

Stop the supermarket monsters

Level: Intermediate–advanced

Time: 90 minutes +

Summary: This lesson is about supermarket chains and consumer habits. In this lesson, students:

1. study a text about 'monster' supermarkets and their waning fortunes;
2. unscramble useful expressions from the article;
3. discuss supermarkets and their own shopping habits;
4. explore the websites of two supermarkets and present their findings.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; one copy of the vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Note: This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students based on a shortened version of the original article published in *Business Spotlight* issue 3/2015.

Addendum: At the end of April 2015, Tesco reported that it had made a £6.4 billion loss, the biggest ever recorded on the UK high street. To learn more about this story and to watch a short statement by Tesco's chief executive, follow the link below.

www.theguardian.com/business/2015/apr/22/tesco-suffers-record-64bn-loss

The following link provides a timeline of Tesco's rise and fall.

www.theguardian.com/business/2014/dec/09/tesco-timeline-the-retail-giants-rise-and-fall

Warmer

This task introduces the topic of supermarket chains and allows the teacher to find out what existing knowledge the students have of the topic. The task can be done in pairs or threes, and then the answers shared with the rest

of the class and written up on the board.

Key (possible answers):

- a. Tesco; Walmart; Wellcome; Carrefour; Aldi
- b. online; local, independent shops (corner shops, butcher's, greengrocer's, etc)

Key words

Students read the definitions and find the key words in the article. Then, they should read the article to see how they are used in context.

Key:

1. looming
2. high streets
3. scale
4. retailer
5. thrown
6. wasting
7. discounters
8. market share
9. sustainability
10. integrity

Understanding the article

Students choose the best answer to each question according to information in the article.

Key:

1. c; 2. b; 3. c; 4. b; 5. a; 6. a

Expressions

Students do tasks relating to expressions from the unit and use at least three of them in sentences of their own.

Key:

a. and b.

1. crush the life from (kill; destroy)
2. a cause for celebration (a reason to be happy)
3. fall out of love with (stop loving/using)

c. and d.

1. big weekly shop (going to a large supermarket and buying everything you need for the week)
2. get the message (understand what someone is trying to tell you, even if they do not say it directly)

Stop the supermarket monsters

3. *stock fewer lines (have fewer sets of products available to buy in the shop)*

4. *economies of scale (reductions in the cost of making and selling products that are made possible because a business is very large)*

5. *price wars (when businesses compete to attract customers by making their prices lower)*

e.

Students' own answers.

Discussion

The questions allow students to discuss their own

Teaching and learning strategy: Helping less confident students to join in class discussions

Class discussion is something most students like and it offers valuable speaking practice. However, a recurring challenge for teachers is making sure that a few confident students do not dominate the discussions and that less confident students also get a chance to practise their English.

- One way of increasing the confidence of less outspoken students and encouraging them to join in is to give the class adequate time beforehand to read through the discussion questions and make notes. During the discussion, you can then actively seek out the opinions of the less-confident students, safe in the knowledge that they will have prepared something to say.
- Also, make sure you sometimes break the class up into smaller groups – someone who is hesitant about speaking up in front of the entire class may feel more comfortable speaking to just a few of their classmates.
- Think before you correct a less confident student before the whole class – this will only serve to embarrass them, making it less likely that they will contribute in future. A better way is to make notes of errors made by all students and have a feedback session at the end, not mentioning who made each error.
- Consider, too, teaching students phrases that encourage others to speak – for example, *Do you*

agree? What do you think? You don't look convinced – what's your take on this? Let's hear what ... has to say. That way, the more confident students can entice others to make a contribution rather than just dominating the discussion themselves.

shopping habits and views.

Webquest and presentation

In pairs or small groups, students choose two supermarkets, research their English-language websites with the help of the questions, and then present their findings. This could be set as a homework task.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all of the new and useful vocabulary they have learnt during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

From retail giants to digital giants, this Business Spotlight lesson asks whether they should be broken up.

www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/should-digital-giants-be-broken-up/554277.article

Stop the supermarket monsters

1 Warmer

a. Name four supermarkets.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

b. Do you visit large supermarkets more or less often than you did five years ago? Where else do you do your shopping?

Stop the supermarket monsters

by Elisabeth Ribbans



By changing their buying habits, consumers are able to reduce the power of the giant supermarkets. But, in order not to create a new monster, we must not forget the importance of sustainability, argues Elisabeth Ribbans.

the out-of-town store. They are buying more products online and combining this with more frequent visits to smaller, local stores. Even Walmart has got the message and is moving back into town with its Walmart Express, at an average size of just 1,100 square metres.

But there is another factor: after years of recession, shoppers are going where prices are low. In the UK and Ireland, German discounters Aldi and Lidl have rapidly increased market share. Figures from analyst Kantar Worldpanel in January 2015 showed that half of all British households had shopped at Aldi or Lidl in the last 12 weeks of 2014.

Aldi and Lidl stock fewer lines and focus on own brands, allowing them to offer even lower prices. According to a report in *The Economist*, a discounter will typically stock 2,000 brands, compared with 40,000 at a large, conventional supermarket.

Now, Tesco has announced it will also simplify, seeking economies of scale by offering fewer brands on more shelf space. But that doesn't sound like more choice for consumers. And the danger of price wars is that, as retailers constantly look to reduce costs, "cheap" will cost us the sustainability and integrity of farming and the food industry. Ultimately, that is a bad deal. Consumer power must see beyond today or we really will create a monster.

Elisabeth Ribbans is a British journalist and editorial consultant. She is also a former managing editor of *The Guardian* newspaper in London.

1 Walmart, Tesco and Carrefour: such giant multinational supermarket chains always make me think of King Kong, another giant. Looming over towns, crushing the life from our high streets and growing increasingly inhuman in scale – it's hard not to see them as powerful, aggressive monsters.

2 So, at the start of 2015, when Tesco, the UK's largest and the world's second-largest retailer, announced cuts that included giving up its plans for 49 new stores in Britain, I pictured a wounded gorilla: a beast on the defensive.

3 The loss of jobs is no cause for celebration. But what might be cause for applause is the sign that seemingly unstoppable big companies can be thrown by the little people. Here's how: Tesco may not be entirely typical – it has internal problems, such as its recent accounting scandal – but the main pressure it shares with other large retailers across the world is that consumer habits are changing.

4 According to analysts, people are buying less and wasting less, and they have fallen out of love with the "big weekly shop" at

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Stop the supermarket monsters

2 Key words

Read the definitions and find the key words in the article. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. appearing as a large shape that is not clear, usually in a threatening way (para 1)
2. the main streets in a town or city, with a lot of businesses along them (para 1 – two words)
3. the size of something, especially when it is big (para 1)
4. a person or company that sells goods directly to the public for their own use (para 2)
5. surprised or confused because you did not expect something (para 3)
6. failing to use something in an effective way (para 4)
7. stores that sell products at prices lower than the typical market value (para 5)
8. the percentage of the total amount of sales of a particular product or field of business that a company has (para 5 – two words)
9. methods that do not completely use up or destroy natural resources (para 7)
10. the quality of always behaving according to the moral principles that you believe in so that people respect and trust you (para 7)

3 Understanding the article

Choose the best answer according to the article.

1. What does Ribbons describe as *looming*, *crushing*, *powerful* and *aggressive*?
 - a. a monster
 - b. King Kong
 - c. supermarket chains
2. What type of stores are currently having problems?
 - a. German discounters
 - b. out-of-town supermarkets and superstores
 - c. small, local shops
3. What is Tesco doing?
 - a. reducing the size of their stores
 - b. closing its stores
 - c. not opening planned stores
4. What are more and more consumers doing?
 - a. only buying online
 - b. buying less
 - c. doing a big weekly shop
5. What is the business model of a discounter?
 - a. sell mostly own brands and keep the prices low
 - b. provide less choice and keep the stores small
 - c. offer big discounts on well-known brands
6. Why is cheap not always good?
 - a. It puts too much pressure on farmers.
 - b. It encourages people to buy more and waste more.
 - c. It means fewer jobs.

Stop the supermarket monsters

4 Expressions

- a. Put the words in the right order to make three expressions from the article.
1. life / the / crush / from
 2. for / cause / a / celebration
 3. of / with / out / fall / love
- b. What do the expressions mean? Use the article to help you.
- c. Use the words in the box to make four three-word expressions and one two-word expression from the article.

big economies fewer	get lines message	of price scale	shop stock the	wars weekly
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1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- d. Discuss what each expression means. Use a dictionary if necessary.
- e. Three of the expressions are business expressions. Use them in sentences of your own.

5 Discussion

- What are the names of the supermarkets where you live?
- What reputation do they each have? Are they good value, overpriced, high end, organic, etc?
- Do they appeal to a particular type of customer? For example, poorer families, middle-class housewives or students.
- Do you shop in any of them? If not, where do you do your shopping?
- Is there one that you would never go to? Why? Why not?
- Do you ever order your food shopping online?
- Do you ever buy food at a market or from small independent shops?
- Have your shopping habits changed in the past few years? If so, how?
- Do you think that consumers have the power to change the way supermarkets operate and what they sell? If so, how? If not, why not?

Stop the supermarket monsters

6 Webquest and presentation

Compare the English-language websites of two of the following companies:

- Aldi
- Lidl
- Walmart
- Tesco
- Carrefour
- another supermarket of your choice.

Consider these questions, and then present your findings.

- What is your first impression of their homepage? Who is it aimed at?
- What services do they offer?
- How attractive is the website?
- How easy is it to navigate?
- Are there any interactive elements?
- What social media do they use?
- Do they have a visible slogan?
- What do they do to help people in need and the local community?
- How easy is it to find information about their finances?
- In how many countries do they have stores?
- In which country are their headquarters?
- Who owns each supermarket chain?
- How many languages is their website in?
- Do they offer anything (services, information, offers, loyalty schemes, etc) that the others do not?

Stop the supermarket monsters

Vocabulary record: Stop the supermarket monsters

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
loom			
	applause		
		unstoppable	
			seemingly

Vocabulary record

