

Whole Foods Magazine
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LET'S GET PHYSICAL

BY JAY JACOBOWITZ

“Dr. Drew” Pinsky, the board-certified internist and celebrity doc, has a new app called “Heal.” You can use it on your computer, tablet or phone to book an appointment with a medical doctor from an independent local practice to come to your home or office within a two-hour window of your choosing between 8am and 8pm, seven days a week, 365 days a year. In other words, house calls.

Because the doctor is seeing you at home, they can review your diet by peeking in your pantry, check the meds you’re taking, and understand your habits, leading to a more-complete picture of your life, better care and better health outcomes. Dr. Drew believes deeply that it is only with the physical proximity of two human beings that real healing occurs, with one receiving the other. This cannot occur online.

A frictionless shopping experience?

Billions of dollars have been spent developing digital technologies to make shopping faster and more convenient. Turns out, not everyone wants a “frictionless” shopping experience. Restaurants especially have embraced online-ordering apps for pickup to help customers avoid waiting in line. But for some, waiting on line to pick up their food functions as an important opportunity for social contact.

According to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, “Some line lovers say technology gets in the way of the personal touch.” The article recounts one fellow that puts his phone down so he can line up the old fashioned way at his local coffee shop because he likes when the baristas remember his name and order; a charming quality of smaller cities and towns. “You like the feeling of someone who knows you,” he says, “It’s just that sense of community.”

One customer who frequents a local natural foods café told the owner that standing in line and getting into a conversation with someone was why she comes to the store. Another says, “It’s my break...my time to just kind of decompress, to not be on the phone.” And a partner in a Silicon Valley venture capital firm says he has avoided using mobile apps to order. Instead, especially while traveling, he goes out and decides in the moment what to eat. “When I actually stand in line for something, it’s for the experience,” he says. He typically uses an ordering app for deliveries.

Others line lovers simply prefer to pay with cash. And some just want to make sure their iced double maple latte comes out exactly as they want it. Manners explains one man’s motivation, who, even though he’s ordered ahead, gets in line to avoid seeming rude to less tech-savvy fellow customers.

A non-interaction

I was recently in a new Whole Foods Market in New Jersey for half an hour walking the aisles. No employee approached me. Perhaps it was the particular store, but my guess is management lets the product selection (massive and fresh) and the place (gorgeous and spacious) carry the company’s value proposition. People—employees—are a less important part of the equation.

Yes, of course, the masses will continue to embrace technology to simplify their lives. But that won’t quench the need for real human contact, something at which you—the independent natural products retailer, intimately involved in the art of healing—should excel. **JJ**