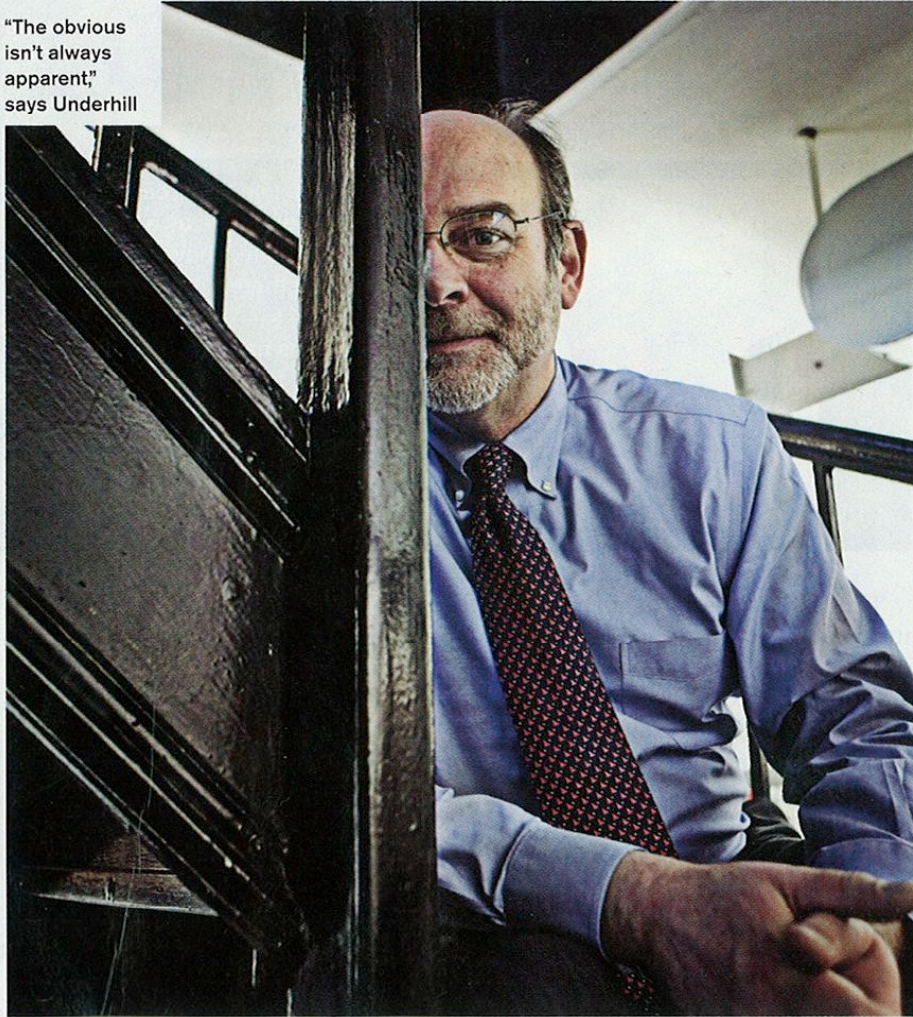


"The obvious isn't always apparent," says Underhill



MARKETING

Getting the Most Out of Every Shopper

The right in-store displays, says retail guru Paco Underhill, can persuade the newly frugal to buy

By Susan Berfield

American shoppers are complex: They're excitable, but often creatures of habit; sensitive to influence, but harder to manipulate than marketers like to acknowledge. And now, as Americans consume more sparingly, an already complicated retail *pas de deux* has become even more so.

To find out how stores are responding, I called Paco Underhill. He was one of the first to study how people shop, and over the past 20 years or so his consulting firm, Envirosell, has worked for the likes of Best Buy, Gap, and Wal-Mart. Underhill gathers information for clients by videotaping and tracking shoppers in stores, often for weeks at a time; he collects some 50,000 hours of video every year.

These days, Underhill's observations take on added poignancy, to use one of his favorite words. For a while, he has been telling merchants that there are no new customers, which is his way of saying that stores must get better at persuading existing customers to purchase more. He has also noticed that people more often make decisions about what to buy when they're out shopping, not before. This gives stores an opportunity: If they can compellingly present information about merchandise—following Underhill's rules, of course—they might exert greater influence on consumers. "It's all about in-store marketing," he says. "It's making things occur to the shopper."

RECESSIONARY BEHAVIOR

Recently, Underhill and his trackers have seen some unusual behavior on the part of shoppers that illustrates how hard it has become to get them to buy. In better times, when people selected an item from the shelf, they usually purchased it. Now the average amount of time shoppers spend in the aisles is increasing, by around 20%,