



DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THIS AGE OF COMMODITIZATION

I need new eye-glasses. My prescription has changed because, well, my vision has changed, and not for the better. Such is life. So, I'm on the hunt for a new pair of eye-glasses. I'm perfectly content with my current eye-glasses' frames but I need a vision correction and they (Warby-Parker, my current provider) no longer makes this model, nor do they replace lens in their current frames.

Last Saturday I stopped in a Warby-Parker store and was helped by one of their Advisor personal. She was super helpful in showing me a number of frames she thought would work. But, alas, we agreed that my current frames look best on me. I must say that despite her help I, nonetheless, felt overwhelmed by the number of choices.

This week I went to the GlassesUSA website. Despite the fact that it offers so many filters starting with gender, to include shape and brands among others, I found it all so very confusing. What I'm saying is that there were just too many choices but, then, not enough since I can't seem to find anything I like.

This brings us to the topic. We live in an "age of abundance and sameness". Specifically, we have so very many choices. So many so that it can often prove confusing and even paralyzing, at least for me (perhaps, I'm too persnickety, or indecisive). Yet when it comes down to it there is an incredible sameness to the offerings. The brands offer similar styles, colors, shapes, etc. And, they all do the same thing, work in the same way, and produce the same basic outcomes – enable me to see better both for distance and reading. By the way, if you review the online providers you'll find they carry similar merchandise and have the same features and very similar terms.

Take a trip down any grocery aisle. You'll see a dizzying array of offerings within a given category and, for that matter, brand. For the longest time it was challenging for me to pick out a mouthwash product from my brand. I seek the therapeutic benefit from a mouthwash to keep teeth and gums healthy but, at the same time, I like teeth whitening. For the longest time I kept away from the whitening mouthwash products because I wasn't sure if they delivered the

therapeutic benefits I sought. When I found out they did (from the Brand Manager) I began using the whitening product. It had been confusing to me and I'm a marketing professional (sad as it is to admit)!

I know the game, it's a share of shelf space and price game. More offerings and more shelf space which can lead to a greater presence and more sales. Also, the marketer can include premium price SKUs (shelf keeping units) to improve margins and increase profit, or add discounted items to attract those so-called "value" or "no-frills" buyers. It can also be a result of being unable to make the choice to discontinue products.

While I'm talking about eye-glasses and mouthwash this applies to virtually all sectors and categories. Let's take the pharmaceutical sector and diabetes drugs. There are a plethora of brands and they promise the very same benefits – lower A1C and may even help reduce body weight. Clinical studies are conducted against placebo or standard-of-care so that very few brands have competitive claims versus each other.

It gets even more complicated in medical devices. Again, despite different "bells and whistles" they do the same thing, work in the same basic ways and generate the same outcomes. We have to believe this last point because they rarely do clinical studies against anything. They are content to merely demonstrate that they work. Importantly, in many of these categories within the sector the surgeon is responsible for the outcome and can, given her/his skill set, produce satisfactory outcomes with just about any given device for a specific procedure.

What does the buyer, or target-customer, do in an age of abundance and sameness? It's rather simple, the buyer commoditizes the category and your offering. Rather than try to analyze a myriad of perceived meaningless distinctions the target-customer boils it down to just one. And, that one, is price! The outcome may be evidenced in the growth of tenders, increase in promotions, deep discounting and price reduction incentives.

So, if you go to GlassesUSA you'll find sales and promotion offers on EVERYTHING. Why? Because if you don't differentiate in some relevant, meaningful way to your target-customer then you become a commodity in this age of abundance and sameness. And, when you are a commodity it is all about lower (i.e., cheaper) pricing.

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