

Opinion

Sometimes, the price is not right

Retailing has changed. It seems to me that, in the not too distant past, I could make a purchase secure in the knowledge that competition would ensure a reasonable price. The mere fact that people like my mother spent their days travelling from one retail heaven to another, comparing prices, meant that retailers had to keep their prices in line.

Adam Smith's "invisible hand" functioned like a built-in Consumer Reports. I liked that. It allowed me the convenience to stop once and know that I wasn't being ripped off.

Of course, then I found that I was being ripped off. Larger outlets kept each other in line but so-called convenience stores set their prices for a captive public. They knew you only shopped at the corner store for items you really needed — immediately.

Then a curious thing happened. My mother, and thousands of mothers like her, got a job. No longer could she scour the retail sector to ensure competitive prices, (save Saturdays and weekdays after 5 p.m.).

Once-responsible retailers saw an opportunity for ripping off the public. Without mothers keeping an eye on their behaviour, they changed pricing policies. They knew that once you were in their store, especially when purchasing staple goods, you weren't going to shop around. You didn't have the time.

Because of this fundamental shift in our perception of the value of time Adam Smith has become inconsequential.

Another tool for practitioners of "new marketing" is grocery store coupons. They're a form of rip off. I appreciate knowing about pricing through the use of newspaper ads but I don't like having to lug the bloody scrap of paper down to the store, find the exact product and root around through my pockets for the coupon, which is as likely as not to have some



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proviso which excludes its use in my particular case.

A FINE FAIR DISCOUNT — A case of 24 Coca-Cola, regular or diet, for \$5.99 with coupon.

The expiry is set either for 10 minutes from the time of discovery or not for 12 years. In the latter case you have the thing kicking around for 10 years in the mistaken belief that you might eventually use it. After leaving it in a pocket during washing, and destroying it, you agonize at your wasted opportunity. The opportunity of a decade.

As often as not the expiry of these coupons is set so that by the time you manage to gather all your coupons, organize your needs and enough money to take advantage of these deals, they've expired.

In the end it's just an irritation. Why not have the same price for everybody and not a discount just for those who, upon pulling a sheaf of tattered coupons out of their pockets, horrify those behind them in line?

Retailing is turning ugly. Once, the customer was satisfied that he was getting a fair shake. People got their goods secure in the knowledge their friendly neighbourhood retailer was exactly that. Now, people wait until they find a better deal on milk, rather than pay some outlandish price. Kids go without, and we're all poorer for it. Who knows what damage this will do to the next generation?



MADE 92

That's one costly kitty

"If she were my cat..." Those powerful, guilt-ridden words from the vet reminded me of "if he were my child" uttered years before by a doctor when he presented me with choices regarding my toddler son's well-being.

The vet continued to comb the fleas out of Annie's fur as the frightened cat trembled on the examination table. Was this newcomer to our family worth putting out hundreds of dollars? I still can't answer that question, but I gave the go-ahead. The following morning, the vet would extract her abscessed tooth (it turned out she was to lose two) and remove the tumour on her side.

I figured I might as well at the same time attack the flea invasion at the house so I booked Annie and the other two cats in for a flea bath. None of these cats would thank me later for my thoughtfulness.

Since Annie would be getting general anesthesia, she could neither eat nor drink after 8 p.m. That posed a minor problem for Panky and Purr-Puss, but I moved their dry food and water into our bedroom and let them come in from time to time to nibble and slurp.

By 8:30 the next morning, three cats had been delivered to the vet's. We had until 4 p.m. to vacuum the house and spray it with heavy-duty flea killer.

My sister, the one who discovered Annie's tumor, conveniently returned to Montreal that very morning, so we were down a pair of hands for the housework. The five-year-old and eight-year-old did a general tidy-up, especially of their rooms. They moved possessions and lightweight furniture away from the baseboards where the spray was to be applied.

I did the majority of the vacuuming while the 13-year-old followed me with the bottle of spray. I didn't monitor the quantity applied and we ran empty halfway through the onslaught so he rushed over to the vet's and bought a second bottle.



**On the
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Finally, it was time to pick up the pussycats. Their disgruntled expressions told me that they had been less than impressed with their eight-hour incarceration at the clinic.

The vet, perhaps in an attempt to justify the steep surgery fee, produced a small bottle in which was floating a grey mass the thickness and size of two loonies. I had the option of paying \$42 to send the blob to the lab to confirm whether or not the tumor was malignant.

This was when the vet pulled out the second of her "if she were my cat" lines, so I wrote the cheque out accordingly. (On Christmas Eve, she called to inform me that the tumour had been benign.)

So there was poor Annie — stitches in her mouth and stitches in her side. Only the abdominal ones would later have to be removed. As soon as she returned home, she headed for the heat register in the kitchen, where she camped out for a day or two as the drugs wore off and she began recuperating.

Unfortunately, neither we nor Annie were finished with the ordeal. For the next 10 days, we had to stuff a pill down her throat. That sure didn't mend human-feline relationships.

One afternoon, she had us frantically searching for her. We feared she had taken off, but she eventually emerged from her hiding place. I'm not sure which bothered me more, the thought of a cold, hungry and sick cat wandering the neighbourhood or the thought of spending all that money on her.

But thanks to Annie, we have a clean house.

Gifted kids are not wimps

Having a "gifted" child is viewed in some quarters as a mixed blessing.

Bright children are portrayed in popular literature in an unfavourable light — physically smaller, weaker, wearing glasses, and socially inept. We are warned that these children won't like to be with peers their own age, won't fit in, will get bored easily and become difficult to please, and may even grow up eccentric, tormented or reclusive.

There are some brilliant minds who turn out to be sad and tormented souls (such as Vincent Van Gogh), but it's the exception rather than the rule. When it does happen it gets a lot of press, precisely because it is so unusual and unexpected.

One of the most famous cases is that of William Sidis. He was born in the United States in 1898, the son of Russian immigrants, both of whom were psychiatrists. He was educated in the early years by his parents, and he was able to read English before he was age three. By five he was reading German, French and Russian. He mastered algebra, geometry, calculus, and trigonometry by age 10. He entered Harvard at 11.

Newspapers documented his decline in agonizing detail. He became an eccentric recluse, took low-paying clerical jobs to support himself, and spent most of his time on his obsession — collecting bus and trolley transfers. He died at age 46, alone, unemployed, and broke.

Will this happen to our child if he is "gifted"? Here is what the research really shows.

Bright children are more likely to be nearsighted, and hence to need glasses. In addition, many have skipped grades and are therefore smaller than their (older) classmates. Perhaps this is where the stereotype of a smart child as weak and small came from.

The fact is, however, bright children appear to be quite the opposite — larger, stronger, and better adjusted. One study at Stanford University selected almost 1,500 children with supe-



Psychology
with ARNOLD
RINCOVER

rior IQs — ranging from 140 to 200. These children were repeatedly monitored on a variety of physical, social and achievement measures during the course of their lives.

In middle childhood — from 7 to 12 years of age — they were about 2.5 cm. taller than their peers. They were superior to their agemates in physical development, health, social skills, and psychological adjustment.

In school, they ranked far ahead of their peers, not just in one or two areas, but in a wide variety of subjects.

Their excellent record in both achievement and adjustment continued into the adult years. About 90 per cent attended college; many became doctors, lawyers, and professors. They exhibited much lower than average rates of alcoholism, psychosis, poor health, criminal behaviour, and divorce.

Other studies have led to the same conclusion — gifted children do not tend to be maladjusted or weaklings, rather they generally become creative, productive, successful, and appear better adjusted than average.

Interestingly, gifted children also tend to be boys, although no one yet knows why. Perhaps parents aren't as quick to encourage, or publicize, the extraordinary talents of girls.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that extremely low IQ scores (and mental retardation) are also much more common in males than in females. Consequently, some researchers have speculated that there may be a biological factor at play — although the average intelligence of boys and girls is the same, it is possible that boys vary more widely and reach the extremes more often.

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