

AdvertisingAge[®]

Grocers: You May Be Marketing to Your Customers' Backside

Research Indicates That at Supermarket Checkouts, Shoppers Are 'Pullers'

By [Beth Snyder Bulik](#)

Published: [January 07, 2009](#)

YORK, Pa. (AdAge.com) -- Are your customers pushers or pullers? We're not talking about the question of push vs. pull marketing strategies but rather, Do they push the shopping cart or pull it through the checkout?



'The front of the store is a department, accounting for 1% of sales or more,' according to Relevation co-founder, Nan Martin.

Photo Credit: AP

That's right. Relevation Research, a small boutique market research firm in Barrington, Ill., does a lot of shopper-insight research and in doing so noticed that the way people approach grocery checkout tends to vary greatly.

Some people push the whole cart straight through and toss the goodies forward onto the counter, while others deliberately step up front and pull the wire basket through and unload onto the conveyor.

Most of you pull

The majority of people are, in fact, pullers, with almost three-fourths (74%) of those surveyed saying they pull into the lane. And contrary to what Relevation researchers hypothesized, men and women are equally likely to be pullers.

So what? Well, while it may only seem to be a simple and interesting insight into human behavior, it could actually mean a lot to the grocery stores, retailers and marketers that make significant sales by marketing to people who might not be, in fact, pushing their carts through the lane at the front of the store. Could all that in-store marketing be, well, backward?

"The front of the store is a department, accounting for 1% of sales or more," said Nan Martin, Relevation co-founder. "It's designed for consumers to make impulse purchases as they push through. If you're pulling, your back is to the merchandise most of that time."

And that means marketers need to employ different strategies to "break through the psyche" of the now-majority pullers. For instance, the findings show that pullers, who are a little more assertive and more efficiency-oriented, might not respond well to cashiers pitching specific products. "One could theorize there's a better way to appeal to pullers," Ms. Martin said.

So what else does your grocery-cart maneuvering say about you? Relevation asked some open-ended psychological questions about why do you push or pull, and included a list of attributes to assign to pushers and pullers. Then the researchers ran content analysis on the answers.

Shopper characteristics

Pullers tend to be more aggressive and impatient about the shopping

experience, while pushers tend to take their time and go with the flow, they found. Pullers also perceive themselves to be more time-sensitive, more in control and willing to break with tradition. Pushers, however, were more traditional and tended not to have as many reasons as to why they drive that way, rather saying "it's just a habit" or "it's the right thing to do."

Demographically, while gender did not seem to play a role in the push-pull preference, Caucasians were more likely to be pullers while Hispanics are twice as likely as Caucasians to be pushers. Younger people were also slightly more likely to be pullers than pushers.

Relevation did the survey online with 150 people -- half men and half women -- whom they screened to target grocery shoppers who do at least half of the household shopping by themselves. The reason for the single shoppers was to eliminate the child factor, because parents skew the results to pushers. Parents almost always push the cart to keep children from falling out or misbehaving, according to Relevation.

There was at least one similarity, however, between the two groups: Neither one is likely to switch, according to the survey findings. "Whether they pulled or pushed, each believed that their way was the best way," Ms. Martin said. "And each attributed more positive attributes to their way."