



WHY DID I BUY THAT?

If you've ever wondered why you bought *that* purple lipstick or *that* turquoise eyeshadow, here's the truth: beauty counters are designed to muddle your mind. Don't get caught out...

1 ENTRANCED AT THE ENTRANCE

The observant among you will have noticed that the more expensive counters dominate store entrances. Why? "Because high-end brands can afford to pay for better positioning," explains managing director of Retail Vision, John

Ibbotson. But the cost of up-front counter space, not to mention pricey marketing campaigns and flash packaging, generally mean a higher mark-up with designer brands. On a budget? If so, the cheapest place for a makeup counter to set up is at the back of the store, so head there for better value.

BY CASSIE POWNEY, PHOTOGRAPHS TRUNK ARCHIVE

2 BE SAMPLE SAVVY

Most brands are prepped to give try-before-you-buy samples. The best are Clarins, which offers 1.5ml of foundation and 3-5ml of skincare after a free consultation; YSL gives 1-7ml samples, dependent on the product; and Estée Lauder and Clinique provide foundation colour-matching plus a trial supply.

3 DON'T ACT ON IMPULSE

"'Impulse' products are always at the front of a store or by the tills," says John. "Those non-essential items you only 'need' once you see them, such as lipstick or hair accessories." Supermarkets do the same – displaying colourful flowers, fruit and veg at the front, as well as sweets and snacks. The key is to write a list and stick to it! Failing that, wear blinkers.

4 EYE-LEVEL ALLURE

Fact: products are shelved according to price. "The more expensive brands, or those with the highest mark-up, sit at eye level; the more affordable brands sit nearer your feet," says John. Lazy shoppers could be spending more than their inquisitive counterparts just by not looking down.

5 SNIFF 'N' BUY

Those human scent sprayers who appear out of nowhere, bottle

poised, may be irritating, but they're also a beauty hall's secret weapon.

"Spritzing can raise fragrance sales by up to 35%," reveals founding director of The Aroma Company, Simon Harrop. "Discounts will offer a similar sales boost, but subsequently cheapen the value of a brand, with sales reverting back once the promotion has ended." Smell sells on a deeper emotional level, so dodge the spritzers to avoid temptation.

6 BRAND IMMERSION

"Brands sell a lifestyle," says Gary Porter, director at Elemental Design, the company behind crowd-drawing displays seen in Harrods and Selfridges. "Expensive-looking finishes such as gloss black and mirror gold are used prolifically." Gary's displays have been known to generate a huge 110%

sales growth in a two-week period, so try not to be too seduced by the gilt factor.

7 BEWARE THE PUSH

Counter staff get 1% commission, which goes up to 2% if their counter hits its monthly target. They are also given daily products to push – usually new launches. "We recently introduced a new serum that gets rid of age spots," our undercover counter girl told us. "So if a lady with pigmentation sat down, I'd tell her, 'We've got a new serum that would help with that.' Some people get offended, but most are eager to hear more." Be aware of their agenda and do some research on ingredients recommended for your skin type or issue first, then study the back of the bottle for the ingredients you're looking for before being talked into buying.



TAKE THE TEST

Trying before you buy can be the key to making a successful beauty purchase. But here are three bits of testing know-how you shouldn't leave home without:



KEEP IT CLEAN

No one wants to pick up a bacterial infection at a beauty counter, so ask your salesperson to prep the tester for you. This involves dipping lipsticks in alcohol or scraping the top layer off, and using disposable applicators to apply makeup to your face.



DIRTIEST DAYS

A recent test carried out on tester makeup found the least-contaminated batches were on Fridays and Wednesdays, with busy Saturdays harbouring the most bacteria. Nice.



TAKE IT OUTSIDE

Beauty counters come with their own imperfection-blurring lighting, so after a free makeover, step outside into natural daylight with a compact mirror to see the 'real' results. ♦