

The Science Behind Impulse Buying and How to Encourage it in Retail Stores

For retail store owners, finding ways to maximize sales starts by understanding your customers. Consider that the consumers in your store will make a purchase for a wide variety of reasons. One of the more interesting and beneficial to the store owner is impulse purchasing.

At first glance, an impulse purchase seems random and therefore difficult to predict much less prepare. However, there is a science behind why people purchase on impulse. The more you understand impulse purchasing, the better you can shape your marketing approach for consumers who visit your store.

What is an Impulse Purchase?

It is the sudden, immediate purchase of an item that comes without any planning or even intention, at least when the customer walks into the store. It's as simple as the customer seeing an item, feeling an overwhelming urge to buy it, and then making the purchase without even thinking about it.

An impulse purchase demonstrates the power of temptation. The sudden feeling that you need to have that item in your home. So strong is the feeling that many people cannot help themselves when making such a purchase.

However, to the store owner seeing someone make an impulse purchase may be like a random event. After all, the motivations of why someone will make an impulse purchase can come from many different reasons. But there is a science to impulse buying which when evaluated can be used by the store owner to maximize the chances of people making impulse purchases.

Science Behind Impulse Buying

Of the many factors involved in this type of purchase, there are 3 that stand out.

- Beliefs & Attitudes of the Buyer
- Their Personality Traits
- Sociocultural & Demographic Factors

Put simply, what someone feels on the inside may be linked to seeing something they want when visiting your store. This creates the trigger that causes an impulse purchase to be made. You could call one version of impulse buying "self-gifting" as it comes from wanting to satisfy an urge.

Although seemingly random on the surface, the impulse purchase is often made of a product that a person has wanted for a considerable time, perhaps even years. It is the combination of long-term memory that interacts with the stimulus of seeing the item that creates the conditions for an impulse purchase.

For example, if you love apple pie and walk into a bakery that makes apple pies, the chance of purchasing the pie goes up. Your brain brings up memories of enjoying apple pie, the desire you feel to have it again, and the smell which may permeate the bakery.

The stimuli of the sight and smell of apple pies combined with your love of the pies themselves and the happy memories they bring may have you purchasing an apple pie without even thinking about it. The decision often happens in a microsecond and sometimes overrides factors that normally would stop such a decision from being made.

But the bottom line is that you saw the pie, smelled the pie, and wanted the pie, so you purchased it and are happy that you did.

Items Most Likely to Be Purchased on Impulse

Admittedly, there are several factors that go into which items are most likely to be impulse purchased. But one consistent factor is the times in which we live. In other words, the concerns and trends of the day often provide added impetus for making an impulse decision.

- Clothing Trends
- New Vehicle Models
- New Technology
- Toys & Games
- Foods, Desserts, & Treats
- Everyday Items

When something is “hot”, that often means people are buying it on impulse. It’s readily apparent when you look back years and even decades ago at trends that make you wonder why anyone would have a beehive hairdo or a pet rock. But such trends at the time were quite desirable and made perfect sense.

In the post-pandemic world that we live in today, there is an emphasis on cleaning supplies, soaps, and hand sanitizers. Items that are in short supply may also become impulse purchases. But in terms of store owners looking for methods that maximize the potential for impulse purchases, you should think about the following:

Driving Impulse Purchases

Eye Stimulation: In other words, the use of visual marketing materials that people see can cause an impulse sale. Such items may include the following.

- Ambiance
- Marketing Actions
- Proper Signage
- Window Displays

Such stimulation of what people see can help drive the internal factors that lead to an impulse purchase. Even how your salespeople act can influence such purchases, which makes them more likely.

Getting a Great Deal: Many impulse purchases are created when desired items considered out of reach are suddenly marked down. Even impulse buyers can be conscious of the price. So, when they see something desirable at a price that is lower than expected, it can kick in the urge to purchase it.

Placement of Products: They can’t buy it if they cannot see it. Think about the type of items in your store that people are more likely to impulse purchase. You can use the history of purchases in your store as a guide. Place such items so they are easy to see. Window displays are a good example, but also where the items are in the aisles can highlight them in the right manner.

Other Impulse Purchase Marketing Methods

In addition to doing the basics, you can add in other methods that help customers see the items they want.

- Low Priced Items at the Checkout
- Point to Items Likely for Impulse Purchasing
- Create Displays, Hold Demonstrations, and Offer Samples
- Proper Language to Entice Customers to Impulse Buy
- Combine Impulse Items with High Demand Items

High demand items are not quite the same as impulse purchases. By combining both, you may make two or more sales in one.

The best method for creating more impulse purchases is to watch what your customers purchase, keep track of the sales, and try out new products which may be promising trends.

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About the Author:

Elias Amash, President of GRIP, is an industry veteran with more than 30 years of experience in global sourcing, manufacturing, distribution, retail merchandising, fulfillment, marketing, technology, and operations. He is a trusted partner to hundreds of retailers and has “leveled up” the industry with GRIP’s undying commitment to offering only the highest levels of service to its customers. Amash has published several books: 8 Skills That Pay Off Forever, The Top 10 Most Important Lessons, The Retail Advantage: How to Win the War with Amazon, Retail Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies and Why, The 50 Most Important Lessons in Life, The Future of Retail, Importing from China: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly, and 101 Bright Ideas: Winning Tactics to Increase Retail Sales.

About GRIP:

GRIP was incorporated by Charles Amash in 1980 and has grown into one of the nation’s top suppliers of innovative products to the retail industry. Located just south of Grand Rapids, Michigan, GRIP features a 200,000 sq ft state of the art warehouse facility including a 2,000 sq ft product showroom. GRIP carries a product line of over 1,000 specialty tools, tarps, automotive, cargo control, cleaning, LED lighting, magnetics, outdoors, household items, impulse and general merchandise. GRIP has a proven track record of excellence in supplying retail clients with innovative products, timely fulfillment, and world-class customer support. At GRIP, everything is about earning your business...one customer at a time. It’s about building relationships and fostering business partnerships that will last long into the future. Our goal is to have Customers for Life. The future at GRIP is exciting and we’re hoping that you can be a part of it as one of our many Customers for Life.

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For more information: 616-877-0000 elias@gripontools.net