

February 3, 2009

Hi guys, here's the piece on in-flight shopping.  
Please ask John if it's for this week or sometime else.  
I took the photo of the magazine cover, like Andy Warhol.  
Thanks, talk soon, Big P

In-flight Catalogue Shopping: The Between-Personality Target Group

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I, like everyone else on Earth at one time or another, sat through a course on the plays of William Shakespeare. Much to my surprise, the class was not as bookish and banal as I'd anticipated, and I ended up getting a couple of dates with some cute college girls during the semester. But I did learn one thing from my time being there in school: All the real action in the work takes place during the time *between* specific periods. The hour between day and night, the day between summer and winter, new year's eve, etcetera, are all times when things are in flux, when very little is certain in the story, and all characters tend to be very vulnerable to outside influence. And I will bet you a buffalo nickel that the guys who produce the in-flight shopping catalogue SkyMall, are big fans of the famous English bard. When you're in an airplane, you are between destinations, breathing pressurized, canned air, drinking too much coffee or booze, and trying like hell to look non-chalant about everything around you. On a psychological level one feels the subconscious helplessness of having no control handling the aircraft. Comfort and distraction are needed to allay reptile brain monsters from completely consuming your already shaky temporal lobes. You'd rather die than watch another Jean Reno, Andie McDowell or Matthew Broderick movie on the center aisle 12" LCD monitor. If there's a colorful catalogue full of mind-numbing, boutique, gifty-nonsense to ogle in the seat pouch right in front of you, you'll probably pick it up sometime during your journey.

In-flight entertainment is currently big stuff and going full-throttle in the airline industry. Major airlines are now fitting new planes with WiFi web access and scads of games and personal comfort settings for future use in every passenger seat. The reason is simplicity itself; the more control one has in his personal environment, i.e.-the option to adjust, re-wind, scan, choose, edit and delete, the greater the feeling of control and, therefore, comfort the passenger will experience.

The compiled psychological data on the airline traveller can incorporate volumes of heavy, rectangular, footnote-filled university text books. The sense of between-ness, not where you were, and not yet where you're going, gives one a short-term subconscious freedom to be the person they really are inside themselves. Conversely, they are in the most controlled environment imaginable. They are told when to sit, move, eat, drink and when it's not possible, during air turbulence, to use the toilet. Problems are bound to arise in people, especially during longer flights, when there is interference with their personal needs to eat, sleep and eliminate. In-flight, immediate access shopping therapy may be just what the doctor ordered to help allay that sense of absolute inability to control the plane's movement and general environment.

To be sure, when on a flight, it is not a time to make major, long-term, life-changing, career decisions. In the SkyMall catalogue, there are no advertisements for real estate, retirement homes, colleges, trade schools or investment banking. Most of the stuff within its pages is indescribably goofy, yet simultaneously compelling to ogle: fibre-optic christmas reindeer, talking Elvis heads, and battery-operated, flying pterodactyls are only a few of the funky items you'll find in the catalogue. When you're approximately eight miles in the air, travelling at close to the speed of sound, a feel-good, ego-stroking, impulse-buying, control-giving, identity-confirming quick-fix is within your reach with SkyMall in-flight shopping.

And, of course, there are items to be had for every pocketbook. Plastic pick-up truck antlers can be yours for a paltry \$24.99. A two-cigar, battery-operated, portable humidor will set you back 39 smackers. Autographed photos of Don Knotts from the 1960s *Andy Griffith* television show go for \$200, and a robotic massage chair, for the big kahunas, rings in at \$6000.

At this point in time, WiFi in-flight connections are few, but be sure they will be widespread soon. The fastest way to order after flight is by cell phone with the catalogue item number. If your laptop has Internet access you can order when the plane is stopped at the airport. However, when the majority of flights begin to have web connections, look out Nellie. I have a feeling people will be buying eyelash curling irons and square-root, analog wristwatches at a good pace.

Indeed, why not have in-flight shopping? I actually enjoy looking at hundreds of pages of absolutely useless, sparkly crap. It doesn't hurt anybody, puts greatly needed money into the system, and provides comfort for itchy, sky-high passengers. It's so lame, it's cool. I demand more stuff from SkyMall in 2009, and, for once in my life, I'm sure I'll get it.