



Two, not three. Boost sales by offering less

Starting as a shoe salesman in the 1950's, Ben Prober went on to own a very successful chain of women's shoe stores. The prices at his stores weren't the cheapest. The selections weren't that much different from any other shoe store in town. And the stores themselves were pretty basic. They were nice enough, but nothing that our design-and-experience obsessed era would consider a competitive advantage.

With no apparent superior offering or value added, how did Prober Shoes managed to outsell their competition year after year after year?

When asked the secret to his great success, Ben would reply simply, "two, not three." You see, Ben understood something about human beings that modern business has long forgotten: more choice is bad.

When a lady came into one of his shops, the odds were good that she would want to try on more than one pair of shoes. If she already had two styles to choose from and asked for a third option Ben would reply, "Of course, madam, I'd be happy to fetch you the style of your choice. And, which one would you like me to take away?"

What Ben learned is that when his customers had two options, they could easily make a choice which style they preferred. However, when they had three or more to choose from, they had more trouble making a decision and, more often than not, left the store without any pair of shoes.

Even if customers think they want more choice, the facts are overwhelmingly against them. Not only are we more likely to make a purchase with fewer options, but the confidence we have in our choices and satisfaction we get from those choices is considerably higher than if we are forced to choose from a larger selection. In other words, the only result of competing with "more," is less.

It may pay for us to look back on the days when helping people make decisions was more about actually helping them make a decision. Despite all our advances in getting more products to market, it turns out how people decide hasn't changed at all.