

# Touch and Get

Written by Galia Myron Friday, 17 September 2010 09:59 [www.demodirt.com](http://www.demodirt.com)

## **Study says consumers pay more for items they can touch. What about e-commerce?**

Shoppers are likely to pay more for items they can touch or are in close proximity, say researchers from the California Institute of Technology (CalTech). However, while many shoppers may feel more comfortable in brick-and-mortar shops than online, e-commerce is still doing well, they add.

When hungry study participants were presented with food choices via text descriptions, photos or presented on a tray, their willingness to pay a specific price varied. While text and photo descriptions attracted no difference in monetary value, food presented on the tray evoked a willingness to pay 50 percent more for the food.

Because food carries aromas that could have tempted the participants, the researchers repeated the experiment using other objects and the results were replicated. They also set up a plexiglass barrier to prevent participants from touching the items; this step then reduced participants' willingness to pay more for the items. This result led the team to believe that when items are close enough to touch, people are more likely to pay more for the products.

Why is the opportunity to touch an object so powerful?

"From my perspective, there is no substitute for a physical—versus a virtual—experience in the e-tail sector. I consult with several companies operating in e-tailing and, especially in the clothing sector, we have found a happy middle way: 'clicks and bricks,'" says L.S. Peter Prabhu, Partner at Interstice Consulting LLP.

"We use the website to showcase our wide inventory, and allow people to select a number of optional items and sizes for a subsequent 'shop-at-home' appointment," Prabhu explains.

This system allows sales representatives to build personal relationships with customers, he maintains, while allowing customers to avoid feeling "followed" as they might when shopping in a brick-and-mortar establishment.

Citing his own disappointment with ill-fitting shoes ordered online, Prabhu contends that "reality dictates a combination of approaches."

"Just think of the disappointment of ordering something and anticipating its delivery for days or weeks, only to find that the color was not as expected from the website's images, or the size was wrong," he adds.

As for his ill-fitting shoes, he says that if he had been in a store when he had found them, he would have bought them one size bigger, but as they were purchased online, he didn't want to go through the return process, which would involve standing in line at the post office.

"Now those shoes just gather dust in my closet until I find a way to donate them," Prabhu concludes.

Of course, some items lend themselves more naturally to online purchases than in-store browsing.

"With adult products, people prefer not to touch," says Dave Levine, owner of [SexToy.com](http://SexToy.com).

"In many ways e-commerce is a more efficient business model than brick-and-mortar, but with adult products that people are afraid to look at and examine in public, the attraction to online purchasing has been greater than almost all other industries."

Former retail reporter and current professional speaker Laurel Tielis, author of [Ka-Ching! How to Ring Up More Sales](#), says that while online shopping is a "blessing" in terms of convenience and sometimes

price, using all five senses in a store evokes more emotions than online shopping.

“Just being there makes you more inclined to buy,” she maintains. “Brick and mortar stores can create committed customers. Stores are a part of the real world--and in the real world we can see, hear, touch, taste, smell. We can interact; we can be involved. When people get involved, they buy.”

John Krech, president, founder, and inventor of [RightOn](#) Online Inventory Order Management, agrees that while consumers will pay more for items they can touch and try, this dynamic can apply to both brick-and-mortar and e-commerce.

“While retail brick-and-mortar can likely get more because of the ability for touch, e-commerce can win when it comes to charging for unusual items that brick-and-mortar does not have room for inventory,” he explains.

“On the other hand, an e-commerce technology solution especially if in the cloud, consumers are likely to spend more because of their ability to try it and verify the return on investment,” Krech continues. “Even though brick-and-mortar customer software developers are very expensive, consumers are still less likely to pay as much when they are unsure of the benefit.”

E-commerce, he adds, is more likely to charge based on use or action. “Consumers are much more likely to pay for this as it directly correlates into something of benefit for the user,” Krech maintains. “[They] are likely to pay more when they perceive value, which can occur for brick-and-mortar as well as for e-commerce.”