

COMMENT

Just as shy Tories helped the Conservatives during the general election, retailers should target shy shoppers, advises **Jacqueline Gold**

Harness the potential of customer curiosity

“I recently spotted someone wearing a T-shirt in *The Guardian* proclaiming that they’d ‘Never Kissed A Tory’.”

Part of me felt a bit cross at yet another contribution to the narrative of the left that portrays every Tory voter as selfish and uncaring.

The country elected the Conservatives because they’ll care for the economy and, in my opinion, will do so better than anyone else. Prosperity pays for the health service – something we all treasure, whether you’re blue, red or yellow.

Another part of me felt sorry for them – if you haven’t kissed a Tory, you might be missing out. Apparently it was the shy Tories that swung the election and you know what they say: it’s always the quiet ones.

Which got me thinking about whether there’s an equivalent demographic in retail? Do we have shy shoppers?

At Ann Summers we divide our customers into the nervous, the curious and the experienced. The nervous look at it, the curious touch it and the experienced buy extra batteries.

Our mission is to turn the nervous into the curious and encourage the curious to become experienced.

I suspect it is a similar customer journey for shoppers at Lidl or Aldi – something that the #lidlurprises campaign addresses brilliantly.

You start nervously, fearing a little for the quality and a little for your credibility: “Times must be tough, I spotted her shopping in Lidl last week”. You become curious, moving on from buying milk and the brands you know,



to trying the meat and one or two veg, and then before you know it you’re bragging to friends about how cheap, convenient and good quality it all is.

I can see the campaign now when the extra £8bn is delivered to a seven-day NHS #torysurprises.

There are parallels for other parties too. If your entire strategy is based on emulating the competition, then any previous successes are likely to have been down to luck. And people will start to see through that.

So copying them and focusing on the lowest common denominator – in Tesco’s case, cutting costs to match the discounters, and in Labour’s, the plight of the worst off – you’re left with a joyless experience, devoid of aspiration. Labour have acknowledged this mistake and are promising change. I hope Tesco does too.

So what of the poor Liberals? I don’t think people hated them or were punishing them for the company they kept or the promises they couldn’t keep.

It just felt that everybody liked the others a bit more. They remind me of Woolworths. We all quite liked some of the things it sold but just not enough.

One thing we can all learn from politics is to never solely rely on the market research. Retail experience and instinct are important too.

The data will tell you some things but your store staff will tell you the real story – never miss an opportunity to talk to them. They’ll tell you if your shy customers are voting for you with their purses.

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