

Black Friday Madness, Patagonia Ads, Cheap stuff (crap) you don't need, Depression...

Wednesday evening I was faced with the always-daunting task of coming up with an email to send to our customers, promoting "Black Friday" items that would bring them into the store for things they couldn't afford to be without. I had the TV on for background noise, but what I ended up tuning into was not the scheduled programming, but the programming the ads wanted to subject me to. An endless barrage of "Black Friday" ads for stores opening at 6am, no 4am, no, Midnight, no... 10pm on Thanksgiving Evening even! People camping out to get first crack at a "door buster" special, and the characters in some of the ads, particularly the Target ads, were simply bonkers. Their purpose for being was all about grabbing some great deal before somebody else.

Even, perhaps especially, if it's something you don't need.

It occurred to me that "Black Friday" was all about the item, all about the store, and not about what somebody might actually need. Over and over and over again with the same message. Not once did I hear anything about "Quality" or "Service." It was all about "cheap" and "buy". Nothing about whether something would be appropriate for your needs. Nothing about durability. In short, no lasting value. Watching the bizarre characters in the ads was like watching an addicted gambler on crack who'd just found \$1000 in a wallet lying on the sidewalk.

It was... depressing. Seriously depressing. So much so that I had a tough time getting to sleep Wednesday night, thinking about those ads, Black Friday in particular, and "Holiday Sales" in general. After getting home from my (wet) ride Thursday, I decided that my initial ad ideas were all wrong. The usual pictures showing particular items at "must buy" pricing, enticing people to buy what I thought they should buy... that's all about "shopping", not serving the customer's needs. So I turned everything upside-down, crossing out the "Black Friday" description of the sale and created more-generic categories of sale items that allow a customer to create their own sale, something that suits their own needs. Needs related to cycling and not some bizarre search for the best deal ever on something that's made like crap and not what they actually need.

And then, this morning, I get an email from Jeff Selzer at Palo Alto Bicycles, telling me about a full-page Patagonia ad in the New York Times. You can view it here. The cynic in me (and Jeff, for that matter) thinks they'll probably sell more product by telling people to buy less. But there is an important subtext, something they didn't actually tell people. Buy better stuff, less often. It makes sense. You'll be happier with what you've got, you'll be creating less environmental damage, and you'll spend less time shopping for replacements when it breaks or wears out. That's my take-away, and that's something I feel very strongly about at Chain Reaction. Our mission is to set you up with better product that will last longer. (And yes, I went out of my way to avoid saying our mission is to "sell" you better product, because that doesn't sound as politically-correct).
--Mike--