

THE HACKER

13 (May 2011)

The Gloves are on

A question: 'Do you consider yourself to be a gullible person?'

Unless you are a half-wit you will most certainly have replied in the negative; none of us likes to think that someone else has got one over on us. And yet the chance to fall foul of some twisted scheme seems to be lurking around every corner. You can't even enter a supermarket without being bombarded with Buy One Get One Free offers at every turn that are so very, very tempting; such good value; and yet you have to be so strong on the basis that you didn't need or want one of the things in the first instance, let alone two!

Even stepping into the shower exposes you to the danger of being tricked. Do you really need to lather, rinse and *repeat*. It is just one little word and yet the use of the word *repeat* on a shampoo bottle has come to represent the zenith of the marketeers skills and saw sales of shampoo double overnight.

So are you still so confident that you traverse our worldly path without being conned? Now I'm sorry to say that I have you at a slight disadvantage here because I know that if you are reading this article there is a 99% chance that you are a golfer. And therefore you are the unwitting victim of one of the greatest marketing swindles of modern times.

To illustrate my point I think I might try and conjure up how, perhaps, this little scheme may just have begun....

The old immaculately dressed man looked on forlornly as the workers filed out in long lines under the shrill background of the factory whistle. He felt tears prick at his eyes as he looked into their eyes. These were his people, his responsibility. How were they going to feed their families or pay their rent once the factory closed? To a man, working here was the only job they had ever had.

Eventually the last of them had passed through the old grand iron gates and he looked on as the watchman swung them shut with a great clang for the last time before walking on to break the news to his son and heir.

The old panelled boardroom was warm from the well stoked fire and he found his son waiting patiently.

"What's wrong?" questioned the older man as soon as he saw the look on his fathers face.

"It's over," came the croaked reply as he fell with exhaustion into the armchair nearest the fire.

"What do you mean?"

"The Bank has looked at our order book and decided to withdraw the overdraft. We are bankrupt."

"But that's impossible, you've banked with them for over forty years, how can they do that now? Things will pick up, Winter is around the corner and gloves sales always improve once the snow comes," pleaded the son.

"That's true, and yet the Bank claims our gloves are such high quality that they last too long, they don't come back for another pair."

"But surely there are always new people to sell to," countered the younger man.

"It is not me you need to convince," said the father. "They told me today that the overdraft must be paid off by 11am Monday morning or they will reclaim the building as per the agreement we have signed with them."

"But that is thousands of pounds, it's impossible. Did they offer no other options?"

"Only that we must either pay the sum or come up with a new business plan that would convince them that we can pay back the sum and quickly. I have racked my brains and lain awake at night these past weeks but to no avail. Son, I'm sorry. I had hoped to hand over to you a flourishing business, instead it seems I leave you nothing."

"But we have a whole two days to come up with a new idea." said the son with enthusiasm.

"If there was some hope, some new great idea, do you not think I wouldn't have come up with it and tried it already? You must not give yourself false hope," the old man whispered.

"I will not give in without a fight," vowed the young man. "Meet me back here on Monday morning and I will have the idea to save us!"

Monday morning found the old man still sitting in the same chair, his hair and clothes unkempt. As the carriage clock over the mantelpiece sounded the appointed hour the son burst through the door.

"Father, we are saved! I have found the answer."

The old man didn't raise a smile. "It is the Bank you must convince, what is your idea?"

"All Saturday I paced up and down my rooms to no avail. All night I stayed up. Finally by Sunday morning I was exhausted and decided to get some fresh air and went to walk on the heath. It was here that I came across some fellows playing golf."

"Huh," puffed the father. "Now there's a waste of a man's time if ever I saw one."

"But father, I got talking to them. There were dozens of them, all playing one group after another. They say that there are hundreds of gold courses appearing up and down the country. Thousands are taking to the game."

"And was it one of these time wasters that came up with your great idea?"

"In a way, yes. I sat down and watched each of them come through and found many complaining of blisters through the constant swing of the bats they use chaffing their palms and fingers."

"So you suggested they wear gloves?"

"Yes."

"I think you'll find the Bank will give you short shrift there. Once again they will claim they will buy gloves and never come back for more."

"Aha!" interrupted the son. "But this is the clever bit. Instead of using the good leather, the strong leather, we use the very thinnest, soft leather we can find."

"But that will be useless, it won't last five minutes!"

"Exactly, we will tell them that to improve the feel of the bat they need soft thin leather. That way they will need to come back for new gloves every few months."

"But that leather is useless with water, what if it rains?" Despite himself, the old man couldn't keep a hint of excitement from his voice.

"We sell them a different pair, made from treated leather to use in the rain."

The old man was standing up now. So let me get this right. We design gloves for golfers made from soft leather that means they need to replace them every few months and get another sale from them in case it rains?"

"Yes."

"Excellent! Of course the Bank will probably say that selling cheap gloves cannot repay the overdraft quickly enough."

"Who said anything about cheap? We charge normal price and say that this is the finest, premium leather designed to enhance their skill with the bat."

"Full price!" the old man was staring to skip around the room, pulling at his hair wildly. "It might work, by jove you may have pulled it off young man. If we charge full price then with the lower priced materials our profits will triple overnight! Not to mention our sales will quadruple if they come back every 3 months at best."

"There is one more thing father...."

"What?" said the old man breathlessly.

"The fellows I met seemed to think it would be impossible to play wearing a pair of gloves."

"Eh?" cried the company owner. "Then it was false hope, we are ruined after all?"

"Not quite, I said it was impossible to play wearing a pair of gloves. Instead we only sell them one."

"One glove!? What good is one glove? Our sales halve immediately."

"What we supply may halve, but what we charge stays the same."

"The same...! You're suggesting that we sell them one glove, made out of useless leather, that crumbles in the rain and needs replacing every three months all for the same price as normal pair of quality gloves?" By now he was standing on his desk.

"Precisely."

"Impossible," came back the old man. "Do you take these golfers for complete fools?"

No, not fools father, just enthusiastic. I am told golfers are obsessive and will spend hundreds of pounds on the sport just to improve. Our gloves will be a tiny part of their outlay."

“Son, you are a genius and have single handedly saved the company and the livelihood of all its workers. Come with me then to the Bank, and let’s put these dark days behind us.” He went to the drinks cabinet and poured them both a generous measure.

“To golf!” he toasted.

“To golf,” repeated the son. “And to joy.”

And the rest as they say is history.

Still feel quite so sharp?

©Phil Churchill 2011
www.philchurchill.co.uk