New users: to win one has to convince
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In order to modify the purchasing or information search habits of users one has to offer them benefits that overwhelmingly compensate the costs of change. Not only does one have to better prices but one also has to offer an experience so satisfying that it is unthinkable to return to the former situation. This is what the Anglo-Saxons call 'convenience', which includes the concepts of being comfortable and indispensable. It is even more necessary when one studies the end user segment that is not familiar with the product or service that is being sold. This type of new users was attracted (at first) to the now questioned AOL Avant and Viaplus projects.

AOL, SCH, Planeta and Melià Viajes, the partners in the company, tried to connect to the Internet a large group of people who had never been online and who were reluctant to use PCs. They tried to do so through a 'silly' terminal rented to those new inexperienced users. The idea was not altogether a bad one: more than 75% of the Spanish population had not yet connected to the Internet and the penetration of computers in homes was one of the lowest in Europe. Besides, this business model should have made the AOL Avant platform become the main surfing standard of end users. As a retailer on the Net, Viaplus tried, from the outset, to change the way users bought things. Just like other B2C electronic commercial initiatives their formula sacrificed the possibility of touching the object, comparing it and commenting it with the neighbour for the convenience of buying it from one's home.

However, Altadis and Cortefiel's virtual shop initially made some mistakes (later corrected) like trying to get their customers to shop electronically through a totem installed at the point of sale or that they had to pick up their shopping from a tobacconist's. These two initiatives seem to have given more importance to the convenience of the companies themselves (imposing a technological standard, exploiting a distribution network) than to satisfying the needs of their users. Did AOL Avant consider whether it was really worthwhile to rule out the benefits of a personal computer when their prices were falling dramatically? Did there really exist a demand for a joint family portal if the consumption and interests of the members of the family were going to be different?

In the case of Viaplus at its initial stage, what benefit did the users get from shopping online if they had to go to a shop to pick up their goods? The arguments used to respond to these questions were usually based on cheaper prices, but they forgot that there were intangible costs that the user was simply not prepared to accept. What can be seen now that the AOL Avant and Viaplus projects are languishing, awaiting the decision of their shareholders to wind them up or sell them off is that when adopting innovations cost is not everything. In technology in order to win one must convince.