



Émile Zola's 1883 Guide to Modern Marketing Techniques



Literary and Human Rights students will remember Zola for his defence of Alfred Dreyfus when he was convicted of treason against France solely because he was Jewish.

But he had a second important contribution to the world. Marketers will remember Zola's documenting of Parisian marketing techniques in his novel "The Ladies' Paradise". And Americans' early fascination with everything French certainly paid off decades later when they finally started to adopt some of the French Revolutionary marketing ideas that Mouret (the leading character in the novel) implemented to make the consumer experience more rewarding and him the richer for it. Here are some examples of the advanced thinking of the mid-1800s and a few big names that are implementing it now.

Marketing Strategy & Consumer Behaviour Analysis

Selection of women as primary targets—used today by Victoria's Secret, Spiegel

"Mouret's unique passion was to conquer woman. He wished her to be queen in his house, and he had built this temple to get her completely at his mercy. His sole aim was to intoxicate her with gallant attentions, and traffic on her desires, work on her fever."

Targeting women through children—used today by McDonald's

"His most profound idea was to conquer the mother through the child, when unable to do so through her coquetry; he [...] created departments for little boys and girls, arresting the passing mothers by distributing pictures and air-balls to the children."

Customer Service Orientation

Home delivery—used today by Domino's, the first home delivery pizza chain

"Why weren't six pairs of sheets, bought by a lady yesterday about two o'clock, delivered in the evening?"

"The first four conveyances [...] had gradually increased to sixty two trucks, one-horse vans, and heavy two-horse ones."

Employee training (in sales and foreign languages—for international customers)—used today by Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom

"Classes were held in the house of an evening; there were lessons in English and German, in grammar, arithmetic, and geography."

In-store restaurants, reading rooms and elevators—used today by Ikea, Barnes & Noble

"He had just opened a bar where the customers could find, gratis, some light refreshment, syrups and biscuits, and a reading-room."

“He had [...] introduced two lifts lined with velvet for the upper storeys.”

Local & International Advertising/ Publicity/Branding

Leaflets/posters, press advertising—used today by McDonald’s, Coca Cola

“The Ladies’ Paradise became a household word all over the world, invading the walls, the newspapers, and even the curtains at the theatres.”

Advertising on delivery carriages—used today by FedEx, Coca Cola

“This van, with its brand-new medley of colours, the name of the house painted on each side, and surmounted with an advertisement of the day’s sale, finished by going off at a trot, drawn by a splendid horse, after being filled up with the previous night’s parcels.”

Gifts bearing the store’s logo—used today by McDonald’s

“A stroke of genius this idea of distributing to each buyer a red air-ball made of fine gutta-percha, bearing in large letters the name of the shop, and which, held by a string, floated in the air, parading in the streets a living advertisement.”

Use of direct mail: catalogues/brochures with samples—used today by Lands’ End, Spiegel

“Mouret spent three hundred thousand francs a year in catalogues, advertisements, and bills. For his summer sale he had launched forth two hundred thousand catalogues, of which fifty thousand went abroad, translated into every language. He now had them illustrated with engravings, even accompanying them with samples, gummed between the leaves.”

“The postal order department [...] occupied several rooms on the second floor. It was there that all the provincial and foreign orders arrived. It was

one of the most complicated and important departments of the establishment, one in which there was a continual rush, for, strictly speaking, all the orders received in the morning ought to be sent off the same evening.”

“This department was the one that was daily assuming the most considerable importance; it now required two hundred employees—some opening, reading, and classifying the letters coming from the provinces and abroad, whilst others gathered into compartments the goods ordered by the correspondents.”

Advertising & publicity techniques to prompt word of mouth—Half.com, put its brand on the map by changing the name of a city (Halfway, Oregon) to Half.com

“Ever since the advertisement had appeared, this silk had occupied a considerable place in their daily life. They talked of it, promising themselves some of it, worked up with desire.”

“Three months later Lhomme had a hundred and twenty musicians under his direction, the dream of his whole life was realised. And a grand fête was given on the premises, a concert and a ball, to introduce the band of The Ladies’ Paradise to the customers and the whole world. The newspapers took the matter up.”

Sales Psychology & Techniques

Price reduction and employee incentives to prompt higher inventory turnover—used today by Wal-Mart

“He had discovered that she could not resist a bargain, that she bought without necessity when she thought she saw a cheap line, and on this observation he based his system of reductions in price, progressively lowering the price of unsold articles, preferring to sell them at a loss, faithful to his principle of the continual renewal of the goods.”
“Having remarked that the old-fashioned goods, the dead stock, went off all the more rapidly when the commission given to the employees was high [...] he intended to interest his people in the sale of all goods, giving them a commission on the smallest piece of stuff, the slightest article sold.”

Bargains placed at the store’s entrance and in-store sale signs—used today by The Bay, Sears, Winners

“In the first place, there ought always to be a crush at the entrance, so that the people in the street

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should mistake it for a riot; and he obtained this crush by placing a lot of bargains at the doors, shelves and baskets overflowing with very low-priced articles; so that the common people crowded there, stopping up the doorway, making the shop look as if it were crammed with customers, when it was often only half full.”

“Like a flag planted over a conquered empire, an immense yellow poster, quite wet, announced in letters two feet high the great sale at The Ladies’ Paradise.”

Large display windows—used today by Cole Haan, Prada, Borders, Barnes & Noble

“In both streets the windows developed symphonies of displays, the clearness of the glass showing up still further the brilliant tones. It was like a debauch of colour, a street pleasure which burst forth there, a wealth of goods publicly displayed, where everybody could go and feast their eyes.”

“This façade, before which people were now crowding, became a living advertisement, with its bespangled, gilded magnificence, and its windows large enough to display the entire poem of woman’s clothing.”

Samples—used today by Whole Foods Market

“There were samples of every material and every tint.”

Return policy (no questions asked)—used today by Spiegel, Lands’ End, Staples USA

“He had penetrated still further into the heart of woman, and had just thought of the “returns,” a masterpiece of Jesuitical seduction. “Take whatever you like, madame; you can return the article if you don’t like it.” And the woman who hesitated was provided with the last excuse, the possibility of repairing an extravagant folly, she took the article with an easy conscience.”

Innovative store layout to stimulate traffic and up-selling—used today by Nordstrom

“He laid down as a law that not a corner of The Ladies’ Paradise ought to remain deserted, requiring everywhere a noise, a crowd, evidence of life; for life, said he, attracts life, increases and multiplies.”

“In the galleries, he had the art of concealing the

departments in which business was slack; for instance, the shawl department in summer, and the printed calico department in winter; he surrounded them with busy departments, drowning them with a continual uproar. It was he alone who had been inspired with the idea of placing on the second-floor the carpet and furniture counters, counters where the customers were less frequent, and which if placed on the ground floor would have caused empty, cold spaces.”

“Firstly, this continual circulation of customers disperses them all over the shop, multiplies them, and makes them lose their heads; secondly, as they must be conducted from one end of the establishment to the other, if they want, for instance, a lining after having bought a dress, these journeys in every direction triple the size of the house in their eyes; thirdly, they are forced to traverse departments where they would never have set foot otherwise, temptations present themselves on their passage, and they succumb.”

Reference Material

Émile Zola, *The Ladies’ Paradise*: introduction by Kristin Ross. Translation of: *Au Bonheur des Dames*. University of California Press. Copyright © 1992 by The Regents of the University of California

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