



Advice

Psychology

of Selling

Why does shopping make us feel good?

Buying *certain* products triggers a centre in the brain that produces endorphins



THEORETICALLY we should feel bad when we buy things because at the same time that we're acquiring something, we're suffering a loss: the hard-earned money we forked over to pay for the goods. As I've mentioned before in this column, humans are two times more likely to avoid loss (or the perception of it) than seek a win. Since we see money as good, giving it up should, in theory, be viewed as bad, so why is shop-

ping frequently viewed as pleasurable? The answer lies in the way customers perceive the purchase.

Often the act of buying certain types of product triggers a centre in the brain that produces the same endorphins that vigorous exercise does. The way that humans perceive a purchase often makes the difference in how good they feel both during and after the purchase. The difference in interpretation

by the brain lies in the need versus the want of the purchase. For example, people don't get any excitement out of buying a new furnace for their home when the old one breaks or from buying diapers at the grocery store. These are "need" purchases and when we're buying to meet a need, we most often perceive the purchase as a loss and, hence, not a very enjoyable or pleasing experience. We realize that we don't want to make the buy, but rather we have to. We feel forced to do so.

Quite the opposite occurs when we're shopping for wants. These are purchases that we make because we want or desire something and the feeling of satisfying that want is often accompanied by a lifting of our spirits. This increase in feeling of well-being comes from a number of factors in want or desire-based buying. For example, in a gift store the customer is often fulfilling a want or desire to demonstrate love or affection for someone through the purchase of an item that will become the physical representation of that affection. So, the item itself takes on the persona of the gift recipient and the buyer can see the satisfaction of that person in the item.

Store owners can reinforce this positive feeling by telling the customer how the recipient will love not only the gift but also the thoughtfulness of the giver. This simple statement will make the purchase even more enjoyable for the customer. ■

James Dion has a bachelors and masters degree in psychology from the Chicago State University and a Ph.D. in industrial psychology from the Illinois Institute of Technology. Coupled with 30 years of hands-on retail experience, he's one of the most sought after retail consultants internationally. He's also the author of three books including *Retail Selling Ain't Brain Surgery, It's Twice As Hard*.