

College of Business Book Review by Myron Leonard

Title: "Why We Shop: Emotional Rewards and Retail Strategies"

Author: Jim Pooler

Publisher: Praeger Publishers

Length: 206 pages

Price: \$39.95

Reading time: 14 hours

Reading rating: 9 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

A set of ideas that made sense a century ago shaped the modern perspective on shopping. Some of these old-fashioned ideas are that people shop for dollar value, that shopping decisions make practical sense, or that shopping is mostly about acquiring needed goods and services. Jim Pooler, author of "Why We Shop: Emotional rewards and Retail Strategies," feels that a new perspective on shopping is now required.

Shopping is one of the most challenging and rewarding activities. The author offers an interesting exploration of shopping's emotional and psychological dimensions. Why do we shop the way we do? Why do people go to malls, boutiques, and Web sites with their credit cards in hand, despite not knowing what it is they're looking for? This book answers such questions, taking an incisive look at how shopping and shoppers have changed in recent years.

The new consumer shops for reasons that seem strange and inexplicable from a conventional point of view. Modern shoppers buy things to reward themselves or to make them feel good. They buy things because they are expensive. They buy things to make a statement, to show off their personality, or to boost their self-esteem. Purchased items have become an affirmation of the psyche.

The author suggests that shopping today is a recreation and sport, often taken to extreme levels to find just the right purchase – that elusive, out-of-stock designer jacket or pair of limited edition athletic sneakers. Drawing on his background as a professor of urban and population geography, the author examines the movements and motivations of the consumers flowing into stores and malls, distinguishing between "flyers" and "floaters." Flyers are active shoppers on a mission; they know what they want and are determined to get it. Floaters, on the other hand, are passive shoppers, just drifting along until they find something.

For those in retailing and marketing, this guide to the fickle consumer's mindset offers concrete and practical advice on modern shopping behavior. Comprehending why people shop as they do is an enormous challenge for today's retailer. For example, why do people feel justified in splurging for Christmas, birthdays, or anniversaries, but suffer guilt from over-spending at other times of the year? Why is there such a thing as a morning-after "urge to return" among certain clothing shoppers, while others refuse to return an item even if it's flawed or doesn't fit?

This is a well-organized and insightful book. The text material will prove informative not only to retailers, advertisers, and marketers, but to consumers as well.

Myron Leonard is professor of marketing in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. His research interests include marketing education and services marketing. For previously reviewed books, visit our Web site at www.wcu.edu/cob/.