Scaling Back Is The New Black

By *Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO*

Like most of us, the recession has caused me to somewhat modify my behavior over the past 18 months. The funny thing about putting a big purchase or two on hold, I've found, is that the longer I wait to get it, the less I actually want it. Case in point: About a year ago, I began drooling over new car ads and decided I would trade in my dependable VW Jetta for something a bit flashier. Nothing like a bird's eye view of your 401K floating in the toilet to derail any thoughts of luxury. I decided that I could wait it out, continue to drive my Jetta, and look slightly less cool. But the longer I spent *not buying* a new car, the more time I had to reinforce the fact that it was something I really didn't have to have.

This leads me to another—perhaps more unsettling—thought: Is the frazzled economy an easy way to get out of making "status" type purchases? Suddenly, scaling back is the new black, and it wouldn't be America if we didn't turn it into some competition over who can save the most. We've become complicit in the drawing of our purse strings, and for every ad I see asking me to buy some new gadget or take a vacation, I also see a web tip advising me to cut my own hair or stop using toothpaste (bicarbonate of soda and salt… thanks, but I'll pay the Crest premium).

It's been a great excuse to streamline, but as things begin to level out, there's a new problem to face: The Spend Craze.

I feel as though my presence is being requested at a party that, frankly, I'm kind of glad I left. I am by no means a miser, but: As costs become less inflated and my wages stay the same, do I owe America some money?

This concept is slightly scary, considering there are a lot of bad habits I've felt pressured to break like brand-shopping and convenience purchases that I've barely noticed in their absence. I've also had some laughable points of self-awareness: If confronted with a blind taste test, can I tell the difference between the 30 dollar bottle of wine, and the 60 dollar bottle? Absolutely not. When the economic constraints loosen, do I gain anything from going back to the 60 dollar bottle? Not likely. So why this needling guilt?

I'm not sure what my point is here, or if I have gained any insight over this dilemma. I want to help America get back on track with my pocketbook, but I also don't want to dismiss all of the smart spending practices I've gained. I'm interested to see if saving stays in vogue, or if those with disposable income really do begin to dispose of it again. I'm not sure where I'll fall on the spectrum. Do you? Share your thoughts: anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [1].

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