



Buy Superseded and Save last year's model can be better value

We've seen it happen - lines of people queuing, even camping outside stores on the eve of a sale. With inflation continually on the rise, you can't blame them for wanting to cash in, especially when, at some stage, they will have to buy these things anyway. Why pay top dollar when you can pick your time and score a bargain? And yet, the same shoppers will follow this dedicated pre-sale routine just to be the first to acquire the very latest tablet, smart-phone, 3D player, or whatever. If it's innovative, they must have it, there and then, no matter what the cost. Within six months, maybe sooner, their brand new, state-of-the-art purchase will be superseded by the next version. Because of this, the model they bought will have dropped in price considerably. Its capabilities haven't changed and despite time spent on the shelf, the original after-sale service and support still apply. It doesn't, of course, have as many bells and whistles as the latest, but it's just as shiny out of the box and will continue to do the job everyone else bought one for when it was the bee's knees. In fact, it may actually be better than the upgrade taking its place, a Mark II that might have been introduced prematurely and is riddled with glitches that haven't been fixed yet.

When it comes to mass-production, the odd item can be a real gem, but that level of excellence doesn't always flow through to the others in the range; and it often takes time for this to be realised. When it is, the lucky buyers will probably hang on to their purchase, whereas the majority who ended up with a lemon will be trying to unload their expensive liability. By then, news will have got around and sell-off prices will reflect the wisdom of "not touching that particular model with a forty-foot pole!" Conversely, certain years or models can become very desirable classics. I seem to recall an old movie about a gun - "Winchester '73", I believe it was called - and if anyone wanted the perfect lever-action rifle, this was the one to seek out. You probably have your own favourites - the '57 Chevy, Persian rugs, a specific brand of washing machine that has a good reputation - and you know about them because they have stood the test of time. I am not, however, suggesting you should wait forever before deciding which model to go for. By then, it could be a genuine antique and will likely cost more than when it was new. But if you jump in too fast to get the very latest, you could pay more than you need to. And you might wind up buying trouble.

Sometimes, brand names are a good guide, especially when a company is a new player in a particular market and is trying to build a reputation. The launch products being the forerunners have been carefully constructed and checked, manufactured from the best materials and are intended to be examples of the quality consumers can expect from that source. To boost initial sales, the first products in stores are likely to be priced to sell, and buyers taking a chance on a relative unknown can scoop up a genuine bargain which will hopefully be trouble-free for the duration of the warranty and longer. Then, getting in early can be a bonus, as long as warranty claims continue to be honoured and repairs are made efficiently. Unfortunately, the honeymoon can't last, not in an arena so competitive and profit-conscious. Eventually, the manufacturer needs to concentrate on making money rather than throwing it away on promotions. Cheaper components are used to cut costs. These may only be small and seem unlikely to make a difference to the overall price; but with mass-production, every nickel counts. By the time it sits on the showroom floor, a particular model of washing machine can be \$50 cheaper than a rival maker's equivalent, all thanks to fifty cents saved in the factory. And that tiny substitute part, which may be less durable and efficient than its predecessor, not only ends up in the cabinet of a front-loader in the store, but may be used to repair earlier models, one of which you could have bought! The practice widens - more sub-standard parts, poor-quality assembly, contracts awarded to cheaper repair shops resulting in shoddy work. Before long, sales drop and the company's reputation bombs out. If you own one of their products, all you can hope for is that they don't go bust, leaving you with a make and model that no-one can repair because the parts

are no longer available. These are a lot of words to make a negative statement, I know. In short - if the brand is new to you, watch and wait. You may miss out on what seems a bargain, but down the track, you'll probably be glad you did.

A company which has already established a good reputation in a particular field may consider diversifying into another. It could be that management sees potential there and believes it worth exploring. Sometimes this works and the new line of goods produced is of a similar quality to the originals which made them a household name. As before, the launch of the new range can benefit buyers taking advantage of promotional specials, presumably guaranteed by what has become a trusted icon. Then there are the not-so-good, even the complete disasters that have dissatisfied customers thinking they have been conned by the well-known brand name. I have been caught this way and am now very wary of any manufacturer stepping out of their area of apparent expertise. I won't turn my back on them completely, but I'll watch and wait until their products prove they are worth sinking my money into.

Heavy market pressure is not just on the new boys, but every player, established or not. To win your approval they must be constantly on their toes, offering the very latest innovations and upgrades. These may look terrific, streets better than last year's version, but can you trust them to be as good? They might be worth consideration if they are the second or third in a series. Cars are an excellent example of this, and how competition drives the market. A particular design that has been around for a few years is only still available because it has been very popular. The overall look hasn't changed much from the time it was first introduced, but thanks to subsequent upgrades, each new version is better than its predecessors. You'd think something this reliable would be available forever, but with other makers putting out their new designs, any manufacturer who doesn't follow suit will be left behind. So, this almost-perfect unit is overshadowed by a flashy new design that has the lines everyone is looking for - that's why you can't tell one brand from the other unless you get up close enough to see the badge. Is this same-same dazzler the one for you, or would you prefer to stick with last year's model that has proved itself? Maybe it isn't quite as modern-looking, but at least it has retained its individualism and a sense of style. It is probably better and, being the superseded model, it should be cheaper.

Electronics is one of those areas littered with traps for the unsuspecting buyer, but it can also be a bargain-hunter's paradise. Most of the goods are made in Asian countries at ridiculously low costs and competition between brands is ferocious, so shopping around is the way to go. Computers, of course, quickly depreciate in value because the next model with the latest features always seems to become available just after buying what was thought to be unsurpassed. Here's one instance where you never have to wait long to get the previous model cheaper. As long as it does what is required of it, why go for the "new", more expensive package which will also be out of date in less than a month? Entertainment units tend to follow similar trends, but they take it a step further by playing around with the actual formats. Once it was good enough to be able to get a picture, any kind of picture, on the old TV. Now there are different types of screens in a range of sizes. As for line-in accessories, standard DVD player/recorders are still available, but there are also Blu-ray and smart 3D modules. I wouldn't presume to say these are the latest - by the time this article goes on the website, who knows what will be in the stores? However, any item that is barely out-dated should be on sale at a special price and is worth consideration. Just bear in mind the earlier advice about names and reputations.

By pausing before you jump in, you can save a great deal of money and will have less regrets after the fact. Whenever you are in the market for something new, check around first to see what's available, at what cost, and how much the superseded model is in comparison. Try not to be sucked in by current, must-have advertising. Wait and see what happens to others who buy before you do. Preferably, go with what you already know to be reliable and long-lasting. Then, you can keep your extra cash in your pocket and your impulse buying to the cheaper stuff – like candy bars at the supermarket checkout!

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