

SELLING TIME:
EMERGING TRENDS IN THE CONSUMER SERVICE INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Time is a scarce commodity which an individual must allocate according to his wants and needs. Economists explain that a consequence of rising productivity and consumerism in modern society is that a person has an increasing number of activities from which to choose and that there is an opportunity cost associated with each. In recent years service industries have discovered that more and more people are willing to pay for the opportunity to redirect their efforts towards a select number of more productive or pleasurable uses of time.

Businesses in the service industries have responded to the greater value placed on an individual's time in a variety of ways. This study identifies new and innovative approaches to selling time to the time-conscious consumer. I have broken the results into three categories: time saving, time buying, and time filling.

Time saving industries attempt to reduce the service process time. This can be done by reducing the actual service time or by reducing the waiting time. Time saving has become such a strong marketing tool in some fields that new standards are being set for speed of service. A major innovation is the institution of time guarantees which promise to pay customers for any "undue" waiting. Some firms, independently or in cooperation, have also focused on condensing travel as a way to save time.

Time buying industries relieve the consumer of his physical participation in a task, thus placing the burden of time coordination on the server. These services are very labor intensive, but the skill level varies. Thus the economics of these transactions depend to some extent on the value the client places on his own time and to some extent on the expertise he requires of the server. As many of the time-buying services are relatively new, it remains to be seen what combination of factors (time, price, quality) will

ultimately determine competitive advantage.

Efforts to fill idle time have evolved from the findings of research into the psychology of waiting. The fundamental principle is that unfilled time passes more slowly than filled time. Thus, service providers use various techniques to modify the customer's perception of waiting time, making it appear shorter or more productive. In addition, businesses have emerged whose sole purpose is to supply other firms with the means of occupying the empty time.

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INTRODUCTION

FAST. SPEEDY. JIFFY. EXPRESS. Scarcely a day goes by without some product or service making an appeal to the time consciousness of the consumer. This is hardly surprising in a world where "fast tracks," "express lanes" and "quick fixes" have become part of everyday life. Everywhere one looks, there is a prevailing sense of time pressure.

One need only look at something as basic as eating. Studies show that habits are changing. At Pillsbury, for example, researchers identify as the fastest growing segment the "Chase and Grabbits," for whom "even microwave popcorn can become a meal." (Wall Street Journal, 3/15/88, p.37) These consumers currently represent 26% of the population, having grown 136% in the past 15 years. In contrast, the "Happy Cooker" segment, characterized as those who cook three meals a day, has shrunk from 35% to 15% of the population over the same period.

Moreover, there is a feeling that eating must be combined with doing. (Anthony Adams, vice president of marketing research at Campbell Soup Company, as quoted in The Wall Street Journal, 3/15/88, p.37) It is no surprise then that fast food restaurants have developed products that are virtually hand-held meals. Both Kentucky Fried Chicken's Chicken Littles and McDonald's Egg McMuffin can easily be

consumed at the steering wheel or in front of a computer terminal. Meanwhile, traditional packaged and frozen foods find themselves vying for shelf space with a widening range of microwavable products.¹

The change in eating habits has marked the kitchen appliance market as well. NPD Group, a market research firm headquartered in Port Washington, New York, reports that the only appliance whose use is rising is the microwave oven. It is estimated to be in 55% of all households. (Newsweek, 6/15/87, p.66) Last year 14% of home-cooked meals were prepared in a microwave. (Wall Street Journal, 3/15/88, p.37.)

Food manufacturers are not the only ones aware of an emerging segment of time-sensitive consumers. A slew of time-saving devices are currently being marketed. Some are simply more powerful versions of well known products (i.e. the Eureka "Express," a 4.0 hp vacuum cleaner). Others were unheard of 20 years ago (leaf blowers and food processors, for example).

During the past decade many service industries have also come to acknowledge time as a dimension along which they can compete. Among the traditional industries to take steps to reduce service time are banking and retailing (not to mention the entire fast food business). Just two of the consequences

¹ At Pillsbury, revenue from microwave-only products grew from \$60m in 1985 to \$150 million in 1987. (BusinessWeek, 4/27/87, p.8)

to touch our lives are the ubiquitous ATMs and mail order catalogs. At the same time entirely new services directed at time-conscious consumers have sprung up, including such innovations as professional waiting and personal shoppers.

The above examples are merely manifestations of a more general phenomenon which can be characterized by the concept of "selling time." This thesis attempts to focus on the most important time-related trends in just the consumer service industries. Towards that end I have scoured both scholarly journals and the current periodicals for examples of time selling, then tried to organize them in a meaningful way that demonstrates the latest developments.

To structure this paper I have borrowed the concepts "time saving" and "time buying" from Nickols and Fox (1983), who first made the distinction between the two terms in the context of household production. By their definition time saving includes ways of reducing the quantity of household production or of increasing its efficiency. Time buying, in contrast, refers to the purchase of capital goods or paid services. I have taken this distinction and applied it specifically to the range of services made available to today's consumer.

In a sense all services are time buying because a task is being performed by somebody else. Under this framework, however, I use time buying to refer to those services designed

to relieve the customer completely of responsibility for performance of a task. Time-saving services still involve the customer's effort in a significant way. The test for time buying is whether or not the customer would typically perform the task himself. A simple example is hair care. A ten-minute haircut falls into the category of time saving because the majority of people do not normally cut their own hair.

Naturally, some services do not fall neatly into one category or the other. In such cases, I have tried my best to classify according to the *spirit* of the service. Thus take-out gourmet shops provide a time-buying service because they generally eliminate the need to cook. Eating at a fast food restaurant, when it is not an alternative to cooking (as during the lunch break at work), comes under time-saving strategies. Obviously, though, some cases are debatable. Reheating frozen foods may be viewed either as an attempt to avoid cooking or as a way to reduce cooking time.

In addition to time saving and time buying, I have found it useful to create a third category, time filling. It encompasses all the efforts to occupy waiting time which, though they do not actually reduce the customer's time expenditure, alter the perception of waiting in a positive way.

Chapter One presents some background on research into the value of time and causes for the recent feeling of time

pressure. Chapters Two, Three and Four correspond to the three broad categories of time saving, time buying and time filling. They describe the various trends found under each heading, as well as some relevant examples from the real world. Finally, Chapter Five looks at some of the general implications of the time selling trends in the consumer service industries.

CHAPTER 1: THE VALUE OF TIME: A QUICK LOOK AT THE LITERATURE

The phenomenon of time pressure has come to the attention of a wide range of researchers, representing such diverse fields as economics, psychology, and marketing. While it is not possible to detail all of the studies that have been written¹, it is useful to mention some of the general directions explored.

Economists have addressed the problem of what appears to be a shortage of time as one of allocating a scarce resource to maximize return. Becker (1965) presented a theoretical explanation as to why people should be even more time-conscious despite a decrease in hours worked and an increase in leisure. In a modern industrialized society, the relative market value of time rises as people become more productive. It is evaluated in terms of earnings foregone or opportunity costs. Simply put, as people rise in income, they must give up more when they are obliged to wait. The less advantaged pay less in profitable alternatives.

Burenstam (1970) proceeded to make the point that technical advances have promoted production but not the actual process of consumption. As a result the quantity of goods per unit time available for consumption increases. This produces

¹ Jacoby, et al provide a valuable, cross-disciplinary summary on the topic of Time and the Consumer.

time scarcity. He further found that as an economy develops, attractive alternative ways of using time emerge. Thus an individual is faced with an increasing number of activities from which to choose and must weigh each against its opportunity cost. Or, as Berry (1979) put it: "It is not that these people don't have discretionary blocks of time, because they usually do. Rather, the problem is that the discretionary time available is perceived as insufficient to accommodate all desired uses of it." (p. 59) One service provider, Resources (in New York), theorizes that many professionals avail themselves of their services just to enjoy doing nothing, without feeling guilty. (Wall Street Journal, 9/24/87, p.1)

Only recently have economists considered the temporal duration of consumption. Linder's work (1970) factored in the expenditure of time in the consumption of goods. He found that even ownership and utilization of goods require time, contributing to making it a scarce commodity. Gathering information about alternatives also takes time.

Schwartz best summarized the previously ignored causes for greater scarcity of time in the technological society in his book, The Harried Leisure Class (1975). First, consumerism demands more time for decision making. Then, the process of buying in and of itself uses up time. Goods require time-consuming maintenance (which is only multiplied by the quantity of goods possessed, particularly in a world of

planned obsolescence where, because nothing is built to last, things break down more frequently). Finally, more leisure-time services create a greater need for appointments and travel, both potential sources of time delays.

The economic reasons behind the increasing scarcity of time having been established, attempts have been made to place an actual dollar value on an individual's time, or at least to demonstrate empirically what economists have long theorized. One such experiment conducted by Deacon and Sonstelie (1985) observed lines at a gas station. Consumers were offered the choice between waiting in line for gasoline and purchasing it at a higher price without waiting. The research found, not surprisingly, that students, housewives and the low-income unemployed placed a relatively lower value on their time. Efforts to fix a set value to time are limited, however, because behavior varies according to the activity and the utility associated with it.

Psychology has contributed an additional dimension to the study of time by suggesting that it is more than just opportunity costs which influence decisions to patronize time-selling services. For certain people there is also a psychological component to the value of time. Waiting is a power game (Levine, 1987). Those with power do not wait. The privileged do not wait. It has even been posited that self-worth and autonomy are affirmed by the higher costs of

services (Schwartz, 1975). One need only consider the popularity of Polaroids and instant-on T.V.s. People enjoy the feeling of seeing immediate results and will pay more for such instant gratification, whether or not time pressure exists.

The decision of when to wait in line is often a subjective one related to personal value judgments. Some people save time just to wait elsewhere. More specifically, the lines outside certain restaurants and movies or the crowd in a doctor's waiting room do not appear dissuasive. They are in fact read as a good sign. Somehow the wait must be justified by the reward.

Marketers have demonstrated an interest in the value of time as it affects consumer behavior. Voss and Blackwell (1979) foresaw that decreasing the consumer's non-discretionary time expenditures would prove to be one of the most promising marketing opportunities. Marketing research has been performed as to the impact of time pressure on purchasing behavior. One such study, completed by Mattson and Dubinsky (1987), which focused on retailing, found that familiarity with a store was an important factor to shoppers in a hurry. In general, marketers view time savings as one more dimension along which to differentiate a product or service, the easing of time pressure as just one more way to meet consumer needs.

A major part of marketing research has been directed

towards identifying who belongs to the time-sensitive segment. One study, for example, posited that working women were major consumers of time-saving goods and services and explored the relationship between a wife's employment and expenditures on such items. Bellante and Foster (1984) found a positive correlation between weeks worked outside the home and expenditure on food away from home, child care, and total services. Level of education and family income influenced such expenditures, too.

Analyses of sales have also proven revealing. For example, The Wall Street Journal reported the following: "Baby boom gardeners boost sales of easy-care plants and accessories. Short on time, but long on money, . . ." (5/5/88, p.1) It is no wonder that more and more commercials advertise the merits of their products as time savers. (John Deere and TYPAR, a landscape fabric that inhibits the growth of weeds, both show their customers out enjoying golf and tennis.)

Finally, it is important to consider some of the social changes leading to the recognition of this emerging marketing segment. Much of the emphasis placed on time is attributed to the rising number of women in the labor force (Berry, 1978). According to BusinessWeek, there are currently 50 million working women. (4/27/1987, p.89) Among the factors contributing to their numbers are (1) the financial need to support the rising costs of raising a family, (2) high divorce

rates, resulting in women becoming the breadwinners, (3) the expansion of the service economy, which employs a disproportionate number of women, (4) changing values and (5) the diminishing value placed on the role of the housewife.

A second reason for the emergence of time-related services is the increasing amount of time being spent on physical and mental well-being. People have become more interested in the quality of their lives and are thus devoting more time to sports, hobbies, television watching. "Feeling good, both mentally and physically, is valued, and yet feeling good takes time - - time that is taken away from other activities." (Berry, 1978, p.62)

What then is the potential of this new segment? Fram (1985) has identified the "upscale market," defined as younger, two-income families with incomes over \$50,000 and from professional backgrounds as the most probable target for time-money tradeoffs (p.30). Lazer (1984) estimated that this is a growing segment, likely to increase by 6 million households between 1980 and 1995.

At present, the proportion of two-income families is close to 50%. By 1990, 31% of all families (vs. just 26% now) will earn more than \$35,000 (in inflation-adjusted dollars). (BusinessWeek, 4/27/87, p.87) Furthermore, the luxury income bracket will reach 11 million or 20% of all husband-wife households. Many of these will be middle-aged, who will

account for a large part of the total discretionary income. Lazer suggests that these people will want to spend time on travel and personal enrichment, not on routine errands and household chores. Similarly, as baby boomers have babies, more discretionary time will be spent with them. Finally, many of the 55% of households under \$25,000 (1980 dollars) will be single-person, who will have more discretionary income to spend on goods and services.

In sum, what many consumers are learning is that time is a finite quantity while money resources are not. The latter can be increased. Money can be used to shift the balance between discretionary and non-discretionary uses of time. While the potential dollar value of reducing non-discretionary time obligations remains difficult to calculate, there can be no denying that service providers are ready to exploit the time dimension.

CHAPTER 2: TIME SAVING

A 1986 article titled "Life in the Express Lane" (Time, June 16, 1986, p.64) observed that "Americans may value such business virtues as courtesy, reliability, economy, and all that, but in the end, what really dazzles them is speed." The culture of quickness has brought us tanning salons¹, copying services and overnight mail. The appeal of speed frequently finds expression in the convenience of time saving. For a service provider, there are two major approaches to creating actual time saving. One is to reduce the service time. Another is to reduce the waiting time, which is a component adding to the duration of the service encounter.

2.1. REDUCTION OF ACTUAL SERVICE TIME

Many services are simple enough to lend themselves naturally to rapid service. Two examples that come to mind are key duplication and heel repair. With a proper supply of materials and the right tools, these tasks can be completed while the customer waits. The question is then why such activities need promote themselves on the basis of speed of delivery. The answer may lie in the fact that neither one

¹ According to The Wall Street Journal, Yellow Page listings were up 55.3% in 1987. (4/28/88, p.1) With names like Quik Tan and Tan N Go, their target market is clear.

alone represents a very lucrative venture; they often exist in conjunction with some other principal activity. A key duplication counter is a familiar sight in many hardware departments, while fast heel replacement often complements full shoe repair. In both cases, they can serve to draw customers to more lucrative parts of the business. (Stand-alone operations do exist. A lesson can be drawn from the example of the French chains, "Clé-Minute" and "Clé-Talon": their shops are located in high traffic areas because volume is critical to their success.)

Dry cleaning is another business where time has become a parameter along which operators can differentiate their product. While overall demand is dropping due to new textiles and improved home equipment, the number of shops offering quick service is on the rise. Where the concentration of dry cleaners is high, same day service is commonly advertised. Some establishments, equipped to do cleaning on the premises, have found that under certain circumstances people are willing to trade quality for one-hour service. One cleaning professional interviewed explained that rapid service is generally not advisable except in an emergency. A different way cleaners have found to offer time savings is through pick-up and delivery.

Less obvious industries are also joining the race for ever faster service. Among the entrants are film processing,

lense fitting and auto repair. All have responded to the competitive challenge by reducing the total time commitment of the customer who partakes of these services. While in the past such services required appointments or involved significant delays before pick-up, they have all managed to collapse the total service time, thus eliminating the inconvenience of having to make a return trip. Below are examples of several increasingly effective strategies.

VERTICAL INTEGRATION

Photo development is a classic example. A glance through the Boston Yellow Pages shows how prevalent time has become as a feature of service. Among the companies listed are ASAP Camera, Back in a Flash, PhotoQuick, Photo:Hour, PhotoSpeed, Jet Photo Service, Snapshots, Zoom 1-Hour Photo, Foto Fast. Technological advances, enabling faster and easier film development on the premises, obviate the need to send film out to bulk processors. Noritsu presented the one-hour photo technology at a trade show back in 1980.

One photo processing executive predicts that there will be over 18,000 of these mini-labs nationwide by 1992 and that their market share will total 65% of the dollar volume in film processing, up from today's 35%. (Chain Store Age, December 1987, p.40.) One hour service, now standard for color prints, rivals the instant gratification provided by Polaroid cameras.

Customers are apparently willing to pay a premium for the speed. Moto Photo, for example, commands \$10.47 for processing and printing a 24-exposure roll of 35mm film.

Hour Portrait Studios (San Jose, California) is going one step further by combining one-hour photo development with the quality of a studio portrait. Elsewhere a studio portrait can take as long as three weeks for delivery. No appointment is required.

For those not satisfied with still photos, video recorders have been a major breakthrough. Rock video boutiques are surfacing all over California. In a just few minutes the aspiring MTV star leaves with a professional-looking video of himself or herself lip syncing to popular tunes. (Chain Store Age, September 1987, p.55) Video services, in general though, have yet to catch on.

Optometrists are now battling for time-conscious customers through promises of delivery of most eye glasses in one hour. (Customers with unusual needs cannot expect rapid delivery). Their strategy for shortening the wait has been vertical integration. Rather than send lens prescriptions to out-suppliers, they do the grinding in their in-store labs. Should problems arise, this presumably facilitates refits. As for contact lens, many opticians carry extensive stocks of the most frequently demanded prescriptions so as to fit most patients on the spot.

The drive towards more rapid service does meet with resistance. To quote an ad placed by Cambridge Eye Associates to counter the promises of companies like Lenscrafters and Eye World, "If all someone can talk about is how fast they can get you your eyeglasses, they're probably not eye doctors....If a lens is rushed, it can be improperly ground....We're eye doctors and we're concerned about your eyes as well as your eyeglasses. We just don't take shortcuts." Optometry is an area where the average consumer has no expertise and where errors in diagnosis may not be evident to the untrained. In essence, these eye doctors want to reserve the right to determine what a quality job is and how long it should take to accomplish it. They do not want to be subject to market pressures.

SPECIALIZED PROFESSIONALS

The automobile repair industry has undergone major changes since the oil shocks of the Seventies. Many full service stations have closed. The total number has decreased by 50% since 1972, while the number of automobiles and light duty trucks has grown by almost 60%. (Genta, 1987) Meanwhile, changes in engineering and additional safety equipment have made self-repair more difficult or time consuming. These two phenomena have driven the expansion of smaller, specialized shops for car care.

The Franchise Opportunities Handbook (November 1986), list no less than 23 companies founded on the principle of rapid service in one specialization, of which the fastest growing are quick lube and oil change. (According to Franchising in the Economy 1986-1988, sales in 1988 are expected to reach 150% of their 1986 level, and the number of shops to almost double.) These specialized car professionals are exemplified by Jiffy Lube (Baltimore, Maryland).² A successful franchise operation with over 650 centers nation-wide, it boasts a ten-minute oil change and drive shaft lubrication. Key to its success is its physical design: a unique drive-thru lay-out and dedicated equipment which make it possible to simplify work. Pits allow access to the car's drive shaft so that there is no need to run a cumbersome hydraulic lift. A single overhead hose makes it possible to replace oil in one simple motion. Thus it takes a crew of three workers just ten minutes to service a car, including checking fluids, lubricating, changing the oil, vacuuming the interior and cleaning windows.

For the customer, the advantage is rapid service at a reasonable cost. A car owner ends up paying just \$20 for a job that not only would have taken him (or her) at least an hour to do, but also would have cost \$11 on filter and oil alone.

² For a fuller description of operations, as well as an analysis of the industry, I recommend Peter Genta's paper "Methods for Increasing Productivity in the U.S."

The irony is that such an attractive offer risks being too successful. It poses the problem of how to manage the lines of cars waiting to reap the benefits of "rapid service." Genta reports having observed patrons waiting up to an hour, but given the above cost analysis, the customer must still feel that he is economizing on his time and effort. Unfortunately, there is no way to measure the number of customers who may have decided not to enter the queue. Location of centers is no doubt a matter of strategic importance to the company. It may well be a tool for preventing excess demand that would harm the perception of speedy service.

The concept of specialized professionals has been applied to other areas of car maintenance: tires, transmissions, tune ups, and auto painting. The secret is to maintain a high turnover. High turnover generates sufficient revenues to justify investment in expensive, specially designed plant and equipment. Thus it is also in the business interest of such firms to provide fast, reliable service. Franchising has proven to be a successful route towards expansion in the automobile service industry, particularly when the business is founded on quality, simplification and standardization. Aggregation into chains enhances the company's overall purchasing power *vis-à-vis* suppliers and spreads the costs of advertising. Franchisees benefit from a nationwide reputation, a reputation upon which car owners can rely.

COMPUTERIZED SELF-SERVICE

Banks face stiff competition these days. One way to win is to reduce service time, which benefits the busy customer while raising the bank's own productivity. The Automated Teller Machine has proven to be particularly advantageous not only because of its efficiency but also because of its ability to expand a bank's market reach. ATMs can now be found in many convenient locations, including supermarkets, airports and office buildings. Their numbers can be increased without expensive investments in real estate.

Recent refinements of the original ATM have only enhanced its performance. Citicorp announced in March 1988 the installation of ATMs with touch screens instead of buttons, which, they claim, are 25% faster. Meanwhile, Mellon Bank Corporation has replaced its old machines with new ones that can handle a withdrawal in half the time. (Wall Street Journal, 3/17/88, p.1) It remains to be seen where the race for faster, more powerful machines will lead. If it is as Empire of America thinks, then the only service customers really want is cash dispensing. (Wall Street Journal, 3/17/88, p.1) Given the gains enjoyed by the banks, however, it appears that such efforts will continue, and that they will be marketing driven. It remains to be seen whether bank customers would really value incremental reductions in processing time, particularly

if they were to carry the costs personally.

New conveniences are also being made available. BayBank has just recently made available "Custom Cash," a pre-set cash withdrawal that eliminates the need to punch in dollar amounts each time, thus minimizing time and time-consuming errors. "Account Updates" report the last five checks cleared, the three most recent transactions made at any of the participating ATMs, and the sum of deposits. BayBank's advertising slogan is "the better informed you are, the better you perform." The bank is assuming that customers are willing to pay for more timely information; come July first there will be a \$.50 charge per Update.

Supermarkets, too, are looking into computerizing their service, ostensibly to save their patrons time. Grocery scanning has been a major step in reducing check-out time, but "RobotCheck," a device used by the customer to scan his own groceries, is less promising. Several Kroger's Markets in Georgia are testing the system, which they advertise as Service Plus. Unfortunately, tests show that the ordinary shopper lacks the skill and speed of an experienced checker. Furthermore, the customer is still obliged to stand in line to pay. However, a time-saving advantage yet to come will be the option of tracking of an individual's purchases, so that the store can send "personalized" announcements of specials, supposedly reducing the time spent reading the grocery ads.

The only sure winner is the supermarket itself, which can cut labor costs and render its marketing efforts more effective. (Newsweek, 6/15/87, p. 67.)

Car rental agencies and airlines are recognizing similar benefits in applying computer technology to solve the problem of long lines at peak hours. Avis and others have installed car-return terminals, supposedly more efficient than humans, to shorten processing time. Continental Airlines provides vending machines called Flying Machines which can issue a ticket and boarding pass in just 7 seconds. (Time, 6/16/86, p.64) Such machines are common sights at most shuttle flight terminals.

2.2. REDUCTION OF PRE-SERVICE WAITING

It is important to realize that for the customer the service encounter begins the moment he enters the queue. While a faster processing time may decrease the length of any wait, it is clear that focusing on this factor alone is not the only way to speed up service delivery. Take, for example, the airline companies. Many have introduced curbside check-in for domestic flights to those passengers already in possession of a ticket and boarding pass. This service, made possible by early issuance of tickets and passes from terminals at the point of sale, eliminates the need to stand in line. Not only

can this shorten the total time a flier devotes to travel, it may also have psychological benefits, by virtue of the fact that the traveler feels that he, rather than the airline, is in control of his entrance into the service process.

Having to hunt for a parking spot prior to entering a restaurant lengthens the amount of time that must be committed to the dining experience. More and more, restaurant owners are taking over the responsibility for this chore. Once a sign of the elite, valet parking is becoming a standard service in areas such as Boston's North End which lack public parking.³ By extending the notion of service to include parking, it becomes possible to reduce the total time expenditure. This can supply customers with precious time savings.

REDISTRIBUTION OF DEMAND

Efforts to redistribute demand often result from a demand in excess of limited capacity. In general, they leave it to the discretion of the individual to determine, explicitly or implicitly, the value of his time. A prime example, furnished by Richard Zeckhauser, a political economist at Harvard University (New York Magazine, June 8, 1981, p.37), is that of

³ Municipalities are also addressing the parking problem. The following was reported by The Wall Street Journal (5/5/88, p.1): "Valet parking comes to downtown Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as part of an effort to lure shoppers from suburban shopping malls. For \$2, city employees in fancy uniforms park and retrieve cars as part of a 90-day test program."

hospitals which institute a minor charge for emergency room treatment. This reduces demand by redirecting some patients to regular hours for care. The seriously ill or injured, who cannot wait, receive more immediate attention. For retailing he envisages the possibility of requiring that one pay an additional charge that goes to charity in order to take advantage of the express line. Another of his ideas is to grant discount coupons proportionate in value to the time spent waiting to check out. So far, to my knowledge, such programs have yet to be instituted.

A different sort of solution for retailers is to offer incentives to customers to shop during off-peak hours. A case in point was observed at the Bass Shoe store in Kittery, Maine, a small town well known for its concentration of factory outlets. Many buyers make a special trip just to shop there. On a weekend afternoon, traffic congestion slows cars to a crawl along the main highway. Stores are jammed and lines at the cash registers long. There is no way to accurately measure the number of lost sales due to shoppers being discouraged by the crowds. Bass Shoes thus hangs banners announcing incentives for the early bird shopper. Bass uses a sliding scale of discounts to draw in customers when service is slower: the earlier the purchase, the greater the reduction. During peak hours, full prices are reinstated.

While it is not within the scope of the study to fully

analyze the use of off-peak pricing, I can refer interested readers to the thesis prepared by Michael Birnberg on this topic, "Slack Pricing: Applicabilities to Retailing." The author cites examples of the use of price reductions at airlines, telephone companies and electrical utilities. Restaurants try to make dining early attractive, while movie theaters encourage people to attend matinees. It would be interesting to know if in the final analysis, the people who take advantage of such savings would have normally used these services. Is the server really capturing lost demand or is he creating a new demand by price-sensitive consumers?

ALTERNATIVES TO PUBLICLY PROVIDED SERVICES

Publicly funded or subsidized services have often not been as susceptible as private companies to consumer demands for efficiency because they are not frequently subjected to competitive threats. In recent years budget cuts, as well as an increasing willingness to pay for time savings, have encouraged the private sector to offer viable alternatives to slow or overcrowded public services. One example is in transportation: rush hour congestion on highways and railways is responsible for the comeback of ferries.⁴

⁴ The problem of congestion can only get worse. The president of the Institute of Transportation predicts an increase in highway traffic of 45% between now and 2005. Highway facilities will only grow by 6%. (Boston Globe, 3/15/87, 29)

To attract passengers, ferry operators are opening more desirable routes, adding capacity and improving the speed performance of their fleets. A shuttle between Logan Airport and the Boston Waterfront was inaugurated in 1986 to enable travelers to avoid traffic back-ups in the Sumner and Callahan tunnels. Now run privately, the service carries 500 passengers a day. In New York there are four new operators to serve Manhattan, and in Seattle a high-speed catamaran now carries passengers on the Bremerton, Washington route. Private investors are also considering routes along the Potomac to serve Washington D.C. Nationwide they are currently carrying 160,000 passengers a day.

Transit planners recognize the growth potential, but realize that cost and convenience are critical to the success of the new ventures. (Wall Street Journal, 3/16/88, p.33.) For example, a resident of Plymouth working in Boston who can cut her commute in half while avoiding the aggravations of driving in rush hour traffic will no doubt perceive a benefit. On the other hand, ferry riders are apt to complain when they do not view the savings in time and effort as worth high fares.

Similarly, private mailbox and postal services are succeeding in drawing disgruntled customers away from overburdened U.S. Post Offices. As the manager of a Post Option in Manahattan describes it: "After people stand in line

for 45 minutes and then see my place, they'll probably come here next time." (New York Times, 3/22/88, p.D9.) Last year industry sales totaled over \$350 million; the executive director of the Association of Commercial Mail Receiving Agencies anticipates a tripling of revenues in the next five years. There are at present more than 3,500 storefronts, a number which could easily double by 1993. Though mom-and-pop shops dominate for the time being, franchises are growing rapidly. Among the leading franchisers are Mail Boxes Etc. USA (San Diego, 600 franchises), and Pak Mail (Denver, 120 franchises).

Offering longer hours and shorter lines is only part of the reason for the success of these private firms. In addition to providing the standard services, private post offices frequently pack and ship parcels or notify of delivery. A renter can even call first to check if he has mail. Such service costs more, but people are willing apparently to pay the higher price for the added convenience.

In the above examples price is a sensitive issue. Public services do not always have the flexibility private enterprises enjoy of being able to adjust price to control demand. Efforts to increase rates on public transportation, for example, often meet with public outcry. Yet it is price that will determine for many people the relative attractiveness of the alternative services. The question is

how to lure enough customers without generating more demand than the alternative facilities can handle.

2.3. TIME GUARANTEES

Marketing consultant Eugene Fram has come up with the idea of Time Guarantees in response to the needs of time-pressured consumers for repair services. As he defines it, "A T(ime) G(uarantee) is a promise by the vendor that would assure the customer that he /she would not have to devote any unusual amount of time to getting product and service concerns resolved." (Fram, 1985, p.29) He remarks that time guarantees are slowly emerging and cites the example of a large appliance manufacturer offering definite time appointments for repair people to visit homes. Unfortunately, he notes, the service is not available when the working person is most likely to be at home, in the evenings and on the weekends. Nevertheless, such a guarantee is already an improvement over most repair services which generally indicate only whether to expect their people in the morning or afternoon. Presumably, the precision permits more efficient scheduling of one's time.

Fram's recommendation can be extended. In fact, his notion of Time Guarantees is one of the most significant trends emerging in the service industries. United Van Lines

recently advertised on network television its own version: it sets down in writing the pick up and delivery times of your belongings. The implication is that such a clause is enforceable under contract law, but that remains to be seen. In a different version unrelated to appointments, Connecticut Bank & Trust promises to respond to loan applications in 15 minutes or less (though it does not indicate what will happen if they fail).⁵

A further variation on the theme of Time Guarantees is the advance purchase policy which has been adopted by some movie houses. Usually, this option is offered at showings which have sold out. If you cannot get in at the time of your choice, at least you can buy a ticket to ensure entrance at a later showing. The owner of a cinema off the Champs Elysees in Paris has instituted a program of advance ticket sales, much along the lines of that of theaters. Throughout the day those working in the vicinity can stop by, thus avoiding discouragingly long lines at the popular evening showings.

Even exercise is responding to the time crunch: Definitions (New York) offers one-on-one personal fitness programs or "The work out for people with better things to

⁵ Such an effort is less a response to customer demand for time saving than an internally driven phenomenon. The currently sluggish mortgage market means fewer applications, thus less processing backlog. Borrowing requirements have also loosened as lenders try to lure new business. (Wall Street Journal, 4/28/1988, p.1)

do." Workouts are by appointment only. Furthermore, there is a limit of six clients per facility at any one time that virtually guarantees that a client will never wait for a trainer or for equipment. (Ad in The New York Times Magazine, 3/27/88)

Many different types of services are recognizing the marketing potential of setting a time limit. Not only do they make promises, but they also frequently impose a penalty on themselves if they exceed the advertised limit. Eye World, for example, promises same-day service, with most prescriptions filled in less than 2 hours. If the glasses are not ready at the designated time, the lenses are free. (See Nynex Yellow pages under "Opticians.") Domino's Pizza gives a discount if it fails to deliver to your home in less than 30 minutes. Pizza is not generally considered a fast food, but Pizza Hut is trying to alter that food's image. It promises your "Personal Pan Pizza" will be ready in 5 minutes or your next pizza will be free. Mission Oaks Hospital in Los Gatos, California is now offering a "No Waiting" guarantee. More than a five-minute wait for emergency room care earns the patient a 25% reduction in his hospital bill. The program appears successful: the marketing director reported a 25% increase in acute care business after one year. (Time, 2/8/88, p.34)

Full-service restaurants are facing stiff competition from fast foods in attracting the lunch crowd. Restaurants

situated along busy suburban commercial strips are also offering time guarantees. One option is to create a special menu. Black Angus Cattle, a California chain, offers a ten-minute-or-free menu including steak or seafood. Bennigan's (owned by Pillsbury Co.) permits open menu selections with its "Express Lunch". Still, to let customers measure its performance, it actually places a stopwatch on the table, allotting itself just 15 minutes to serve. (Wall Street Journal, 2/1/88, p.29.)

A place called the Hourglass Tavern in New York suspends an hourglass over each table, but in a reversal of the roles, it is the customer who must respect the time constraint and leave when his allotted time has run out. (One assumes the service has been paced accordingly.) What this gimmick demonstrates explicitly is that the focus on time saving is not just in the interest of the customer. The Hourglass has merely found a way to render a small dining space profitable without resorting to expensive meals. (Wall Street Journal, 1/25/88, p.33.)

What all the examples have in common is a certain lack of control over the arrival rate of customers, who tend either to bunch up (as in lunch hour restaurant visits) or arrive totally unpredictably (as in emergencies.) In either case, once the customer has made the decision to call upon the service, he is usually disinclined to wait. As lunch hours

become more compressed, any unexpected wait means that something else on the day's schedule must be adjusted. A person who accidentally breaks his glasses cannot wait two weeks while new lenses are ground in a distant laboratory.⁶ The amateur photographer is generally impatient to see the fruit of his endeavors.

Another common feature of the industries tending towards Time Guarantees is the existence of a large number of competitors offering similar services. It should be noted that the restaurants described above target the lunch hour crowd in high density urban areas or in high traffic suburban areas where they must vie with the traditional fast food restaurants. In the example of eye care, while the different offices are not necessarily located in close proximity, the promise of delivery in less than one hour permits the customer to calculate his total expenditure, which includes travel. Finally, the hospital in question is located in an region with a dozen other emergency facilities. Advertising a Time Guarantee is clearly a way to differentiate its service.

⁶ Recall the commonly accepted definition of emergency: "an unforeseen combination of circumstances or the resulting state that calls for *immediate* action." (Webster's Seventh Collegiate Dictionary, author's emphasis)

2.4. ELIMINATION OF CUSTOMER TRAVEL

CONVENIENT LOCATION

Strategic planners in the service industries are well aware of the advantages of locating their businesses near users. For the consumer, such a decision brings convenience. For the firm, it increases the likelihood that the consumer will patronize his company. For this reason, laundry and dry cleaners are optimally located somewhere on the route between office and home. Car rental agencies now advertise themselves as "Just Minutes Away" (Jiffy Auto Rental, serving the Boston region). Tele-Trip Company, Inc., a subsidiary of Mutual of Omaha, sells travel insurance policies from vending machines and counters at the place where travelers are most likely to think about such insurance: at airports. It now claims 169 locations, plus an additional 45 franchise operations. Similarly, Red Carpet Airport Car Care, a car repair service, is conveniently located near airports. This way, the client can drop his car off so as to have it repaired while he is out of town.

Last but not least, there is the proliferation of neighborhood convenience stores, of which Southland Corp's 7-Eleven is one of the most familiar with 7,663 stores in 1986. (Forbes, 11/3/86, p.42) Despite intensified competition from supermarkets offering extended hours, sales for

convenience stores were up 9% in 1987 and are expected to rise another 10%. The total number of franchise stores, up 5% in 1987, is expected to rise an additional 6%. (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1988, p. 18) Some of the names of franchises currently trying to exploit this niche reveal, however, a shift in emphasis from extended hours to rapid service: In 'N' Out Food Stores, Quick Shop Minit Marts, Zip Food Stores.

One of the new franchise chains to take on the neighborhood convenience stores is Breaktime, Inc. (since 1984). The stores stock various essentials from pre-packaged food to personal items. Their strategy is to locate in high traffic areas near office buildings rather than in residential districts. This allows them to target the employee on his or her lunch or coffee break. As the company name suggests, the customer can run errands during a spare moment at work rather than during valuable leisure time. There is no need to stop off somewhere on the way home.

Established general merchandise stores are exploring ways to ape the success of convenience stores. One example is Woolworth Express. Combining Woolworth's reputation for value with convenience, the new, smaller stores offer items from the most successful core businesses: candy, greeting cards and health and beauty aids. (Chain Store Age, August 1987, p. 6)

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

While it is highly probable that a time-pressured individual with an errand to run will select the most convenient location, it remains to be seen how he will manage several different errands. Logically, he will try to minimize his total time expenditure. Fortunately for him, some service providers have developed a strategy that accommodates time constraints. The key is to offer multiple services in a single locale.

The practice seems to span a wide range of industries, from financial to retailing. For instance, Convenience Money Centers, a franchise begun in 1982, wagers that there is a market for one-stop financial services. Its offerings include check cashing, money orders, postage, notary, Western Union, and utility payments.

In 1983 Tele-Trip, the travel insurance company described earlier, developed its own one-stop concept, the Mutual of Omaha Service Center. According to company literature, the centers offer the following business services: baggage and garment storage, photocopying, secretarial service, notary service, facsimile transmission, computer rental time, telex, airline ticket pick up, foreign money exchange, telephone suites, flowers-by-wire and news service. Rates vary depending on the service. As of October 1987, eleven such centers were in existence at the nation's leading airports.

Convenience stores, while continuing to capitalize on their locations, have been expanding their range of products and services. With an eye to broadening their customer base, shops have been adding fast food, health products, small appliances and gasoline to their mainstays: milk, bread and cigarettes. Furthermore, they are crossing over into services such as video rental, box office, postal box rentals, automated banking and voter registration. The additions are based on sound business considerations. Research shows that an ATM may well generate business. In fact, 25% of users make purchases in the store. It has also been found that customers who buy gasoline at convenience stores spend on average \$1.20 more than other customers. (Consumers' Research, 1985, p.25) Not indifferent to such findings, Mobil began in 1984 to transform its full-service stations into self-service with convenience centers to boost its revenues. (Forbes, 2/13/84, p.44) While its hope is to attract impulse shoppers, it is the individual in a hurry who benefits, too.

In the retailing business, however, the newest trend is towards megastores, which bring under one roof multiple merchandise departments and ample stocks so as not to disappoint shoppers. (Chain Store Age, December 1987, pp.29-33.) Home Express, a West Coast chain, typifies the new breed, which includes IKEA, Branden's and Best Brand. Its market, as suggested by its name, is the harried customer. It

focuses on consumer electronics, housewares, textiles, ready-to-assemble furniture and home organizers. To simplify the task of shopping, Home Express utilizes extensive cross merchandising and "total-look" displays, along with a high level of customer service. Accessory items are sold along side featured items so that the customer need not have to hunt them down in other departments. (This also generates add-on sales.) In the final analysis, Home Express sells decorating ideas, as well as merchandise, tastefully and efficiently. At the core of Home Express's success is more than just time saving. It is also the shrewd realization that upscale shoppers also seek quality at reasonable prices.

A unique element of the Home Express approach to retailing is its effort to combine shopping with entertainment such as musical recitals and guest appearances by noted chefs. Thus two activities become available under one roof. (No doubt the time also passes more quickly for spouses less engrossed in the actual shopping.)

Photo finishing has its own entrant in the superstore category. Moto Photo, a chain of one-hour mini-labs headquartered in Dayton, Ohio, has designed its version of the one-stop store of the future, the Moto Photo Image Centers. Their charter is to meet all imaging needs. The first Image Center opened in 1986. While photo-finishing remains the core business, complementary services have been added, from walk-in

portrait sittings to custom framing. Its video services, including filming, editing and transferring home movies, have yet to catch on. Moto Photo also merchandises all photo accessories, with the exception of cameras themselves, the sale of which ties up too much of a salesclerk's valuable time. Prospects seem good. The company's President and CEO, Michael Adler, plans to open 1300 centers by the 1990's. (Chain Store Age, December 1987, p.40)

HOME SHOPPING

Direct marketing is transforming the way people shop. Thanks to the mail, consumers can shop from home. Among the hassles they avoid are parking, hunting for the right size or color, lining up to pay at the register. Polls conducted by the Roper Organization last year indicate that over a three month period more than half of all adults bought something without leaving home. The majority of the items purchased fell into the following categories: apparel (47%), books (27%), records/tapes/compact discs (17%) and toys (17%). Other purchases include appliances and cooking utensils. It was recently estimated that busy female shoppers spend \$324 annually on catalog merchandise. (Chain Store Age, August 1987, p.29)

Traditional catalogs such as Spiegel's have now been joined by those of major department stores and specialty

shops. Among the merchants leveraging their store's image are Saks Fifth Avenue, Lord and Taylor, Bloomingdale's and L.L.Bean. Credit cards and 24-hour toll free numbers are even eliminating the need to fill out order forms. Upscale catalogs are increasingly offering an additional efficiency: customized inserts for those shoppers identified by certain consumer characteristics or having indicated an interest in a particular sport or hobby. (Chain Store Age, September 1987, p.17) (Even American Airlines is getting in on the boom with its own in-flight catalog, displaying merchandise for busy travelers.)

Credit card companies have not been insensitive to the business opportunities. American Express now sends merchandise brochures directly to its clients. According to a Forbes article, in 1984 direct marketing accounted for approximately \$180 million in sales. (May 7, 1984, p.91) Sears promotes a similar "Shop at Home Service" to its cardholders. It offers the convenience while announcing an additional advantage to the time conscious: Sear's will ship gifts directly "so you won't have to make an extra trip to the post office." (a form letter to card holders, April 1988)

As a customer is not likely to place subsequent orders if any order is not properly handled, the continued success of direct marketing will depend on an efficient processing system. Return policies must adequately reassure shoppers

reluctant to purchase merchandise sight unseen. Still, the benefits are clear in not having to rely solely on multiple showrooms with the associated costs of inventory and salesclerks.

Another form of home shopping has emerged thanks to television. The proliferation of 800-numbers has been a major contributing factor. Products are offered that are not always available elsewhere. One firm exploiting this distribution channel is called Dial-a-Mattress. It has no showroom. Meretrends, a consulting firm, predicts sales via "teleshopping" will be as high as \$3.5 billion in 1991, double the 1987 figure. Not too surprisingly Meretrends finds that the target market is generally upscale. This segment often places a premium on its time. Almost 75% are women, 60% of whom are college educated with an average income of \$40,000. Meretrends warns, however, that this industry is most likely headed for a shakeout. Among the factors potentially having a negative impact on the future of T.V. shopping are government regulation, customer service and fulfillment problems, and saturation. (Chain Store Age, August 1987, p.29.)

Teleshopping has its limitations. It requires that a buyer watch T.V. until he sees something he wants to buy. While frequently this means of distribution lends itself to purchasing on impulse, it tends to ignore the viewer who already has a particular objective in mind. J.C. Penney has

been working on the latest innovation in distribution, a system that allows a customer to select when and where he shops. It has already signed up over 30 national retailers for Telaction, a form of interactive video shopping. Viewers, who must have a touch-tone telephone and a cable-wired T.V., make selections from an on-screen menu by pressing the buttons on their telephones. Upon choosing a provider, the shopper then goes on to select department, style, color, and so on. The touch-tone phone system also registers orders. (Note: use of the network, which will become available in the Chicago region by September 1988, might still involve some waiting. It is predicted that consumers may sometimes have to queue up for access during peak viewing hours. (Chain Store Age, April 1987, p.7)

HOME BANKING

The latest development on the banking scene is touch-tone home banking, which has the potential of replacing ATMs (except for deposit making and cash dispensing). Express/24 is available through California's Provident Central Credit Union. With it, the telephone operates in much the same way as the ATM. Once you have dialed and entered your account and security number, pressing "8" gives you a list of services, such as account information, loan payment or year-to-date tax information. You are automatically instructed as to which

button to press to proceed. Even a form of withdrawal transaction is possible: a check can be mailed the same working day to the account address. There is no human intervention unless you request Operator Assistance. Barclays Bank of California has a similar "Information Line."

It should be noted in passing that in France, home banking was established earlier through the use of Minitel, a small home terminal made available to telephone subscribers through the state-owned telecommunications monopoly, the PTT (Postes Télégraphes Téléphones). Minitel offers additional time-saving information services, such as articles from the day's major newspapers, weather reports, restaurant listings. These services are available for varying costs, which are charged to the phone bill. Special hook-ups are available upon request. For example, doctors may subscribe to a computerized Physician's Desk Reference to pharmaceuticals. The driving force behind the creation of a such a sophisticated centralized exchange has been a need to generate additional revenues as much as a desire to provide convenience.

HOME DELIVERY

While clothing and other merchandise lend themselves to home shopping, and as logical follow up, to home delivery, food shopping, which occurs much more frequently, has not made as much progress in this area. For the most part, food stores

are trying simply to reduce service time *on the premises*. One exception is Grocery Express, which is a phone-order grocer in the San Francisco Bay Area. To better serve its customers, it gives a report on the day's produce, before the order is placed. Though its 4,000 customers pay 12% over what their normal supermarket shopping bills would be, the firm's sales reached \$2.5 million in 1987. (BusinessWeek, 4/27/87, p.87)

VCRs have become standard equipment in many American homes. The potential savings in time, money and effort associated with viewing rental movies is evident. Nevertheless, the convenience does require a trip to the local video shop. Cinema Express in Daytona, Florida has eliminated the need with catalogs and a phone-in order system. The firm not only delivers videos to special lock boxes installed outside the customer's home, but also picks them up. (The Wall Street Journal, 3/26/87, p.1) While the service benefits retirees or shut-ins who cannot get around, the name holds definite appeal for the time constrained. Likewise, car rental companies such as Jiffy Rental are also promising free pick-up and delivery.

Not only are service providers delivering merchandise, they are also delivering services. While this eliminates the inconvenience of client travel, it does necessitate finding a mutually agreeable appointment time. Fitness to Go (Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts) is just one example in the area of

physical training where the service provider delivers, bringing equipment to the client's home or office. The founder explained to Boston Magazine (March 1987) that her clients are mainly people who do not have time to go to gyms.

Ibis at Your Service, an extension of Ibis Hair and Skin Specialists on Boston's fashionable Newbury Street, sends its staff to office or home or hotels to take care of the personal beauty needs of the busy woman. The specific services include make-up, hairstyling and massage. Appointments are made at least 24 hours in advance for lunchtime, evenings and weekends. There is a travel charge.

Incidentally, The Barking Lot (Brookline, Massachusetts) and Bark-n-Purr (Revere, Massachusetts) provide similar convenient grooming services for the family pet. While the former actually makes house calls, the latter schedules pickups, generally on Thursdays, and delivers when the work is completed.

The trend towards specialized professionals in the car care industry has already been noted. In true entrepreneurial spirit, however, some auto specialists are providing an alternative to car care centers: home delivery. Among the new breed of businesses advertised in the Boston area are Dr. Tune Up, Nathan's Executive Auto Shine and The Roving Oil Can. Freedom Tires, a very new franchise, offers an at-home tire service. What all companies have in common is that they will

care for your car at the place of your choice. They generally charge a fix fee but limit themselves to a specific region.

INTER-FIRM CREATION OF TIME ECONOMIES

A clear tendency is to regroup several services at one convenient location. This spares shoppers needless travel time, with the associated costs of finding parking. The shopping center has grown into the shopping mall, located in the suburbs to attract residents who, as an added plus, are able to avoid the congestion of downtown traffic.

This bringing together of different businesses at one site is currently occurring at the store level. Sears, Roebuck & Company recently announced its agreement with McDonald's to open a fast food outlet right on the store premises. (Wall Street Journal, 2/8/88. p. 39.) While the desire for a new, youthful image may be behind the move, time saving is likely to be an added benefit for hungry shoppers. Unlike Sears, McDonald's business is food service, with known standards for quality and efficiency. Store-run luncheon counters often do not have the same kind of experience behind them.

A rather unique variation on the joint venture has been dubbed Macy's-On-Call. (Chain Store Age, January 1987, p.7) The Hilton Gateway in Newark, New Jersey has equipped its rooms with a hotline to a nearby Macy's store. Hotel guests, upon consulting catalogs, can phone in their orders directly.

An answering machine records orders made after store hours. Deliveries are scheduled three times a day. It should be noted, however, that key to the success of this enterprise is the fact that the service is also extended to the many people living and working in the office complex where the hotel is located. Together they are capable of generating a sizeable, steady demand. More importantly, there are no viable shopping alternatives in the immediate vicinity.

The shopping mall itself is undergoing changes, due in large part to market saturation. On the one hand, malls are being redesigned to offer a total living experience. Originally a major department store served as anchor to draw people in. Facilities such as ice rinks and cinemas were sometimes incorporated. Some real estate developers are now focusing on an entirely different concept: regional centers anchored by a major amusement park. Fashion Mall of America (owned by Triple-Five Corp. of Edmondton, Canada) will be located a mile from Minneapolis's airport, a real convenience for air travelers. It will house an indoor amusement park with a roller coaster, a four-acre indoor water park, a hotel, 100 restaurants and 800 stores. (Wall Street Journal 9/2/87, p.21) More modest versions will still revolve around the notion of entertainment. The bottom line is that shops hope to pick up sales from impulse purchases without taking too much time away from their customers' leisure activities.

At the same time a new kind of specialty mall is springing up. Chain Store Age (July 1987, p.16.) reports that the first Car Care Mall opened near St. Charles, Missouri. As of July 1987, there were already 25 similar malls in the Pacific Northwest and more were planned for the Midwest. As the traditional full-service garage fades, specialized professionals operating independently are now uniting to offer one-stop car service.

Even dentists are banding together in dental centers. One center, which advertises several locations, claims: "We're able to provide a wide range of professional services, including general dentistry, orthodontics, children's dentistry, periodontics, endodontics and oral surgery. All in one convenient location." While a patient may not save time by making a single visit to handle all his dental needs, he need not search to find the specialist he requires. Furthermore, such a concentration of professionals allows the center to accept walk-in patients who have emergencies or who finally get up the courage to have a check-up but who would back down before their appointments came around.

2.5. THE ADVICE MARKET

Before closing, a word should be said about the boom in self-help books and related media, which directly or

indirectly appeal to the time-pressured consumer. (It would be interesting to know if enrollments in speed reading have also gone up.) In these books experts share their time saving tips or promise fast results. Books and articles on personal time management abound. Cooking is a popular area for time saving; among the newest titles commonly available at local dealers: Instant Gourmet (1987), Microwave Gourmet (1987), Entertaining Fast and Fancy (1986), Shortcut Main Dishes (1986), Fast and Fabulous Four Ingredient Cookbook (1984). In keeping with the trend, The New York Times publishes a monthly column just on microwave cooking.

For those who cannot afford a housekeeper there is Speed Cleaning (1988), written by "The people who clean San Francisco homes 10,000 times a year." Even vacations can be the subject of time management. The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World (Sehlinger, 1985) presents an analysis of attractions and strategies for minimizing waiting in lines.

As to a related market, video, "how-to" tapes represent \$90 million in sales, with exercise tapes leading the pack. (Chain Store Age, January 1987, p.37) While the popularity of exercise tapes is no doubt price-related - a cassette costs less than membership in a spa - the convenience of not having to go to a club is undeniable. There is even help for parents who do not have time to devote to training toddlers: Happy Bear Potty-Time videos. (Wall Street Journal, 1/21/88,

p.1) Retailers are finding that educational tapes are the fastest growing segment of the sell-through market.

2.6. LIMITS TO THE TIME SAVING TREND

One of the more intriguing examples of a business promoted on the basis of time saving - and one of the rare examples among professionals - is that of Riva Poor, a management consultant and self-proclaimed Professional Problem Solver. (Cambridge, Ma.) According to the woman's promotional material, she applies management techniques to resolve in two days problems which traditional therapies could take years to treat. Her advertisement, which appeared in Harvard Magazine (April 1988), asks "Do you want to flounder for another 365 days? Or are you willing to invest 2 days that will change your life?" She seems to think that there is a market for help in solving difficult problems in a short time. She charges \$400 an hour for her services. As an additional convenience to her clients, she offers for the same fee "Dial-a-Decision" which, according to the ad, is a "long distance Telephone Time Package that gives you the immediate results you require without the expense and inconvenience of travel." To my knowledge, however, this is an isolated example that does not yet appear to constitute a "trend."

Still, a quick glance through the Los Angeles telephone

book revealed other unexpected combinations of time saving and service. Speedy Attorney Service and Instant Wedding Chapel are just two of them. Recalling the campaign of the Cambridge Eye Associates against rapid eye care earlier in this chapter an important question arises: Where does one draw the line between genuine time saving and rushed work that results in poor quality? The average individual has a much harder time judging services which are based purely on expertise and which deliver no tangible product. His ability to recognize the quality of the service received may well determine which industries will successfully market time savings.

CHAPTER 3: TIME BUYING

There are certain tasks where consumers are able not only to reduce their time commitment but also to eliminate their participation in the actual realization. "Time buying" refers to just such situations where the consumer hires another person to perform the entire task, thus freeing himself from any obligation other than perhaps providing instructions and paying the server. Time buying is a simple transaction involving money for time, where the labor of another substitutes for the labor of the customer. In some instances, the consumer pays a fixed amount for performance of the contracted task. He is assigning any risks of unanticipated delay to the service provider. In others, he pays an hourly rate which recognizes the value of the server's time.

In the course of my research I have identified a continuum of services oriented towards time buyers. At one end are the time-intensive services, requiring little or no skill or expertise, such as paying a parking fine. At the other end are skill-intensive services, which contain a component of expertise in the service being offered. The provider is actually creating value by performing a task which the consumer, even with no time constraint, might not be able to perform as satisfactorily or as effectively. An example would be clothing consultants. Admittedly, this approach to looking

at time-buying services is somewhat artificial as many services fall between the two extremes. Nevertheless, this differentiation is useful in understanding the particular problems facing different services and in explaining their requirements for growth.

Another category of time-buying services which does not fit into the continuum above is composed of facilitators. They serve in situations where the individual would not chose to delegate decision making, yet wants to eliminate time-consuming searches. These facilitating services comprise a separate section of the chapter.

3.1. TIME-INTENSIVE SERVICES

Many of the jobs in this category were previously performed by a family member, often the wife or a mother. Nowadays, with many more working wives and single parent households, others must be found to perform the "simple" tasks of running errands, watching after children, and maintaining the house and garden. The low skill requirements and practically non-existent barriers to entry often attract the individual entrepreneur, but increasingly, in response to demand, such service is becoming big business. One even sees larger, more professional organizations with telephone listings taking over the business. They have realized that

with the proper management there are profits to be made by freeing time-crunched people from everyday responsibilities.

GENERAL ERRANDS

A recent development in the service industry has been the establishment of numerous personal service firms offering to perform a wide variety of relatively simple tasks. These generalists come very close to filling the function of the housewife. The names themselves are quite evocative: All Tasks Considered (Denver), Rent-a-Drudge (Pittsburgh), Road Runner (Kansas City), Support System, Inc. (run by two Wharton MBAs in Philadelphia), The Busy Body's Helper (New York), Errands Unlimited (Boston). Their assignments run the gamut from watering plants to waiting for deliveries, from walking the dog to wrapping gifts. While statistics are not readily available on the success of these fairly new ventures, one service, The Intrepid New Yorker, did report to The Wall Street Journal that business was "very, very good." (9/24/87, p.1)

One reason business is so good is that these firms have all discovered that because busy people frequently place a high value on their limited time, they are willing to pay handsomely to have someone else handle errands. A general errand running service can charge as much as \$15 an hour for services that require not much more than time and a little

legwork. (One service has developed a complex rate schedule that charges more between 6 P.M. and 8 A.M. and more for more than 15 minutes of waiting.) In fact, the only skill requirement is simple common sense. Customer satisfaction depends mainly on reliability. Whether the job is to get concert tickets or to walk the dog, the customer wants to be sure that the task is completed in timely fashion. Beyond timeliness of completion, however, it is difficult to talk about the quality of the service.

Staffing thus becomes relatively simple. Various firms have been reported to hire students, housewives, artists seeking to complement their income, the unemployed. Lend-a-Hand in New York recruits from among the many out-of-work actors and actresses. (Tuhy, 1983, p.218) What all these people have in common is the relatively low opportunity costs associated with their time.

Still, problems do exist, given the nature of the service involved. Assigning and completing tasks individually, on a one-by-one basis while attempting to respect the time constraints placed by the client can produce logistical nightmares. It becomes impossible to make efficient use of employees, who must remain on call. This lack of economies of scale is generally reflected in the price.

SPECIALIZED TASKS

To simplify their work, some service providers have chosen to specialize, placing restrictions on its customer base and on the tasks performed. An Austin (Texas) firm, EatOutIn, does nothing but fetch meals from local restaurants. BusinessWeek reported the example of a woman in the Chicago area who specializes in time saving for expectant mothers. She purchases all the necessities for the Lamaze method of childbirth, everything from tennis balls to lollipops. (4/27/87, p.94)

Boston offers its own example of the independent service entrepreneur who provides a specialized service to a defined customer base. Residents of Beacon Hill can spare themselves the frustration of hunting down one of the rare empty parking places thanks to the services of an elderly woman who has established herself as the local parking attendant. A familiar sight at the corner of Grove and Philips Streets, she will guard spots for her "clients." Though she has no fee schedule, she does accept gratuities and gifts.

CarTender Inc. (Dallas) focuses solely on keeping its clients' cars in running order. Open since 1983, it picks up the car, takes it to the garage, negotiates the costs of any work, and sees that the owner is not without transportation in the interim. It provides no actual maintenance care itself. It just relieves the owner of the time-consuming job of

arranging for repairs. This "insurance" is rather expensive: it costs \$175 for up to six services. (Inc., May 1984)

Regina Russell of Greetings! in Boston does card mailing anywhere in the world. Her clients need only supply a list of names, occasions and dates. She stocks a selection of quality cards from well-known printers and museums and sends notification that cards have gone out. For a retainer fee of \$30 she will accept last minute phone orders. While she handles greetings for private individuals, a substantial part of her customer base comes from local business. (Boston, March 1987, p.132)

For those able to build up a sufficiently large clientele, setting up shop to perform a special tasks becomes a possibility. One of the franchises to develop in the early Eighties dealt with the problem of sending parcels. Packaging Know-how and Gift Shipping, Inc. started offering franchises in 1983 and has grown to 37 outlets. Tender Sender alone has added another 51 outlets to this emerging industry since its founding in 1982.

Along similar lines Wrappers (Boston) can also handle any gift wrapping needs for under \$5. While customers must invest a little time in dropping off their packages (Wrappers is conveniently located near shops in the Prudential Center), they do not have to spend time shopping for materials such as ribbons and paper nor fussing with the actual wrapping itself.

Numerous gift basket outlets have sprung up. One that offers the speed of home shopping is a franchise called Dial-a-Gift. It has borrowed heavily from the FTD florist concept. With 115 shops, it now makes it possible to wire a gift basket. Many similar gift services offer customized baskets to reflect the special interests of the recipient.

The aging of the American population is making companionship a growing service. Boston Magazine claims that providing surrogate granddaughters may well be the "ultimate service of the Eighties" (March 1987, p.130). Always at Your Service (Wellesley Hills, Ma.) has been in existence for three years, providing helpers for people over 65 whose families do not have the time to look after them. Common tasks include accompanying an elderly person or paying bills. Registration is \$40, and hourly rates are \$10. The cost of chauffeuring varies with the distance and wait involved. HomeCall (Frederick, Maryland) started out back in 1974 performing similar chores. (It has since grown into a full range care provider, which includes medical services.)

Perhaps one of the most intriguing time buying services focuses attention uniquely on the time expended while waiting in lines. Red Tape Cutters of New York has successfully taken the onerous task of waiting in line and turned it into a profit generating business. According to its documentation and press clippings, the firm offers a list of services at fixed

prices. They cover a wide range of defined objectives: passports, car registration renewals, payment of motor vehicle violations. In addition, Red Tape Cutters will provide miscellaneous waiting, such as for concert tickets, on an hourly basis.

For the busy individual, the service is well worth the price, particularly as he would easily have to take half a day off from work to stand in line himself. At the same time the firm makes healthy profits because it can batch requests. For example, Red Tape Cutters collects \$30 from each of perhaps ten clients who must pay driving violations. The "waiter," earning \$4 an hour (more than minimum wage), need stand in line only once. Furthermore, from experience these waiters know which strategies to apply, such as arriving very early to be first in line. Because they are familiar figures in some places, they can also leave off a pile of work, only to pick it up later in the day. Meanwhile, to ensure that there is enough demand to create such economies of scale, the company also contracts out to businesses, which then offer the service to their employees.

These are just a few of the services recently made available to consumers, but the list is in no way complete. A major reason is that finding out about these low skill, time-intensive services can pose a bit of a problem. The difficulty is that many are so new and so small that no

heading exists for them in such traditional information sources as the Yellow Pages. Better sources are local newspapers, bulletin boards and schools.

CHILD CARE

Other services are easier to identify because they have been around much longer. Neither child care nor home service is a new concept, but because of increasing demands on time, both are enjoying tremendous growth. Where this can best be seen is in the ever increasing number of franchises devoted to these services.

Demand for child care is a direct consequence of mothers entering the work force and the increase in single parent households. While local operators still account for most child care, chains are joining in on the boom. Recognizing the potential need for child care facilities back in the Sixties, Kinder-Care Inc. (headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama) began offering day care. It now counts over 1,100 centers. The company reported a 13% profit margin in 1987. Net income jumped 40% from 1986 to 1987. It identifies businesses as its next big growth market. (BusinessWeek, 4/27/87, p.92)

Agencies are also providing placement in the home. Among one of the time saving features offered are reliable, rapid service and pre-screening of care providers. At One on One in Andover, Massachusetts, a representative of the agency visits

the family at home to determine its needs and to help in selecting the right person. Because most of its candidates come from the Midwest or West, interviews between the family and the prospective nanny are conducted over the phone.

A more professional approach has been taken by Nanny, Inc. of Chicago, a sort of training school for child care providers. Students pay \$1500/month for 3 months of lessons in psychology, health and other relevant fields. The company then places its graduates with families, who also pay (\$500).

Parents in a Pinch (Brookline, Massachusetts) specializes in same-day services, including sick-child care and care of children when a parent is sick. In 1986 it had over 1000 clients. Fees for baby sitting run on average \$8 per hour in the Boston area. This same firm charges an "express fee" for one-day or less notice. Services such as these eliminate the need to spend endless hours calling around for a baby sitter.

One of the innovations in the child care category is really just a substitute for the old-fashioned mothers' car pool. In 1984, New York City boasted 12 after school sports services whose responsibility it was to haul kids around for different sports activities. Picking kids up from same the school represents terrific economies of scale for the service provider: one company reported annual gross revenues of \$250,000. (BusinessWeek, 3/12/84, p.84)

HOME SERVICES

Home services are becoming big business. They are predicted to grow at a rate of 20% through 1990. (Franchising in the Economy, 1986) While scarcely a new idea, in the past they were limited to a select few. The rising number of dual income families, however, has led to the tremendous growth in the number of franchises in home and garden care.

Maid services are proving to be highly successful franchises. From 1984 to 1986, fourteen existing maid service franchisors saw the number of their units almost double. New entrants have also entered the market. Part of the reason for such success is what the franchises can offer: professional, competent, dependable cleaning service. Often hiring an independent housecleaner requires training the person on the spot, providing equipment and stocking supplies. Because so much cleaning is done during work hours while the home is unattended, many clients find it reassuring to deal with a bonded and insured organization that accepts complete responsibility for the job.

Leading franchises include Merry Maids (Omaha, Nebraska; 400 units), Mini Maid International (Marietta, Georgia; 66 units) and Molly Maid (Ann Arbor, Michigan; 40 units). (Franchise Opportunities Handbook, 1988) Many of the larger cleaning services have discovered that working in teams of four is cost efficient. The team approach makes it possible

to clean a house in an hour or less. However, to reap the benefits it is necessary to cluster clients so as to avoid wasteful transportation time. It is also important to have regular clients.

Because there are virtually no barriers to entry, customer satisfaction is primordial; it is usually maintained through competitive pricing and quality work. Members of the industry already predict that the job of housecleaning will become more complicated as franchisees add special services. "Tuff-Tasks," a division of Mini-Maid, has been created to do special chores such as window washing and carpet cleaning. (Nation's Business, May 1986, p.39)

Specialists in home organization will do a one-time spring cleaning for its customers. A principal part of the service is to make suggestions as to how to optimize storage space. These consultations are free. It is the closet remodeling that generates revenues. California Closet is one such franchise. The company has been in business for almost a decade and has grown to more than 75 stores.

Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp. (Naperville, Ill), a 10-year-old franchise with 107 units, is to suburban gardens what maid service is to interiors. The service which it and other similar companies provide does not cost much more than what a homeowner would pay to fertilize the lawn himself. As in other time-buying services, local reputation is a critical

success factor because a large portion of business is done on referral; particularly in home services, having a nationally recognized and dependable name is key. (Nation's Business, March 1986, p.36)

Though child care and home service are included under time-intensive services, it should be clear that they are approaching the skill-intensive region of the time-buying spectrum, especially in those cases where some form of training enters the picture. The reason this distinction is important is that this will affect the growth patterns of such services. Properly training employees in special techniques takes time, more time than is required when recruiting for purely time-intensive tasks.

3.2. SKILL-INTENSIVE SERVICES

At the other end of the spectrum are the skill-intensive services. In no way does is this categorization intended to imply that such services are not time-intensive. They often are. A major difference from purely time-intensive is that instead of relying solely on the client's instructions, the skill-intensive service provider depends a great deal on his own talents or judgment.

TAKE-OUT MEALS

Cooking in general lends itself to time buying opportunities. Just as the number of meals eaten out has risen dramatically, the number of take-out shops has also grown, mostly in urban areas. Franchising in the Economy points to the ever increasing number of home delivery operations in the fast food and gourmet categories. (p.16) As concerns the first category, this is perhaps most evident among pizza makers. Stakes are high in a market where sales totaled \$20 billion in 1986. Growth of Domino's Pizza, a delivery-only chain, has been explosive. Total sales went from \$1.4 billion to \$1.8 billion between 1986 and 1987. It currently dominates the delivery market nationwide, holding a more than 50% share. (Wall Street Journal, 1/12/88, p.39)

For the working person who can afford the price but not the time, take-out gourmet shops have proven a viable way to eat well at home. One shop making a special appeal to the time-pressured is Epicurean Express in Brookline, Massachusetts. Other gourmet take-outs are sidelines of fine restaurants. The establishment's name can be taken as a guarantee of quality. For the restaurant, this represents an attractive way to expand without investing in high cost real estate. Many places in the Boston area, at least, provide delivery. L'Espalier's Great Food Store delivers by cab.

In New York, too, a wide variety of cuisines are

obtainable over the phone. One major restriction frequently applies, however. The caller must generally be calling from within the same neighborhood. The logistics involved in delivering a hot meal can become too formidable otherwise for an establishment trying to maintain its traditional restaurant service simultaneously.

One creative solution to the complicated logistics of delivery is to meet the customer halfway, literally. The Gourmet Caboose (Connecticut) started out with a very popular service which met commuter trains at the end of the day with take-out meals. Despina's, in East Watertown, Massachusetts offers bulk delivery of its frozen gourmet food. With a selection of 40 entrees, its trucks deliver twice a month in the Boston/Cambridge area.

FUNCTION PLANNING

Catering is not a new industry but it has modified its services somewhat in response to changes in customer needs. The "personalized party planners," working independently or with a staff, not only supply the food but often make all the necessary arrangements from sending invitations to hiring bartenders, ordering decorations, and assuring clean-up. Specialists, these function organizers dispose of connections that the average party giver might not have. Their fees run

from 10% to 20% of the costs of the party, with an additional hourly rate for any of the caterer's own personnel. (Boston Magazine, March 1987, p.132)

Some caterers are even beginning to specialize in particular types of parties. The functions include not only weddings but also children's theme birthday parties (which is the specialty of Hostess Helper in Newton, Massachusetts). One franchise in operation since 1985, Tote-a-Shower (with 9 outlets in Illinois), organizes mainly baby and bridal showers.

PERSONAL SHOPPERS

Termed one of the hottest lifestyle trends by Boston Magazine (March 1987, p.130), personal shoppers are one of the most significant time-buying industries to emerge in recent years. Now a standard feature in many department stores, personal shopping is also attracting independent entrepreneurs, who do not limit their purchases to the merchandise of one store.

The purchases these personal shoppers make for their clients range from clothing to gifts. Not only do they promise the best quality at the best price but they also will make selections themselves. The Present Company (Dallas), for example, needs only the price range and the recipient's name. By asking the right questions, it can come up with an

appropriate gift suggestion. As regards clothing shoppers, their service is frequently provided in conjunction with color and style analysis. It is clear that in both instances it is more than just time that the customer is paying for. It is also judgment. Billing is generally a combination of an hourly rate plus a commission based on the dollar amount of the purchases.

The Gifted Shopper (Boston) is just one of the myriad personal shopping services available. In just three years its client base has grown from three customers to one hundred seventy-five. Judith Rosenthal, founder and company president, provides everything from fashion consultation to a return service (known as Many Happy Returns). Below is a brief summary of her work (based on a telephone interview).

Though The Gifted Shopper employs one full-time and five part-time employees (to manage the billing end of things), the business is basically a one-woman show. Ms. Rosenthal explained that personal shopping is unavoidably labor intensive. She will frequently put in a seventy- to eighty-hour week. Part of the reason is the need to accommodate her clients, who may make requests on very short notice. To facilitate things, she maintains a database and uses a Polaroid camera to keep track of her clients' wardrobes. (The latter comes in handy especially when a client calls up, wanting to know which tie to wear with a

suit.)

The key to the Gifted Shopper's success is the fact that it saves not only time but money. Ms. Rosenthal is very well connected in the retail world. She makes purchases during sales and from off-price distributors. As a consequence, her clients pay less than what they would normally pay for clothes purchased on their own. (This is reflected in her commission, which is 10% percent of the savings over full retail price.) Though she charges \$75 for an image and fashion consultation and \$35 an hour for shopping and fittings, she claims her fees are more than offset by the elimination of costly fashion mistakes. Evidence to support her claim of having become a near necessity is the fact that even after the October 1987 crash, none of her clients dropped her service.

Logistics do pose a problem for the Gifted Shopper. While it is possible to shop for several people at one time, there is still considerable travel between clients. (Though she recognizes the advantage of limiting her customers to one region, she has customers as far as Rhode Island. For jobs beyond a certain distance, there is an additional charge.) Ms. Rosenthal expressed the desire to franchise, but she has yet to find a satisfactory way to replicate her special talents. After all, it is her flair for fashion and her nose for bargains which clients are paying for, not just the time savings.

While not exactly in the personal shopper mold, traveling tailoring services offer many of the same benefits. Tailors who make office calls have been reported in Pittsburgh (Annie Akers) and Boston (Sheila Attig). They make clothes for busy people, a significant portion of whom are women. Many clients express appreciation for the time saved in not having to go to a shop to try on clothes. They find exactly what they want and in the perfect size. (Sheila Attig also contracts to do hand sewing and alterations for \$15 an hour.)

3.3. FACILITATING SERVICES

Some entrepreneurs have recognized the necessity of greater efficiency in one's personal life. Thus technology has been applied to provide the pleasure of relationships without the time and effort that goes into meeting unlikely prospects. Dating services are enjoying a resurgence as they segment their market, focusing on time-pressured individuals seeking companionship. LunchDates (serving greater Boston) and Lunch Couples (in both Massachusetts and New Hampshire) offer busy single men and women the opportunity to meet one-to-one over lunch or an after-work cocktail. The People Network, like Relationships Video Dating Service, carries efficiency one step further, thanks to videos which allow the client to prescreen potential dates. Its ad exhorts readers to "See and

hear someone first. Save energy, time, and best of all connect with someone who attracts you." (emphasis added) The implication is clear: why bother meeting someone who does not appeal to you.

A great deal of inefficiency is found in the used car market. Private Party Used Car Sales Lot, mentioned by Fram (1985, p.31), brings potential buyers and sellers together. This service offers economies of scale to both the parties involved in the private sales transaction. They do not have to answer individual ads and inspect cars individually.

Another service, which has been around for more than 20 years, also comes straight from the want ads. It is roommate matching. A market for this kind of service exists where rents are high and where there is a concentration of single working people. In Boston, working people with little time pay \$25 for the convenience of not having to chase down announcements.

Not all facilitators are for-profit organizations. The state of Massachusetts spent \$1.2 million in 1987 to fund six child care resource and referral centers (five existing ones plus one new one). Such centers serve as clearinghouses for information. For a \$10 annual fee, clients have access to listings concerning day care, after-school care, baby-sitting agencies. Non-publicly funded agencies also exist. Referrals Unlimited (Lexington and Newton) is a licensed child care employment agency.

Similar professional organizations exist to help match supply with need in the repair service sector. Associations such as Electricians Unlimited make it easier to find a qualified repairman quickly and efficiently. Such groups are an improvement over the alternative of making random calls from the listings in the Yellow Pages.

The epitome of the facilitator has to be the professional organizer who, equipped with extensive referral lists, can solve most any problem. It is his business to know where and how to get things done. Can Do of Weston, Massachusetts finds what no one else can find. Among its most unusual achievements are finding a skywriter and locating a garage for a 1928 Chrysler Imperial. (Boston Magazine, March 1987, p.143)

Because information relating to new and unusual time-buying services is hard to come by, there is also a need for some sort of clearinghouse of local service providers. Boston Magazine has compiled a fairly thorough listing of services in the Boston area. Barney's of New York took a similar initiative in commissioning its own guide, ESSENTIALS: A Collection of Timesaving Services, written by Deborah Haber. No doubt other publications are available in other cities.

3.4. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS FOR TIME-BUYING INDUSTRIES

Most time-buying firms will be under constant pressure to

maintain quality. The absence of barriers to entry make competition a continual threat. To gain a competitive edge, most firms will face a decision between generalization and specialization. On the one hand, the flexibility to perform multiple tasks offers greater convenience to the customer, who need only call upon one service provider. On the other hand, the increased efficiencies of performing a single task can be very attractive both dollarwise and timewise. It still remains to be seen what effect, if any, price will have on the choice of a service provider as more companies enter the market.

A major difficulty many of the time-buying services will face is the problem of growing while preserving quality. No matter what the skill level involved, reliability of performance forms the foundation of the service provider's reputation. Too hasty an expansion could cause even the simplest of service standards, timeliness, to slide. In this world of time-buying, where word-of-mouth is critical, it is important never to disappoint customers.

CHAPTER 4: TIME FILLING

Marketers and operations researchers are realizing that reducing the actual duration of the service encounter is but one way of selling time. An alternative approach is to manage the *perception* of time spent waiting. To borrow from Hornik (1984), time can be divided into "objective" time and "subjective" time. It is the latter which is of interest here. "Subjective" time reflects the notion that an individual's sense of the passage of time varies according to conditions. These conditions can presumably be manipulated to some extent to the advantage of the service provider. Not surprisingly, considerable effort has been devoted to identifying these variables. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this study to include all aspects of the psychology of queuing, but I will refer in passing to some relevant concepts.

In his article "The Psychology of Waiting Lines," (1984), Maister lists several propositions about the psychology of queues. The very first one is of major significance to the selling of time. It states: "Unoccupied time feels longer than Occupied time." One can refer to Schwartz (1975) to understand why this should be so: "To say that waiting is an anticipatory mode simply means that it imposes constraints in attention; that is, it draws attention to time itself, which, being without inherent content, passes more slowly precisely because

it is attended to."(p.168) At the same time he notes that there may be a cost, not just in time but from the displeasure or distress of boredom. Thus, finding successful ways to fill empty time can be invaluable to a service provider.

With these observations in mind, I would like to devote the rest of this chapter to specific efforts to modify the perception of waiting. While such efforts do not always in fact increase the customer's actual supply of discretionary time, they do create the impression of offering time savings. I will focus first on some of the techniques currently employed by service providers and second on businesses which have emerged for the express purpose of filling waiting time.

4.1. TECHNIQUES USED BY THE SERVICE PROVIDER

Maister (1984) identified two major ways of occupying time: movement and distraction. The two categories are useful for structuring the discussion of the different techniques now in use for occupying waits.

MOVEMENT

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines the verb "to wait" as "to remain stationary in readiness or expectation." This suggests that a simple way of transforming waiting time is through movement itself. The following

examples, borrowed from the airlines and from amusement parks, show just how this can work.

As one North American airline company discovered, an activity as simple as walking can have dramatic effects on an individual's perception of the passage of time. In an example first presented by Martin (1983) and taken up later by Larson (1987), the airline in question learned, counterintuitive though it may be, that it could actually *increase* customer satisfaction by lengthening the walk between the gate and the baggage pick-up area. Studies conducted in response to passenger complaints about slow baggage delivery showed that the airline's performance was in fact comparable to that of its competitors. The only difference was that a supposedly more efficient terminal design permitted passengers to reach the baggage carousels in less time. As a consequence, the airline's passengers were forced to stand idle, which made them more aware of waiting.

The amusement park industry, because of the nature of its "product," has devoted considerable energy to the management of large numbers of waiting people through the design of queues. One commonly used device which make waits seem shorter is the use of winding lines. The benefits appear on several levels. First, in situations where there are few people waiting, snaking through a maze of barriers can actually delay arrival at the entry to the attraction, with much the same

effect as described in the airport example. Second, this particular configuration dissimulates the true length of the line. Maister posits that the sight of an equal number of people in a single straight line inflates one's expectations of the wait involved. Third, this same configuration reassures those already waiting that no injustice will occur. The barriers set up for "crowd control" make it difficult for someone to cut in line, thus eliminating one source of anxiety which can also make waits seem longer.¹

A different design adopted by amusement parks is the continually flowing line, which once again uses movement to fill empty time. According to Maister, the advantage of such a system is that it focuses attention on the rate of progress, rather than the length of the line. Visitors file past exhibits at a pace set by the operator.² The Haunted House, as well as If You Had Wings and Peter Pan's Flight, are just some attractions in Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom that fall into the category of "continuous loaders." (Sehlinger and Finley, 1985)

Where such an approach to loading may not be possible, waiting is often broken up into multiple stages: outside the

¹ Maister's Proposition 3: "Anxiety Makes Waits Seem Longer"

² One of the museums in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has also experimented with continuous flow during special touring exhibits. Such a system is particularly attractive when public demand far exceeds capacity, but the result is that visitors are denied the luxury of lingering before displays. Time expenditure is a minor consideration at best.

concession, inside the vestibule, at the actual boarding platform. Instead of inching along in one long, monotonous wait, the visitors experience three relatively short waits, each in a different environment.

DISTRACTIONS

The use of movement to fill waiting time is not possible or practical in all service encounters. In these situations an alternative is to provide distractions. In general these time-filling activities can be divided into two categories: those which relate to the overall service and those which appear unrelated.

In the first category the food service industry immediately comes to mind. Popular restaurants often suffer from an excess of demand at peak service hours. Rather than turn customers away, restaurants have resorted to a number of tactics to keep prospective patrons busy. Perhaps the best known is the addition of a bar, which also makes sound business sense, given a bar's revenue-generating capabilities.

In a variation on the bar theme, in the Latin Quarter in Paris, France, where it is common to see people waiting in line outside restaurants, the owner will frequently offer a small aperitif that not only gives the diners something to do but also signals that the service encounter has begun. The latter function is significant because it is an application of

Maister's second Proposition: "Pre-Process Waits Feel Longer than In-Process Waits." Salad bars serve a similar purpose by allowing patrons to total control over the moment the meal commences.

Shifting the beginning of consumption is not the only tactic at the restaurant's disposal. Another common one takes advantage of the ordering process. A popular seafood restaurant in Kittery, Maine makes menus readily available in advance. (Menus are also posted.) Not only is idle time filled constructively, but also the time required to order may be reduced. Whether or not this speeds up the actual arrival of food to the table is another matter.

Fast food restaurants such as McDonald's send service personnel out to the line to record orders. (USA Today, 1984, p.14) Requests still have to be rung up at the cash register, so that the impact on actual time saving may be minimal, but the customer feels like he is being served more rapidly.

Once the diner is seated and his order has been taken, there can still be a significant period of waiting. In "theme" restaurants, memorabilia can be examined as way of occupying the time. Other time fillers involve the opportunity to let the customer observe the service provider. In Japanese restaurants such as Benihana's, food is prepared right at the table, making the cooking demonstration part of the complete dining experience. Moreover, the customer is fully aware of

the reasons behind his waiting as he watches the chef prepare each dish. There is certainly no need to worry about an order having been forgotten in the kitchen. Additionally, there are very real time savings. The efficiency gained by eliminating waiters speeds up service and ultimately customer turnover.

Music can also be part of the full dining experience. Musical ambiance is often manipulated according to the needs of the restaurant. Fast food restaurants, which generally lack adequate seating for all customers, play less relaxing music than full service restaurants, where music sets a slower pace. The livelier music is more than just an appeal to the youth market. It also serves to distract those waiting and to stimulate those eating to move on.

Service-related activities can also be purely informational, enhancing either the customer's enjoyment or his understanding. For example, after waiting to board their plane, air travelers are typically eager for snack service to begin. It should be noted that during take off, in-flight service must be suspended for safety reasons. To fill this empty time when no attendant is available, specially equipped aircraft project the pilot's view from the cockpit.

Similarly, Jiffy Lube service centers are designed in such a way as to allow viewing during service. They have discovered entertainment value in their unusual service process design. Their thinking is not unlike that of the car

washes which permit users to ride inside the car during operations.

There are many service-related activities which could be organized around a medical waiting room. The Medical Center at the University of California tried installing "self-diagnosis" stalls during cold and flu season. At one station, waiting students could take their own temperatures, at another, check their throats for redness.

Some informational activities even double as a form of advertising. For example, Disneyland and Disneyworld strategically "bombard" patrons with entertaining and useful messages about rides. Information about activities is often broadcast until just prior to the end of the waiting line. As a consequence, there is little dead time. In a similar vein the Paris Métro has inaugurated informational displays at specific stations (sculpture near art museums, science exhibits near the Palais de la Découverte). They serve to highlight and promote the particular quarter's cultural opportunities.

Distractions can also be totally unrelated to the service expected. A classic way of diverting people's attention from the passage of time is well known by secretaries: serving a welcoming cup of coffee. While this is not an element of the business of the appointment, it gives the waiting person something to do (or makes him feel as though he has been

compensated in some small way for his time). Fauchon's, a gourmet shop in Paris, now serves hot coffee to patrons when they must queue up during the busy holiday season.

More and more, service providers, particularly those offering while-you-wait service, are becoming sensitive to the comfort of their customers during waits. One such example is the Cambridge Tire Center (Cambridge, Massachusetts). It advertises free cold drinks, coffee, hot chocolate and donuts in its waiting lounges, which are equipped with color T.V., magazines and newspapers.

Creative solutions for distracting waiting customers have been found, thanks in large part to video and closed circuit T.V. One bank in California runs "Three Stooges" clips, another in Mexico shows Walt Disney cartoons. (Martin, 1983, p.100.) In the French subway waiting passengers can watch music videos, news briefs and commercial announcements from closed circuit televisions on the platforms. (Some monitors have even been installed inside the subway cars.) Even a major health clinic in Paris, the Centre Médical Miromesnil (C.O.S.E.M.), has installed television monitors for its patients to watch.

On a more ambitious scale, the Manhattan Savings Bank in New York began in 1984 a program to provide a variety of entertainment during busy lunch hours. The hope was to draw in customers, despite the fact that this might add to the

congestion within the branch office. Presumably, some form of entertainment would provide incentive to wait out the crowd. On the agenda were piano recitals, dog shows, ice shows, and wildlife exhibits. Thus, a visit to the bank could become multifunctional. According to a customer service representative, however, the events have been suspended for lack of space. Certainly a cost-benefit analysis must be made of such undertakings, particularly as investment in expensive equipment and real estate may be involved.

The Boston subway has been the site of tremendous experimentation to distract impatient transit riders. Part of the reason is that people who are occupied are less prone to vandalism (according to a telephone interview with Mary Jane O'Meara of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, responsible for art and literature projects along the recently renovated Orange Line in Boston). The MBTA set a national precedent with its "Arts on the Line," a joint program with the local art community to decorate the Red Line subway stations. One of the more unusual pieces of art appeared in October 1987 at the Kendall Square station: a functional mobile by Paul Matisse often referred to as the chimes of "Pythagoras." Levers on either platform allow waiting passengers to "make music." Two additional pieces of interactive artwork have been installed since. "Galileo" (1987) makes thunder. "Kepler" or "Ellipse in F#" (1988) works

by pumping a lever to crank up a hammer which, at the critical point, falls against a single metal ring, causing it to reverberate. For the moment the pieces seem fairly popular, and impromptu concerts are common. However, it remains to be seen if the novelty will wear off. There is a risk, too, that expectations have now been set. A breakdown may cause disappointed "music aficionados" to focus even more on the unoccupied time.

Perhaps the simplest solution to filling waiting time is to give the customer the opportunity to decide for himself how to fill it. Now that the waiting time for eyeglasses is shrinking towards one hour, the problem is what to have the customers do for that hour. For opticians located in commercial centers, the solution is to offer the customer his freedom. At Eye World, if he decides to wander around, he can do so without fear of expending one minute more than necessary. The center loans customers beepers with a forty mile range that warn them when their eyeglasses are ready. One can only speculate as to the additional psychological satisfaction a beeper, normally worn by busy professionals, gives the ordinary shopper. The underlying message is that Eye World thinks the customer's time is just as valuable as, say, a doctor's.

4.2 BUSINESSES CREATED TO OCCUPY WAITS

Unavoidable waits have created market opportunities for enterprising third parties to exploit. Individuals have emerged who function as what Larson (1987) refers to as "street-level entrepreneurs." These are vendors who take advantage of stopped traffic (either at a light on a heavily traveled road or in rush hour traffic jams) to hawk their services and wares, which range from newspapers and flowers (Boston) to soft drinks and windshield washing (Caracas). In large metropolitan areas street musicians, jugglers and other assorted artists often perform for people waiting outside cinemas. The result is that what would normally be considered wasted time is turned into productive or pleasurable time. It is interesting to note that the number of such individuals appears to drop as the standard of living rises. This suggests that even these individuals place a bottom limit on the value of their time (or that the social services available render such endeavors unnecessary or less financially attractive.)

A more original development is the emergence of firms offering to fill unoccupied time with specially designed products. Just to mention one being sold directly to the subjects of long waits is the cellular telephone, which can turn time stuck in traffic into productive time. (Some Boston taxis are at present participating in an experiment to

evaluate the potential for credit-card operated phones. (Wall Street Journal, 4/22/88, p.35.)

Unabridged books recorded on cassette make it possible to combine the pleasures of "reading" while driving. Recorded Books of Clinton, Maryland offers 30-day rentals by mail. Another supplier of best sellers on cassette is Books on Tape (Newport Beach, California). The Fast Track (Farmingdale, New York) carries the concept one step further, with taped summaries of business books at around \$4.60 a piece.

Other products are targeted for the providers of services to offer their customers. Whittle Communications plans to publish six quarterly magazines which will appear only in doctors' offices. Called Special Reports, they will include articles which take approximately 27 minutes to read. The significance of precisely 27 minutes is that this has been calculated to be the average waiting time spent in a doctor's waiting room. Meanwhile, Time Inc. is reported to be considering a similar plan. (Wall Street Journal, 3/3/88, p.19.)

Captive Audience T.V. (Aurora, Ohio), a closed-circuit television system developed as a joint venture between Funtime, Inc. and Mills Hall Walborn & Associates, targets amusement parks. According to its documentation, "we design and install the system by placing monitors at strategic locations throughout the park. We entertain and inform the

people who are usually bored waiting in lines for park rides and attractions." Their video formula includes entertainment, park information and paid T.V. commercials. First installed in Geauga Lake Park in Ohio, systems are being planned for three more amusement parks. (Incidentally, all four are owned by Funtime.)

4.3. PROSPECTS FOR TIME FILLING

Certainly, the tactics to occupy waits can only multiply as more service providers realize the potential benefits of managing time perceptions. It may only be a matter of time before tactics similar to the ones described above become generally available, in supermarkets or other places where long waits tend to occur.

As concerns distractions specifically, the question does arise as to whether or not certain forms achieve their purpose. Given the subjective factors which influence temporal judgment, it is possible that some forms of distraction are more successful than others. Then again, there may be a matter of appropriateness. In the example of the California bank, there may be risk of a subconscious association between the Three Stooges and the bank itself.

Some forms of distraction may in fact prove more of an annoyance than a benefit. A prime example is "muzak." As

concerns distractions, Maister proffers the following rule: "...the activity provided to "fill time" should (a) offer benefit in and of itself, and (b) be related, in some way, to the ensuing service encounter." (p.116) He cites what he considers the successful application of his rule: a sports team that provided highlights of the previous week's game when its telephone lines were busy. One caller actually objected when the receptionist came on the line - he wanted to hear the complete play. Another example would be that of a bank which provided via monitors information such as exchange rates and descriptions of banking services. Unfortunately, the problem is that it may not always be easy for service providers to fill up waiting time in such constructive ways.

It is often difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of such measures to modify customer perceptions of waiting time. Some of the time filling strategies are quite new and untested. Research remains to be done on the perceived value of the distraction over time. Videos may have to be renewed, art redone. As for Whittle's Special Reports, will patients actually appreciate the 27 minute articles or will the anxiety of the moment prevent them from even noticing the difference?

Additional consideration will have to be given to the relative importance of other variables affecting the perception of time. Some which have already been identified are anxiety, uncertainty, fairness, the value of the service

to be received, the environment, the attitude of the server, and the personal history of the consumer of the service.

Cost benefit-analyses should be applied to the design or purchase of time fillers. One danger of certain strategies is that they may prove too effective. In a supermarket, for example, an especially entertaining video could conceivably interrupt the flow of customers or even distract them from impulse purchases, such as magazines and candy. A potentially more serious risk is that efforts to alter the perception of waiting may direct attention away from problems in the service process, the solutions to which can perhaps improve customer satisfaction in more lasting ways.

Finally, as people come to expect lines and waits, they may arrive prepared. Just like the seasoned mass transit commuters who carry newspapers or books, service customers in the future may prefer to equip themselves with Walkman cassette players or miniature games, anything which expresses their own interests, or gives them some control once again over their own time.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It appears clear that many time-related consumer service industries are just at the beginning of their growth cycles. Faith Popcorn, head of BrainReserve, has been quoted as saying that people will spend as much as \$100 an hour for convenience. (BusinessWeek, 4/27/97, p.86) At such rates, and with the number of affluent, dual income families expected to rise, it is easy to understand the attractiveness of the new market segment.

As in any industry, however, the potential for profits draws in new entrants. This is especially true of services, where investment requirements are usually low. Thus no service provider can afford to sit tight. One consequence of greater competition is the race to offer speedier service, which further feeds the consumer desire for instant gratification. As service providers enhance their performance, they encourage expectations which can create additional pressure to improve. We have already seen that in the quick car lube business, where ten minutes has become the new norm. Even among the established service providers there is a never-ending need to rethink one's business. McDonald's is reportedly experimenting with a second drive-up window at some locations. Circle K is considering pickup and delivery of laundry. (BusinessWeek 4/27/87, p. 86)

Ultimately, one can expect a shakedown once the newer services reach saturation, not unlike the one which has already occurred in the fast food business. Maid services and quick lubes should be probable candidates. The winners will be those firms which not only offer a good "product" but also which are backed by good marketing and *continued* innovation.

Experts predict that franchising will become increasingly important in consumer services in general and specifically in the convenience services. It has been predicted that the convenience industry will account for the largest gains in franchising in the next 20 years. (BusinessWeek, 4/27/87) The U.S. Department of Commerce, under "Trends and Outlook," says to keep an eye on quick lube and oil change centers, maid services, and carry out restaurant services. (1988, p.6)

Franchising may well prove more advantageous than independent entrepreneurship. For a relatively modest investment, a service provider can establish himself more quickly than if he were to attempt to build a local reputation through word-of-mouth and referrals. With more and more competition, it should become increasingly difficult and expensive to make a name for oneself. As Franchising in the Economy (1988) points out, franchisees benefit from an established trade name, marketing expertise, a distinctive business appearance, the standardization of product, training and advertising support from parent company.

Based on the examples of the classic time-related service industries cited throughout the study there will be another likely development. After an initial phase of fragmentation and specialization, there may be a swing in the opposite direction, towards a concentration of conveniences. We are already witnessing the slow shift of convenience food stores towards mini-supermarkets and department stores, as these chains seek not only to offer time saving to their customers but also to enhance their own revenues. A potentially more successful approach may well be the further banding together of standardized professionals. This approach combines efficiency for the customer with a sound business strategy. Each specialist focuses on what he does best, maintaining a high level of quality. The individual reputations then contribute to an overall marketing advantage for the all the members in a professional center.

What will remain true for all consumer service industries is the attractiveness principle: customers will go the place which is the most attractive along multiple dimensions. As competition drives time expenditure down, and people come to expect to spend less time, other factors will become predominate: cost, quality, flexibility, even environment. Those service providers who have made great strides towards reducing service time cannot afford to be satisfied with their original competitive advantage.

In the final analysis, faddish or frivolous time-selling services, which do not represent genuine value or a true cost benefit to the consumer, may be in danger, particularly in an economic downturn. The survivors in the long-term will be those time-selling services where sound business practices make it possible to respond to a multitude of shifting consumer needs.

APPENDIX: A SAMPLING OF TIME BUYING SERVICES

Because many time buying services are often difficult to locate, I have listed below some that I have uncovered. My list should in no way be taken as complete. An asterisk indicates that the company is also listed in the Franchise Opportunities Handbook.

NAME	LOCATION
<u>Housekeeping</u>	
Day's Ease, Inc. *	Grand Blanc, Mich.
Dial-a-Maid *	Johnson City, N.Y.
Domesticaide *	Lincoln, Neb.
Maid for a Day Corp. *	Tuscon, Ariz.
Maid in America	Englewood, Colo.
Maid-to-Order *	Glastonberg, Conn.
McMaid *	Chicago, Ill.
Merry Maids *	Omaha, Neb.
Mini Maid International *	Marietta, Ga.
Molly Maid, Inc. *	Ann Arbor, Mich.
Reddi-Maid	Chicago, Ill.

House and Garden

Lawn Doctor Inc. *	Matawan, N.J.
Lawn King, Inc. *	Fairfield, N.J.
ServiceMaster *	Downers Grove, Ill.
Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp. *	Naperville, Ill.
Superlawns *	Bethesda, Md.

Errands

All Tasks Considered	Denver, Colo.
Errands Unlimited	Boston, Mass.
First in Service	Boston, Mass.
HomeCall, Inc.	Frederick, Md.
Lend-a-Hand	New York, N.Y.
Personalized Services	Chicago, Ill.
Red Tape Cutters	New York, N.Y.
Rent-a-Drudge	Pittsburgh, Penn.
Resources	New York, N.Y.
Road Runner	Kansas City, Mo.
Sara Care	El Paso, Texas
Services Unlimited	New York, N.Y.
Support System, Inc.	Philadelphia, Penn.
The Busy Body's Helper	New York, N.Y.
The Intrepid New Yorker	New York, N.Y.

Whim Agency Inc.

Mill Valley, Calif.

Meal Delivery

Despina's (frozen gourmet food)	Watertown, Mass.
Domino's Pizza *	Ann Arbor, Mich.
EatOutIn	Austin, Texas
Gourmet Caboose	Darien, Conn.
Grocery Express	San Francisco, Calif.

Child care

Champion Sports Club	New York, N.Y.
Kinder-Care, Inc.	Montgomery, Ala.
Nanny Inc.	Chicago, Ill.
Parents in a Pinch	Brookline, Mass.
The Nanny Connection	New Haven, Conn.

Shopping

For Your Image - Dayton's	Minneapolis, Minn.
Instead of Your Time	Denver, Colo.
Personal Touch - Macys	San Francisco, Calif.
Present Company	Dallas, Texas
The Gifted Shopper	Boston, Mass.

The Professional Shopper

Boston, Mass.

Car Care

CarPort

Atlanta, Ga.

CarTender, Inc.

Dallas, Texas

Dr. Tune Up

Andover, Mass.

Freedom Tire

New Berlin, Wis.

Red Carpet Airport Car Care

Cleveland, Ohio

The Roving Oil Can

Greater Boston, Mass.

Other

Always at Your Service (elder
care)

Wellesley, Mass.

ASAP Alterations *

Atlanta, Ga.

Bark-n-Purr (pet grooming)

Revere, Mass.

Can Do

Weston, Mass.

Closettec (closet organization)

Dedham, Mass.

Fitness to Go (home training)

Chestnut Hill, Mass.

Greetings (card mailing)

Boston, Mass.

Tender Sender * (mail packaging)

Portland, Ore.

The Barking Lot (pet grooming)

Brookline, Mass.

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