



By C F Tunnicliffe and Raymond Sheppard from Ernest Hemingway's 'The Old Man and the Sea'

Four words have echoed in my head for several days.

“Not everyone. Not always.”

Why do such thoughts leap
sparkling like swordfish
from the dark waters
of the mind?

I can't be sure, but I suspect my heart is responding to all those authoritative voices making silly statements about “the customer” with misguided certainty. These voices whisper to us from websites, blogs and business books.

How can they teach us about “the customer” when every person has two different customers inside them?

When you are in “Transactional” shopping mode, you

- are thinking short-term.
- care only about today’s transaction.
- look forward to the process of shopping.
- fear only paying too much.
- plan to become expert through extensive research.
- are willing to spend lots of time investigating.
- are highly focused on price.

When you are in “Relational” shopping mode, you

- are thinking long-term, hoping to find a permanent solution provider.
- consider today’s transaction to be one in a series of many.
- aren’t in the mood to comparison shop or negotiate.
- fear only making a poor choice, “buying the wrong one.”
- hope to find an expert you feel you can trust.
- consider your time spent shopping to be part of the purchase price.
- are likely to become a repeat customer.

“Time and money are interchangeable.

You can always save one by spending more of the other.”

– Princess Pennie Williams

A person in **transactional** shopping mode is more willing to spend time than money.

A person in **relational** shopping mode is more willing to spend money than time.

Customers in transactional shopping mode make high demands on your staff and on your time.

Transactional customers are the source of about 80 percent of all your problems.

Customers in relational shopping mode go straight to the provider they think of immediately and feel the best about. If this provider has a reasonable solution to their problem, they purchase it and are done. None of the competitors to this provider were ever given a chance to make the sale. In fact, they were never even aware this customer was in the market to buy. Relational customers are the source of about 80 percent of all gross profits, even though they represent only 50 percent of the shoppers in any given category on any given day.

You buy the cheapest eggs because “eggs are eggs.” The grocer makes very little profit on this sale. But 3 seconds later you reach into the milk case and happily pay double the price of the cheapest milk because this particular brand of milk combines a unique set of production circumstances that you offer consequential benefits.

The person behind you buys the cheapest milk because “milk is milk.” The grocer makes very little profit on this sale. But 3 seconds later, they reach for eggs and happily pay double the price of the cheapest eggs because THESE eggs were laid by free-roaming, never caged, vegetarian hens that deliver higher levels of B12, B2, A, and B5, plus selenium and folate! And these yolks are a deep golden yellow!

Each customer bought one item transactionally, one item relationally.

You have a transactional mode of shopping and a relational mode of shopping and so does everyone else.

Now this is the part that might stick in your throat a bit: I’ve never found a product or service category in which the ratio of customers in transactional mode versus relational mode wasn’t approximately 50/50. This holds true even for groceries and new cars, although grocers and new car dealers have a difficult time swallowing it. The problem, you see, is that customers in transactional mode are the vocal ones up in your face, making threats and demands, while the relational customer slips invisibly in and out, leaving only a pile of money behind as evidence they were ever there.

The only way to target the relational customer is through your ad copy.

Do you know how to write it?

Dr. Roger Sperry was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1981 for his documentation of brain lateralization when he demonstrated that we don’t have a single brain divided into two halves so much as we have two separate, competing brains.

Transactional mode is largely a function of the logical, rational, sequential, deductive-reasoning (and suspicious) left hemisphere of your brain. Relational mode is a function of the intuitive, pattern-and-connection seeking (not suspicious) right hemisphere.

Are you beginning to understand why I'm uncomfortable with authoritative voices making silly statements about "the customer" as though every customer makes decisions according to the same criteria used by every other customer? Heck, we don't even use the same criteria from moment to moment!

I should probably have wrapped this up and concluded it 3 paragraphs ago, but I want to give you another fun bit of evidence of the never-ending tug-of-war between the left and right hemispheres of our brains.

Have you got another minute?

"Almost every wise saying has an opposite one, no less wise, to balance it."
– George Santayana (1863 – 1952)

"Proverbs contradict each other. That is the wisdom of a people."
– Stanislaw Lec (1909 – 1966)

Look before you leap.
He who hesitates is lost.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
Don't beat your head against a stone wall.

Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.
Don't cross the bridge until you come to it.

Haste makes waste.
Time waits for no man.

Life is what we make it.
What will be, will be.

You're never too old to learn.
You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Hitch your wagon to a star.
Don't bite off more that you can chew.

A word to the wise is sufficient.

Talk is cheap.

It's better to be safe than sorry.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

“Rollercoaster, carousel.

You can grab the ring, you can ring that bell

When the ride is over, you can never tell.

Well maybe I'm just cynical and all these words are lies.

Experience keeps telling me that the cautious one is wise.

But caution makes you hesitate, and hesitate you're lost.

So take your opportunities and never count the cost.”

– Sara Ramirez, “Rollercoaster”

Ciao for Niao,

Roy H. Williams