

# Buying a new product: When is it better to ask a novice rather than an expert?

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If you're considering a purchase, you might want to avoid asking an expert's advice. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, experts have a hard time recalling product features—especially if they feel they need to explain their logic.

"People tend to assume that knowledge is always a good thing, but our research suggests that in some cases this may not be true," write authors Ravi Mehta (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign), JoAndrea Hoegg (University of British Columbia), and Amitav Chakravarti (New York University).

The researchers evaluated "expert fallibility" in recalling product features and evaluating products. "Our research shows that when the features are not directly comparable, consumer experts accidentally 'fill in' missing information about the products with information from their prior knowledge," the authors explain.

Even though some of those false recalls are reasonable assumptions, some of them are not. Novices do not have such prior knowledge, so they can't confuse actual recall with the other information stored in their memories.

In four studies, the authors found that experts had a harder time than novices in accurately remembering features of videogame consoles; as a result, the quality of their product judgments was reduced. The authors believe that this is due in part to the experts' sense of accountability and

responsibility for reporting comparisons to others.

"We showed that experts naturally focus on the steps by which they reached their decision, presumably because they feel they need to explain how they determined which brand was better," the authors write. "If [experts](#) are told that all that matters is the outcome and that they will not be asked about the steps they took to reach it, their false recalls are reduced and their decision quality improves.

"When seeking advice from a consumer expert we suggest that it's a good idea to ask them what you should do, but just don't ask them why you should do it," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Ravi Mehta, JoAndrea Hoegg, and Amitav Chakravarti. "Knowing Too Much: Expertise Induced False Recall Effects in Product Comparison. *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2011. [ejcr.org](http://ejcr.org)

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