

Can you give supermarkets a run for their money now?

21st Century shopping is complicated and a far cry from the simple tasks remembered by **DICK LUMSDEN**

Back in the day, shopping was a fairly straightforward and practical exercise. Local communities were served by a few specialist shops within walking distance of home, and there was precious little in the way of competition.

At the end of the 1950s only around 5% of homes in the UK had a fridge, and when I was a lad in short trousers we had a cupboard against an outside wall which doubled as a larder where meat, milk, eggs or butter stayed cool, but were eaten quickly and replaced with frequent trips to the shops.

Or the shops would come to us. On a Friday we had the "fish man" who stopped his white van outside our house and sold fresh fish out of the back doors. We also had the "lemonade man", the "baker" and the "butcher" who all did their rounds at various times in the week.

Simple, straightforward and practical. If only things were that simple nowadays.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not looking back through rose-tinted spectacles and wishing things could be like they were then (how could I survive with a larder now when I clearly need a fridge for food, a fridge for wine and a fridge for beer)? But when did shopping become so complicated?

I sometimes think Mrs Lumsden is talking to me in a foreign language when she flourishes a handful of vouchers and tries to decide whether to go to Tesco to get £7 off £50, or Sainsbury's to get £4 off £40 – or Waitrose because she can get a free coffee.

One of our friends this week did a 20-mile round trip to visit Waitrose, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Aldi and back to Waitrose again to take advantage of the deals in her purse.

If it goes on like this, I can see shopping becoming an event at the 2024 Olympics with medals for those who can get everything on their list for the lowest price in the quickest time, ticking off the most number of shops.

Talking of shopping lists though, there is a phenomenon which has gone full circle in only



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■ Supermarkets have many sophisticated techniques to monitor the activities of shoppers.

Photo: PA

minutes it took to walk to the shops and back.

But with the advent of self-service supermarkets and fridges, people began to shop less often and buy more at a time. Being human, we needed to write down on a list the things we needed to get on each visit.

As supermarkets became more sophisticated and more cleverly laid out, so too did our lists. Shopping became an event.

For the last few decades, we have honed our shopping skills, ticking off the items as we toured the aisles (sneaking in treats that were not on the list). But now, it appears, the "traditional" family shopping list is on the way out.

In a survey released by The Co-op last week, it seems young people, who clearly lack the mental capacity to plan a week's worth of meals in advance, are shopping more often for fewer items at a time, so no need for a

make their money?

The answer lies in sophisticated marketing, high tech surveillance and laying highly successful traps that would make Bear Grylls proud.

Loyalty cards, bonus points, money-off vouchers, petrol discounts, doubling up, price matching, three for two, six for five, dine in for a tanner are all part of the game. Keeping ahead of the supermarkets requires planning. Surely it is only a matter of time before the National Curriculum offers a GCSE in shopping.

Many of the supermarkets now have high tech camera surveillance throughout their stores. This is not just to deter shoplifters. They are using cameras to watch how we go round. Where we stop, how long for, what we look at and how we interact with the displays. By filming thousands and thousands

military precision. Key items are placed at multiple places in the store – including right at the end, by the till when we suddenly realise we should have bought a pack of batteries, a bag of sweets or a pack of tissues.

As a marketing professional I am proud of the way the industry is honing its skills to sell us more and more. But as a shopper, I'm embarrassed to say that I just can't keep pace with rules of the game.

I'll always end up paying more than I should because I have forgotten to use the right card, or failed to produce the right voucher. I fall for the traps, I impulse buy and throw things in the basket that were never on the list. I am, in short, the ideal customer for them.

But as long as there is wine and beer in the fridge I don't care.

■ Dick Lumsden is managing