

Does the Salesperson have the Midas Touch?

Posted At : September 1, 2016 9:58 AM | Posted By : Dr. Suri Weisfeld-Spolter

Related Categories: Sales



The rate of evolution and diffusion of technology has created new means for consumers to search for product information and gain increased knowledge before an actual purchase. The additional channels available for product search

and purchase leads to the use of multiple channels by consumers, thereby changing the consumer's purchase behavior. Consumers now approach the purchase process as multichannel consumers (MCCs), resulting in changes to the retail-selling environment. In this relatively new "click and brick" MCC-shopping environment, the role of the in-store salesperson is being questioned.

Given this new landscape of retailing in which certain MCCs seemingly have more knowledge than the salesperson (Verbeke et al., 2010), it is unknown how or if the in-store salesperson can be used to increase MCCs' purchase behaviors. Recent research proposes conflicting roles of the salesperson with the implication that the salesperson is obsolete (Grewal et al., 2002), suggestions that the salesperson has been transformed to a knowledge broker (Bendixen, Yurova, Abratt, and Rawdan, 2014), and yet other scholars contrast this by claiming technology cannot replace the unique functions of the salesperson (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010). It appears a gap of agreement, understanding, and knowledge exists regarding what role, if any, the in-store salesperson has in the new shopping environment.

Similar to the story in Greek mythology whereby everything King Midas touched turned to gold, we consider if the salesperson has the "Midas touch" by using adaptive selling as a tool to lead the MCC to purchase. We maintain that adaptive selling, if done correctly, can play a pivotal role in persuading MCCs to purchase in-store. In fact, we did a study of 400 MCC's and found that salespeople who are able to adapt the sales presentation to the MCCs' needs are more effective in influencing purchase intention than those who present the same information to all buyers. Overall, the results confirm the ability of adaptive selling to be utilized as a technique in persuading a multichannel consumer to purchase in the retail store and add support to the notion

that the salesperson is not obsolete, but rather can be very influential in persuading MCC's to purchase at the retail store. Our findings represent an opportunity for companies to encourage multichannel searching for their products across channels while simultaneously training retail salespeople in adaptive selling techniques, so that they can have the Midas touch when selling to MCC's at the retail store.

Do you agree with our findings? Do you find salespeople to be knowledgeable and helpful? Do you use your phone for information rather than ask a salesperson for help?

Image source: walyou.com, 2016.

Sara Weisfeld-Spolter, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Marketing, H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship, Nova Southeastern University. Dr. Weisfeld-Spolter can be reached at sw887@nova.edu