

Unfinished business drives us crazy

How behavioural economics and 'being human' affects your business.

By Aki Kalliatakis

It's a familiar feeling. You're watching a movie or a series on TV. You are tired and way past bedtime, but ... you just can't seem to quit. The talented writer creates a series of awe-inspiring cliff hangers that keep you hooked in, and then you simply have to watch some more.

Here's another example: What happens when you are driving down the road and you see some traffic lights in the distance? If you are like most of us – particularly if you are a man – you probably accelerate to make sure that you make it before it goes red. Is it the cleverest thing to do? Of course not in fact it is really very risky behaviour.



Zhenya Bluma Zeigarnik

Andrey Zeigarnik, www.flickr.com/photos/

Why do we do this? It's called the Zeigarnik Effect and goes something like this ...

“ People don't like the tension created by incomplete tasks. That's why we remember them better or take action to complete them. ”



<https://stockcake.com/i/neon-sneakers-jumping>

If I come into your store with a list, and I don't get everything on my list (inevitably), it leaves me with a feeling of dissatisfaction). Of course, rationally, logically, I know it's impossible to have everything in stock but, you see, I'm neither rational nor logical.

Here's a recent example: As I get older, comfortable (boring) shoes are far more important than a fashion statement, so I went to buy a famous brand of expensive soft shoes at the branded store. They didn't have what I was looking for, but the staff response was at best, indifferent. Slightly irritated, I asked if they could look on the computer, and it was as if I'd suggested they plan an expedition to climb Kilimanjaro. The final answer? No, we can't help.

By a pure stroke of luck, I happened to pop into a large hyper store of a grocery chain that sells, not only groceries, but also many other products like lawnmowers, electronics and apparel. I saw a really cheap version of the shoes I was looking for, but made in South Africa – an added bonus. They were literally 15% of the price of the branded shoes, so I bought two pairs!

On the other hand, what if you make it easy for me to discuss my dilemma of the missing items with you, and then have a system to respond to that through delivery to my home or office, or a simple phone call or text message to let me know when it's available. I can tell you without any hesitation that the businesses that do this have my greatest support. My pharmacist who runs out of my medicine gets delivery from the supplier the same day, and then by 17h00 the motorbike rider delivers.



NEW TO THIS YEAR'S SHOW THEME DAYS

DAY 1 New Product & Innovation
in Action

DAY 2 Installer Appreciation
Day

DAY 3 Women in
Safety & Security

REGISTER
ONLINE
FOR FREE
ENTRY

One venue.
Five shows. Smarter,
safer, more resilient
operations start here.

South Africa's leading platform for security,
occupational health and safety, facilities management,
fire protection, and energy resilience returns in 2026.

What's on the show floor?

- Five free-to-attend seminar theatres across the shows
- Dedicated drone demonstration zone
- Live K9 demonstrations
- Premier Visitor Lounge
- SAIDSA Techman Competition
- OSPA Awards
- RE+ South Africa Paid for Conference

Why attend?

- **Source and compare** solutions across five critical disciplines
- **Experience** live demos, new product launches, and free seminar theatres
- **Connect** with decision-makers, specialists, and solution providers

SECUREX
SOUTH AFRICA | 2026



A-OSHEXPO
SOUTH AFRICA | 2026



FACILITIES
management expo
SOUTH AFRICA | 2026



FIREXPO
SOUTH AFRICA | 2026



Now Launching

RE+ SOUTH AFRICA
Premium Paid Industry Conference



2-4 JUNE
2026



GALLAGHER CONVENTION
CENTRE | JOHANNESBURG



SCAN TO REGISTER FOR
FREE ENTRY

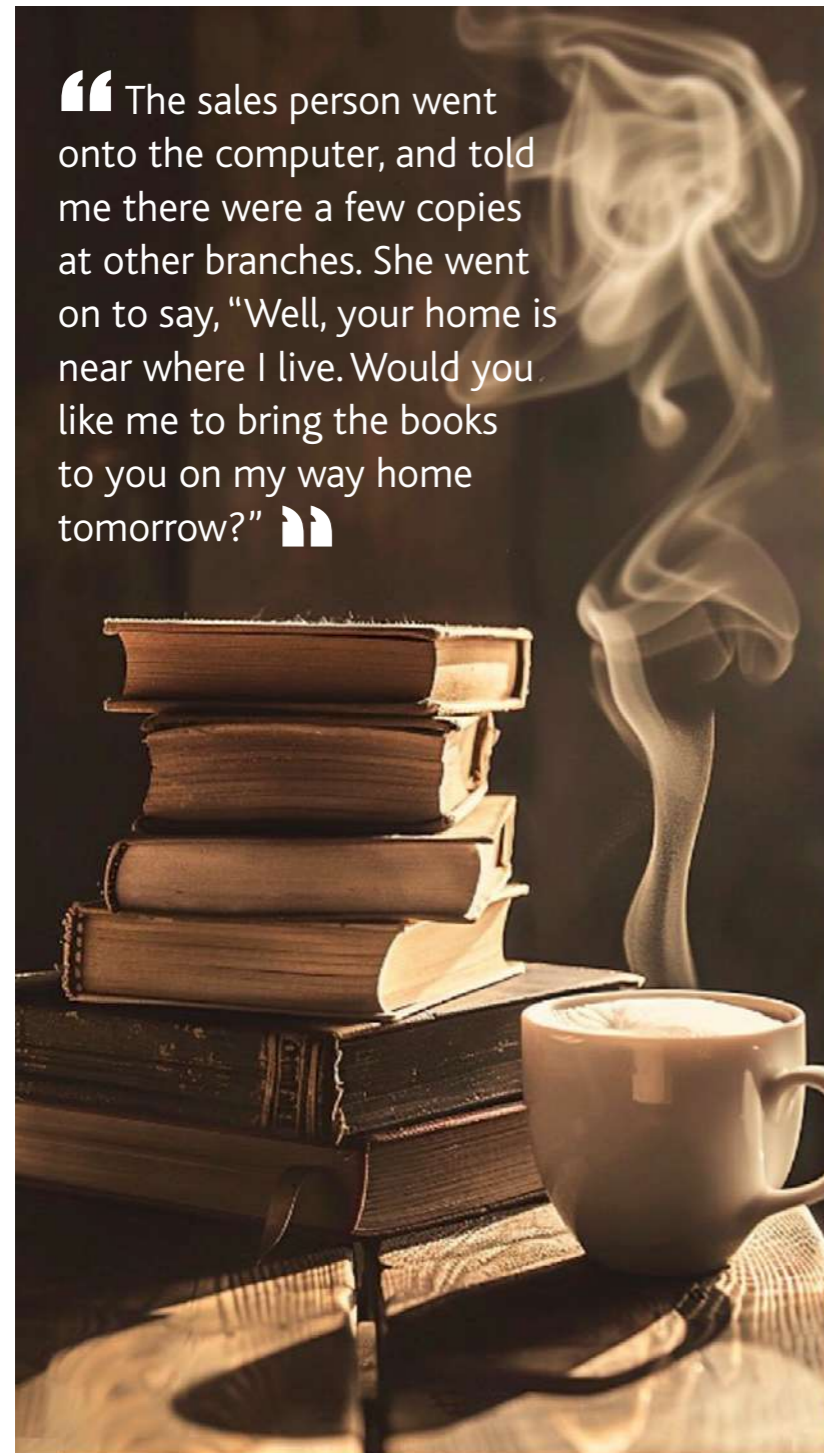
9am – 4pm daily

BROUGHT TO YOU BY **MONTGOMERY GROUP**
AFRICA

www.securex.co.za | www.aosh.co.za | www.fmexpo.co.za | www.fireexpo.co.za | www.re-plus.com



The place where I occasionally buy clothes and apparel sometimes doesn't have my size, but they phone around to the other branches, see who has it in stock, and then get my details to deliver it to me.



“The sales person went onto the computer, and told me there were a few copies at other branches. She went on to say, “Well, your home is near where I live. Would you like me to bring the books to you on my way home tomorrow?””

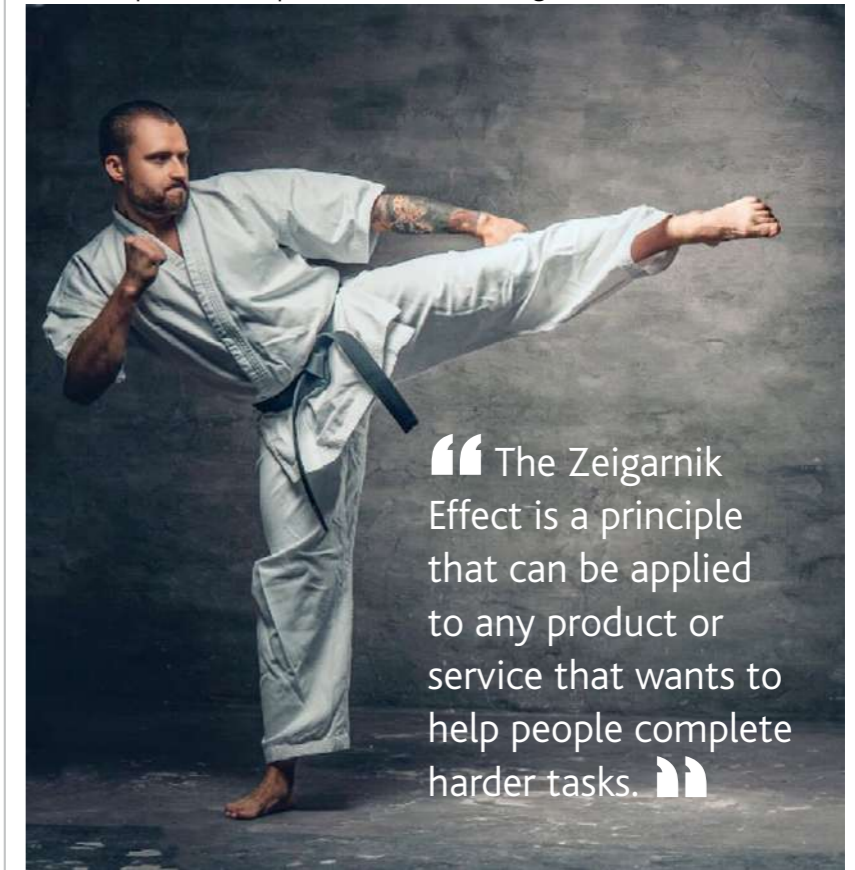
<https://stockcake.com/i/books-and-coffee>

A final example: I love books, and the feel and smell of books. Although my Kindle and Amazon are usually my go-to for buying business books, fiction simply has to be on paper to be enjoyed, so I popped into my favourite bookseller, but they didn't have what I was looking for. Without prompting, the sales person went onto the computer, told me there were a few copies at other branches, but then offered me something I've never experienced before.

“Where do you live and work?” she asked. I told her, and she said, “Well, your home is near where I live. Would you like me to bring it to you on my way home tomorrow?” I got such a surprise I nearly had a heart attack. There and then I vowed to write the head office a letter – which they loved because more often than not they get complaints – and I promised myself I would support them forever.

But here is where it gets better for you. All the previous examples I mentioned were in response to your customers' needs, but the Zeigarnik Effect is a principle that can be applied to any product or service that wants to help people complete harder tasks. It's used by social media, for example, when your profile is incomplete. The algorithm tells you that there are some gaps or empty spaces, and you need little encouragement to complete your professional profile. On LinkedIn, you are even ranked by your completeness with the lowest rank being 'Beginner', and then you move to 'Intermediate' by completing two simple steps. You know exactly what you need to do next to reach completion.

[/www.freepik.com/free-photo/bearded-karate-fighter](http://www.freepik.com/free-photo/bearded-karate-fighter)



“The Zeigarnik Effect is a principle that can be applied to any product or service that wants to help people complete harder tasks.”

We see it in the martial arts too: you begin as a white belt and then progress every three months or so to the next level until eventually you become a black belt. Even then it doesn't end, because the first level black belt, or 'Sho-Dan', is followed by 'Ni-Dan' (2nd level), then 'San-Dan' and so on.

I've also noticed that this technique is very successfully used by some online retailers like Amazon, for example, at the checkout point. Many don't use this technique, and the cart abandonment rates are generally much higher than their rivals. (As a minor negative, you probably find that you get caught up going down multiple rabbit holes in your research to find the perfect product for you, and hours later you may finally complete your transaction!)



Upgrade Your Labels Upgrade Your Shelf Presence



Labels That Make Your Product Sell

- Consistent colour & quality • Custom sizes & materials • Variable data
- High-quality digital & UV printing • Fast turnaround times • Short runs made affordable

www.3js.co.za

quote@3js.co.za

010 157 3028

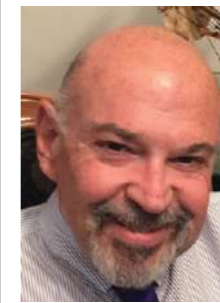




But with a few isolated exceptions, bricks-and-mortar retailers have not been very successful at using this effect. While the 'cart abandonment' rates in your store are probably not nearly as high as those online, that is probably not because your customers want completion, but more because of their sunk costs. They are time hostages, and to abandon their transaction right now means they have wasted a whole lot of their time and energy – and you can be sure that they leave your business resentful about that.

The biggest weakness? I would suggest that it is because the final step, the long and complicated checkout process, is the area where most improvement can occur. Where is the finish line in the store? How many steps to complete the transaction? How long will it take? Sure, they can watch and maybe even time the queue's progress, but there is never real certainty or guarantee, is there?

And therein lies your opportunity. **SR**



Aki Kalliatakis is the managing partner of The Leadership LaunchPad, a company dedicated to helping clients become more customer driven. He can be contacted at +27 (0) 83 379 3466, or via the website at www.leadershiplaunchpad.co.za

BIN SALES AND PALLET SALES

Contact: Johan or Janine
salesteam@masterjack.co.za



MASTER JACK
 Lifting Equipment • Pallets • Bins
 Since 1989

PALLET JACK SALES

Contact: Brendan
internalsales@masterjack.co.za
www.MASTERJACK.co.za

Wheelie Bin-120L, 240L, 360L



Mobile Bin-660L & 1100L



Pallet Bin – Solid or Perforated



- 500kg or 1000kg
 - Lids, Castors,
 And Outlet Valves
 are optional extras

Pallet Jacks

- 2000 to 5000kg
- 1200 x 685mm
- 1500 x 685mm
- 1800 x 685mm



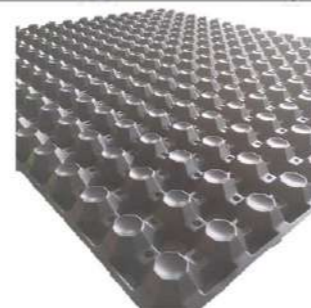
Semi-Electric Stacker 1500kg

- Lifts up to 2500mm-3500mm
- Forkover or Wide Straddle
- Electric Lift
- Manual Push/Pull



Pharmaceutical Hygienic Pallet

1200mm x 1000mm x 150mm



Freezer Spacers

1219mm x 1016mm x 35mm



Stronger Racking. Smarter Stores.

Pallet racking, gondolas, and in-rack shelving. We manufacture and install complete storage systems.

- Heavy-duty & light-duty racking
- High load capacities engineered for safety
- 60+ years of experience across Africa

[REQUEST A QUOTE](#)

 sales@storequip.co.za

 **011 503 1551**