THE TICKER

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THE BATTLE FOR VIRTUAL SUPREMACY

In the war for customers, China's largest e-commerce players—Alibaba and JD.com—are taking their battle for dominance virtual.

Alibaba struck the first blow when it previewed Buy+ in July, its first virtual reality (VR) store, which will allow users to select clothing, accessories and other items via a 360-degree panoramic viewer and a robotic assistant. GnomeMagic Lab, an arm of Alibaba, has begun the process of creating models of some of the retailer's nearly 1 billion items for sale on its Taobao website. The company also hopes to develop tools to allow its merchants and brands to create their own virtual reality shops.

"VR technology will help customers have a vivid experience," Zhao Haiping, an engineer at GnomeMagic Lab, told AllChinaTech. "In the near future, customers could be experiencing shopping on Fifth Avenue in New York while sitting at home."

Not to be outdone, Alibaba's archrival JD.com announced plans late in 2016 to build VR and augmented reality (AR) access points on its website. According to *China Daily,* for example, the company will launch an AR home decoration product that will allow customers to view a couch in various positions in their homes or a paint color on their walls.

"We don't want to miss the future development of VR and AR technologies," Long Yu, chief human resources officer at JD.com, told *China Daily*. "They could provide better shopping experiences and bring convenience to our lives. At the same time, innovative technologies can drive the development of JD's future business."

By seeking to gain an edge in this emerging marketplace, Alibaba and JD.com are not only enhancing customer experience, they are also looking to tap into a VR and AR industry that Goldman Sachs estimates could reach $110 billion by 2025.

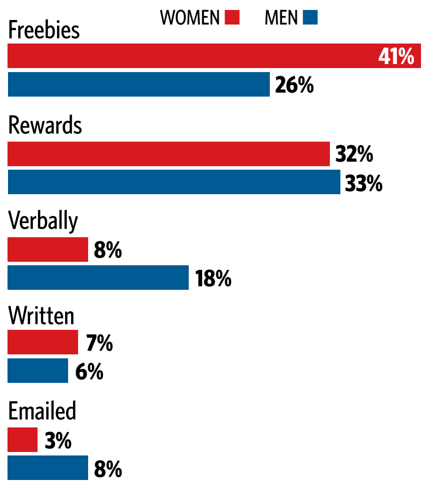
GIVING THANKS

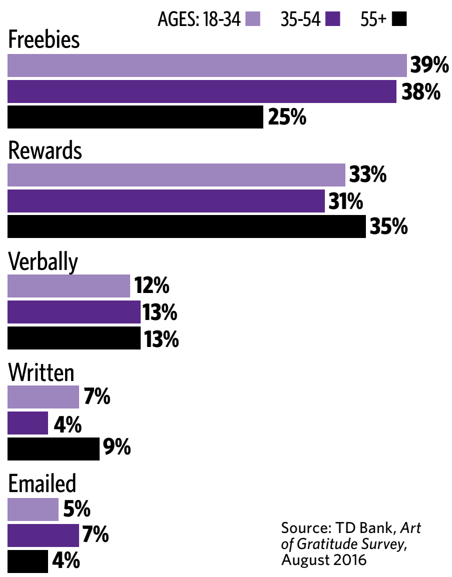
When was the last time your organization showed a little gratitude to customers—beyond a generic email or thank-you note?

According to a recent survey by TD Bank, more than 3 out of 4 consumers (77 percent) like when brands demonstrate their appreciation. But they want more than lip service.

Among the more than 1,000 U.S. consumers who responded, 67 percent prefer to be thanked by organizations via freebies and rewards programs, while only 25 percent appreciate verbal, written or emailed signs of gratitude.

Here is a breakdown of how different consumer groups prefer organizations show their thanks:





Source: TD Bank, *Art of Gratitude Survey*, August 2016