

# Shopping

by

Chaelynn M. Wolak  
wolakcha@scsi.nova.edu

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School of Computer and Information Sciences  
Nova Southeastern University

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## Abstract

Diamonds are a girl's best friend is synonymous with women and shopping. Shopping is my favorite pastime. I especially like shopping for bargains, deals, closeouts, you name it, and I like it. Moreover, I like it a lot. This research paper details my shopping technique. The traditional and online approaches are detailed as well as a comparison analysis between the two.

## Shopping

A research paper dedicated to the one thing I love best – shopping. Shopping is my favorite pastime. I truly believe that a woman was born to shop because I have yet to see a man enjoy it. In order to analyze my shopping process, this paper will focus on one product item. I am in the market for a digital camera.

This is an item that my husband, Ron, and I would enjoy having. However, for Ron the objective to shop for something like this is easy – just go to the local Best Buy store and get one. There is no price comparison, no window shopping, nothing. For me, shopping for expensive items requires more of a research and analysis approach.

To examine the true traditional approach to shopping, I describe how I research and analyze using no online formats. For the online approach, I detail only online formats. Lastly, in the comparison analysis, I show how the traditional and the online approach to shopping are, in a sense, becoming more “blurred” for me.

### Traditional Approach

To shop for a digital camera requires window-shopping. Various electronic specialty stores, such as Best Buy or Circuit City, are visited. The goal is to get an idea of the various styles and try to understand the differences. This also provides the opportunity to actually touch and feel the camera. I analyze the physical attributes of the product as it relates to weight, bulkiness, ease of use, etc. Based on these physical attributes, I narrow down my selection to a few digital camera models. This is considered the initial phase of research.

The initial phase of research always begets a deeper analysis of the manufacturer models selected. Now it is time to investigate specific models. This is where the research and the analysis phases are intertwined. Magazines such as *PC Computing*, *Buyer's Guide*, and other advertisements are explored. As I read the material, I make a mental graph of which model is fairing the best.

Upon much scrutiny, I determine which model is best suited to meet our needs. After selection of a digital camera model, the price comparison stage starts. This is another part of the analysis phase. Therefore, I venture back to the stores. This time, though, the selection of stores is different. Instead of looking at the same electronic specialty stores as was done in step one, other types of stores are looked at. Other types of stores include general merchandisers and warehouse types. Generally, the warehouse types, such as Sam's or Costco's are cheaper. Lastly, the buy occurs.

### Online Approach

As in the traditional approach to shopping, the same action plan is followed in the online approach. To start the research, I visit <http://www.computershopper.com>. This web site

lists all the manufacturers as well as the distributors with price. This makes it easy for the price comparison analysis. Computershopper.com has an exceptional web site because it not only places all the information in a central location but also allows for deeper investigation of the manufacturer's model. In most cases it links directly to the manufacturer's web site where all specifications can be viewed.

Selection of the digital camera model is based more on prior knowledge in this approach. TV advertisements, friend's recommendations, and prior readings have narrowed the choice to which model I am shopping for. However, I do look at brand names, so I may visit Kodak to see what they have or plan on introducing. In any case, when I shop online, I have a good idea what exactly I am looking for. For my online purchase, I selected a Sony Mavica MVC-FD81 digital camera.

I am still on Computershoppers.com web site and I notice the price ranges from \$589 to \$799. That is quite a difference. The lowest price happens to be with Best Stop Digital. I click on the Best Stop Digital hyperlink and click vendor web site, <http://www.beststopdigital.com>. This online shop specializes in digital cameras. Therefore, I select the Sony brand, model, and look for price. However, this site does not support online purchases. Nevertheless, I now have an estimated price range that the Sony FD81 is going to cost me.

The next step is the auction sites. I love bargains, and if I can get a \$800 camera for \$400, even better. The best web site that lists all the auction sites with price history is Lycos, <http://www.lycos.com>. They were highlighted in *SmartMoney Online* as the best resource for auction information and prices. Lycos has a site called AuctionConnect. AuctionConnect filters all the products that are auctioned by various auction houses (i.e. Surplus Direct, FirstAuction, UBid, etc). I click on the hypertext link, AuctionConnect, and go into the electronics, photography, digital camera category searching for the Sony FD81. I see it listed twice. AuctionWarehouse and UBid are auctioning the item. If I am in no rush to buy the camera and the price is much lower than can be bought in online retail, then I place a bid. However, in this case, it is not. Currently the lowest bid to win the camera is \$638. I will continue shopping.

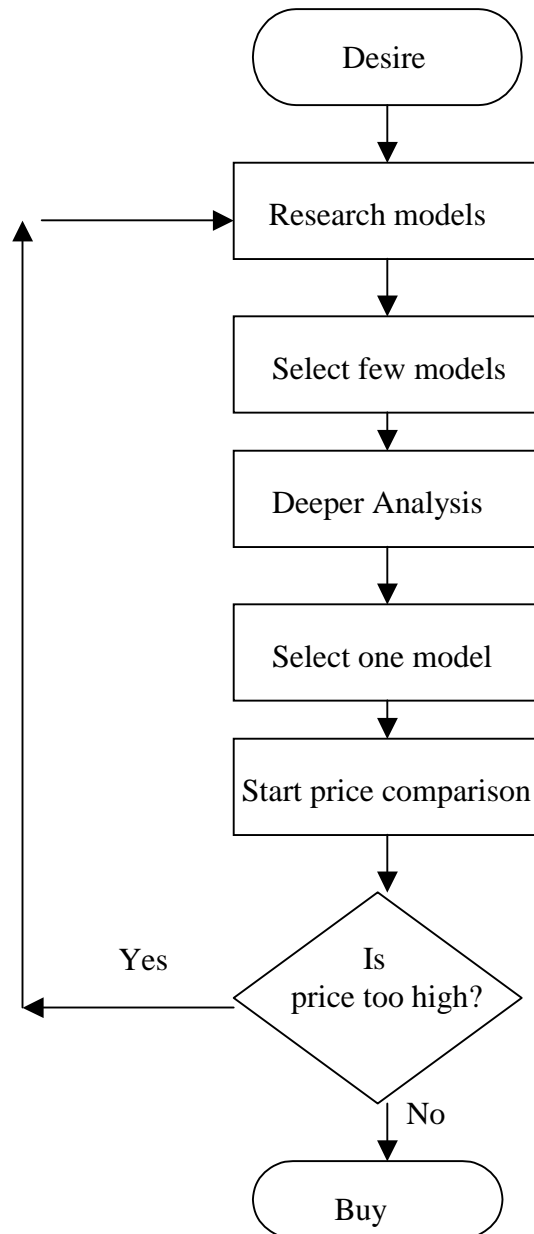
The next step is the web sites that specialize in consumer comparison shopping. Pricewatch, <http://www.pricewatch.com>, is an excellent web site for price comparisons on all electronics and consumer goods. It matches Computershopper's lowest price from Best Stop Digital. However, Pricewatch provides more price comparisons on accessories such as the carrying case and batteries. Items that cannot be done without. Another good site is Consumer World, <http://www.consumerworld.org>. However, they find that the lowest price on the Sony FD81 is \$637 at Best Stop Digital.

All I know is the numbers are not jiving from web site to web site. Therefore, I make the telephone call to Best Stop Digital. They do in fact tell me the price is \$589 plus \$24 in shipping and handling. However, I am looking for a web site that allows online purchasing. Therefore, I browse back through pricewatch.com. Buycomp.com, <http://www.buycomp.com> is the next lowest at \$597. When I go to the web site and look

for the camera, it shows a price of only \$588.95. I add the FD81 to my shopping basket and continue to checkout. My final price is \$599.94 which includes \$10.99 ground shipping. We have a winner! I will buy the digital camera.

### Comparison Analysis

The traditional versus the online approach follow the same basic steps. Below is a simple business model as it relates to my shopping technique.



The above business model simplifies the shopping technique. However, I have come to rely on the online approach for purchasing expensive items. Price comparison is much easier as well as finding out detailed information about the product. Nevertheless, I still need the traditional approach in order to see the physical object and to be able to touch it. In addition, I need the traditional approach to know what I really desire. Therefore, both approaches have "blurred".

Will I ever rely only on the online approach? I think that still remains to be seen. As companies find new ways to sell their product, I am sure the traditional approach to shopping will slowly disappear. However, there is something to be said for actually "seeing and feeling" a product versus a virtual one.

I now know I require more information on purchases than I have in the past. I want to make sure that I am getting my money's worth. In addition, I want to verify that I am not making a mistake of purchasing a product that would become obsolete in two months. However, that is getting harder since technology changes so often. Whatever the approach, Ron says I make a big production out of this. I tend to disagree. I get more value out of our hard-earned dollars.