

There's an old adage in retailing that you should know your customer but the really successful retailer knows rather more. He knows how to manipulate the customer; how to pull the right strings; how to stroke the right strokes and how to make the customer believe that finding this particular store was an unbelievable stroke of luck. Stan Curtis ponders upon how science has revealed that we are all natural born suckers.

I'm a man of many interests with a working knowledge of many obscure subjects and a desire to learn more about others. Indeed I harbour a long held desire to spend a month in Florida to get my pilots licence followed by a month in Colorado to get my "Blasters" certificate to expand my knowledge of explosives. However that plan is currently on the back burner after my wife pointed out that my chosen curriculum would certainly give US Immigration collective heart failure and probably ensure an unwanted vacation in Guantanamo Bay. Another of my rather more pedestrian interests is Behavioural Science; one of those subjects which has spawned endless papers and books with the good science being frequently degraded into the populist paperbacks of the "Women are from Romford; Men are from Huddersfield" variety.

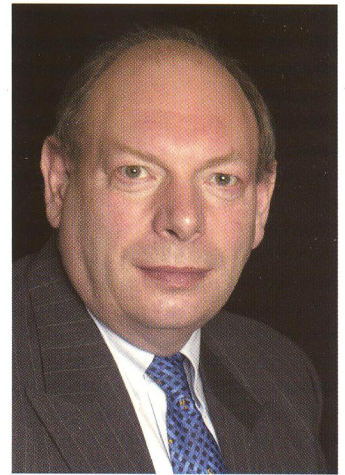
This fascinating subject plonked itself back into my consciousness when I came across a Radio 4

times as much on lighting as they do on the sound system.

The other great thing about the senses is that as you grow up you develop matrices of links between your senses. You talk to a sadly missed former girlfriend who greets you warmly on the phone and somehow you smell her perfume; feel the touch of her soft skin on yours; and..... But I digress for what we are discussing is "association" and it is a very powerful influence on our behaviour. Send the right signals to

seen better days; the period whiff of "Jeye's fluid" from the lavatory; and the attendance of a scruffy salesman in a T-shirt who then proceeds to scratch his balls; is not going to work well in the association stakes.

It seems that given the luxury of time the most successful interrogators are not the guys with the baseball bats and hypodermic syringes loaded with Sodium Pentothal but the more gentle cerebral types who work the emotions and the tricks that our senses play until the subject makes an association between his own comfort zone and the questioner. Equally we all know that in selling we can adopt the "in your face; bash your brains out" sales approach beloved of Saira in "The Apprentice" or we can employ some gentle manipulation



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It's not what you say, it's the way that you say it.

just some of our senses and the other signals will pop up unbidden. For association is rather like our sixth

until the customer really believes that buying the product was their own decision. My butcher has those skills

"If you see one thing but hear another you'll always go with what you see"

programme, discussing "man's" five senses; how they work together and how they influence our reactions. The more I heard the more I realised how some successful small retailers had harnessed the inherent behaviour of the customer in order to steer them to a satisfactory buying decision. Probably the most important factor that we must take on board is that sight is the sense that dominates all others; if you see one thing but hear another you'll always go with what you see. Yes, if it looks like a duck; walks like a duck and talks like a chipmunk you'll know it is a duck. So if you are selling AV equipment most of the budget needs to go on the picture side of things; a policy borne out by the scientific; namely a recent university research programme which showed that viewers were unaware of even severe audio signal degradation when watching a movie; and the anecdotal; the long established fact that most clubs spend around ten

sense and this is where the good retailer can really score. What we are really talking about is the overall mood; that general ambience; those little clues which we pick up without being aware of them. The behavioural scientists tell us that we are absolute suckers when it comes to association. Sit someone down in a comfy sofa in a nicely relaxing room-set with those nice smells of bread-making or freshly roasted coffee and proceed with a demonstration of a "feel good" movie whilst you, the retailer, make regular but imperceptible encouraging affirmative sounds and body movements; and it will be a pound to a penny that that person will associate that AV system with good things. Depending upon the client, the added ingredient of an attractive saleswoman dripping in Chanel adds even more confidence to the belief that they are ready to buy the system. On the other hand, the substitution of a demonstration room that has

in abundance and for several years we've bought twice as much meat as we need and we've enjoyed it. I don't know how he does it but I do know that he'll never be poor.

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