

The new price of shopper loyalty

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NEW YORK — American shoppers require that products be on sale in the grocery aisle — not only when they're trying a new brand, but even when buying those brands they already strongly prefer, according to a new survey by global market research firm Synovate. The company recently surveyed 650 grocery shoppers in the US to understand shopping behaviour and patterns across 18 different product categories as well as which product categories drive store visits and store image.

"There is a well-defined pattern among shoppers we call 'System Beaters'", said Joel Robinson, Senior Vice President and shopper insights expert at Synovate in North America. "System Beaters often have strong brand preferences but have been trained by manufacturers and retailers to expect, and even require, a good deal on price before they will actually buy", Robinson said. "Nowhere is this pattern more pronounced than in carbonated soft drinks where 75 percent of System Beaters maintain they have a favourite brand that they strongly prefer despite requiring a deal to actually make a purchase. Furthermore, 58 percent of System Beaters admit to switching stores to take advantage of sales on the brand they prefer."

While System Beater behaviour poses a challenge to maintaining profit margins for certain product categories, it also represents an opportunity for retailers to convince shoppers to visit their store, knowing they will also fill up their cart with purchases that are profitable. "Our research shows that, depending on the category, the same shopper can simultaneously be a System Beater, an 'Explorer' who enjoys buying interesting items on impulse, and a 'Planner' who puts the product and even the brand name on their shopping list", said Robinson. For example, of those shoppers exhibiting System Beater behaviour, only 20 percent exhibited it consistently across product categories.

Based on available advanced data mining tools, retailers are now able to identify category shopping styles and how they apply to specific product categories, and use this to selectively promote certain items to their shopper base.

The research also showed that some product categories tend to be bought on impulse, rather than being planned and, surprisingly, such products can have a great impact on shoppers' opinions of the store overall. "Apparently, shoppers choose which store to go to not only based on what they plan to buy but also based on what they might want to browse for during their shopping trip. Some of the products that we found to be the most fun to shop for in a supermarket would definitely be a surprise to some retailers", Robinson offered.

"The implications of these shopper findings are massive", Robinson concluded. "This will set new priorities for a retailer that assesses a product category's total profit contribution to a store by considering if that category can be promoted in a way that brings shoppers into the store". The results also reveal ways in which manufacturers and retailers can optimize shelf and display areas for products, depending on the predominant shopper style for a given product category, resulting in sales lift.

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