

How Much Stuff is Enough?

Why We Buy Things We Don't Need

Bob Putman

Ever read a book that made you mad? I was intrigued by the title of Pamela N. Danziger's *Why People Buy Things They Don't Need*. But after browsing through pages 1-96, I found myself grouching. Why? Because Danziger knows precisely what she's talking about, and her job is to sell marketers the goods on you and me.

If you don't like being manipulated any more than I do, you might want to look at what Danziger says about Madison Avenue's clever ploys. These people study your weaknesses, then use them to raid your earnings.

Danziger spent the past 20 years researching why Americans spend as we do. We purchase kitchen gadgets, home textiles, computer software, candles and aromatherapy products, gardening items and a host of other discretionary products. In fact, we fork out about 30 percent of our income for stuff we don't need. Why this madness?

According to Danziger, 14 "justifiers" underlie our motivation to spend money on unnecessary items. "When marketers do the hard work of providing the justifiers for their customers, it is amazing how this bolsters product sales. Justifiers overcome objections and compel the consumer to buy," she writes.

How do we justify spending hard-earned cash on unneeded purchases? On the basis of one or more of the following "reasons."

- Quality of life – The product will improve our education/knowledge, health, spiritual life, emotional satisfaction/security, social success.
- Pleasure – The experience of shopping in an exclusive place makes us feel better.
- Beautify the home – We get a feeling of identity and worth from our home's appearance.
- Education – The more education we have, the more we crave. And then we apply it in the excitement of researching our major purchases.
- Relaxation – The longer we stay in a store, the more we spend, especially on relaxation products.
- Entertainment – We buy or rent things to reduce boredom and generate excitement. Or we seek an environment that helps us experience shopping as entertainment.
- Planned purchase – We build anticipation for buying something unneeded by researching and planning for the purchase.
- Emotional satisfaction – We spend seeking emotional comfort, the fun of having the latest and greatest, or to express our identity.
- Replacing an existing item – Replacing a worn-out item often serves as a catalyst for an extended spending spree on coordinated items.

- Stress relief – We turn to relaxation products/ equipment, nostalgia- and tradition-themed items to deliver comfort.
- Hobbies – We collect for the joy of ownership and the thrill of the hunt. If one family member collects, usually others do also.
- Gifts – When buying gifts for others, we often buy a more expensive one for ourselves.
- Impulse purchase – We gain a feeling of power and entitlement from making an impulse buy.
- Status – While few of us admit it, we buy things that will be visible to others in order to impress them.

Do any of these justifiers sound familiar? They should. Advertisers spend billions each year to push these buttons in your psyche. For the most part these reasons to spend are simply nonsense. Danziger states: "The justifiers give consumers the illusion they are acting rationally in purchasing, but in reality, they remain driven by personal desires and emotions. ... When marketers really understand how their products play into the hearts and emotions of their customers, the judicious use of justifiers in marketing communications stacks the deck in the marketer's favor and gives consumers permission to buy."¹ In other words, they pull your emotional and psychological strings and a-spending you go.

Armed with these clues to how marketers snag you, how do you declare war against Madison Avenue manipulation?

A few suggestions:

- Whenever you see an advertisement on TV, talk back to it or mute the sound. Point out the commercial's hidden lie to your children, spouse or friends.
- Do a word study on "content" and "contentment" in the Bible. You might want to begin with 1 Timothy 6: 6-8 and Philippians 4:11-13.
- If you're wired for impulse buying ("see it; like it; buy it"), pray while you shop. And exercise the most non-commercial spiritual fruit, self-control.
- Meditate on your motivations. What do you get out of shopping and spending? Does it improve your mood, strengthen your confidence, energize your emotions? Should it?
- For long-lasting satisfaction, invest your extra money in helping people and extending Christ's kingdom. See Luke 16:9.

You don't have to be a victim of your own indulgence or Madison Avenue's manipulation. You were chosen for a better life. So shop wisely, shop well and shop only when necessary. Diligently search for your satisfaction in God alone. There's plenty there for the savvy shopper (Isa. 55:1-3).

Bob Putman is editor of BGC•WORLD. Reprinted by permission of BGC•WORLD.

¹Why People Buy Things They Don't Need, by Pamela N. Danziger, © 2004 (Paramount Marketing Publishers), pp. 59-60.

Are We Trifling With Missions?

Arthur T. Pierson challenges the Church of the 1890s – and today – to lay down its materialism in an effort to make the Gospel “speed its way around the globe.”

I am a little afraid that the seeds of a great apostasy are in the Church of God today, that in the midst of this century and its closing decade it should even be questioned whether we could evangelize the world in our generation, when the luxuries alone that crowd our homes, that cover our persons, that are hung upon our walls and stuffed into our library cases, the gold and silver, the jewelry and the ornamentation, the costly furniture in our homes, would of themselves suffice to make the Gospel speed its way around the earth inside of a decade of years.

It is a pretty solemn question whether we ourselves are saved if we allow this state of things to go on much longer. I used to think I was in earnest about missions. I made up my mind that I had been trifling with the whole subject, and I could not get over the conviction that I was trifling with it until I came with my wife and my seven children and said to God and to His church, “If we can be of more service in foreign lands than here in spreading the Gospel, we will go and take our places in the foreign field.”

My friends, begin at your garret and go down to your cellar, and make an estimate of the useless things that are lying in the drawers of your bureaus, in the cabinets of your curios, on your walls, and on your library shelves, and wherever the secret treasures of your house are lodged, and consider how far towards the evangelization of the world in this generation the simple sacrifice of your superfluities might go.

Then go down through your conveniences and comforts until you come to the necessities of life, and consider what a marvelous awakening there would be in the Church, and in the world too, if we came to the point of dividing the last crust of bread for the sake of giving bread to starving men, and consented to go without two coats where there was another man that had none. That is the only way to deal with the question of mission, and any other way of dealing with it is, in a sense, hypocrisy, or at least disingenuous and

insincere treatment of our God and of lost souls.

It seems to me that the Church of God is trifling with the whole subject of missions. Why should we not show a spirit of enterprise in the Church such as the world shows in all business schemes? What is the matter with the Church, that in this nineteenth century she has scarcely one of those great master agencies which men use to carry their inventions to the ends of the earth? Why should we not have a “great church exploration society,” and go forward and pioneer the way into destitute fields, on the basis of inter-denominational comity and courtesy, and put into every field some working force, so that no absolutely destitute place should remain in the world? Why should we not have a pioneer information bureau, to guide missionaries into new districts?

Why should not the Church agree and covenant that it is as much a matter of necessity to give to the support of missionaries as to come to the Lord’s table or to the prayer meeting, or to make a decently punctual attendance at church?

Why should not we have great world agencies to carry on this work for God?

What is the matter with the Church, that she has not learned even from the men of this generation the wisdom that guides them in matters of this world?...

When Francis Xavier stood and looked from the island on which he died, upon the colossal empire of China, he cried out, “O rock, rock! When wilt thou open to my Master?” If Francis Xavier could come back today and look on a world wide open before that Master, and on a Church lying in sluggish idleness in her hammock of ease, one end fastened to mammon and the other end nominally to the Cross, and see that Church supinely looking on the destitution of a thousand millions of the human race, that she might reach in 25 years if she had the energy of mind and the consecration of heart to do it, he would turn from the colossal empire of China and face the Church and say, “O thou rock, thou rock! When wilt thou open to my Master?”



Condensed from “The Evangelization of the World in the Present Generation—How Made a Fact,” a speech delivered by Rev. A.T. Pierson, D.D., at the First International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, Friday, February 27, 1891. Original address found in Student Mission Power, published by William Carey Library Publishers.

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