

# HAIRCUTS AND THE ART OF UPSELLING

by George Ding

For me, getting a haircut is a special kind of hell. First there's the irony of paying someone to make you look worse. Second, since you have to take your glasses off and I'm essentially blind without them, I can't read or play with my phone - so I just kind of sit there and think about all the things I'd rather be doing than getting a haircut.

But most importantly, I can't stand the constant whedling from stylists to get more expensive procedures when all I want is a simple haircut.

So how fortunate it was that I found a stylist I liked at the salon across the street who didn't try to upsell me until the third date. Sure, Jacky eventually talked me into buying a membership card and getting a disastrous perm that made me look like an Asian Lionel Richie - but no one's perfect.

Then one day, Jacky disappeared. The local salon closed for renovations and when it reopened it had been rechristened "Fashion Wharf"

I wandered in there and asked for Jacky. The receptionist was circumspect.

"Jacky isn't here," she said.

"When will he be here? I can come back tomorrow."

Jacky was gone. Where, I'd never know. In his place was a young upstart: No. 805. That's right, Fashion Wharf stylists were known only by their employee number.

805 moved fast, shearing off chunks of hair willy-nilly. He also tried to upsell me immediately.

"Have you thought about a perm?" he asked.

I told him I had suffered one before and didn't want to repeat the experience. "We have really skilled specialists here. It won't be like last time."

I refused again. 805 looked dejected. He flicked my hair around with a finger and said, "If you don't get a perm, there's nothing I can do to make your hair look good."

805, the Pontius Pilate of stylists, couldn't wait to absolve himself of responsibility. He made a few more snips and sent me on my way. It turned out that the haircut was only 24 *kuai*, even cheaper than before.

As I left, 805 gave me his card.

"Ask for me next time," he said.

It seemed like the new management had a new business strategy - charge less for the haircut and make money by upselling people on perms and hair care products and manicures.

It was months before I went back. The reason I didn't go somewhere else was because I still had money on the membership card I had bought so Jacky could get a commission.

The next time, I got No. 106. The upselling started almost before my butt hit the chair.

"What do you think? Let's perm this."

I told him no, and kept telling him no, as the haircut wore on. I could tell 106 was fuming with each rejection because his entreaties became more and more insulting.

"I really think you should consider getting a perm."

"To be honest, your hair looks terrible and it's going to keep looking terrible until you perm it."

I declined until the end. 106 sighed as he finished up and let me go, though I know his conscience was eating at him for letting someone who looked as awful as I leave Fashion Wharf.

The cashiers glared at me as I paid 24 *yuan* and rebuffed their pitches to charge my membership card with 10,000 *kuai*.

As I walked back to my apartment, I thought about what kind of a place would institute such a transparent scheme for making money, and then make the customer feel bad for not taking the bait. It would be like IKEA deriding people who only go there for the 1 *kuai* ice cream cones.

After that experience with 106, I decided I would never go back to Fashion Wharf, even though it's so painfully convenient - not out of righteousness or moral indignation, but simply because I don't think my self-esteem could take it.

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