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Is It Best to Withhold Favorable Information about Products?

Consumers are more likely to choose products when marketers withhold some favorable information until late in the choice process, according to the [Journal of Consumer Research](#). But marketers need to walk a fine line to disclose information at just the right time.

“Conventional wisdom suggests that when seeking to persuade consumers to buy certain products, sellers ought to always ‘put their best foot forward’ by providing as much favorable information about these products as possible once they have consumers’ attention,” write authors Xin Ge (University of Northern British Columbia), Gerald Häubl, and Terry Elrod (both University of Alberta). But the researchers’ study challenges this view.

Consumers use a two-stage process to make purchase decisions. First, they assess the various alternatives available in the marketplace and screen out those that are not attractive to them. Then they evaluate a small set of products to make a final choice. The authors found that marketers need to strike a balance between revealing too much information too soon or delaying so long that the product doesn’t survive the initial screening process.

“This research shows that the preference-enhancing effect of the delayed presentation of favorable information after consumers have completed their initial screening often trumps the disadvantage due to the increased risk of the product not surviving the screening, resulting in an increase in the product’s overall probability of being chosen,” the authors write.

Why does this happen? The authors found the delayed presentation of favorable information causes a shift in the relative importance that consumers attach to different attributes (like price, cleanliness, and size for hotel rooms). They also found that delayed release of information causes a preference boost for the product as consumers compare it to a more “static” competitor, for which no additional information becomes available in the final choice stage.

“These findings have important implications not only for the sellers of consumer products, but also for other ‘persuaders’ seeking to influence the actions of target individuals or organizations,” the authors conclude.

Xin Ge, Gerald Häubl, and Terry Elrod. “What to Say When: Consumer Choice by Delaying the Presentation of Favorable Information.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2012 (published online August 15, 2011). For more information, contact the author at gerald.haeubl@ualberta.ca or visit <http://www.ejcr.org>.

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