

The sweet taste of uncertainty: Winners enjoy waiting to discover what they've won

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You've just won a prize. Would you like to find out what it is right away, or wait until later? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* says most people are happier waiting.

People who know they've won a prize enjoy the anticipation of wondering what they will win, especially if they have clues about what it might be, explain authors Yih Hwai Lee (National University of Singapore) and Cheng Qiu (University of Hong Kong). Prize winners spend time imagining using the potential prizes, and such "virtual consumption" prolongs positive feelings, making them receptive to marketing messages.

The authors conducted two studies where participants played and won simulated lucky-draw games. Some learned what their prizes were immediately; others were told they had won something from a pool of prizes. "We find that consumers will be more delighted after winning a lucky draw when they do not know immediately the exact prize they will receive than when they do," the authors write.

Participants who got clues about the nature of the possible prizes (such as knowing it was an electronic product) responded even more favorably. They also favored prizes that were capable of eliciting mental imagery, like sensory-stimulating products such as chocolates or aromatherapy candles. (Apparently, functional items like cutlery and digital clocks failed to stimulate.)

"Consumers in happier moods have been found to react more favorably to marketing information and activities," write the authors. "Our research suggests that by incorporating positive uncertainty into the design of marketing activities (for example, in promotional events), marketers may not only make consumers happier, but also make them potentially more receptive toward subsequent marketing efforts."

Source: University of Chicago Press Journals

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