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INTEROFFICE MEMO

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CC: Operations Committee

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SUBJ: TRACTORS AND COMPUTERS

I am in the market for a backhoe. It is not an important project and I am embarrassed to spend much time on it, but it is an interesting experience.

The other day I stopped at a Ford tractor place and went through their literature rack to get some background information on tractors. They had two kinds of literature. One is a colored brochure with beautiful pictures and glowing terms describing what their tractors would do and the other, black on yellow data sheets which are very plain and just filled with numbers.

They have four models which I think may cover my needs but they all say they are made by different product lines. They seem to compete with each other in who can make the most expensive, beautiful, color brochure and it appears they are more in competition with each other than with other tractor manufacturers. No way would they explain why one Ford tractor would have advantages over another.

Everything in the literature is positive and beautiful. I then tried to study the data sheets. These too seemed to be made by separate product lines even though their tractors were almost identical. They vary from two pages to eight pages and there is no consistency in the way in which the data is presented.

I thought one way of comparing would be to find out what each model weighed so that I could make a guess as to which one had more power and more value. One data sheet had no weights, the next had a tractor without a loader and without a backhoe, the next had a tractor and a loader and the fourth had a tractor, loader and a backhoe. There were all possible combinations and no way of comparing them.

One brochure brags about the wonderful feature of having a 3 point hitch. It goes into great technical detail of what the pin sizes and dimensions of the hitch are and how much power it has but nowhere does it ever describe what the advantages of a 3 point hitch are and what you sacrifice in order to get it. With all the beautiful color brochures and the glowing claims made for their tractors which are obviously aimed at the layman, the real questions can only be answered by an expert who happens to know what a 3 point hitch is.

I stopped by the Ford place while going between plants and felt guilty about getting involved with the salesman and so I didn't talk to anyone. I was afraid that once I did start talking I would get involved for a long time and I wasn't sure that the salesman would understand the difference between the models anyway. My guess is the salesman would, first of all, sell only the tractor models which he has had experience in selling and would not get involved or feel at ease with the tractor models which he did not have experience with. Then there is the other type of salesman, who I am sure is in this field as in all others, who once he got hold of you would spend most of the time telling about his experiences when he used to sell John Deere Tractors and avoid all technical issues involved in the present line which he is selling.

If I don't get tired of the whole idea of a backhoe after trying to figure out the pile of literature I have, I'll try talking to the salesman and see how I do. It takes a lot of nerve because I feel intimidated by my lack of knowledge about the equipment and also about the traditions of buying in this market. I don't know if you pay list price or whether you look for a 20% discount. I also have to build up my nerve because I am always embarrassed when they act surprised that I don't know how deep a ditch I want to dig and how heavy a load I want to lift, and I don't even know how high I want to lift the load.

Sometime I'd like to have you explain whether there is a parallel at Digital with this or not.

dag