move the coupon distribution business online). Women's lives have changed, and the thought of sitting hunched over the kitchen table scissoring away at the *Daily Bugle* suddenly seems as cost-effective as churning your own butter. Oh, there are some pockets of coupon-clipping resistance—senior citizens, the highly budget-conscious and motivated, mostly women who aren't working at jobs all day. But otherwise—outtahere!

Of course, we're all familiar with how men have become better, more caring, more sensitive shoppers, willing to shoulder some of the

burden even of mundane household acquisitioning and provisioning. But let's not forget that this reformation came about in large part because of gentle prompting (if not actual violent pushing and shoving) by women. And let's keep in mind also that while the future of retailing will undoubtedly show the effects of more male energy in the marketplace, for the most part the big shifts will continue to reflect changes in the lives and tastes of women.

But what, as marketing genius Sigmund Freud was moved to ask, do women want from shopping? We speak a great deal of the distinct differences between how men and women behave in stores, but rather than dish out generalizations, let me start with a good example. It's from a study we did for an Italian supermarket chain, and it comes directly from a video camera we trained on the meat counter.

There, we watched a middle-aged woman approach and begin picking up and examining packages of ground meat. She did so methodically, carefully, one by one. As she shopped a man strode up and, with his hands behind his back, stood gazing over the selection. After a brief moment he chose a package, dropped it into his cart, and sped away. The woman continued going through meat. Then came a couple with a baby. The wife hung back by the stroller while her husband picked up a package, gave it a quick once-over, and brought it back to their cart. His wife inspected it and shook her head. He returned it, chose another, and brought it back to their cart. His wife inspected it and shook her head. He chose again. She shook again. Exasperated, she left him by the stroller and got the meat herself. As they walked off, the first woman was making her way through the final package of meat on display. Satisfied with her research, she took the first one she had examined, placed it in her cart, and moved on. My sister complains that her husband goes out of his way to buy tired vegetables. "He doesn't get it. We want to eat fresh ones, not adopt the sad ones."

What makes women such heroic shoppers? The nature-over-nurture types posit that the prehistoric role of women as homebound gatherers of roots, nuts and berries rather than roaming hunters of woolly mammoths proves a biological inclination toward skillful shopping. The nurture-over-nature fans argue that for centuries, the all-powerful

patriarchy kept women in the house and out of the world of commerce, except as consumers at the retail level.

This much is certain: Shopping was what got the housewife out of the house. Under the old division of labor, the job of acquisitioning fell mainly to women, who did it willingly, ably, systematically. It was (and in many parts of the world, remains) women's main realm of public life. If, as individuals, they had little influence in the world of business, in the marketplace they collectively called the shots. Shopping gave women a good excuse to sally forth, sometimes even in blissful solitude, beyond the clutches of family. It afforded an activity that lent itself to socializing with other adults, clerks and store owners and fellow shoppers.

As women's lives change, though, their relationship to shopping must evolve. Today, most American women hold jobs, and so they get all the impersonal, businesslike contact with other adults they want (and then some). They also get plenty of time away from the comforts of home. And so the routine shopping trip is no longer the great escape. It's now something that must be crammed into the tight spaces between job and commute and home life and sleep. It's something to be rushed through over a lunch hour, or on the way home, or at night. The convenience store industry is a direct beneficiary of how women's lives have changed—instead of a highly organized weekly trip to the supermarket, with detailed list in hand, women now discover at nine P.M. that they're out of milk or bread for tomorrow's lunches, prompting a moonlit run to the 7-Eleven. Catalogs, TV shopping channels and web shopping all have flourished thanks mainly to the changes in women's responsibilities. And the less time women spend in stores, the less they buy there, plain and simple. As they hand over some of their traditional duties (cooking, cleaning, laundry, child care) to men, they also relinquish control over the shopping for food, soap and kiddie clothes. Women may even become more male in their shopping habits—hurried hit-and-run artists instead of dedicated browsers and searchers. Right off the bat, the advantages of the postfeminist world to retailers (women have more money) are offset by some disadvantages (women have less time and inclination to spend it in stores).

The use of shopping as a social activity seems unchanged, however.

Women still like to shop with friends, egging each other on and rescuing each other from ill-advised purchases. I don't think we'll ever see two men set off on a day of hunting for the perfect bathing suit. All our studies show that when two women shop together, they spend more time and money than women alone. They certainly outshop and outspend women saddled with male companions. Two women in a store is a shopping machine, and wise retailers do whatever they can to encourage this behavior—promotions such as "bring a friend, get a discount," or seating areas just outside the dressing room to allow for more relaxed try-ons and assessments. Stores with cafés on the premises allow women to shop, then take a break, without ever leaving sight of the selling floor.

When you've observed as many shoppers as I have, you realize that for many women there are psychological and emotional aspects to shopping that are just plain absent in most men. Women can go into a kind of reverie when they shop—they become absorbed in the ritual of seeking and comparing, of imagining and envisioning merchandise in use. They then coolly tally up the pros and cons of this purchase over that, and once they've found what they want at the proper price, they buy it. Women generally care that they do well in even the smallest act of purchasing and take pride in their ability to select the perfect thing, whether it's a cantaloupe or a house or a husband. In fact, watch men and women in the produce section—the man breezes through, picks up the head of lettuce on top of the pile and wheels away, failing to notice the brown spots and limp leaves, while the woman palpates, examines and sniffs her way past the garbage, looking for lettuce perfection. He'll even fail to notice how much the lettuce costs, something almost unthinkable among women. Men do take pride in their proficiency with certain durable goods—cars, tools, boats, barbecue grills, computers. Women, though, have traditionally understood the importance of the impermanent world—cooking a meal, decorating a cake, fixing hair and makeup.

Not that there's anything superficial about the female relationship with consumption. In fact, it's women, not men, who plumb the metaphysics of shopping—they illuminate how we human beings go through life searching, examining, questioning and acquiring and assuming and

absorbing the best of what we see. At that exalted level, shopping is a transforming experience, a method of becoming a newer, perhaps even slightly improved person. The products you buy turn you into that other, idealized version of yourself. That dress makes you beautiful, this lipstick makes you kissable, that lamp turns your house into an elegant showplace.

In practical terms, this all means one patently obvious, overarching thing: Women demand more of shopping environments than men do. Males just want places that allow them to find what they need with a minimum of looking and then get out *fast*. If a male is made to wander and seek—in other words, to *shop*—he's likely to give up in frustration and exit. Men take less pleasure in the journey. Women are more patient and inquisitive, completely at ease in a space that gradually reveals itself. Therefore, they need environments where they can spend time and move about comfortably at their own speed in what sometimes resembles a semitrance state. Our most famous discovery, the “butt-brush factor,” indicates to us that women have an actual aversion to examining anything much below waist level, for fear of being jostled from the rear. This takes in quite a bit of American retailing's selling space. You can't ask a woman (or a man) to bend over and expect that she's going to feel comfortable for more than a moment or two. You can't crowd a woman and think that she's going to linger. Watch shoppers' faces in busy aisles—once they've been bumped a few times they begin to look annoyed. And irritated shoppers do not tarry; in fact, they frequently leave before buying what they came for. Retailers must keep all this in mind when deciding where to sell what.

It's equally true that women can and will steel themselves for a sale they know will be crowded. They'll shop at Filene's Basement in Boston and the Barneys Warehouse Sale, and their hunger for bargains will overcome whatever issues they have with strangers piercing their body bubbles. What we've noted over the years is that a woman's butt-brush radar is also calibrated to respond differently to other females than unfamiliar males. In most of the crowded places where women wade fearlessly, they're jostled, pulled and yanked not by men but by other women.

For instance, department store cosmetics sections require women to sit or stand in one spot while makeup is demonstrated, which can be a problem during busy times. Over and over, our research has shown that women standing at the corner of a counter, where they can wrap themselves around the angle and nestle in a little bit, actually buy at a higher rate than women standing a few feet away along the main stretch of the counter. Some cosmetics departments use counters to create cul-de-sacs, recessed areas that allow shoppers to stand clear of passing foot traffic and browse without fear—we call them catchment basins, and they are successful at inducing women to shop a little longer. As discussed earlier, drugstores sometimes stock unglamorous products such as concealer cream at the very bottom of a wall display—meaning that older women, the shoppers least likely to appreciate having to stoop, are forced to bend low and stick their butts out where they'd rather not go. As a result, less concealer will be sold than if it was positioned higher.

Women's spatial requirements can be seen everywhere in retailing. Airport gift shops, for instance, are typically divided into the "grab and go" zone—near the register, where you dart in for a paper or gum, pay and run—and the "dwell" zone, farther into the store, where gift items are usually displayed. Our research shows that women in these stores gravitate away from the hubbub around the counter and toward the dwell zone, where they feel protected from foot traffic. Many of these stores' architecture features little nooks and crannies created by shelving and racks—perfect cul-de-sacs for uninterrupted shopping. That's how women prefer to shop: within view of the main flow of traffic, but sheltered in sectioned-off areas.

The butt sensitivity of women also establishes a relationship between store design and typeface: The narrower the quarters, the less time a woman will spend there, so the clearer and more direct signs and other merchandising materials must be. All print must be big and high contrast; designers of shampoo bottles, for instance, or any products sold in the close quarters of a chain drugstore, have to heed this reality. We've studied many drugstore health and beauty departments and the result is always the same—women like to study products before they buy, especially if the product is new on the market. In one study, we saw

that 91 percent of all drugstore buyers read the front of a package, 42 percent read the back and 8 percent read the sides. Sixty-three percent of women who bought something read at least one product package. So there's a clear connection between reading and buying. And reading takes time. And time requires space. Here's the breakdown from our compiled database; times are for how long women who made purchases read the packaging first:

- Facial cleaners: 13 seconds
- Moisturizers: 16 seconds
- Hand and body soap: 11 seconds
- Shower gel: 5 seconds
- Sun care: 11 seconds
- Acne medications: 13 seconds

But if women don't feel comfortable, they won't pause for two seconds, and they certainly won't buy any of the products that require a little study. Retailers should walk every foot of selling space asking this question: Can I stand here and shop without being jostled from behind? Any place where the answer is no is no place for merchandise requiring a careful look.

Even in fast-food restaurants, males and females have different spatial requirements. Without much consideration, men choose tables up front, where they have a good view of the busiest part of the room. Women will take a moment or two to shop for where they'll down their Big Macs, and then they gravitate toward the rear, to tables that afford a little privacy. In fact, women aren't all that crazy about going into fast-food restaurants alone. They make up a large percentage of fast-food diners who go through the drive-thru and eat in their cars in the restaurant parking lot.

You can really see the female shopping reverie in stores where women dominate—for instance, at the greeting card shop. There, women aren't merely fulfilling obligations, they're searching for authentic emotional expression. Women will devote quite a bit of time to studying card after card to find the one that speaks their hearts. Card

stores should therefore feel like places where the emotional life reigns. A few years ago Hallmark hired an architect with a lot of experience designing department stores to redo its retail spaces. She created a very stylish look, using lots of marble and other expensive materials, but the overall feeling was colder and more elegant than Hallmark customers had been used to. They must have missed their familiar warm and fuzzy environments; in response to the redesign, shopping time dropped.

Card stores must be designed to allow quiet, unhurried contemplation, meaning that aisles should be wide enough to allow room for readers and for those just passing by. Aisles must also be wide enough for baby strollers. Adjacencies should be planned rather than accidental: You don't want to be trying to find the perfect message of condolence and have your concentration broken by the woman next to you laughing at the dirty fortieth-birthday cards. Other important display issues also come to the fore in card stores. Women buy cards only after picking up, opening and reading a great many of them. But the merchandise is fragile—easily folded, torn or soiled. It amazes me that there is still no widely used display system that would allow shoppers to read sample cards but not actually touch the merchandise. Also, in card stores the displays usually start at about a foot or so off the floor and rise to about six feet high. There are two problems with that: One, the low cards are too far down to be seen without stooping; and two, the low cards are too easily touched by grubby-fingered small children accompanying their mothers. If the whole display were raised by a foot, the problems would be solved. Even if the highest cards were seven feet off the floor, they would be within reach of anyone taller than five feet.

The other great arena where female shopping behaviors are on display is in cosmetics. Whether it's in a department store's impossibly glamorous cosmetics bazaar or a chain drugstore's wall display of lipsticks and eye shadow, this is where a woman in jeans and a sweater can be transformed into a princess just by testing a few items and pouting into a mirror. This is as public as a private art form ever gets. There's a good reason cosmetics are usually stocked along a wall or in their own sheltered area—this is where women let their hair down,

literally and figuratively. They need a little privacy if they're going to cut loose.

Typically, women start as adolescents buying the cheaper brands down at the drugstore. Then they'll trade up to the fancy, high-priced stuff sold in department stores by the glam representatives of the various manufacturers—the dolls in the officious white lab coats (but Saturday-night-out makeup) brandishing brushes loaded with rouge and base and the rest. This is the high-pressure school of cosmetics selling. You sit on the stool, she turns you into a slightly toned-down version of herself, and you buy what she urged on you (in theory, at least). The prices are intentionally obscure, figuring that you'll be too intimidated to ask.

That's still the standard setup, but it's quickly changing now thanks to the "open sell" concept finally having come to the cosmetics counter. It's a form of women's liberation: The makeup is being freed from the clutches of the demonstrator-saleswoman and is out on its own for shoppers to test, ponder, try and then buy—or not. Some of the old game of let's pretend is gone, but so are some of the old high-pressure tactics. This open sell also allows women to check the price of makeup without having to endure the humiliation of asking that imperious clerk. By lessening the sticker shock, stores should end up selling more cosmetics.

These are the immutables of how women shop, the fundamentals that still (and may always) apply. Which is all well and good and necessary if anyone is going to sell anything. But it's not where the action is today.

We've seen what gender revolt means where male shoppers are concerned: All the contemporary effort lies in taking stores and products intended mainly for women and making them safe for guys. For women, it's just the opposite—the challenge is in making traditionally "male" products and environments appealing to female shoppers.

For example, the old-fashioned emporium of nuts and bolts still lingers here and there, but for the most part, one category killer has done

away with it. How did Home Depot and Lowe's manage that? Mainly by reflecting the socioeconomic reality that women no longer depend on men in the old-fashioned way. What does that have to do with wing nuts and duct tape? Well, were the females who spent all day at the barricades of social and political enlightenment going to come home at night and beg hubby (for the fifteenth time) to paint the window trim or install the dimmers? Unlikely. Not to mention the rise over the past three decades of the single female homeowner—women with the money and the desire to feather their own nests. Can we have female cops and firefighters and CEOs and cyber-entrepreneurs and presidential candidates and not have confident, ambitious, fully empowered handywomen, too? I don't think so.

And where would these women go to begin their careers as tool guys? To Joe's Hardware? No—the typical hardware store was exclusively, unapologetically masculine, and maybe even a little unfriendly to female ways. It was a tree house with a cash register. So something had to give. Enter the do-it-yourself chains. (And, from the other end of the retailing spectrum, the hardware boutiques.) They stripped hardware of its arcane side, rendering it unintimidating, even friendly, to the greenest tyro. Doing that required a major shift in mission as well as merchandising: Stores that sold nuts and bolts gave way to stores that sold lifestyles. Under that vast umbrella, nuts and bolts and lumber and sheetrock could be sold alongside lighting fixtures and kitchen cabinets and Jacuzzis and frilly (and nonfrilly) curtains and everything else. These stores sold not hardware but homes. The retail hardware industry has gone from an Erector Set mentality to a "let's play house" approach, from boys-only to boys and girls playing together.

This has also been done by hiring salesclerks who are knowledgeable and able to instruct and inspire confidence in female customers. The new wave of home stores hires women for sales and managerial jobs traditionally held only by guys named Joe (or Jim). There are many Home Depot TV spots in which only females appear. The stores also make enthusiastic use of any opportunity for education, whether with how-to videos or free in-store handyman lessons. These stores realize that the woman who is taught to hang a picture today will spackle

tomorrow and install crown molding next month. Who do you think is watching *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and HGTV and all the other fix-it shows on TV? The manly men are watching the bass-fishing channel, while the women are watching handymen like Ty Pennington, who resemble nothing more than hunky soap opera stars in toolbelts.

This infusion of female energy changes even how the stores display their goods. No longer can lighting fixtures simply be hung on a rack or stood on a shelf. Retailers have to show exactly how the lights will look in a room. Instead of displaying a box of bathroom faucets, stores now show the whole tub, complete with shower curtain and towels. Here's the indisputable proof of how Home Depot and Lowe's vanquished the old-fashioned nuts-and-bolts emporium: Before, you went to a hardware store only when you needed something. Now, you go just to browse, to see what's new and what's on display. You can now actually shop hardware—which means, by definition, that women have won and Joe (or Jim) has lost.

It's no accident that the most successful recent paint launches sell under the names of lifestyle gurus Martha Stewart and Ralph Lauren. Paint has gone from being hardware to being fashion, all because women got involved. Men don't paint until the walls are peeling and cracking; women do it when they (the women, not the walls) need a change. Of course, painting has always been within the abilities of your average man or woman. But only now has paint itself—the way it is packaged and marketed and sold—gone unisex.

There's another beneficiary of how hardware has changed—all we baby boomer men who somehow made it to adulthood without ever learning how to be handy around the house. As women became more handy, men became less so; we, too, had begun to feel a little intimidated by the old-fashioned hardware store. But even this has come at some cost to men: In the days since feminism's rise, we've seen the decline not only of hardware stores but also of the guys-only barbershop, the shoeshine stand and the men's clothing and shoe store. First the barriers to female admission to universities, the military, private clubs and all the rest fell. Then unisex hair salons and stores like the Gap, Banana Republic and J.Crew came along to desegregate clothing stores and even

styles. The overall thrust of the second half of the century has been to flush men out of their dens, and for better or worse, or maybe both, it's worked. (Is the pendulum ready to swing back? Have you been to a cigar bar lately?)

A second great arena for gender upheaval is the computer store and other places where consumer electronics are sold. Stereotypically, we think of males as being the ones at the personal technology frontier, actually knowing what gigabytes mean or shelling out five-figure sums for speakers. More recently, personal computers and cell phones all began life as toys for boys. But the fact is that often, women are the earliest adopters of new technology. When businesses began using computers, the female office workers had to learn first about operating systems and software. Those same women, crunched for time on their lunch breaks, were the earliest enthusiasts of the automated teller machine.

How did we not notice? Because men and women use technology in very different ways. Men are in love with the technology itself, with the gee-whiz factor, with the horsepower and the bang for the buck. Back before cars had computerized innards, the commonest sight in America was three or four guys assembled around the raised hood of a car, watching its owner adjust a carburetor or install a generator and offering copious advice on how it could be done better. Today, those same men are gathered around the barbecue comparing the size of their hard drives and the speed of their BlackBerries. As they say, it's a dude thing.

Women take a completely different approach to the world of high tech. They take technologies and turn them into appliances. They strip even the fanciest gizmo of all that is mysterious and jargony in order to determine its usefulness. Women look at technology and see its purpose, its reason—what it can do. The promise of technology is always that it will make our lives easier and more efficient. Women are the ones who demand that it fulfill its promise.

From the vantage point of 2009, we know that the female consumer is key to the health of the consumer electronics industry. RadioShack has gone out of its way to hire female store managers. Best Buy has

made the correlation between the success of an individual store and the number of female employees it has out on the selling floor.

What will all this lead to? Well, someday there will be a computer company with a highly visible woman at (or very near) the helm, somebody to hold forth on the business page of the *Times* and on CNBC—kind of like a female Bill Gates (but with a better haircut). Its products will emphasize not the size of the RAM or the speed of the microprocessor but rather ease of use, versatility and convenience. It will focus on results, not process. Its computers will be sold like refrigerators instead of like scientific instruments. The most heavily promoted feature will be a toll-free number for plainspoken technical help when a program freezes or a printer malfunctions. Then some agency will begin using images of women in its TV and print ads, maybe even in a campaign that lampoons how men relate to technology. Finally, designers will provide ergonomically improved keyboards. Computers will be easy to clean (they're almost impossible now). Most will even come in colors other than putty or black! And you'll be able to buy a Coach laptop case in a matching or complementary color.

Need evidence that men and women see technology differently? At a computer software store we studied, the shoppers were largely male, but the conversion rate, the percentage of shoppers who bought something, was highest among women. That's because they were in the store with some practical mission to carry out, not just to daydream over a new Zip drive or a scanner.

The car industry, perhaps the most backward and antishopper business in America, has realized for a few years now that women buy cars. Considering what a male-dominated world car sales has always been, dealers should be hiring lots of women to sell and service cars. But fewer than 10 percent of all car salespeople are female. Hiring women to sell cars isn't just political correctness, either—most women surveyed say they'd feel more comfortable buying cars from other females. They're not male-haters so much as they are feeling a little condescended to and maybe even ripped off by male car salesmen.

Car salesmen live by the conventional wisdom that the male half of a couple makes the decision, not realizing that in many cases the woman

is the one who's pushing for the new wheels or that her objections are what must be overcome. So the pitch is directed at the male while the woman silently burns. After the sale is closed, the buyers will usually be brought back to the service department to meet the manager. Back there it's usually 100 percent guy-land, starting even with the choice of magazines in the waiting area (*Car and Driver* and *Sports Illustrated* but not *Vanity Fair* or *People*). Someday soon we may see Ms. Goodwrench or the Pep Girls—Mary, Jo and Jill—but they're not here yet. Women report a distinct distaste for all their dealings with auto dealers, mechanics and car parts stores. They feel patronized, scorned and ripped off, but they also realize there's not much of a choice so far. They deserve better.

Again, the smart first move would be to hire females to fix cars and sell parts. Using actresses in TV spots also goes a long way toward repositioning this all-male world. A few years ago we did a study for a mass merchandiser's auto parts department. Ninety percent of the shoppers were male, but 25 percent of those who used the computerized information fixtures were female. Clearly, those women had questions and wanted answers that they weren't getting from the salesclerks. Maybe the clerks didn't know the answers, or maybe the women just didn't enjoy asking those guys. Either way, it shows that women are eager to learn how to handle the basic maintenance and easy repairs for their cars.

If I bought a gas station tomorrow, the first thing I'd do is put up a huge sign saying CLEAN BATHROOMS. Gas stations persist in displaying most prominently the price per gallon, down to the tenth of a cent, as though we even think that small. Gas is gas, and prices are fairly uniform, too. But clean bathrooms would draw female drivers, who make more use of facilities and so have more bitter complaints about horrible, filthy conditions. The fact is that while gas has become a self-serve item, we need assistance on the road now more than ever. We're going greater distances and so need directions, decent places to eat and drink, and clean bathrooms. Maybe even someplace with a clean baby-changing table and a working sink and a trash can that isn't spilling all over the floor. No woman is going to sweat a few pennies in gas

price if she is cared for otherwise. Don't male gas station owners realize that? Mostly they don't—why would they? But if there were more women involved in the car business, from dealerships to parts and repair to gasoline, the whole industry would look different. It would look like—hardware! Which may mean that even the car business isn't quite hopeless.

TEN

If You Can Read This You're Too Young

No doubt you already know this statistic: By 2025, nearly one fifth of all American people will be 65 or older. If you live in Japan, Italy, Germany, France or China, the percentage gets bigger. You also realize what that means: old baby boomers. A lot of old baby boomers.

But what will *that* mean? Well, right off the bat, it means it'll be good to be old. How could it be otherwise? When boomers were young, youth was good. When they were middle-aged, a certain seasoned maturity was good. And old people of the twenty-first century won't be like the current sober crop of senior citizens. Future oldsters didn't grow up in the Depression or slog through World War II; they came of age during the fat, self-indulgent '50s, '60s and '70s. They weren't forced the virtues of sacrifice, self-denial and delayed gratification, nor did they absorb the quaint notion that to be old is to accept infirmity and inability stoically, as one's lot in life. The little old lady of 2025 won't have a spotless Ford Fairlane (that she drives once a week, to church) sitting in her garage. She'll be buzzing around town in an Alfa Romeo (standard equipment including seats with hydraulic lifts), dressed head to

toe in the Nike "Silver" line, parking in the plentiful spaces reserved for people who are old but not impaired (as mandated by the 2012 Spunky Aging Americans Act). Thanks to improved health care, nutrition, fitness and cosmetic surgery, at seventy she'll look and feel like her mother did at fifty. The kids will be grown and gone, working like ants to keep Social Security afloat, while we geezers squander the fruits of our 401(k)s along with what we inherited from our departed parents, whose demise is even now beginning to trigger the largest transfer of wealth in the history of money.

For the world of shopping, it's going to be a party! That's obvious. All of retailing—stores, restaurants and banks—is going to have to cater to us, because we'll have the numbers and the dollars. But we're going to need a whole new world. This one's not going to work. And we're not gonna take it!

What's wrong with this world? For starters, all the words are too damn small. See this sentence? How could you? Too damn small. How about the morning paper? Forget it. Too damn small. The directions on your jar of organic herbal laxative? Too. Damn. Small. And you're not even going to try squinting. (It causes wrinkles.) If you can't read it, by gum, you just won't buy it. And if you don't buy organic herbal laxative, nobody will. And if nobody buys it . . . well, you see where this is going.

Human eyes begin to falter at about age forty, and even healthy ones are usually impaired by their sixties. With age, three main ocular events take place: The lens becomes more rigid and the muscles holding it weaken, meaning you can't focus on small type; the cornea yellows, which changes how you perceive color; and less light reaches your retina, meaning the world looks a little dimmer than it once did. The issue of visual acuity, already a major one in the marketplace, will become even more critical—not just in some far-off future, but from this moment on.

For example, every current study done of newspaper readership comes back with the same result: Readers want bigger text. Most papers now use body text of roughly nine-point type. (This book is set in 11.75-point type.) Readers want twelve-point or larger. And newspapers

are just starting to get it. *The Miami Herald*, I think, was the first major daily to upsize, then the *London Times* went from a broadsheet to a tabloid format, with larger headlines and chubbier font, and in 2007 the *New York Times* actually shrunk the paper size and reduced the number of columns, making the print easier to read, but still uses 8.7-point type. We still have a long way to go, but why did it take this long for them to see us waving at them?

But typeface problems aren't limited to the publishing business. The main market today for drugstores is older people, and that dependence will only increase. Certainly, of all the words we are required to read in the course of our lives, few are more important than the labels, directions and warnings on drugs, both prescription and over the counter. For instance, we have found that 91 percent of all skin care customers buy only after they've read the front label of the box, bottle or jar. Forty-two percent of buyers also read the back of the package. Clearly, reading is crucial to selling skin care and other health and beauty items.

Our studies of drugstore packaging also reveal some interesting comparisons. For instance, the directions, ingredients and/or warning information is ten-point or larger on the packaging for famous brands of hair dye, skin cream, acne medicine and toothpaste. But it's between six-point and nine-point on aspirin and a host of other common analgesics. It is also between six-point and nine-point on cold capsules and other sneezy-stuffy-drippy products, as well as on vitamins. In other words, packaging designers make it much easier for teenagers to read their pimple cream than for seniors to read their headache or cold remedies. The only concession to age we found was on a box of Polident, which uses eleven-point type for directions and eight-point for ingredients.

This is obviously a failing on the part of the wizards in drug companies' packaging divisions. But when you realize that most graphic designers, including those who create labels, are in their twenties, it's easy to see why there has been such a gargantuan miscalculation. The people who make the packaging have no idea how it looks to the people who must read it. Take a gander at publications intended for youthful readers—I mean magazines like *Wired* or *Spin*. In all, the type is tiny and frequently printed on backgrounds that provide little contrast. The

message is clear: This magazine is meant for the young and will make no concessions to decrepitude. It's equivalent to when Mick Jagger, a well-born college graduate, slurred and swallowed his lyrics, rendering his music inaccessible to ears that had grown up on Bing Crosby and Patti Page. In the next century, the disparity of age between designers of drugstore products and their most frequent readers will only broaden.

At some drugstores in Florida, magnifying glasses on chains have been attached to the shelves. This is a clever makeshift solution, but it's not going to be enough. Drugstores report that overall, about one shopper in five seeks employee assistance, but almost double that percentage of senior citizen customers ask for help. Invariably, what they require is the aid of younger eyes to find a product or read a label. You can go through *any* kind of store and find commercial type that's a challenge for aging eyes to read. The nutritional information on the side of a cereal box. The laundering instructions on a silk shirt. The directions on hair dye, a self-test for cholesterol, the manual for a camera or software or a DVD player. The specifications on a computer printer ink-jet cartridge. The song titles on a CD. The size on a pair of golf shoes. The price on a paperback. And how are future customers going to find your business—by reading the telephone book or online directory? I can't read it *now*. And let's not forget restaurant menus, train schedules, government forms, birthday cards, postage stamps, thermometers, speedometers, odometers, the radio dial, the buttons on your washer and dryer and air conditioner and refrigerator, your humidifier, your hot-water heater . . . Did I mention those little stickers that tell you the pear you just bought is, in fact, *a pear*? How will you ever know? In every instance, the object makes itself forbidding and even hostile to older shoppers by dint of typeface size alone. Today's senior citizens endure this minor form of discrimination without complaint, as their lot in life. But old boomers, accustomed to having existence itself tailored to their specifications, surely will rebel. By 2025, anything smaller than thirteen-point type will be a form of commercial suicide. Even today, as our vision begins to blur, using nine-point type qualifies as a self-destructive tendency.

But did you notice the dilemma here? The better educated (and therefore better off) the shopper, the more he or she makes decisions

based on what's written on labels, boxes and jars. In fact, all retailing depends on the written word now more than ever before. That would seem to call for putting as much information on products, packaging and merchandising materials as possible. But when designers are told to squeeze in more type, they usually do so by making it smaller. Maybe bigger packages are a solution (although that would cause its own difficulties when it's time to allocate shelf space, not to mention the waste of more good trees). Maybe labels should make greater use of graphic images. Maybe it's time for bigger and better signs or talking display fixtures. It might come in the form of a prompt sent to our cell phones or BlackBerries. Or better yet, a completely re-thought-out union of package and instructions—environmentally friendly, with recyclable containers and instructions printed on renewable hemp paper. Maybe we should try all of the above, because we're going to need a culture-wide jump in type size before long.

And size isn't the only optical consideration. The yellowing of the aging cornea means that certain subtle gradations of color will become invisible to a large part of the population. So, for instance, more people than ever will trip up (or fall down) stairs as the clear distinction between step and riser disappears. The difference between blue and green will become more difficult for many shoppers to perceive, and yellow will be become much trickier for designers to use—*everything* will look a little yellow. As a result, packaging, signs and advertising will have to be designed for maximum contrast, not just for the nuanced interplay of colors. We're going to have to see a lot more black, white and red and a lot less of any other hue.

For instance, we tested merchandising materials for a large California savings bank, and while interviewing departing customers, we found that a large poster on the wall behind the tellers had low recall among older patrons. The poster, which promoted the bank's Visa Gold card, showed an oversized credit card sitting atop a gold brick. To us, the image was clear. To older eyes, though, the distinction between the card and the gold was invisible, so it looked like a single large, mysterious yellow shape—a meaningless poster, to many people over sixty-five. We studied signage at a major New York hotel and realized that the color

scheme for the room numbers, gold lettering on an off-white background, was making the place difficult to navigate for old eyes.

Finally, the typical fifty-year-old's retinas receive about one quarter less light than the average twenty-year-old's. That means lots of stores, restaurants and banks should be brighter than they are now. There can't be pockets of dim light, not if shoppers are going to see what they're shopping or even where they're walking. Illumination must be bright, especially during those times of day when older shoppers tend to arrive. And again, all print will have to be bold and high contrast—dark colors on white (or light) backgrounds.

Why is it that winemakers have begun thinking of their labels as art projects? From Kroger to Trader Joe's, we've documented a kazillion people struggling to read labels. It's even worse at your local liquor store, where the lighting tends to be dimmer than in the big chains and the shelves can be downright gloomy. I'm not suggesting that a label can't be pretty or have a kangaroo on it, just that a bottle has to be picked up and glanced at before it gets bought. This is particularly important for small and up-and-coming vintners. Type of wine, country of origin, year, vineyard and a marketing plug—this is all stuff customers are looking for. Proven snotty French brands can do what they want, but all those superb newcomers to the global wine market from Chile, Argentina, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand need to pay attention.

One of our fast-food clients realized that diners over fifty-five were their fastest-growing demographic, despite the fact that the menu boards used type that was almost impossible for older people to see well. The company redesigned the menus using large photos of the food, and even though it meant listing fewer items, sales rose.

Changing the visual world to accommodate aging eyes will be easy compared to the structural alterations that are going to be required. Even in the twenty-first century, old people will be creaky. And keep in mind that senior citizenship is going to last longer than anyone ever imagined—we'll be old for decades, many of us, longer in some cases than we were young. The same world will have to be navigable by robust sixty-five-year-olds and rickety eighty-five-year-olds. Twenty years ago

many of the newly retired bought retirement condos in seaside areas, and some of those apartments were two- or three-story walkups with ocean-view porches—perfect aeries to while away your golden years, it seemed. Now, however, two decades later, many of those springy-gaited sixtysomethings are wheelchair-bound or otherwise unable to climb, rendering those getaways obsolete. How will our stores and streets and malls fare when today's swarms of baby carriages are replaced by motorized wheelchairs? Doorways, elevators, aisles, cash register areas, restaurant tables, bathrooms, airplanes, trains, buses and private cars will all have to be considerably wider than they are now. Ramps will be required by commercial considerations if not by government fiat. Stairs will be relics. Escalators and moving sidewalks will have to be redesigned and in some cases slowed down. Think of all the multilevel malls that by 2025 will seem inconvenient, if not downright impossible, to one fifth of the population. Remember, older shoppers will be everywhere then, at the drugstore but also at the Gap and Ralph Lauren and Toys "R" Us and Starbucks and Borders, the brand names on which tomorrow's codgers—we—came of age. Once manufacturers start making stylish, sporty motorized wheelchairs (they'll be more like street-ready one-person golf carts) and sleek, European-styled walkers, we'll really see the difference. We'll need cops to direct pedestrian traffic.

It won't just be for the immobile that the retail landscape will have to change, either. Even ambulatory older shoppers can't bend or stretch like they used to. And they don't really want to—bending and stretching make them feel their age, which is the last thing they want to feel. At RadioShack, the slowest-selling batteries were for use in hearing aids, so the conventional wisdom dictated they should be stocked at the bottom of the freestanding "spinner" fixtures. Of course, who buys hearing aid batteries but old people, the shoppers least able to stoop? When the batteries were moved higher on the spinners, sales went up, and sales of the batteries that were moved to the bottom didn't drop at all. We looked at the women's couture floor of a New York department store and found a similar issue. Not surprisingly, many of the women who can afford these clothes are older and therefore tend to be of generous proportions. The designers, however, in order to keep

up their image, stock sizes 4 and 6 on the racks and keep sizes 14 and 16 in a back room somewhere, forcing the humiliated shopper to ask one of the painfully thin salesclerks to go and fetch her something a little roomier. Elsewhere in apparel a similar situation pertains: Racks and shelves of underwear or trousers are organized in size order, the smallest up top and the largest way down at the bottom—forcing the fattest and oldest customers to strain themselves, while making it easy on the young and the supple.

(Personally, I'd like to lead a revolt of tall shoppers, those of us who are forced to bend low at every ATM and water fountain in existence. We're getting taller as a populace, and older, too, meaning that bending will truly hurt in two or three decades.)

In supermarkets, products stocked too low or too high are virtually off-limits to the older shopper; it's just not worth the trouble, they sigh. I'll find it elsewhere. This is especially so with heavy items like cases of soft drinks or large boxes of detergent—if you can't just slide it off the shelf and into your cart, you won't buy it there. (In fact, for the sake of shoppers of all ages, bulky packages should be shelved at shopping-cart-top height.) Remember our pet treats example from chapter 1? Making life easy on older shoppers not only sells goods, it engenders warm feelings among a group that is often badly served by retailers. The geezer who comes in for hearing-aid batteries and doesn't have to exert himself to get them will probably return when he needs to buy a cell phone or a computer.

Japan is one country that has made great strides in accommodating its aging population. In Japan, land is precious and the malls tend to go up rather than sprawl. In some malls, the escalators move very slowly, not to annoy the sprinting teenagers in the crowd, but in deference to Japan's aging customer base. Japan's largest mobile service provider, DoCoMo, has a senior-friendly phone with big buttons and oversized numerals. It bears asking again: Are we as remotely prepared in the U.S., or in Italy or Russia (two other countries with rapidly aging populations), for the same graying consumers? Our over-fifty population is increasingly unable to endure spatial uncertainty. Which is a fancy way of saying that in stores that cover more than thirty thousand

square feet, most graying consumers don't get a kick out of getting lost. Merchants would like their customers to get deliciously lost, not addled-and-simmering-and-ready-to-blow-their-tops lost.

Waiting areas are, or should be, another key concern for merchants and landlords. If your average senior knows she can walk a certain distance and find a place where she can sit, she's more likely to do just that. HEB, the Texas grocery store chain, recognizes that many Latino families enjoy shopping in multigenerational clusters. Having benches scattered through the store is both an act of kindness and guerilla marketing. Plus, any waiting area is a fantastic selling and communications point. Your audience is captive, ready to read any and all information you give them. You'll also score especially big points with elderly customers if you make your chairs easy to get into and out of. Those of us in our presenior years who are in positions of moderate influence have a fairly vested interest in preparing the universe for our own dotage. Now isn't too soon to take a hard look at older shoppers. Before Calvin Klein comes out with a line of designer adult diapers, we need to make our world a lot more senior-friendly.

One of the ongoing challenges in contemporary banking is getting older customers to use ATMs. The automated tellers can be intimidating if you're not already comfortable with interactive touch-screens and machine-speak. Senior citizens can be taught, but it shouldn't be by youngsters or officious junior VP wannabes; older customers prefer to be instructed by their contemporaries, all our surveys say—one older bank employee stationed by the teller lines can escort multitudes of senior customers to ATMs. It also helps to have ATMs within sight of the teller lines; if seniors can watch people use the machines, they lose some of their fearsomeness. Due to failing eyes and arthritic fingers, those ATMs will have to adapt, too—the buttons will have to become larger, as will the screens and the words on them. If the gains in economy made by self-serve are to be maintained, lots of machines will have to be redesigned for older hands and vision. The written directions and buttons on the stamp vending machines and do-it-yourself scales at the post office, for instance, are too small for the aged to manage easily. The same is true of the credit card reader and pump at the self-service gas

station line, the commuter train ticket machine and the check-in kiosk at the airport.

Tiny buttons and hooks on clothing—especially the inconvenient back closures on women's garments—will have to be replaced with simpler fasteners, like Velcro. Cell phone makers currently compete to see who can go smallest, but at some point the phone with the largest buttons and liquid crystal display will be most desirable, at least among older users. (That'll be at about the same time that cell phones go from being yuppie toys to senior citizen lifelines.) Remote controls for TV, cable box and CD player, the buttons on the camcorder, the notebook computer keyboard—at the current rate, all will essentially miniaturize themselves out of the running for senior citizen dollars. I keep speaking as though all this is going to take place in the future, but that's wrong: It's already begun to happen. The world of retailing is having an interesting response.

Where are all the energy and innovation and capital expenditure in retail environments going today? To serve the coming tsunami of ancient shoppers, of course, am I right? No, I'm wrong—they're all devoted to stores aimed at youthful dollars, like Abercrombie, American Eagle, Roxy and Torrid. The new interactive fixtures and displays coming out of design labs are dazzling—you're never sure if you're in a store or a theme park, which is the whole point, I guess. It must be a lot of fun to dream up such gizmos and the stores that contain them. And so it's no wonder that's where all the action is.

Unfortunately, these stores are catering to a market that's already on the decline. Based on U.S. census data, the number of Americans over sixty-five will more than double by the year 2035—as I said, it's by far the fastest-growing segment of our population. There's plenty of work ahead in making the world of retail better serve senior citizens. For our own sake, let's hope some of that labor, too, is carried out with imagination and verve.

In fact, the time to begin that work is now. Let's start small—by demanding better elevator music! I want to make my supermarket

sojourns to the sounds of the Doors themselves, not 1001 Syrupy Strings' version of "Light My Fire." In fact, I can't wait to join a senior citizen social center, where we'll all prop ourselves up on our walkers and careen around the dance floor as the DJ spins the special fiftieth-anniversary edition of the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack.

The aging eye is beginning to be felt in marketing. Mass merchandisers have built a pretty good franchise with older consumers in a few categories, including small appliances, hardware, automotive items and seasonal products. They've been much less successful in books, apparel, health-and-beauty aids and over-the-counter drugs. It's not because older people don't care about the written word or about wanting to look good. It's certainly not because they don't need pain relief or the occasional cough drop for an itchy throat. It might have something to do with the products themselves. The fashion world doesn't seem to have grasped the fact that older people want stylish yet suitable clothing that fits.

At the same time, if you're a guy like me, I'll bet you don't need any more stuff. The fifty-and-over crowd is generally downsizing, adjusting for empty nests and aging parents. Right now I own every shirt, tie, pair of shoes and piece of jewelry I foresee needing for the rest of my life. The only things I require are fruit, vegetables, pasta, wine, olive oil, meat and fish weekly, and annual doses of fresh socks and underwear. Everything else is discretionary (although my longtime live-in—who I call Dreamboat, because she is one—did surprise me two Christmases ago with a new gadget called a Slingbox, which hooks up to my cable TV and home Internet service, so now when I'm stranded in a hotel room in Singapore at two A.M., I can watch Yankees games on my laptop from my TV at home—pure heaven). Like most fifty-somethings, and with the notable exception of that Slingbox, which you're not taking away from me, I'll pick experiences over things any day. Plus a few pairs of socks.

I mentioned the brave new world of wheelchairs earlier, virgin territory that no one, to my knowledge, has staked out yet. These personal vehicles will surely receive a makeover, including souped-up engines, cruise control, lots of upholstery choices (will black leather be too hot

in summer?), big tires like we had on our Jeeps back in the '90s, cell phone chargers, cup holders, CD players and the appropriate bumper stickers (*IF THIS WHEELCHAIR'S A-ROCKIN' DON'T COME A-KNOCKIN'*). There will be plenty of licensing opportunities, bringing brand names like Harley, BMW and John Deere (or Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Prada) to the marketplace. They won't even be called wheelchairs—and in fact they'll more closely resemble tractor mowers or three-wheeled motorcycles. These babies won't even necessarily connote a handicap. They'll just be cool conveniences, something for the geezer who has everything.

At the other end of the spectrum, it's no secret that next to kids, old people are the biggest market for sneakers. Who else has a lifestyle that doesn't ever require serious grown-up footwear? In fact, athletic gear—soft, rubber-soled shoes, baggy, open-necked shirts, loose pants with elastic waistbands—is tailor-made for the needs of aging fashion plates. Senior citizens have a lot more money to spend on sneakers than kids do and would gladly pay for features designed to bring extra comfort. Still, no self-respecting teenager wants to wear the same athletic shoes as Grandmom, which is probably why all those ads for Nike and Reebok feature youngsters rather than oldsters. Is there no way for a major athleticwear maker to target aged customers? I bet we'll see it before long—it'll just be too lucrative to miss. (Maybe the commercials will star the sixty-five-year-old Michael Jordan playing one-on-one with the twenty-first century's premiere eight-foot center.)

There's a similar question brewing over how the baby boomer fashion staple will age: Will kids buy the brand of jeans preferred by their grandparents? I'm assuming that we boomers will wear blue denim right up to the tomb (and why stop there?). But if it's the uniform of the senility set, will anybody else dare touch it? Or will jeans go the way of fedoras?

The world of health and beauty aids now doesn't pay enough attention to the older consumer, but it will have to in the future. There should be entire brands devoted to the needs of people over sixty-five, including special formulations of products for hair, skin, teeth, male grooming and cosmetics. Somebody is also going to have to figure out how to sell incontinence products to aging boomers. The current

category—a few low-key brands of adult diapers sold sheepishly in the feminine hygiene aisle—isn't going to cut it. Will it be Hanes, Calvin Klein, or Estée Lauder? Or will they be sold next to the extra-hold sports bras and athletic supporters?

The mattress store of the future will do well to specialize in selling to seniors. They'll shop long and hard for bedding that's ergonomically sound, and they'll pay for it, too. From Tempur-Pedic to Sleep Number, mattresses will become more quasimedical products than home furnishings. The sleep category is booming. Even hotels are using their beds as a marketing engine for the aging, aching traveler.

When there aren't so many kids afoot in America, the fast-food trade will have to redouble its efforts to keep senior citizen diners interested. They already make up a large part of the fast-food audience, without even being acknowledged beneath the golden arches. Someday it won't be the latest Disney animation flick that gets the Burger King tie-in; it'll be *Rambo: The Nursing Home Insurgency*. And instead of a Beanie Baby, the Happy Meal will come with a Hummel figurine.

When parents shop for clothing, toys, books and videos for their children, they usually know what size to get, or which favored plaything, or at what level the little one is reading. Thirty years from now, though, today's parents will be buying for their grandchildren, and they'll need a little guidance. Will clothing makers have wised up by then and created a sensible, standardized system of sizes? It's chaos out there now, as anyone who shops for kiddie clothes knows. If such a system isn't in place, stores will have to do whatever's necessary—big, easy-to-read size charts, mannequins of different heights, lots of attentive salesclerks, all of the above—to ensure that grandparents can buy clothing with confidence.

If they can't buy clothing, they'll opt for toys or books or DVDs instead. But again, manufacturers and retailers have to make it easier than it is now. The appropriate reader's age should be marked prominently on all kiddie and adolescent books. Same for videos and video games, too. Grandmom doesn't want to accidentally buy *Grand Theft Auto* for her dear little five-year-old grandson, and she needs a hand to make sure she doesn't.

Of course, we boomers are born technocrats, but who knows what new marvels will exist to intimidate us three decades from now? New technologies usually bring benefits that are perfectly suited to the older shopper: Internet shopping and e-mail make it easy if you can't get around like you used to, and the pocket PCs of the future (like today's BlackBerries and iPhones, only better) will have plenty of memory for the times when yours fails, like when you need a phone number or you're standing in the middle of the supermarket and can't remember why.

But look at how technology is marketed and sold—you'll never see anybody over thirty in an ad or behind the counter of a store. And the product itself is unfriendly to older users, from the miniature keyboards to the type design on websites to the frequency with which printer and computer on-off switches are located in the back. Maybe some of high tech's appeal is lost when it's easy enough for your grandmother to use. But a couple decades down the road, when *we're* the grandmothers, there's going to be hell to pay.

ELEVEN

Kids

With gender revolt (or reconfiguration, at the very least) having changed so much about our lives, and men and women off boldly shopping new terrain, the effect on children today is quite simple: Kids go everywhere.

Where did they ever go? To school, of course, which left their mothers free to perform the myriad tasks of the domestic superintendent, high among them the acquisition of food, groceries, clothing and other supplies and services as needed. Dad bought booze, tires, cigars, lawnmowers, groceries (maybe once or twice a year) and Mom's birthday gift. Banking was done by either mother or father, depending on the household's particular division of labor. Only major purchases required the presence of the entire family, but how often did anyone get a car or a couch? Not so often that the children who came along for the ride required very much in the way of accommodation.

Today, both parents are almost certainly working at jobs, which means buying that cannot be done over lunch hours must take place during times the family might happily spend together. Shopping then

becomes an acceptable leisure outing—less pleasurable, perhaps, than a week at Disney World, but not entirely without potential for fun, as we'll see. Also, divorce is common enough that the single parent (either one) in the company of the brood is a common sight in movie theaters, restaurants and stores. On any given Saturday afternoon, is there a Cold Stone Creamery or game arcade in America that goes unvisited by divorced dads with their weekend-custody kids? Kids go everywhere because we take them, but once there, they alter the shopping landscape in both obvious and subtle ways.

The older we get, the more we recognize that the ownership of any product, no matter what it is, isn't transformative. That dress, that lipstick, that iPod nano is not going to change you or anyone's opinion of you. The aging consumer is also better at ignoring pop-up ads online and TiVo-ing their favorite programs so they don't have to watch five annoying commercials in a row. Thus, the twenty-first-century marketer is focused on kids and teens. It's no surprise to note that the average four-year-old American child can identify more than one hundred brands.

There is also the fact that our children consume even more mass media than we adults do, much of it vying to sell them things. The marketplace wants kids, needs kids, and kids are flattered by the invitation and happy to oblige. They idolize licensed TV characters the way their junior forebears once were taught to worship patron saints, and they manage to suss out the connection between brand name and status at a very early age. It's just one more example of how capitalism brings about democratization—you no longer need to stay clear of the global marketplace just because you're three and a half feet tall, have no income to speak of, and are not permitted to cross the street without Mom. You're an economic force, now and in the future, and that's what counts.

All this, like every major upheaval, is both boon and burden. In practical terms, it means three things:

1. That if a store is somehow unwelcoming to children, parent shoppers will get the message and stay away. I can't tell you how many stores that depend on female customers fail to ensure that all aisles and paths between racks and fixtures are wide enough for a baby stroller to pass.

If they're not, at least half of all women in their twenties and thirties will be shut out at least some of the time. (A great many men shoppers will be, too.) We did a job for a department store and determined, using a tape measure, that the baby and children's clothing section was more crowded with racks and fixtures than any other part of the store. As a result, it was the most difficult part of the store to navigate if you were pushing a stroller; it was also the least-visited section of the store, which was no coincidence. Every year, Hallmark spends a small fortune on TV commercials for the Christmas ornament sections of its stores. In one prototype store we studied, the fixture sat on a narrow aisle. Every time a shopper with a stroller ventured there, the section was totally blocked off. As a result, our research showed, only 10 percent of the store's shoppers ever saw the ornaments. By store design and fixturing alone you determine whether you will be kid-friendly or kid-avoidant: Automatic doors, wide aisles and no steps make it easy on parents pushing prams or dragging (or chasing) toddlers.

2. That children can be counted on to be enthusiastic consumers (or co-consumers) as long as their needs have been considered. In other words, if you want to sell something to kids, you've got to put it where they can see it and reach it. That goes for obvious items, like bubble bath in an Arthur-shaped container, but also for things like dog treats, as I explained in an earlier chapter, since children (along with old people) are the main market for liver-flavored cookies. Conversely, if you don't childproof the store the way you would your home, you'll be in for many unhappy surprises.

3. That if the parent's sustained close attention is required (by, say, a car salesman or a bank loan officer), then someone must first find a way to divert the attention of a restless, bored child.

The first time I paid practical attention to the effect of children on the "adult" world was not in any retail emporium but in a temple of culture, the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia. I was wandering among the great one's larger-than-life bronzes, lost in aesthetic reverie, when I heard a young voice exclaim, "Look, Mom—a bottom!" I turned to see

an angelic tyke gripping with both little hands the buttocks of Balzac.

I then gazed around the room and noticed that there were touch marks on all the statues, roughly at the height where this adorable child had grabbed poor old Honoré. Clearly, this little fellow was not the only touch-oriented art connoisseur in America.

That moment illustrated several truths about children. First, they are exuberant participants in the world of objects. If it is within their reach and it offers even the slightest inducement, they will touch it. A child's creative impulse is expressed in his or her search for the essential toy-ness in everything, from the most mundane objects to the loftiest. An ironing board? That's a toy. Balzac's butt cheeks? They're a toy, too. I realized that if you want children to touch something, you must only put it low enough, and they will find it. In fact, objects placed below a certain point will be touched by children *only*.

Supermarkets have been at the forefront of exploiting the hands-on shopping style of children. We have countless videotape moments showing kids in grocery stores begging, coaxing, whining, imploring Mom or Dad to choose some item (and when that fails, simply grabbing it and tossing it into the cart). If it's within their reach, they will touch it, and if they touch it, there's at least a chance that Mom or Dad will relent and buy it, Dad especially. Even this must be done with care, though—we once studied a market that had placed products with kid appeal on the bottom shelf, not realizing that for children riding in shopping carts, the shelf just below the middle one is ideal.

Supermarkets have gotten so good at appealing to children that parents are in semirevolt. In response to complaints about the candy and gum racks by the cashiers, some markets have begun to offer candy-free checkouts. (Now the confectioners are complaining.) We found an alarming trend in a study a few years back: a growing number of parents who assiduously steer clear of the cookie and cracker aisle in order to spare themselves the predictable youthful hue and cry. To counter that maneuver, our cookie manufacturer client began securing strategic adjacencies—with appropriate aisle partners (cookies on one side of the aisle and baby food on the other, for example) to guarantee that one way or another, families will have to confront chocolate chips.

In the '80s, General Mills devised a new product for callow palates: a microwave popcorn that came in different colors. They advertised the stuff heavily on kiddie TV, but then—in a classic example of the merchandising hand not knowing what the marketing hand was doing—failed to make sure it was being displayed within reach of its intended consumers. In fact, assuming that parents would do the buying, the firm's typical supermarket planogram had positioned it on the high side, and this, we felt sure, was to blame for the product's disappointing sales. We still show clients the video of a boy of six or so making repeated flying leaps at the shelf where the popcorn was kept, trying to knock one to the floor so he could show it to Mom. He finally got it down, but his mother refused to allow it in the cart. Dejectedly, he put it back on the shelf—not where it had been, but down at *his* eye level. And sure enough, the next kid who came by saw it, grabbed it and tossed it into Dad's cart, where it remained. A classic moment in the wisdom of watching the shopper.

It would be almost impossible for families to shop together if not for the advent of kid-friendly dining, and McDonald's, more than anyone, has prospered from this—the restaurants are part convenience, part bribery for the little citizens if only they'll behave through a morning at the mall. McDonald's realized early on that if it could appeal to children—through its menu but also with the toys and licensed character cups and playlands—it would get the parents as well. It's no coincidence that America's dominant fast food is also the favorite among kids. But even McDonald's doesn't get everything right. One glaring omission: The counters are all too high for children to use. A seven- or eight-year-old is certainly capable of going alone from table to counter to order more fries or another soda. But the design of the restaurants forbids it. Even the menu boards are so high that only an adult can comfortably see them. There should be kid-level menus that employ large photos of the food and as few words as possible.

I have my own personal kids-in-a-restaurant story. As I mentioned earlier, for a time I was one of the owners of a downtown New York bar and restaurant known as the Ear Inn. When we first bought the business, the bar was patronized mostly by aging printers and longshoremen—a

rough-and-tumble blue-collar crowd. As the new owners, we were interested in reaching out to the homesteaders, artists and young families who were slowly moving into our industrial neighborhood, located only a block and a half from the Hudson River. We also needed to raise the prices, and to do that we had to—gently, unassumingly—change the makeup of the Ear's customer base. Our solution? We put paper and crayons on every table and at happy hour we invited our preferred patrons to set their kids loose inside the bar so that Mom could cook dinner in peace at home while Dad nursed a beer and kept watch. Thus, beginning at about five in the afternoon until after eight, the Ear Inn had a huge posse of toddlers and small kids underfoot. Happy hour became all about being happy, and not about scarfing down as many whiskey sours as you could. The longshoremen and printers disappeared. These weren't people you wanted to annoy, but they were scared off or turned off or both.

What we could never have foreseen was how the presence of children protected us in other ways. Almost every other new bar owner reported having trouble with the local mob: protection money, payoffs for garbage, staged fights, bookies camped out in their telephone booths jotting down bets. The Ear somehow steered clear of all these issues. Most mysterious.

In the ensuing years I got to know some of the neighborhood wise-guys. Two guys from that era of my life are now doing hard time in prison. Others I still see on the street and am always glad to run into. Even now I joke that if I ever needed someone whacked, I'd know where to go. One night about ten years ago I was walking down the street when I ran into, well, let's call him Tony. We retired to a local bar for a few drinks and a lot of talk about the old days. I asked why we got left alone.

"Paco, it was the friggin' kids. Three times someone was supposed to have a little talk wit you guys, but we walk in and you got old ladies and kids in the bar; we could do nothing. *Nothing.*"

Amazing what paper and a whole bunch of crayons can do for you.

No, you're not dreaming: There are more kids in bookstores today than ever before. Once, the children's books section consisted of a few shelves stuck way in back, behind the dictionaries. Today it may be the best-looking, most inviting part of the store.

Here's how smart booksellers stock the shelves: They place the books featuring characters from popular TV shows down low, so the little ones can grab Bratz, SpongeBob or Fairly OddParents unimpeded by Mom or Dad, who possibly take a dim view of hypercommercialized critters. Children's classics—Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, *The Little Prince* or anything that seems old and wordy—are displayed high, at eye level for adults, since that's who'll be choosing those worthies. In the middle go the books and characters whose appeal spans generations—Babar, for example, or *Curious George*, or Dr. Seuss. (DVD planograms should work the same way bookstores' do: the venerables that parents might choose—*Old Yeller* or *The Wizard of Oz*—displayed high, and contemporary favorites like *High School Musical* or *Hannah Montana* down where children can grab them and commence their noisy yet still somehow charming pleas.)

We always advise our bookstore clients to group sections by gender, acknowledging the tendency of men to cluster in sports, business, do-it-yourself and computers while women troll psychology, self-help, health, food, diet, home and garden. Place the children's books within sight of those women's sections, we counsel—and use low shelving for the kids, so that mothers can browse their books and look over from time to time to keep an eye on the children.

At the Barnes & Noble superstore near my office, there's a kiddie section with lots of miniature seating, which is good, but it ignores the fact that most children are accustomed to being read to while sitting in a parental lap. I'm always tempted to grab one or two of the large armchairs from elsewhere in the store and drag them into the kiddie section.

The publishers of children's books do a fairly lame job of making their product appealing for its main audience—adults. If you're buying books for your own child, whose tastes and reading level you know well, you probably don't require much direction. But what about all

those grandparents and aunts and uncles and friends of the family who wish to buy books for the kiddies? They need some clear indication on the books (and maybe on the bookshelves and other displays) about for whom each book is intended—which grade (or age) reading level, mainly. But few children's books or book displays carry this important information. This is a classic example of a product's designers and marketers having no idea sometimes what shoppers require. You'll see potential buyers standing in the stores reading, as though they'll find a clue there, and then, fatally uncertain about their choice, they put it back and decide to get Junior something else instead. It may also be important to find a way to let shoppers know about the focus of a particular book—whether it's meant to teach relationship building or imaginative play—as a way to signal a book's appropriateness as a gift.

Here's another way publishers fail shoppers at gift time: Kids' books tend to be relatively inexpensive, meaning that if you're buying, you may buy more than one. But even in the successful children's series, such as Goosebumps or Lemony Snicket, you'll find few boxed sets, despite the fact that collections of four or five books would make a perfect present.

Though technically adults are the ones who select and buy toys, the kids are the real decision-makers. Even if Junior is still preverbal, you'll see his parents take a toy from the shelf, consider it, and then dangle it in the little one's face to get the opinion that counts. If he bites, they'll buy—it's why most toy packaging now allows you to push the buttons or pull the string without opening the box.

The principle, then, is simple: If adults are highly tactile shoppers, kids are uninhibitedly so. As Balzac's buns discovered, kids will touch anything. You've just got to watch them in action and then plan accordingly. But there are at least two troublesome aspects there, both of which require common sense on the part of the retailer.

First, you've got to realize that the degree to which you are successful at getting children to see and touch and pick up and then desire items is also the degree to which you will frustrate and annoy their parents—the ones who brought the children in the first place. Like those adults who avoid the cookie aisle or the checkout piled with candy and gum

and toys inspired by the latest Nickelodeon hit, for instance. Shopping is much more difficult when you're chasing after a child who believes he or she is the one doing the shopping. After a time, the experience of a store with too much kid appeal becomes one the adult wishes only to avoid. There's a balance there, one worth striking.

Second, if you're going to merchandise your store for kids, you've got to protect them from it as well. In other words, baby-proof it the way you do your home—wander it with your eyes trained on the area from the floor to about three feet off it, seeing exactly what kind of mischief can be created by an energetic four-year-old. The obvious dangers like electrical outlets and sharp-edged shelves should be easy enough to spot and address. But you've also got to make sure that heavy items can't be too easily yanked or toppled. We spent a day at a Burger King that controlled the line at the counter with a "hard maze"—a waist-high running ledge that doubled as a planter. In eight hours we counted a total of fifty-two boys and girls who climbed, clambered over, walked or jungle-gymmed on that hazard, and I have no doubt that some kids have taken nasty spills there.

In one of my first assignments, before the popularity of cell phones, I studied three AT&T phone stores in different parts of the country. All were attractively designed. All had the same number of employees to handle roughly the same number of customers. One store, though, had a much lower shopper interception rate—the percentage of potential customers who were spoken to by a salesperson—and a much lower average time spent with customers. What made that store so different when all of the other numbers were the same? It took us a while to figure out that our underperforming store was the only one to employ a "waterfall" display system—a row of pedestals of descending height on which the equipment was shown. We watched various videotaped angles of the sales floor, and after a while a pattern emerged: In the underperforming store, staffers were constantly having to run to the rescue of phones and fax machines that were within easy reach of children in the store with their folks. The salespeople would be involved in a conversation with a shopper but with one eye always out to see what the little darlings were about to grab from that waterfall display. It wasn't just for the sake of

neatness, either; the store only had one or two of each model in stock, so, for instance, if an expensive fax machine fell off its pedestal and broke, there were no replacements to sell. The poor clerks spent more time rescuing expensive telecommunications equipment than talking to shoppers. It was smart to place phones within reach of curious shoppers, but not so smart to put them within striking distance of children.

I sat one afternoon with a highly regarded designer of interactive video fixtures as he unveiled his latest prototype, a video game station to go in the play area of a fast-food restaurant. The first two kids sat in the contraption and played it without incident. The third boy took off his shoes, leaned far back in the seat and worked the touch-screen with his toes. The next child took the hard plastic toy that came with his lunch and began pounding the video screen with it.

"My God," the designer gasped, "look what he's doing!"

"He's interacting," I reminded him. Wasn't that the point here? The fundamental lesson? Any technology that's located on the floor of a store, and that's accessible to kids, has to be built to combat standards—as if it were headed to Kabul or Baghdad.

You don't have to be a Wiggle to keep kids relatively entertained. But especially in businesses where customers have to remain in one spot and pay attention, providing child diversion is a must.

That thought will seem painfully obvious to any parent. So it's amazing how few businesspeople make any allowance for it. I recently watched a two-year-old run wild while her mother tried to shop in an establishment that really should be aware of the presence of children in the lives of its customers: a maternity clothing store. Diverting a child can mean simply setting up a TV and some Disney videos in a little alcove, as is done in French hypermarkets. (I'm always amazed to see that of all places, video stores frequently fail to run kiddie programming on at least one monitor, leaving parents free to browse a few minutes longer.) Placing some plastic toys in a five-foot-square area where Mom and Dad can glance from time to time can suffice in a small store. Ikea is famous for its kiddie pen, the avalanche of colorful plastic balls having

become a friendly icon. No surprise that a Swedish chain would be at the forefront here; Europeans—in particular, Scandinavians—are less paranoid about the safety of their children and will leave them in the custody of store personnel while they shop. A few years ago there was a ruckus in New York when a young Danish woman parked her sleeping baby in a stroller just outside a restaurant's window, then went inside (to a window table) to enjoy lunch. Police were called, child welfare workers descended and the woman very nearly had a custody battle on her hands.

For whatever reason, American parents *are* paranoid where their kids are concerned. Here, Ikea has had to institute a rigorous ID check for adults trying to retrieve their children from the play area. Many parents simply refuse to leave their children in play areas that can't be seen from the rest of the store at all times. A few years ago Blockbuster built a clever little drive-in theater for kids, complete with big-screen videos and tiny cars where the tykes could sit and watch. Unfortunately, it was positioned in a corner just inside the exit, giving most parents the willies. We don't really have much experience with public day care here. So it's no surprise that children end up traipsing through our stores and banks and other retail businesses.

We did a study for Wells Fargo a few years ago showing that 15 percent of all those entering its branches are under seven years old.

"What's your most effective selling tool?" I asked a loan officer there. She reached into her desk drawer and pulled out a lollipop. She said it could usually be counted on to buy her two minutes of uninterrupted face time with a parent, all she needed. The bank also offers a coloring book starring a puppy who lives in a Wells Fargo branch. That and a handful of crayons can add up to a brand-new home equity loan, no question. In New York, Citibank produces an activity book for children. In both cases, the banks are buying quiet today and—given how we like to fetishize our happy childhood experiences—loyal customers of tomorrow.

There are just a few principles of designing a good area (as opposed to a holding pen) for children. The sight lines must allow parents to see their children at any time, so it must be in an open area, unshielded by

walls or obstacles. It must be safe. It must be large enough. And ideally, it would allow children of different ages to be segregated. Otherwise, the older kids will always dominate, making it an unhappy experience for the small ones who get in their way.

Car dealers tend to do a lousy job of diverting children, which is disappointing, when you think about it, because kids are already disposed to liking cars—toy ones, at least. A lot could be done, but the car business is far behind most. As a result, shopping for a car is more difficult for families than it needs to be. If no car dealer addresses this, then all are safe. But the minute Ford or Chrysler starts acknowledging the reality of kids in dealerships, the rest will be forced to respond. In Japan, Nissan is divided into Blue and Red dealerships, each selling different lines of cars. But both feature beautiful toy car displays in the front of the store that showcase the models and colors the dealership sells. Since a lot of the dealerships are small and don't have the sprawling parking lots we find in the U.S., the toy cars serve as an easy way for people to preshop. I tried to get Nissan to stock enough toys so that dealers could hand them out like lollipops. It's good, cheap, instantaneous advertising, and in the twenty-first century, even a six-year-old has a voice in the family automobile purchase.

Another place where children must be amused is in the pharmacy waiting area. There, among sickly adults waiting for prescriptions to be filled, the charm of youthful exuberance wears thin. Many of those children are likely to be ill themselves, which doesn't do much for their dispositions. Drugstores can easily stock toys or coloring books and crayons near the waiting area, creating an efficient adjacency. That's another great way of amusing children—give them something to shop while their parents do the same thing just a few feet away. Especially given how many parents resort to bribery as a way to quiet their progeny, this could be a smart strategy all around. Since women still do most of the shopping, it makes sense to place products for children near sections being shopped by their mothers. Is this child exploitation, or is it doing a mother a favor? Maybe it can be both.

A few years ago I read a news report about a convenience store that was having problems with teenagers loitering in the parking lot at night. Hiring a security guard to stand out there and scowl was an expensive solution. So here's what the store did: It began piping the smooth, suave sounds of Mantovani through the loudspeakers. No more loiterers.

Teenagers are still young enough to be total suckers for image, for all the blandishments of advertising, identity marketing, media messages, trends and labels. They still believe in a brand name's power to confer status, cool, charisma, knowledge. They construct their identities by the shopping choices they make—they're a lot like adults were back in the '50s, before we all became so wise in the ways of image hucksters. Kids also have fewer media choices than adults, so messages come through to them in concentrated form. They love to scour the world for icons or any other clues that something—some product, some store—is intended for them. They'll flee easy-listening music as if it were anthrax, while we can tolerate just about anything.

Which should make them fairly easy marks in the marketplace. But they have some built-in limitations, too. During a study of how jeans are sold, we noticed an odd pattern to adolescent shopping: Teenagers in groups spent a relatively long time in the jeans section (three minutes, fifty-two seconds) compared to teens with parents (two minutes, thirty-two seconds). And teens in groups examined one third more product. But the percentage of teenagers with parents who bought jeans was nearly double the number of teens in groups who bought, 25 percent to 13 percent. Then we realized: They come with their friends to browse—to preshop, as it were. Having made their choices and gained the approval of a jury of their peers, they return with Mom or Dad—the wallet bearer—and make quick work of the transaction, wishing not to risk the humiliation of being seen in public buying clothes with their ancient caretakers.

Does this not suggest that commerce in general and banking in particular can do a better job of serving young shoppers? How about inaugurating direct deposit of allowance, accessible by ATM/debit cards? Does any retailer still offer layaway, and should it become common again, but aimed at young shoppers? We've done some research

for Crédit Agricole, the French financial institution, which is building branches for customers in their late teens and early twenties—the Gen Y bank. It won't look like a bank or sound like one; the design, graphics, operating hours, staffing, music and so on will all reflect its Gen Y target. It'll hold on-site seminars on how to rent a first apartment, how to finance a motorcycle etc.

That's a wise approach—remember, it's only one branch among many—for it acknowledges the fact that a product or service meant for youthful shoppers thereby declares itself off-limits to the rest of us. Clarion, the Proctor & Gamble cosmetic brand, no longer exists, but it was for a while a heavily promoted cosmetics brand. It was an early user of interactive computer fixtures—women would type in some information about their coloring and skin type, and the computer would tell them which Clarion products to buy. For some reason, though, the fixtures gradually migrated downward to low shelves, positioned perfectly for adolescent girls. They returned the favor by making avid use of the computers. Once adult women saw this, naturally, they assumed that Clarion was meant for beginners and steered clear. Thus was Clarion's reputation sealed, and before long it was withdrawn from the market.

I V

**See Me, Feel Me,
Touch Me, Buy Me:
The Dynamics of Shopping**

S

o far we've seen all that must be done simply to make retail environments user-friendly at the basic levels. The demands of anatomy must be obeyed just for shopping to be possible. The behavioral differences due to gender and age must be accommodated, or else stores, restaurants and banks will be best suited to a generic—sexless, ageless—human being who does not exist. Once all that is seen to, of course, things get really interesting. This third aspect of the science of shopping is where we find all the give and take, the back and forth—the romance, if you will. Retailing, for all we know about it, remains a mystery. Why does someone who walks into a store thinking Hewlett-Packard walk out lugging a Canon? (Or vice versa?) What induces someone who decides to kill a few minutes in a boutique to walk out \$1,000 lighter but feeling infinitely more fashionable—more beautiful—than ever before? Yes, the simple answer is that he found something he wanted, but there's no easy explanation for how *that* happened. Good stores perform a kind of retailing judo—they use the shopper's own momentum, his or her own inclinations and desires, to get him or her to do something

perhaps totally unplanned. In the end, it's not enough that goods be within reach of the shopper; he or she must want to reach them. And having reached them, he or she must then wish to own them, or all this effort goes for naught. Amid so much science, we discover in the end it's love that makes the world of retailing go round. What do shoppers love? A few important things, we've learned, such as:

TOUCH. We live in a tactile-deprived society, and shopping is one of our few chances to freely experience the material world firsthand. Almost all unplanned buying is a result of touching, hearing, smelling or tasting something on the premises of a store—which is why merchandising is more powerful than marketing, and why the Internet, catalogs and home shopping on TV will prosper and complement, but never seriously challenge, real live stores.

MIRRORS. Stand and watch what happens at any reflective surface: We preen like chimps, men and women alike. Self-interest is a basic part of our species. From shopping to cosmetic surgery, we care about how we look. As we've said, mirrors slow shoppers in their tracks, a very good thing for whatever merchandise happens to be in the vicinity. But even around wearable items such as clothing, jewelry and cosmetics, where mirrors are crucial sales tools, stores fail to provide enough of them.

DISCOVERY. There's little more satisfying than walking into a store, picking up the (metaphorical) scent of something we've been hunting for and then tracking it to its lair. Too much signage and point-of-purchase display takes all the adventure out of a shopping trip; stores shouldn't be willfully confusing or obscure, but they should seduce shoppers through the aisles with suggestions and hints of what's to come. The aroma of warm bread can be enough to lead supermarket shoppers to the bakery aisle; a big, beautiful photograph of a James Bondian stud in a creamy dinner jacket carries more levels of information than the clearest FORMALWEAR sign can ever convey.

TALKING. Stores that attract lots of couples, friends or groups of shoppers usually do very well. If you can create an atmosphere that fosters discussion of an outfit, say, or a particular cell phone, the merchandise begins to sell itself.

RECOGNITION. In that old TV show *Cheers*, the theme song went, "you want to go where everybody knows your name." This is a battlefield where the small, locally owned store can still best the national chains, and smart stores make the most of this advantage. Given a choice, people will shop where they feel wanted, and they'll even pay a little more for the privilege. Even the smallest stores can build customer loyalty just by keeping track of what people buy and giving price breaks when appropriate. Our studies show that *any* contact initiated by a store employee—and I mean even a hello—increases the likelihood that a shopper will buy something. If the salesperson suggests a few things or offers information, the chances rise even higher. Of course, shoppers don't love pushy salespeople, so there's a line here.

BARGAINS. This seems obvious, but it goes beyond simply cutting prices. At Victoria's Secret, for example, underwear is frequently piled on a table and marked five pairs for \$20, which sounds like a much better deal than the \$5 a pair normally charged. At even the poshest stores, the clearance racks get shopped avidly. Still, while shoppers expect a certain amount of elbow-to-elbow crowding around the discount table, they won't bite if the physical discomfort becomes too noticeable. They'll extricate a blouse from a jammed sale rack, for example, but if there's no room to back up and examine it as closely as the full-price merchandise, they won't buy.

On the other hand, shoppers tend to hate:

TOO MANY MIRRORS. A store shouldn't feel like a funhouse. At a certain point, all that glass becomes disorienting.

LINES. Not only do they hate to wait; they also hate to feel negative emotions while they do it—like frustration at watching inefficiency, or anxiety wondering if they're in the fastest line, or boredom because there's nothing for them to read, watch or shop while they wait. The memory of a good shopping trip can be wiped out by a bad experience in the checkout line.

ASKING DUMB QUESTIONS. New products especially should be out where shoppers can examine them, not behind glass. And there should be enough signs, brochures, instructional videos, newspaper articles, talking displays and whatever else is necessary for browsers to

bring themselves up to speed before they ask a question. When stores work at making new or complicated products accessible, sales always increase.

DIPPING. Or bending, either, especially when their hands are full. If it's a challenge to reach down and pick up merchandise, shoppers will pass, figuring that another store will make the acquisition easier.

GOODS OUT OF STOCK. Self-explanatory.

OBSCURE PRICE TAGS. Ditto.

INTIMIDATING SERVICE. Also rude service, slow service, uninformed service, unintelligent service, distracted service, languid service, lazy service, surly service. Probably the single best word of mouth for a store is this: "They're so nice down at that shop!" When service is lousy, shoppers will find another store; bad service undoes good merchandise, prices and location almost every time. Regardless of how practical an activity shopping seems to be, feelings always come first, and good is always better than bad.

In the chapters that follow, we'll discuss what is probably the most powerful inducement to shopping—the opportunity to touch, try, taste, smell and otherwise explore the world of desirable objects, and how the artful juxtaposition of those objects can sometimes make all the difference in the world. We'll see how not just the merchandise but the displays, too, determine what gets noticed or ignored. We'll talk about how retailers can manipulate even our perception of time in order to control the shopping experience. We'll also take a look at what might seem to be the antithesis of sensual shopping—the future world of retailing via the Internet.

TWELVE

The Sensual Shopper

This might seem like an odd question coming from anyone at any time but especially coming here and now, in an inquiry such as the one we're conducting. But I need to ask it anyway: What is shopping?

I don't mean what is buying. I don't mean what is entering a public place where goods are kept until they can be exchanged for money. I definitely do not mean what is retailing, or what is commerce, or what is trade.

I mean: What is shopping? Who does it, and how? How does one go about this shopping activity?

For the purposes of this discussion, let's stipulate that shopping is more than the simple, dutiful acquisition of whatever is absolutely necessary to one's life. It's more than what we call the "grab and go"—you need cornflakes, you go to the cornflakes, you grab the cornflakes, you pay for the cornflakes, and *haveaniceday*. The kind of activity I mean involves a human being experiencing that portion of the world that has been deemed for sale, using her senses—sight, touch, smell, taste, hearing—and then choosing this or rejecting that (or choosing or

rejecting it all, I suppose) on the basis of . . . something. It's the sensory aspect of that decision-making process that's most intriguing, because how else do we experience anything? But it's especially crucial in this context because virtually all unplanned purchases—and many planned ones, too—come as a result of the shopper seeing, touching, smelling or tasting something that promises pleasure, if not total fulfillment.

I want to repeat this, because I think it's key: We buy things today more than ever based on trial and touch.

Now, why might somebody wish to touch something before buying it? There are plenty of very practical reasons, the most obvious being that if a product's tactile qualities are what's most important, we must know how it will feel. For instance, we like to touch towels before we buy them—in a study we did, towels were touched on average by six different shoppers before they were actually purchased. (Which is why you really ought to wash them before you use them.) Bed linens—how sheets feel is pretty much the whole ball game. And clothing—we need to pet, stroke and fondle sweaters and shirts especially, but most apparel falls into this category. I think men's underwear makers are missing an opportunity by sealing the goods inside plastic bags. No women's underwear is sold that way, for good reason—women want to test anything that will go against their skin. Men would, too, if someone only gave them the chance.

There are also nontextile products that come into contact with our bodies and are therefore touch-worthy—lotions and moisturizers, lipstick, makeup, deodorant and powder, just to pick a few things from the health and beauty aisles. You need to touch something if it will be held or carried or wielded in some way. A hammer, for instance—you've got to heft it before you know it's right for you. Same goes for a handbag, briefcase or suitcase. An umbrella. A knife, a spatula, tongs. Anything you're going to carry around all day, like a wallet. Looking gives you a pretty good idea of how it's going to feel, but nothing takes the place of your own hand.

What don't you need to touch? Lightbulbs—*nobody* touches lightbulbs. But even they cry out to be experienced. You can buy them in a box in the supermarket or hanging from a rack in a hardware store.

Or you can go to a big home center and see those lightbulbs in action, glowing cozily inside lampshades. Which method sells more bulbs, do you think, or more expensive bulbs?

The rule of thumb in these matters is usually that shoppers want to spend time investigating and considering those products in which they have a high level of "involvement," meaning products that offer possibilities or invite comparison. In the supermarket, for instance, you might want to try a new brand of ketchup or cheese, or a pricey variety of apple or peach, before you buy. Salsa makers, for some reason, always seem to be conducting taste tests of new variations. Nobody needs to taste-test Budweiser, but if you're going to buy that expensive new lambic ale or that Armenian beer, you'll want to try a little first. How about sugar? Waste of time—sugar's sugar. Ditto vegetable oil, although people taste olive oil as though it's vintage wine. Twenty-year-old balsamic vinegar is always going to be a specialty item, but if stores let you try a little you might spring for it. Milk? As long as it's cold and the expiration date hasn't come and gone, you're convinced.

Close to 90 percent of all new grocery products fail, but it isn't because people didn't like them—it's because people never tried them. In my opinion, a new product introduction that doesn't include a well-funded, fully supported (with marketing) effort to give shoppers samples is not a serious attempt. Cigarettes may be bad, but until the 1990s the tobacco companies had a great method for getting samples out there: pretty boys and girls standing on street corners handing out freebies. Even nonsmokers took them, not wanting to reject such pleasant entreaties. Maybe we need to retrain those kids to hand out stuff on the supermarket floor.

Of course, a combined marketing-sampling effort still must properly decide on its target audience. In the earliest days of microwave popcorn, we were hired by General Mills to help expand the market for its product. "Who buys it now?" we asked. "Sixty-four percent of our purchasers are females," they replied. That was partly because back then men had yet to discover the ease of microwave cuisine, and partly because most of the marketing effort—the TV commercials and print ads—were directed at women and placed in women's programming and media.

"Whom do you want to reach with the sampling campaign?" we asked. "Well, women, of course," they replied. Which was the wrong answer—they had already reached a substantial female market. And when you think about microwave popcorn, you realize that it's perfect for men. It's the easiest thing in the world to make, it's a salty snack food and men are suggestible, impulsive shoppers who can be convinced to try almost anything. The product was being sold in six-packs for around \$4. To gear it toward men, we advised, required less of a commitment—sell a two-pack for a buck and advertise it during hockey games.

Once you get beyond food, the involvement level drops. I'm convinced there's room in the marketplace for high-end toilet paper. People would spend more but only if it were possible to show them the difference on the floor of the supermarket, and there's the rub. Makers of brand-name plastic food wrap, aluminum foil and trash bags experience a great deal of frustration over this issue. Most shoppers will buy whatever's cheapest, and it's almost impossible to convince them that there's any point to buying a better (and more costly) trash bag. Why spend more when only your trash will know the difference?

Supermarkets are wisely becoming more sensual than ever. Most good ones now feature on-premises bakeries, which fill the air with warm, homey scents. You may be in the vitamin section when that aroma hits you, and before you know it you've followed the olfactory trail right up to the counter. Suddenly you're thinking, "I need bread"—but even more importantly, a good smell gets your saliva glands working, which translates into more sales. Stores have taken a tip from Starbucks and begun brewing and selling by the cup the expensive coffee beans they sell loose, another way of putting a product's sensory assets to work.

Scent is the new frontier of marketing. Martin Lindstrom, a prominent author and consultant, helps companies brand smells. In his book *BRAND sense*, he describes the special places fragrances hold in our memories, whether it's Play-Doh, Johnson's baby shampoo or a whiff of pure vanilla. Just as a baby animal recognizes the odor of its mother, we humans bond intimately with smells, too.

In April of 2007, I visited a new prototype store in Halifax, Canada,

run by the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission. The store was divided by what they considered to be age preferences, and each section had its signature scent, piped in through air vents. There was a sweetly fruity, fragrant section for thirty-and-under imbibers filled with Pucker-shot concoctions, tequilas and flavored vodkas; another section of whiskeys for the mature palate (the piped-in aroma was smoky-dark and more sophisticated) and then extensive wine collections designed for the specific age groups of the customers, with different fragrances depending on the product and vintage. Just as our eyes age, so do our smell and taste buds. I loved the ad I saw once on a New York City bus shelter promoting a well-known Scotch whisky. The ad read, "You thought girls were yucky once, too." It's no accident that kids like sweets and sweet smells, and that the older we get the more we enjoy savory and bitter tastes.

In the new Best Buy consumer electronics store that opened just off Columbus Circle in the fall of 2007, the appliance section smelled of freshly ironed linen; these days, the dispersion of scent is done via machines. But when is enough enough? Will we start smelling eau de steak or essence of bacon-on-the-griddle in the frozen meat section of our supermarket? I'd like that. More meat would certainly be sold, but smells would also add something else to the overall shopping experience. It would become a sensualist's journey, not just another trip to the supermarket. Problem is, one person's perfume is another person's stink. I have an Italian friend who loathes the smell of oranges to the point where she's banned oranges in her office. The smell of roasting meat may get a lot of us salivating, but to many vegetarians it's nauseating.

In England, some infant apparel stores now pipe in baby powder through the air ducts, to put shoppers in mind of the sweet-sour smell of newborns, which is perhaps the most powerfully evocative scent of all. When we suggested to American baby powder makers that they add smell to their packaging, they recoiled, fearful that store managers would banish any product that threatened to contaminate the supermarket's sterile, odorless confines. And it's true that with the exception of the produce aisles, supermarkets here have no tradition of feeding our desire for sensory stimulation, for scent or taste or touch or even sight. They're still stuck in the early '60s, the time of frozen food, canned

food, processed food, powdered food, packaged food and the germless ideal of blinding white cleanliness. I wish one would install a big open kitchen, like something you'd see on a TV cooking show, where the store chef can whip up snacks and pass them (and their recipes) out to shoppers. How about if the manager announced over the loudspeaker, "Attention all shoppers! For the next fifteen minutes, in the frozen foods section . . . free passion-fruit sorbet for everyone!" How about a DJ and a dance floor in produce, a puppet show in the cereal aisle, a jazz trio or the high school glee club at the checkout? It's possible to bring a little more life to a store that is the epitome of shopping puritanism.

Touch and trial are more important today than ever to the world of shopping because of changes in how stores function. Once upon a time, store owners and salespeople were our guides to the merchandise they sold. They were knowledgeable enough, and there were enough of them, to act as the shopper's intermediary to the world of things. We could take a clerk's word for something because he or she had been right so many times before. That was, not coincidentally, back in the day of grand wooden cabinets with glass fronts behind which goods were displayed, the heyday of the hardware store and the haberdasher and the general store, when space was clearly divided between shoppers and staff.

Today, the "open sell" school of display puts most everything out there where we can touch or smell or try it, unmediated by sales clerks. In 1960, 35 percent of the average Sears store was given over to storage. Now it's less than 15 percent. Today it's almost pointless to ask a clerk if an item you want is in the back room. Chances are, there is no back room. Everything is either on the shelves or in the little storage cupboards below. It's a brilliant innovation—what good is anything when it's in storage? You can't buy it unless you can find a clerk, and what do you do when there are too few clerks, or too few knowledgeable ones, or too few clerks who are actively trying to help you buy anything? It makes perfect sense to just put it all out there as invitingly and enticingly and conveniently as possible, and then let the shoppers and their good senses discover the stuff on their own.

Another reason touch and trial have become so important is the

waning power of product brand name. When consumers believed in the companies behind the big brands, that belief went a long way toward selling things. No longer. This is an extreme example, but revealing: In a study we did for a national brand of skin and hair products, we found that of all ethnic groups, Asian-American shoppers were most aggressive about opening the packaging and touching the lotions, soaps and shampoos. In fact, 23 percent of those shoppers tore into the boxes or opened the bottles to test the viscosity and scent of the products. Clearly, this was due to the fact that the brand, despite having spent many millions on ads and media, still had not gained instant recognition and loyalty among an important and growing ethnic segment.

For that matter, we are all post-Nader shoppers—we'll believe it when we see/smell/touch/hear/taste/try it. Depending on what we're buying and what it costs, there's a healthy skeptic (or is it a nagging doubt?) in our heads that must be put to rest before we can buy at ease. We need to feel a certain level of confidence in a product and its value, which comes only from hard evidence, not from TV commercials or word of mouth. It's shocking how little stores seem to understand something so simple. We've done lots of research in computer retailing, and we've come upon this over and over: big sections of printers on display, but only some of them actually plugged in and working and stocked with paper, despite the fact that most printers make it easy to run tests.

And it's not just for big-ticket items like cars, stereo speakers or designer suits that we need to build our confidence. We performed a study of a newsstand design meant to accommodate a refrigerated soft drink case. One plan hid the cooler discreetly under a counter, then allowed for a display of empty cans to show customers what was available. A very unconvincing scheme, we soon learned—people don't believe the sodas are cold unless they can see the frost on them. The need for proof here (as elsewhere) seems almost instinctual. Once the cases were placed where customers could see inside them, lots of very cold sodas were sold. Convenience stores excel at this—they taught supermarkets that shoppers prefer to buy their soda or beer cold, even if they're not planning to down it on the spot. Warm beer just feels unnatural.

A great deal of our firsthand (ha!) experience of the world comes

to us via shopping. Where do we go with the specific intention of closely examining objects? To museums, of course, but don't try touching anything that's not in the gift shop—a retail environment. Stores alone abound with chances for tactile and sensory exploration. Even if we didn't need to buy things, we'd need to get out and touch and taste them once in a while.

The purest example of human shopping I know of can be seen by watching a child go through life touching absolutely *everything*. You're watching that child shop for information, for understanding, for knowledge, for experience, for sensation. Especially for sensation, otherwise why would he have to touch or smell or taste or hear anything twice? Keep looking—watch a dog. Watch a bird. Watch a bug. You might say that ant is searching for food. I say he is shopping.

If you still don't believe all this, go to the home of a product fairly unconcerned with matters of smell, touch or any other sensual experience—a bookstore. There you'll be treated to the sight of shoppers stroking, rubbing, hefting and otherwise experiencing the physical nature of a product where no physical attribute (aside maybe from typeface size) has anything to do with enjoyment. Still, helplessly, we touch. We are beasts like any other, and despite all our powers of imagination and conceptualization and intellectualization and cerebration and visualization, we physical creatures experience the world only via our five senses (and maybe, if you're so inclined, our sixth sense—the übersense, the metasense, the sense that senses that which cannot be sensed). The world and everything in it reaches out to us and stimulates us through our senses, and we react. So fundamental is our ability to sense and our need to do so that even when we come upon something we can't know via our senses, we speak of it as though we can.

Do you see what I mean? Does this sound right? Do you feel that I'm making sense? Or does my reasoning stink?

Here's a final reason touch is so important. When does a shopper actually possess something? Technically, of course, it happens at the instant that the item is exchanged for money—at the register. But the register is the least pleasing part of the store; nobody is savoring the joy of possession at that moment. In fact, all that is experienced is loss (of

money) and pain (of waiting in line, of waiting for credit card approval, of waiting for the clerk to get the thing into the bag so you can leave). So where does possession take place? Clearly, it's an emotional and spiritual moment, not a technical one. Possession begins when the shopper's senses begin to latch on to the object. It begins in the eyes and then in the touch. Once the thing is in your hand, or on your back, or in your mouth, you can be said to have begun the process of taking it. Paying for it is a mere technicality, and so the sooner a thing is placed in the shopper's hand, the easier it is made for the shopper to try it or sip it or drive it around the block, the more easily it will change ownership, from the seller to the buyer.

That's shopping.

So, then, the principle seems simple enough: Shoppers want to experience merchandise before buying it. Therefore, the main function of a store is to foster shopper-merchandise contact. Stores should be begging shoppers to touch or try things, though frequently they make it as difficult as possible instead. I don't care if we're talking about computer keyboards, shower massagers or a new flavor of Jell-O. If a product does something, it should do it in the store. If it has a taste, shoppers should be able to taste it. If it has a smell, shoppers should be able to smell it. In fact, even if its smell has nothing to do with its purpose, we should be permitted to smell it, for there are times when a product's primary use has absolutely nothing to do with how it will be experienced.

For instance: What do air conditioners promise to do?

Make rooms cool. How do we know if they can keep that promise? Oh, ask your friends, or read *Consumer Reports*, or rely on the sales-clerk's opinion. You can't tell by looking, or even by turning it on in the air-conditioned store. So, in the absence of hard evidence, you buy the brand you always bought, or the brand that's on sale. But there's another issue here: How does that air conditioner sound? Precisely because cool air is cool air does this matter. In the final analysis, sound is one of the few things that distinguish one air conditioner from another. The unit is going to be humming (or clattering) away in your house for

a number of years, after all. In a typical summer, I'll bet I have three or four conversations about air conditioner decibel levels. That's what actual human beings care about when it comes to air conditioners, but you'd never know it when you're shopping for one. The manufacturers and retailers are missing an opportunity here: Maybe if the salesperson were encouraged to flip a few switches to show you how they sound—this one like a prop airplane, that one like a busted blender, this other, more expensive one like a very small kitten purring in its sleep—you'd have some new basis for choosing one over another.

The same holds true, to some extent, for all major appliances—refrigerators and dishwashers and vacuum cleaners and washers and dryers—and even some minor ones, like coffee grinders, food processors and can openers. We can stare at the box and see at a glance if it's the thing we want. We can read the spec sheet to know more or less what it will do. But then we can at least *hear* it in action.

Here's another way that stores miss the point about how we wish to experience products. Judging by how bed linens are packaged, you'd think the most important issue is something called "thread count." What is thread count? Damned if most people know, but it is posted on nearly every sheet and pillowcase package you see. Bed connoisseurs know thread count. Normal human beings, however, judge a sheet by this measure: How does it feel? The problem is that most sheets are sold in plastic bags, which allow you to look but not touch. So you tear open the bag with your nail and furtively rub the fabric. Now if you decide to buy, you'll choose another package, because who wants one that's been damaged (even if *you* did the damaging)? And either way, you still don't know how that sheet will feel, due to what is known as the "sizing." What exactly is sizing? Again, damned if anybody knows, but you have to wash it out of new sheets or they'll be stiff and scratchy. So why, then, are shoppers made to touch sheets at their absolute worst? There's a huge bed and bath emporium near my office where display sheets have all been laundered once to pillow perfection, then hung from hooks so shoppers can know what the linens will feel like once you get them home. Which is all that anybody cares about.

Perhaps the most obvious arena for touch and trial is in clothing.

Today, it's a rare clothes store where shoppers can't touch and fondle and stroke all the goods, whether it's \$3 sweat socks or \$1,500 designer suits. You still can't go into the Museum of Modern Art and rub a Picasso, but you can walk over to the Calvin Klein or Armani store on Madison Avenue and have your way with masterpieces of ready-to-wear apparel. For the most part, the men and women who design clothing stores do everything possible to allow us to touch all that's for sale. But then, when it's time to design the dressing rooms, they show how completely they misunderstand what happens inside that store.

Where do they go wrong? They think of dressing rooms as bathrooms without the plumbing. They see them as booths where shoppers can strip, don the garment in question, emerge for a quick, dutiful glance into a mirror and then switch clothes again. They design dressing rooms with all the romance and glamour of changing stalls at public pools. It's the most misguided aspect of store architecture and design, a trade that at its best isn't terribly responsive to retailers or shoppers. They skimp on dressing rooms, I believe, because they don't want to "waste" space by making these rooms too large. They don't want to blow too much of the budget on rooms that will never be photographed by the fancier design magazines.

In fact, the dressing room may be more important than the floor of the store. It's a truism that improving the quality of dressing rooms increases sales. It never fails. A dressing room isn't just a convenience—it's a selling tool, like a display or a window or advertising. It sells more effectively than all of those combined, if it's properly used. I am an incurable dressing room visitor—I'll make a special trip into a store's dressing room if I'm anywhere in the vicinity. If the coast is clear, I'll even ask if I can look in on women's dressing rooms. The truth is that I could write an entire book about dressing rooms—there's that much to say. Here's a formula we've recognized after studying a great many clothing stores: Not only does shopper conversion rate increase by half when there is staff-initiated contact, it jumps by 100 percent when there is staff-initiated contact *and* use of the dressing room. In other words, a shopper who talks to a salesperson and tries something on is twice as likely to buy as a shopper who does neither.

Still, we did a study for a major national apparel chain, one that has been extremely successful, where the dressing rooms were just dismal. Stark, cheesy little cubicles, a long corridor of them, with a single, badly illuminated mirror down at the end of the row. In the store we measured, customers who bought spent between one quarter and one third of their total shopping time inside the dressing rooms. In other words, they were captives in a very small space with nothing on their minds but the desire to buy something that will make them beautiful. In any other business, such a time would be avariciously thought of as "the close"—the critical moment when the buyer is vulnerable and ready to take the plunge. In a car dealership, which is itself no great shakes at the art of retailing, there are rooms set aside just to orchestrate this critical juncture. Here, however, there was absolutely no effort to make the rooms even minimally pleasant, or to make the area conducive to seeing the clothes in their best possible light. Neither was anyone viewing this as the moment for bringing all the charm and service of the sales force to bear on the situation. I mean simple things, too, like the clerk escorting the customer to the dressing room, then going out to find a few belts that might go nicely with the trousers, or a shirt, or a vest, knowing that many times the right accessory sells the garment. When the customer is in the dressing room, he or she is in a total buying mode. But instead of taking advantage of that, most stores squander it.

In fact, I visited the couture floor of a major department store in New York and saw what may have been the most horrible dressing rooms I've ever seen. Dirty, shabby, worn rugs. Harsh, unflattering lighting. The same wall hooks and seats you'd find in a low-rent discounter. Mirrors that distort the viewer's body, and not for the better. When I pointed this out a saleslady sardonically asked, "Doesn't every woman want bigger hips?" The furnishings there should be what you'd want in your dream boudoir. The lighting should make everybody look like a million bucks. In fact, the illumination should have several settings, so you could see what a color or fabric would look like in daylight, or under fluorescent lighting, or by candlelight. The mirrors should be large, plentiful and first-rate—they should be like the frame for a flattering portrait, not just a slab of glass hung by clips on a Sheetrock

wall. If there's space for a little anteroom outside the dressing rooms, so much the better. A shopper and his or her companion can really look the goods over out there. A shopper could actually see what it feels like to sit down wearing the garment, an important issue if it's to be worn at a special dinner, for instance. And there should be fresh flowers. Fresh flowers say that someone has paid attention to the room today, not yesterday, and that's the proper message.

Even outside the dressing rooms, apparel stores often mishandle something as simple as mirrors. Most commonly, there are too few of them, or they're placed badly. There should be a mirror anywhere there's merchandise that can be tried on or even just held up for inspection. If you pick up an item and can see in an instant how it looks on you, you might buy it. If you've got to search for a mirror, at least some of the time you'll decide it's not worth the trouble. If the hats are here, the hat mirror should be here, too—not five feet away. And I've seen more than one self-serve shoe department with no mirrors down at floor level. I've seen self-serve shoe sections with no chairs! This all seems so simple. Why is it ever wrong?

You need enough dressing rooms, and they must be clearly marked so they're easy to find, even from a distance. The farther the dressing rooms are from the clothes, the fewer shoppers will bother to make the trip. A truly determined shopper will always find the dressing room, but no store can survive only on the stouthearted. We've seen stores where you have to cross the entire selling floor and then go up or down a few steps to try something on. That's fatal. We did a study for a department store where our video cameras caught shoppers wandering uncertainly, garments in hand, searching (and searching) for the dressing rooms. There were enough of them, but they were hidden in corners, bare little doorways marked by inconspicuous signs. Finding a dressing room shouldn't be a challenge.

Okay, what have we here? A guy in an office supply store, one of the big chains. Looking for a pencil sharpener. Amazing that they still even exist—turntables are extinct but pencils and pencil sharpeners live on,

thanks to the popularity of Sudoku. Anyway, the sharpeners are all together on a shelf, a few manual ones, some battery powered and some big plug-in jobs. He turns the handles on the manual ones to get their feel. Then he lifts a battery model and pries open the compartment to find . . . nothing. The thing won't turn on! He moves on to the plug-in models and lifts them, too, then looks around to see if there's an outlet. Nothing. Even if he had found a battery or an outlet, there's the small matter of pencils, none of which are anywhere in sight. He grabs a sharpener, then wheels away, out of the aisle, in search of an electrical outlet, I presume, and maybe a pencil, too.

Does this seem like a serious effort to sell pencil sharpeners? Clearly, there must be a difference in sharpeners, or else why would there be so many choices? But how can this poor guy choose one over another—or any one at all—without a test grind? It seems like the simplest matter in the world to anticipate what shoppers will want to do and where they'll want to do it: In the absence of a pencil-sharpener clerk, please allow me to figure it out myself. But bad stores get it wrong all the time, even large, sophisticated, profitable national chains of bad stores. In that same store, there is a ten-foot-high wall rack of paper sold in reams, which are encased in paper wrappers. Some of the paper is cheap, some of it more expensive—but there is not a single chance to actually see or touch the paper being sold. As a result, every fifth or sixth package has been torn open for some frustrated shopper's furtive inspection. This is a classic example of how a decision to be cheap (not allowing shoppers to touch even one sheet of paper) ends up costing money (lots of packages are torn and unsalable).

Making goods inaccessible hurts in other ways, too. We studied a jewelry store whose owner had recently scored a coup by hiring a designer well known for creating museum exhibitions to design some jewelry display cases. The result was beautiful but distancing—the guy was accustomed to making displays that allowed the public to see but kept them at arm's length, exactly what you don't want in a store where people are encouraged to take the goods home. The displays performed poorly compared to less exalted fixtures.

Here's how good stores do it. We were performing a study for

RadioShack just when the chain had decided to try to become America's favorite phone store. We watched countless shoppers approach the wall of telephones on display, look them all over, check out the prices, and then, almost without exception, pick up a phone and hold it up to an ear. What were they hoping for? Nothing, probably—it's just a reflex action, I think. What else do you *do* with a phone? On what other basis do you compare phones but by how they feel in your hand and against your ear? Well, we reasoned, if the first principle of trial is to make it as lifelike as possible, you can complete the experience by putting a voice in that phone. We advised RadioShack to connect the phones to a recorded message that would be activated when the receiver was lifted. Once that happened, the stores were alive with shoppers picking up display phones, listening a moment, and then holding the receivers out for their companions to hear—which was a bonus, because that would provide some basis for discussing the purchase, which greatly increases the chance that something will be bought. (People in stores love to talk about whatever it is they're shopping for.) This was also a good way for RadioShack to sneak in a commercial message. In another study, Sprint's cell phone stores used a counter display so you could see and heft the various models, but each phone was also activated, which is the only way to do it—customers picked up the phones and dialed a spouse or friend to discuss the very gadget they were considering. The phones sold themselves, which is the whole point.

Other stores, like Brookstone or the French beauty retailer Sephora, all understand the value of putting merchandise out there for shoppers to experience, damage be damned. If Brookstone displays a vibrating chair and after a few months it's shabby from shopper use, that's OK—they've no doubt sold more than enough chairs to cover the loss.

Store displays can be remade to allow shoppers to touch and try the merchandise. But if product packaging doesn't change as well, a great many opportunities will continue to be lost. In the health and beauty aisles, for instance, smell and touch are vitally important. What is skin lotion's first responsibility if not to feel good when applied to skin? Why does anyone buy deodorant except for its scent? And while shampoo's main job is to clean hair—something you can't really test in a store—it

also must leave that hair smelling like the rain forest on a good day, and that's something you *can* investigate in the aisle, if only the manufacturer will permit it. Unfortunately, today's tamper-proof packaging thwarts every respectful attempt to experience the product.

Gillette made quite a splash with its clear gel deodorants for men—they come in a variety of scents, each with an evocative (yet manly) name. Somebody at Gillette was thinking correctly when they decided to give men more of a choice than Right Guard menthol or regular. But then the boys in packaging got their mitts on the idea. In the store you are faced with several varieties of deodorant, differing only in scent, and so naturally you wish to learn how they smell. You remove the lid from one and are confronted by a formidable strip of heavy-duty foil tape sealing the applicator. (Why? Can terrorists kill people through their armpits?) Now, if no one's watching, you might peel that tape back some and give it a sniff. But that would be wrong. So what's a shopper to do? If he's not terribly motivated, he'll put it back and walk away. If he is persistent, he'll glance up and down the aisle and, if the coast is clear, rip back that tape and take a whiff. Of course, if he then decides against buying the Alpine Morning underarm experience—maybe he feels like more of an Arizona Twilight kind of guy—how will the next shopper who comes along feel when he discovers that the tamper-proof strip has been tampered with? A lot of perfectly good deodorant is going to be ruined that way, by package designers who refuse to acknowledge how human beings shop.

One solution for this and all the rest would be for drugstores to create a sampling bar, a counter where new items can be freely auditioned. The tactile issues of body products are so important that resolving them would surely result in increased sales.

The biggest struggle in this area has to do with how cosmetics are sold. Manufacturers and retailers want to sell the products in as clean and orderly a way as possible. Women don't object to that, but understandably, they want to try before they buy, which is not always a clean and orderly impulse.

In days of old, most cosmetics were sold by the same kindly druggist who doled out prescriptions and fountain sodas. You'd ask for

foundation, say, and he'd go behind the counter, open a drawer and begin pulling out boxes until he found your brand. It was kind of arm's-length, and no one would stand for that today, but it was efficient and neat. The world of cosmetics was liberated in large part by the Cover Girl brand, which was the first one to make wide use of the peg wall, allowing shoppers to touch makeup without an intermediary getting in the way. This was what moved cosmetics toward its future as a self-serve category. That also put a serious crimp in the prospects of another cosmetics tradition, the department store bazaar. There, even to this day, shoppers perch on stools at counters while Kabuki-faced representatives of makeup purveyors paint and daub them into perfection, the result of which is a small but costly shopping bag of makeup on the departing shopper's arm.

But even that method of selling cosmetics is passing from the scene—women are getting fed up, I think—and is being replaced by the open-sell layout. And so you have each manufacturer trying a different system that allows shoppers to look at cosmetics, and even, under controlled conditions, to try them. But not too much. And you have women who wish to undo those controls so they can test products as they please. The interests of seller and buyer shouldn't be at odds, but they often are. Designers of cosmetics fixtures are sometimes culprits, too—they build displays without considering that shoppers need simple amenities like tissues, for instance, which would actually improve the overall neatness of cosmetics sections. Or they don't put in enough mirrors, so women have to scramble around the store as they try out makeup. The designers of these sections never visit them at five P.M. on a Saturday afternoon, I can assure you, because if they did they'd design them differently, with more accommodation for the women who use them. Shopper-unfriendly packaging intended to prevent cosmetics trial is almost always a bad idea—bad because it discourages buying and because it encourages women to damage merchandise. In any product category, the best way to limit package destruction is to offer shoppers a way to try things without doing any damage.

The advent of shrink-wrap has made it difficult to experience a great many products firsthand. In fact, many products seem to be overly

packaged, which is a pain if you're a hands-on shopper. We've come a long way from the simple listening booths once found in record stores. Today in the very troubled world of music, there are several rather complex electronic systems that try to make samples of recordings available to shoppers. Typically, these involve listening stations—headphones plugged into a board, and then a menu of CDs that can be dialed up. One problem is that you may be unfamiliar with these gizmos, and so you push the button for the disc you want, but then . . . nothing. In fact, there's a wait while the song cues up, but no indicator on the machine tells you so. You give it a moment and either shrug and give up, or you assume you've chosen a nonworking channel and push another button, and then more buttons, ultimately sending the machine into meltdown.

The best system is always the simplest and most direct one. There, a shopper just selects any CD from any rack and brings it to a listening bar, where a clerk opens the package and plays the disc. That's it—no gizmos, no buttons, no menus, no waiting. Instead of spending money on complicated, unreliable song-sample-playing machines, the store buys one shrink-wrapping device to repackage whatever's not purchased, and that's that. And such a system must allow shoppers to listen to music as human nature intended—meaning, nobody listens to music standing still and staring at the floor. In a store we researched in Alabama, listening station headphones were equipped with twenty-foot-long cords, so music fans could move around and even shop nearby racks. With that, the stores go from being places to buy records to places where one can listen to them, find out what's out there, what's new, who's playing what. It turns the store into an interactive radio station and makes shopping there a fun experience. Best of all, from the store's point of view, it lessens the retailer's dependence on the labels to market their merchandise properly. When a store allows access to merchandise, it is in essence doing its own marketing—one-on-one, to an interested consumer who is in a position to act on his or her desires on the spot.

Packaging often suffers when the shopper's desire for information is thwarted. We see this with electronics—the shopper for headphones, for instance, finds a stack of them, boxed, in a store. There's no display model in sight. If the box were properly designed—with a large, clear

photo of the phones and all the features and specifications listed in readable type—maybe seeing the headphones would be less crucial. But when the packaging forces shoppers to guess, it becomes easier to just rip the damn box open, pull out the headphones and see for yourself. No one's going to buy anything being sold in a shredded box.

Packaging need not always be such an impermeable barrier to touch, however. Toy manufacturers realized that adults wanted to try toys before they bought them. Maybe this was because so much toy advertising is deceptive, giving gullible kiddies the impression that this cheap plastic airplane is actually capable of zooming around the kitchen like a miniature bomber on an air strike. At any rate, the trend is now to design packaging so it allows toys to be tried without having to molest the box or the plastic wrap. You can push the button or pull the string and Cookie Monster sings from inside his cardboard prison. This suddenly made it a lot easier to know what you were buying in the toy store, and this was one of those instances where shopper confidence led to increased sales. I recently saw maybe the smartest toy packaging yet—a kiddie plastic tricycle that was boxed in a way that left exposed the seat, pedals, handlebars and wheels, thereby allowing a child to test-drive it without disturbing the box. If that principle were applied to all product packaging, shopping would be a lot more fun than it is now.

Security considerations are behind some reasons for placing merchandise off-limits. MP3 players are one such product. I guess any pricey item with lots of appeal for teenagers is heisted frequently. But the decision to sell these behind a locked counter should be enough; instead, they're also packaged inside bulky, clear plastic "clamshell" containers, which makes it impossible to hear the player before buying it. I'm sure that shoppers would trade up to more expensive models if only they could comparison-shop a few brands—just witness the success of the Apple Stores, which invite you to play iPods and fiddle around with iPhones and other cool gear.

Costume jewelry is another category that's often guilty of this sin. You've got items that cost maybe \$20 or \$30 padlocked behind glass and steel, depriving shoppers of the chance to see how the chains and

pendants would look and feel on a neck or a wrist. In the same store you'll see plenty of other merchandise of equal or greater value on open display. It's reflexive but makes no business sense. We see the same thinking about one of the hottest items to grow out of the computerization of America—ink-jet printer cartridges. Until very recently, in almost every major U.S. office product superstore (like Staples, OfficeMax, Office Depot and so on) they were displayed inside locked cabinets, owing to their small size and high price. But when you've seen as many frustrated shoppers prowling store aisles searching vainly for a clerk with a key as we have, you wonder if there isn't something self-defeating about all that security. Printer ink cartridges drive a huge percentage of office product store profits, and in the past ten years, most of the major chains have redesigned their stores around the ink-jet cartridge section.

Clothing retailers have learned a trick or two about placing goods on display without allowing them to be abused in the process. Let's go back to that beautiful Armani store on Madison Avenue, for instance. You've got shoppers whose hands have been who knows where, and they're groping costly Italian adornments like they already own them. Would you feel at ease knowing how many fingers have already had their way with your suit sleeve? Here's one strategy: If a suit comes in several colors, the store will place the dark shades down where they can be reached easily and display the beiges and pale grays and off-whites up high, where they can be seen but not touched. If a sweater displayed on a table comes in several shades, you'll always find the lighter ones on the bottom and the dark on top, where they'll be rubbed and grubbed, but who will know?

Selling is the main reason for making merchandise as available as possible to shoppers. But it's not the only one—there's also selling up. If you have no real basis for comparing one product to another, the normal instinct is to buy what's cheaper. But if a store sets itself up to educate shoppers, even just a little, a certain number of them will spend more than what is absolutely necessary. If given a choice of three brands, or three models, and given the chance to pit one against the others, the

shopper will at least have a sensible reason for choosing the better item.

This is an issue for just about every product we've mentioned so far—men's underwear and coffee and stereo headphones and sweaters and skin cream etc. In mattress stores, too. There, typically, you find a whole field of undressed beds awaiting inspection. Some are cheaper than others, but it's just as expensive to stock and maintain the \$1,500 mattress as it is the \$4,000 one: So if you can get just one customer in five to start out trying the cheap number and work up to a better one, you're doing pretty well.

And how, aside from trial, can that be made to happen? Clearly, no other way. And the beds are all out there, ready for you to recline, isn't that right? Well, kind of. You really need to feel comfortable to try out a mattress. It's a vulnerable position to take in such a public space, in front of strangers. You may even wish you didn't have to lie down while the salesman stands there, looming over you. (He, of course, is afraid that if he backs off five feet and stops sending you telepathic "Buy this mattress now!" messages, you won't purchase anything.) And you're on a mattress that has been helpfully positioned in the front of the store, where your supine form can be seen easily through the front window, and where, if you are a woman in a dress or skirt, your modesty will be severely tested. How much worse can this experience be made? How about no sheets on the bed, so you never even see how it will feel if and when you get it home, and no pillow either, so you get no idea of the comfort this baby will (or will not) provide?

It seems that if the better mattresses were positioned away from public view, maybe even partly partitioned, to give the experience a little of the feel of a dressing room, maybe shoppers would be encouraged to upgrade their bedding desires. More thought is given to the trial experience when you're buying a pair of \$40 jeans than when you're buying a \$4,000 mattress. We did a study of mattress retailing, during which we asked a manager whether pillows of various thicknesses and firmness could be provided, along with freshly laundered pillowcases, for mattress try-outs.

"But we don't sell pillows," was his flat rejection of the idea. Never mind that pillows have a much higher margin than mattresses even, or

that selling pillows was a way of adding on accessories to a product that had few opportunities for such novelties.

Similarly, at AT&T phone stores, the focus was on selling the main product; almost as an afterthought, they sold a dopey little item called the SoftTalk phone holder. It was a soft plastic cradle designed to make it more comfortable to keep your phone jammed between your neck and shoulder. The thing didn't look like much of anything, but once you tried it you learned that it was ingenious and truly effective. Without trying it, however, it looked pointless, and because none were on display there was no easy way to actually try it, and thanks to the sales staff's lack of effort nobody ever did. Sure, it was only a \$5 or so item, but the margin on it, as with most accessories, was obscenely high—the most profitable thing in the joint. We computed that if every third customer bought one, the profit would cover a store's monthly rent.

Another glaring example is wireless services, where customers can compare the costs of handsets and services online. It is a very competitive market where margins are small and where the money is made by selling accessories, from ringtones to carrying cases. Best Buy, for example, has struck a deal with Liz Claiborne to develop slick cell phone and laptop cases. At one recent store opening, they staged a fashion show exhibiting carrying cases for phones, computers and digital cameras. None of them were cheap. Great idea. I just wish they'd been smart enough to realize that if you want to sell high-priced laptop bags, you also need mirrors. In Japan you can "tattoo" your phone or iPod—you pick out the skin and for about \$40, someone carefully applies the decal to cover your phone. Add to that spare batteries, a charger for your car and a hands-free device, and the transaction is that much more profitable.

There's one final issue regarding the sensory and tactile nature of shopping. Oddly, it involves letting shoppers know that it's all right for them to touch. At Hallmark stores we studied, some front-end Christmas ornament displays were so artfully designed and painstakingly constructed that shoppers didn't know if they were supposed to take or just gaze adoringly. Bookstores, too, sometimes run into the same problem when tabletop displays show a little too much effort. People know how hard it is to get anything looking nice, so they can be reluctant to undo

somebody's hard work. We ran into this while helping Einstein Bros. Bagels test-drive a prototype restaurant in Utah, of all places. A brilliantly anomalous decision, by the way, inventing a new way to sell bagels in a place where there is no bagel culture to speak of—if you can get it working there, it'll work anywhere. At this store, a wall rack holding bags of variously flavored bagel chips was positioned so that customers standing in line to pay would be able to reach out and grab something on impulse. The problem was that the bags were stocked so neatly, and with such an orderly eye, that customers were never quite sure if they were meant to touch the thing. The solution was to have an employee come out every so often and mess the shelves up, pull a few bags out so there would be obvious gaps. *Then* the customers touched. (People are awfully polite in Utah, aren't they?) Actually, the clerks would create a total sensory experience by grabbing a bag, ripping it open and proffering it to those waiting in line, as a way to introduce the locals to the wonders of jalapeno-cheddar whole wheat bagel chips. Which may sound like a joke, but don't laugh until you've tried them.

THIRTEEN

The Big Three

I've got a brilliant idea: Let's save money! We're in charge of merchandising and display for a chain of stores here, so let's make an executive decision to replace our expensive old wooden shelving with a cheaper new wire grid system. The difference in cost goes directly to the bottom line. There. Done. Next?

What? Oh. Well, look at that. Yikes. Who knew? The wire shelving seemed perfectly beautiful and functional—until actual product was placed on it. At that point (or minutes after, I should say) the main drawback to the wire grid became clear: Every time a customer touches something, it tilts. Sometimes, to be honest, nobody touches a thing and it tilts. I think the damn boxes may be tilting each other. And you look down the long expanse of wire grids and every fourth or fifth thing has tipped, and it looks like hell, I'll be the first to agree, so somebody needs to go straighten it. The boys over in Operations are screaming like wet chimps: We're now paying people \$8.00 an hour to straighten boxes. On a busy Saturday night, as the lines grow long, we're talking an hour or

more per store of wasted labor. How many stores? How many hours? How much did we save? Uh-oh.

And that's not a hypothetical scenario, either—it's verbatim from the Envirosell playbook. It illustrates one of the most important principles of shopping. Retailing 101 starts with the notion that a store has three distinct aspects: design (meaning the premises), merchandising (whatever you put in them) and operations (whatever employees do). These Big Three, while seemingly separate, are in fact completely and totally intertwined, interrelated and interdependent, meaning that when somebody makes a decision regarding one, a decision has been made about the other two as well. In this particular instance, the mistake was one that's made all the time: Display designers never go into stores to see their creations in action, so they don't have a firm grip on what happens in the real world. The larger lesson here is that if one of the Big Three is strengthened, it takes some of the pressure off the others. If one is weakened, it shifts a greater burden onto the remaining two. This is not a good thing or a bad thing—it just is. It's the geometry that rules the shopping universe.

Here's an example. The Gap's trademark is that you can easily touch, stroke, unfold and otherwise examine at close range everything on the selling floor. A lot of sweaters and shirts are sold thanks to the decision to foster intimate contact between shopper and goods. Obviously, that merchandising policy dictates the display scheme (wide, flat tabletops, which are easier to shop than racks or shelves). But it also determines how and where employees will spend their time. All that touching means that sweaters and shirts constantly need to be refolded and straightened and neatened. That translates into the need for lots of clerks roaming the floor rather than standing behind the counter ringing up sales. Which is a big expense, but for the Gap, it's a sound investment—the cost of doing business. The main thing here is that it was a conscious decision.

Sometimes it's not a decision so much as a response to a fact of life. Revlon's merchandising must work in a variety of settings—mass merchandisers, cosmetics specialty stores and drugstores. In the latter,