

Marketers Can Reach Shoppers Devoted to Lists

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Marketers tend to be optimistic folks who are ready for a good challenge. They're usually confident about swaying shoppers toward their products and campaigns.

But what happens in an environment when consumers are suddenly not open to being swayed at all? Is that the situation we find ourselves in?

An interesting viewpoint on that question comes from Thomas Blischok, president, consulting and innovation, Information Resources Inc. He recently outlined new consumer behaviors at the FMI Midwinter Executive Conference in Orlando.



He said IRI research has found that 76% of respondents now plan to make purchase decisions at home or on the way to the store, rather than in the store. "List' is the key word driving 2009 decisions," he declared.

Blischok explained that consumers in this downturn are holding to prearranged buying plans and avoiding new products. He suggested that marketers avoid an aggressive expansion of in-store marketing at this point.

The implications of this viewpoint are large, so I reached out to respected sources in the new products and in-store marketing worlds to help make sense of it.

"Nothing's ever that black-and-white" for in-store marketing, said Peter Hoyt, executive director of the In-Store Marketing Institute. "Most shoppers have a list, or have one in mind. They may mean to get juice, but maybe they weren't specific about which kind or brand. How and when they reach those decisions is critical. Proper in-store marketing isn't just about pushing things in their path – it's about shopper marketing, communicating, making it easier to shop, discover, buy."

This becomes more crucial, Hoyt added, at a time when consumers are eating more at home.

On the new products front, Robert Levy, president of Brand Spark International, an independent market research and strategy firm, discussed results from his organization's just-launched national consumer study about new products (click on "Value Drives New Product Purchases" for the story). Levy is the founder of a new program called Best New Product Awards. He pointed out that some 75% to 80% of consumer respondents to his survey said they like trying new products, and it's up to marketers to "reframe the value of their products" for these economic times.

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Part of that value involves price, but it's also about durability and quality, because people at this point want things to last longer, he said. Health benefits represent another value-add as consumers continue to embrace products like probiotics or omega-3-enriched items, he said.

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It seems to me this entire discussion could be a case of everyone being right, or at least partially so. Yes, consumers these days are likely to be more resistant to making unplanned purchases or succumbing to marketing pitches. But they may be open to being convinced that a marketing campaign or a new product presents a good substitute to a planned purchase – or even fills a need they were planning to meet elsewhere. One thing we can all agree on: It's now more important than ever to deftly handle these types of communications with consumers.