

Views

on the world of
shoppers, retailers
and brands



The Amazonian Ghost

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Herb Sorensen, Ph.D.

In the movie *Ghost*, with Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore, we see the spectral Swayze trying to reach his real world lover, by the power of the mind. He had some instruction on this matter by another cranky ghost, in the subway.

This is not totally unlike the problem that the modern self-service retailer faces. First, just like the Swayze ghost and his love, Moore, the retailer (the ghost) effectively inhabits a different world than his beloved, the shopper. Here, I will provide some down to earth, uncranky assistance to retailers seeking to bridge their own gap. :)

First of all, let's acknowledge that the gap is real. It is a gap in communication, largely broken 100 years ago when much retailing became self-service. Self-service, of course, limited the amount of personal communication that could occur between the retailer and the shopper. The exact form of personal selling that was common 100 years ago is unlikely to ever become a huge component of *self-service* retailing again.

However, in the past few years, another form of retailing has arisen that recaptures many of the original personal selling features, and we can learn from this something of how "personal" selling can be returned to self-service retailing, without all of the real-world staff that that might conjure. Just as with Patrick Swayze, the real adjustment that opens communication between the two worlds of retailer and shopper, is an adjustment between the ears of the retailer. So we begin with a renewed understanding of how to *SELL to someone you cannot physically reach*.

We must take our learning here from the world of online retailing, the Amazonian Ghost. The metaphor is apt, because, like Swayze, the online merchant cannot be physically present with the shopper. And yet Amazon, and other online merchants, sell aggressively, their wraith-like avatars doing the work for them!

The screenshot shows the Amazon.com product page for the book "Inside the Mind of the Shopper: The Science of Retailing" by Herb Sorensen. The page is viewed in Mozilla Firefox. The main product listing shows the book is priced at \$17.15, a 34% discount from the list price of \$26.00. It is in stock and eligible for free shipping with Amazon Prime. Below the main listing, there are sections for "Frequently Bought Together" (with "How We Decide" by Jonah Lehrer) and "Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought" (listing several related books like "How We Decide", "Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy", "Harvard Business Review on Retailing and Merchandising", "Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping", "The Age of Enrage: Reinventing Marketing for T...", "Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be...", "Predictable Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape...", and "Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion").

First of all, as soon as you arrive at Amazon, their goal is to get you to the book or merchandise that you may be seeking, as quickly as possible. It is a fact that the abandoned shopping cart is the bane of online selling. Notice the "one click" option, and overnight delivery - speedy checkout - in the upper right hand corner. Amazon is ready to consummate the sale *immediately*, and at all times. Every personal salesman in the world knows that the longer a shopper takes to make up their mind, the more likely they are to decide to not buy.

Assuming you were looking for a book, as soon as you arrive at any book page, Amazon tells you what else people frequently buy *with* this book, and, further down the page they will tell how this specific book ranks in comparison to all the other 50 million books they sell, and more specifically, how it ranks compared to the other books in its category. Of course there are book reviews as well.

What is going on here is that the "salesman" avatar at Amazon is doing all they can to close a sale. First, responding to your expressed interest (a search that brought you to this page,) and secondly, seeking to reassure you about your choice by telling you that most people who visit this page, buy this book. But at the same time they are going for the close ("One Click" - close early and close often,) they are teeing up alternates in case, they can sell you two books here, or maybe close on an alternate if you reject this one.

All the rankings and reviews play two crucial roles that are intertwined:

- To get you to the close
- To drill into your mind for post close, that you made the right decision.

This second role is often overlooked in selling, although it is inseparable from the first. Buyer's remorse does not just occur because of poor product performance after delivery. It also occurs because advertisers and sellers (retailers) fail to adequately reassure customers that, "You made the right choice. Given all the options out there, you made a smart selection." Even if there are flaws - everything has flaws, that's life - YOU are one step ahead of the game!

Now, Mr. Retailer (or brand supplier,) let's see if we can "borrow" the Amazon avatar to help us *SELL* in the aisle of a bricks-and-mortar store.

So here you are, hovering like a ghost over an aisle, as a shopper turns into the aisle. This is her first "click" (Amazon, remember?) giving you a clue as to just what you might be able to sell her. Although this doesn't have quite the specificity of the individual book that the Amazonian avatar gets for starters, it's close enough for you to start making a single intelligent offer. Remember, this is about YOU selling, not passively standing by to see what she will buy.

Hmmm! So just what should you sell, of the thousands of products in this aisle? "Amazon" will check to see what most other shoppers have purchased in this aisle. It's in your transaction logs. The number one item sold in this aisle is _____! Tell them what it is. Simple statistics tells you what the crowd buys most of, is what you are *most likely to SELL* to an individual. So, if you are going to sell something to this shopper, your best bet is a Top Seller for this aisle, for this category, for this brand, etc.

Remember, even though you are the Amazonian Ghost lurking above the aisle, you can make your presence felt by putting those "Top Seller" or "Shoppers' No. 1 Choice" notices on the few appropriate items in the aisle.

Continuing our Amazonification discussion - we think, but what if she doesn't *want* to buy what the crowd is purchasing? No problem, you, like Amazon, have thoughtfully provided many alternatives - the long tail. The shopper will be reassured in her purchase from the long tail because she has consciously rejected the crowd's choice and expressed her individuality by selecting from the rest of the options. Remember, the long tail attracts shoppers to the store, but it can also *provide reassurance* to shoppers who reject the big head, and make *some level of purchases* from the long tail. So all are not only aided by your selling the big head to them, but are reassured they got what was best for them, whether they bought the big head or the long tail.

Here's to **GREAT** *"Shopping!"*
Your friend, Herb Sorensen

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