

NOTE: This student paper has been only lightly edited to correct its most egregious grammar and punctuation errors, leaving the great majority. Your critical response to this paper should be based on its content in terms of your understanding of our class writing principles, more than on mere surface matters, unless they are a distraction from the content of the paper.

Shopping Spree at Tom Thumb

I don't know about you, but when my mom goes to the grocery store to get "a few things," she always comes home with twice as much as she had on her list. As a former employee of Tom Thumb on northwest Highway and Centerville Road, I can say that my mom is not the only one to buy more than planned. The reason for much overbuying is the result of the arrangement of products throughout the store, mainly between the most popular items, bread and milk. When I asked Mr. Shermer, the General Merchandise Manager, about this, he said: "Yes, the products are strategically laid out to obtain maximum sales" (Shermer). This interested me, so I looked into it further.

To get a rough estimate of how many customers come in during the average week, I asked Mr. Shermer. After looking at the checkout from the previous week, Mr. Shermer said that approximately 22,000 customers shop at Tom Thumb on the average week. Of those 22,000 shoppers, an astonishing 92% buy milk and bread while in the store (Shermer). Let us take a trip through the store just to buy bread and milk and see how many items we are tempted to purchase along the way.

As we enter the store, the first thing that we encounter are the checkout stands. There are fourteen checkout stands that take up the entire length of the front of the store. This makes it possible for the store management to guide its customers towards the areas of the store that they choose. After we enter the store, we are immediately forced, because of the way the checkout stands are structured across the front of the store, to walk towards either side. For us to get to the bread, we must walk near the deli, where all the fresh baked pies and cookies are being put out on shelves. The shelves are made

with clear, glass fronts and have white florescent lights shinning down on all of the baked goods that are encased. This environment makes it seem like all the pies and cookies are saying, "Come and get me."

When we get to the bread aisle, it is quite narrow, approximately five feet wide. This makes it difficult for two buggies, which are two and a half feet wide, to pass down the aisle easily. While I was employed at Tom Thumb, I always noticed that on busy shopping days, such as Saturday and Sunday, the bread is the most popular aisle in the whole store. Since the bread aisle has many people on it and is so narrow, some customers walk to the back side of the bread aisle just to try to stay out of a crowded area. In order to get to the back side of the bread aisle, we walk around the gourmet food display, which has many tempting items to purchase, including Swiss cheese, pasta made at the store from scratch, small links of summer sausage, and many other appetizing gourmet foods. It is not as crowded here because the aisle doubles in width to about ten feet. Since we do not want to get into a crowd, we grab the first bread that we see at eye level, the easiest to reach and most noticeable part of the shelf. This happens to be Mrs. Baird's, the second most expensive bread (\$1.20). LaMadeleine is the most expensive bread (\$1.90), but it is located in the bakery by all the pies and cookies. Now that we have gotten the bread and have been tempted to buy pies, cookies, and a selection of gourmet food, we move on to the milk.

The milk in Tom Thumb is located at the back right hand corner of the store. The distance from the bread to the milk, via the frozen food aisle, is 92 yards. This distance took me, as probably it would take the average shopper, about 1.25 minutes, which is plenty of time to notice other items. After we snatch the loaf of bread, we turn towards the center aisle, which is the quickest way to the milk from where we are. However, after turning, we glance over towards the left because we cannot help but notice that lime-green shelves in this section. This is the produce section, with all of its fresh and

healthy fruit. The shelves are arranged at a forty-five degree angle, which makes it possible for us to see most of the produce. After glancing at the fruit, we turn to the right, which places us on the center aisle, heading across the store. As we journey towards the aisle, we cannot help but notice all of the interesting items on the ends of the aisles, or end-caps. The first thing that we lay our eyes on is a display about four feet wide and six feet tall, filled with Hostess snacks. The snacks are very well priced, being between \$.99 and \$1.19 per box. This location, on an end-cap right by the bread, makes it very accessible and eye-catching, which leads to more people buying Hostess snacks.

As we ignore the tempting snacks and walk further, we find ourselves noticing another end-cap. This end-cap houses Zee brand paper towels, which are usually found fourteen aisles away, next to the toilet paper and other personal hygiene products in the non-edible grocery section. However, this week, it is on sale, so Tom Thumb's management has decided to place it in a spot that will be seen by practically everyone that comes into the store. For all people that come into the store to buy bread and milk, the paper towel section is not in the path of shopping, so to draw attention to the paper towel on sale, the store has placed it in our direct path between the bread and milk on an end-cap. On a Friday afternoon at about 4:30, I stood in view of the paper towel end-cap and counted forty people that walked past the end-cap in a span of five minutes. After that, I stood near the normal location of the paper towels. In the same time span, I counted only five people. The location of the paper towels allows, by my observation, eight times greater than the normal number of shoppers passing the end-cap than the normal location, which increases the chance of customers buying the product.

We move on to the center aisle, which is actually two seven foot wide aisles separated by an eight foot wide freezer. This waist level freezer holds all the frozen juices. Because of the aisle's size, it is the most traveled and most maneuverable aisle in the store. This aisle runs to the back of the store and houses all of the frozen foods, including

pizza, ice cream, and other treats. As we walk down the aisle, the most noticeable objects are florescent paper signs hanging on the freezer doors. These ten inch by eight inch signs attract quite a bit of attention because of their color , size, and placement. They also encourage shoppers to take a closer look at what is inside the freezer. Walking further, we head to the back of the store and around the corner. There it is, what we have journeyed all the way for, the milk. However, there is still about thirty yards between us and the milk. This thirty yards has numerous tables, which hold items to be bought. This aisle is about fifteen feet wide and each of the tables is fifteen square feet. This means there is only six feet on either side of these tables. This arrangement with the closeness of all the tables causes the shopper to notice the tables, and more importantly, what is on those tables. One of these tables holds Entermann's cakes and brownies. This table is at waist-level, which puts all of the cakes and brownies at arm's reach. Again, we are tempted to buy baked goods. After avoiding the display table, we are finally able to get our carton of mil,. All ninety-two yards and 1.25 minutes of walking through the store have encouraged us to buy many items other than bread and milk, such as pies, cookies, different types of gourmet food, an assortment of fruit, Hostess snacks, paper towels, varieties of frozen food, and Entermann's cakes and brownies. Luckily, we managed to control ourselves and bought just what was on our list: milk and bread.

Going to the grocery store may seem like a very easy task; but the next time you go to the grocery to buy bread and milk, remember that all of the tempting items are placed where they are for a reason. Buy only what you came to the store to buy. Like many other stores, Tom Thumb sets its store up so that you have to walk through the whole store in order to buy just a few groceries. The strategic placement of the grocery items in Tom Thumb, on Northwest Highway and Centerville, contributes to increment shopping.

Works Cited

Mr. Shermer, General Merchandise Manager, Tom Thumb: interviewed on July 19, 1994.