

## Kenshoji

The *Economist* reports that the recession in Japan has produced a generation in their 20s and 30s called 'kenshoji'. They hate shopping, except on the internet and from thrift stores.

I empathise with the kenshoji. Thrift shops like Lidl have an air of mystery about them – you never know what bargain you're going to find. The best online traders welcome you with useful suggestions of things to buy and many will reward you with hefty discounts for customer loyalty. I just got a 12.5 per cent loyalty discount on a new bike.

Kenshoji don't like shopping centres. My most recent experience at one new centre may explain why. I felt so small because it was so big; the constant background "white noise" made me feel quite disorientated; and with the exception of the Apple Store, it was a completely de-personalised experience.

The Apple Store gave me reason for hope. Even though the shop was frenetic, staff members were visible and relaxed and seemed to have time and enthusiasm to help. I didn't have to queue to pay because the staff carried mobile pay points on them and even offered customers an emailed receipt. It was the kind of experience that makes it worth visiting a store because it was quick, courteous, and relaxed – plus I was made to feel valued.

The huge irony is that we live in an era when it's possible to feel more valued as a customer by a web retailer than by a shopping centre. This means that owners and managers have to think creatively about how they can deliver superior personal experience to their customers.

Simon Property Group is showing the way. It is rolling out a smart-phone application at its malls called "Shopkick," which uses a phone's positioning feature to give consumers a run-down of discounts and shopping deals once they walk through the doors of any participating store. Is this a pointer to the future – using technology to give the kind of personal service and loyalty bonus that will entice the kenshoji generation?

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