

REVISED 3rd INTERNATIONAL EDITION

MAX SUTHERLAND

ADVERTISING
AND THE MIND OF
THE CONSUMER

What works, what doesn't, and why



This book is published in eight languages (English, Dutch, Polish, Korean, Chinese, Turkish, Indonesian, and Rumanian).

Puts the psyche of advertising on the analyst's couch to reveal the sometimes surprising mind of commercial persuasion.

Jim Spaeth, Former President, Advertising Research Foundation

This is a well-informed and engagingly written description of the processes involved in the communication of advertising. It does not share the problems of advertising text books, which are generally superficial as well as being invariably out-of-date. Nor is it one of those populist works that receive a wide sale by propagating over-simple theories.

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Professor of Marketing, Syracuse University

I learned a lot from the book, while thoroughly enjoying it. It has much to offer for both the novice and the experienced advertising person. Insights about the advertising process are backed up with many examples of real advertising, research monitoring hundreds of advertising campaigns around the world, and a wide variety of academic research. Amazingly, all this is combined in a delightful writing style that entertains while it teaches.

Alan Sawyer, Professor of Marketing, University of Florida

A thought-provoking and practical book on how ads work and how advertising campaigns can be most effectively managed that also contains many useful ideas for achieving more effective advertising campaigns.

Professor John Rossiter, University of Wollongong, co-author of
Marketing Communications: Theory and applications

Breakthrough thinking. I have been consulting in the advertising business and have taught graduate level advertising courses for over 20 years. I have never found a book that brought so much insight to the advertising issues associated with effective selling.

Professor Larry Chiagouris, Pace University

Finally, a book that evades the 'magic' of advertising and pins down the psychological factors that make an ad successful or not. It will change the way you advertise and see ads.

Ignacio Oreamuno, President, ihaveanidea.org

A very stimulating, provocative, and interesting book. A gold mine of practical and memorable advertising findings.

Professor Shelby McIntyre, Santa Clara University

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REVISED 3rd INTERNATIONAL EDITION

MAX SUTHERLAND


ALLEN & UNWIN

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CONTENTS

Figures and tables	vii
Acknowledgments	x
About the author	xii

PART A

WHY ADVERTISING HAS REMAINED A MYSTERY FOR SO LONG

Introduction	3
1 Influencing people: myths and mechanisms	6
2 Image and reality: seeing things in different ways	28
3 Subliminal advertising: the biggest myth of all	36
4 Conformity: the popular thing to do	48
5 The advertising message: oblique and indirect	60
6 'Under the radar': paid product placement	72
7 Silent symbols and badges of identity	81
8 Vicarious experience and virtual reality	91
9 Messages, reminders and rewards: how ads speak to us	101
10 What's this I'm watching? The elements that make up an ad	116
11 'Behavioural targeting': consumers in the crosshairs	140
12 The limits of advertising	146

PART B

WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T, AND WHY

Introduction	165
13 Continuous tracking: are you being followed?	168
14 New product launches: don't pull the plug too early	175
15 Planning campaign strategy around consumers' mental filing cabinets	183
16 What happens when you stop advertising?	190
17 The effectiveness of funny ads: what a laugh!	198
18 Learning to use shorter-length TV commercials	209
19 Seasonal advertising	221
20 Underweight advertising: execution anorexia	227
21 Why radio ads aren't recalled	233
22 Maximizing ad effectiveness: develop a unique and consistent style	237

23	Sequels	251
24	Corporate tracking of image and issues	258
25	The web: advertising in a new age	266
26	'Mental reach': they see your ad but does it get through?	278
27	Measurement of advertising effects in memory	285
28	The buy-ology of mind	301
29	Conclusion	320
Appendix: How to prompt ad awareness		324
Notes		338
Index		357

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

1.1	Low-involvement decision	7
1.2	High-involvement decision	7
1.3	Small cumulative increments	8
1.4	Jim Beam ad reinforcing the stereotypical user image	11
1.5	Paul Hogan triggered instant recall of the brand Winfield	22
1.6	Visual salience—the ‘pop-out’ effect	26
2.1	Is it a rabbit or a duck?	28
2.2	A vase or two faces?	28
2.3	An advertisement for Mikimoto pearls	30
3.1	An ad for Camel cigarettes	37
3.2	Only one word, ‘Speed’, appeared on this ad	37
4.1	Card 1 and card 2	49
4.2	Card 3	50
4.3	A Nivea ad promoting the brand as no. 1	52
4.4	Image of increasing popularity	54
5.1	Valentine’s Day ad for Jewelry.com	60
5.2	Image effects revealed	68
7.1	Michael Schumacher for Omega	81
8.1	The characters from the Taster’s Choice coffee commercial	93
8.2	Jerry Seinfeld in mini-drama ads with the American Express card as the hero	93
9.1	You don’t necessarily have to like this ad for it to be effective	102
9.2	Fat free Pringles ad	108
10.1	An ad for Lever body wash	118
10.2	Victoria’s Secret lingerie advertising	119
10.3	The animated M&M characters don’t ‘age’ like regular characters	134
13.1	Shampoo advertisement awareness	171
13.2	Shampoo market share as affected by new advertisement	171
14.1	Advertising influence on intentions	176
14.2	Awareness of a new food product	181
15.1	Television share of mind and share of voice	187
16.1	Spontaneous awareness—brand A	193

16.2	Spontaneous awareness—brand B	193
16.3	Size of market segments	194
17.1	Some humor relies on wit	199
18.1	A fifteen-second advertisement failure	210
18.2	A fifteen-second advertisement campaign that worked!	212
18.3	Percentage of people associating the brand with the advertised image	212
18.4	Another fifteen-second advertisement failure	214
19.1	Seasonal advertising campaign—spontaneous ad awareness	224
20.1	The number of advertising executions	231
22.1	Consistency—MetLife advertising	240
22.2	Consistency—Absolut vodka	241
22.3	The Nike ‘swoosh’ symbol	242
22.4	The Energizer bunny	243
22.5	Transamerica ads show the landmark Transamerica building	247
23.1	Residual recall of old and new advertisements	253
24.1	What do you see?	258
24.2	A Hyundai ad showing the diversity of its products	261
24.3	When the context is changed	265
25.1	An eBay cybernetic ‘signpost’	267
25.2	Outdoor ads for Federal Express and Lotto	268
25.3	Banner ads often focus on behavioural response— click-through	271
26.1	A print ad for Colgate	279
26.2	Cumulative reach over four weeks	281
26.3	How ‘eyes on screen’ impacts on memory for TV ads	282
27.1	A memory network	291
27.2	We are more likely to be reminded of ‘hand’ by the word ‘fingers’ than ‘glove’	295
27.3	‘Mom, can I have some more calcium?’	296
27.4	Brand associative mental network	298
28.1	The ad executions for VW and Dairy Soft spread grab attention	302
28.2	An ad experience memory network	303
28.3	Associative mental network connections	308
28.4	Dogs’ knowledge memory network	309
A.1	Case 1—category- vs brand-cued advertising recall	327
A.2	Case 2—category- vs brand-cued advertising recall	327

Tables

1.1	Mental agendas for lots of things	17
1.2	Common brand cues	20
BI.1	Calculation of TRP figure	167
18.1	Comparison of advertisement campaigns	215
18.2	Various ways shorter-length commercials have been used	218
22.1	Some examples of popular music used in commercials	246
24.1	Agenda of concerns	264
27.1	Primary measures of effectiveness	297
28.1	Measures of advertising effectiveness	306
28.2	Brand-focused measures	306

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these other households recorded TV programs and fast forwarded the ads, their dad had to record and fast-forward through the programs to *watch* the ads. Thanks to all of them for their understanding and the time to make the book happen.

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PART A

**WHY ADVERTISING HAS REMAINED
A MYSTERY FOR SO LONG**

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of advertising seems to be riddled with mystique and apparent contradictions. This book resolves some of those contradictions. It had its beginnings in regular columns for various trade publications and journals; Part B brings together some of those articles and subsequent articles and more material can be found at www.adandmind.com.

This book is not just aimed at advertisers and their ad agencies but also at the people to whom they advertise. As David Ogilvy, a leading advertising expert, said (in the chauvinistic 1960s): ‘The consumer is not a moron. She is your wife!’¹ Our wives, our husbands, our partners, our children are all consumers. The consumer is not an idiot. The consumer is you and me.

Many years ago the advertiser’s dilemma was expressed in this way: ‘I know that half my advertising is wasted—but I don’t know which half!’² But developments in market research are beginning to change all that by better enabling advertisers to identify what works and what doesn’t.³ This book draws on the experience of tracking week by week the effects of hundreds of advertising campaigns over a period of more than fifteen years.

Almost everybody is interested in advertising. The average consumer is exposed to hundreds of ads every day. By the time we die we will have spent an estimated one and a half years watching TV commercials.⁴ Yet advertising continues to be something of a mystery.

The response ‘Gee, I didn’t know that’ to an advertisement tends to be the exception. A round trip special price to New York for \$400 is news. Ads that announce the release of new products like iPhone, the Segway, self cleaning windows or voice-operated computers are news. And if we are someone who is compulsive about germs maybe Mr Clean with a new disinfectant that kills germs 50 per cent better than the old Mr Clean might also be news. With news advertising we can easily recognize the potential of the advertising to affect us.

But most advertising is not ‘news’ advertising. Much of the advertising we encounter doesn’t impart news and it is difficult for us to see how it works on us. As consumers we generally believe it does not really affect us personally. Despite this, advertisers keep on advertising. So something must be working—but on whom, and exactly how?

This book demystifies the effects of advertising and describes some of the psychological mechanisms underlying them. It is written primarily for those who foot the bill for advertising and those who produce advertising. In other words, for those many organizations involved with advertising—the marketing directors, marketing managers, product managers, advertising managers, account execs, media people and creatives. However, in the various editions it has also been read by many interested consumers who wonder how advertising works and why advertisers keep on advertising. Understanding the mechanisms and their limitations tends to lessen the anxieties we may have about wholesale, unconscious manipulation by advertising.

It may come as a surprise to many consumers that those who foot the bill for advertising are often frustrated by knowing little more than the consumers themselves about how, why or when their advertising works. Advertising agencies, the makers of advertising, also know less about these things than we might think. They are seen as wizards at selling, but an agency’s most important pitch is to organizations that *want* to advertise—companies that will engage the agency’s services to design their advertising on an ongoing basis. To keep clients coming back, advertising agencies need to sell the effectiveness of their advertising to those clients and to the world. Inevitably, some agencies become much more accomplished at selling their clients and the world on the great job the advertising is doing than they do at creating advertising that is truly effective.

Like the skills of tribal healers, ad agencies’ powers and methods are seen to be all the greater because of the mystery that surrounds advertising. Books like Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders*⁵ enhance this image of the power of advertising agencies because they portray them as having witch-doctor-like powers. So in a way the mystique and aura of advertising works in favor of its makers—the advertising agencies—by boosting their image, status and perceived power.

Way back in 1978 Alec Benn, an advertising agency principal in the United States, claimed in his book *The 27 Most Common Mistakes in Advertising*: ‘There is a great conspiracy participated in by adver-

tising agencies, radio and television stations and networks, advertising consultants, newspapers, magazines and others to mislead corporate management about the effectiveness of advertising.⁶ Benn was pointing out that advertising failed more often than it succeeded, usually because its effects ‘are not measured objectively’.

Since then, advertising has begun to be measured more objectively and more often (indeed continuously) and this has highlighted the hard fact that many ads still fail. Part of the reason is that advertising agencies get too little in the way of ‘news’ to work with—there aren’t the breakthrough things to say about existing brands to cause immediate impacts. But the other part of it is a historical overreliance on intuition and introspection.⁷ When these qualities are used instead of objective measurement as the basis for deciding what works and what doesn’t, there are more ads that fail than ads that are outstandingly successful. Sustained effects occur less than half the time.⁸ Until recently these failures stood a good chance of going unrecognized because the majority of campaigns were not tracked in a formal way.⁹

In the general population there are those who believe that advertising is all powerful and that the mechanism of advertising must be unconscious and subliminal, because its effects do not seem open to introspection. Such views are associated with the ‘dark and manipulative’ view of advertising. This book reveals a much more benign interpretation of advertising’s so-called ‘unconscious’ effects. In elaborating on some of the subtler mechanisms of advertising, it dispels many myths and exaggerated claims. At the same time it reveals just how subtle advertising’s influence can be and how much of an impact it can have on the success or failure of one brand over another.

This book will help advertising agencies to diagnose the *why* of what works, and what doesn’t. It shows advertisers how to get better results from their advertising budget and their agency. And it reveals to consumers how advertising works to influence which brands we choose—especially if the choice doesn’t matter to us personally—and why it is that we find it difficult to introspect on advertising’s effect.

1 INFLUENCING PEOPLE: MYTHS AND MECHANISMS

- Why do people buy bottled water that is available free from the tap?
- Why does advertising work on everybody else but not on us?
- Why do advertisers keep repeating an ad that we have already seen?

All these questions reflect the general belief that advertising works by persuading us, yet we don't feel personally that we are at all persuaded by it.

Why is it so difficult for us to introspect on advertising and how it influences us? Because we look for major effects, that's why! Too often, we look for the ability of a single ad to persuade us rather than for more subtle, minor effects. Big and immediate effects of advertising do occur when the advertiser has something new to say. Then it is easy for us to introspect on its effect.

But most effects of advertising fall well short of persuasion. These minor effects are not obvious but they are more characteristic of the way advertising works. To understand advertising we have to understand and measure these effects. When our kids are growing up we don't notice their physical growth each day but from time to time we become aware that they have grown. Determining how much a child has grown in the last 24 hours is like evaluating the effect of being exposed to a single commercial. In both cases, the changes are too small for us to notice. But even small effects of advertising can influence which brand we choose, especially when all other factors are equal and when alternative brands are much the same.

Weighing the alternatives: evaluation

It is easiest to understand this with low-involvement buying situations. The situation is like a 'beam balance' in which each brand weighs the same. With one brand on each side, the scale is balanced. However, it takes only

a feather added to one side of the balance to tip us in favor of the brand on that side. The brands consumers have to choose from are often very similar. Which one will the buying balance tip towards? When we look for advertising effects we are looking for feathers rather than heavy weights.¹

The buying of cars, appliances, vacations and other high-priced items are examples of high-involvement decision-making. This high level of involvement contrasts with the low level brought to bear on the purchase of products like shampoo or soft drink or margarine. For most of us, the buying of these smaller items is no big deal. We have better things to do with our time than agonize over which brand to choose every time we buy something.

The fact is that in many low-involvement product categories, the alternative brands are extremely similar and in some cases almost identical. Most consumers don't really care which one they buy and could substitute easily if their brand ceased to exist. It is in these low-involvement categories that the effects of advertising can be greatest and yet hardest to introspect upon.

Even with high-involvement products the beam balance analogy is relevant because very different alternatives can have equal weight. We often have to weigh up complex things like 'average quality at a moderate price' against 'premium quality at a higher price'. Often we find ourselves in a state of indecision between the alternatives. When the choices weigh equally in our mind, whether they be low-involvement products or high-involvement products, it can take just a feather to swing that balance.²

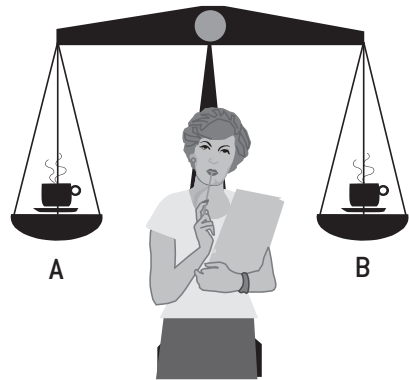


Figure 1.1: Low-involvement decision: deciding between two virtually identical alternatives.

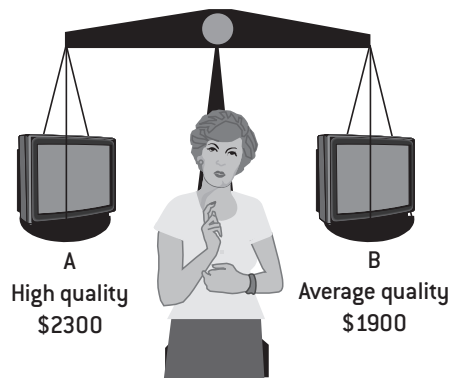


Figure 1.2: High-involvement decision: very different alternatives can have equal weight.

With high-involvement decisions we are more concerned about the outcome of the weighing-up process, so we think more about how much weight to give to each feature (quality, size or power). How many extra dollars is it worth paying for a feature? Automotive writers for example can reach very different opinions. The more complex a product's features the more complex this assessment because there are usually both positive and negative perspectives. For example, a compact car is positive in regard to both fuel economy and maneuverability but negative in regard to leg room and comfort.

So which way should we see it? What weight *should* we give to a particular feature in our minds? When advertising emphasizes points that favor a brand, it doesn't have to *persuade* us—merely raise our awareness of the positive perspectives. Chances are we will notice *confirmatory* evidence more easily as a result. When we subsequently read a newspaper or consumer report or talk with friends, research shows that we are prone to interpret such information slightly more favorably.³ This effect is a long way from heavyweight persuasion. Rather it is a gentle, mental biasing of our subsequent perceptions, and we will see in Chapter 2 how perspective can influence our interpretation. It is not so much persuasion as a shifting of the mental spotlight . . . playing the focal beam of attention on one perspective rather than another.

Repetition

As with the amount by which our kids grow in a day, we are just not aware of the small differences advertising can make. Even though these imperceptibly small changes in time add up to significant effects, individual

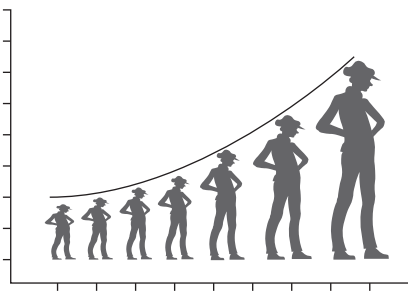


Figure 1.3: *Small cumulative increments. We don't notice a child's growth in 24 hours.*

increments are too small for us to notice. They are just below what is known as the just noticeable difference (JND).

Through the process of repetition these small increments can produce major perceived differences between brands, but we are rarely aware of the process taking place.

The cumulative effects of changes in brand image become starkly noticeable only in rare cases:

for instance, when we return home after a long absence and find that an old brand is now seen by people in a different light—that in the intervening period the brand has acquired a different image.

Registering a claim in our minds (e.g. ‘Taste the difference’ or ‘Good to the last drop’) does not necessarily mean we believe it. However, it makes us aware that there *are* claimed differences between brands. This is a proposition (a ‘feather’, if you will) that, when everything else is equal, may tip the balance of brand selection, even if only to prompt us to find out if it is true.

Repetition increases our familiarity with a claim. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, a feeling of greater likelihood that the claim *is* true begins to accompany the growing familiarity. This effect of repetition is known as ‘the truth effect’.⁴

We tend to think that if something is not true it would somehow be challenged. If it is repeated constantly and not challenged, our minds seem to regard this as *prima facie* evidence that perhaps it is true. The effect of repetition is to produce small but cumulative increments in this ‘truth’ inference.⁵ It is hardly rational but we don’t really think about it. We don’t go out of our way to think about it because low involvement, by definition, means we don’t care much either way. Such claims are ‘feathers’.

In summary, the reasons we are unable to introspect on advertising’s effects—especially in low-involvement situations—are:

- the effect of each single ad exposure is small;⁶
- with repetition, even imperceptibly small effects can build into larger perceived differences between brands;⁷
- if something is repeated constantly without challenge, our minds seem to regard this as *prima facie* evidence that maybe, just maybe, it *is* true (the ‘truth’ effect);
- often it is no big deal to us which of the alternative brands we choose, anyway.

If you have ever wondered why advertisers seem to persist in repeating the same ad—if you have ever wondered why they think this could possibly influence sane people like us—then here is the answer. Much of advertising creates only marginal differences, but small differences can build into larger differences. Even small differences can tip the balance in favor of the advertised brand. This is especially true of ‘image advertising’.

Image advertising

The effect of image advertising is easier to see in relation to high-involvement products, so let us start with a high-involvement example—Volvo cars.

Volvo traditionally focused its image advertising on safety. Through repetition, it built up a strong image of the Volvo as a safe car. Other brands have caught up a lot in recent years but on a scale of 1 to 10 for safety, most people would still rate Volvo higher than almost any other car. Safety is now an integral part of our perception of this brand. (The fact that the car actually delivers on this promise has of course been a very important ingredient in the success of the safety campaign—but that is another story.)

One effect of image advertising, then, is to produce gradual shifts in our perceptions of a brand with regard to a particular attribute—in Volvo's case, safety (in other words, to effect marginal changes in our mental rating of the brand on that attribute). This is often not perceptible after just one exposure because the change, if it occurs, is too small for us to notice.

Now let's take a low-involvement product in the very late stages of its product life cycle—hair spray—and tease out some insights from its history of brand image advertising.

The first brands of hair spray originally fought for market share on the basis of the attribute of 'hair holding'. That is, each brand claimed to hold hair. To the extent that they all claimed the same thing, they were what are called 'me-too' brands.

To break out of this, one brand began to claim that it 'holds hair longer'. Just as Volvo claimed that it was safer, and thereby moved Volvo higher up the perceived safety scale, so this brand of hair spray made people aware that some brands of hair spray might hold hair longer than others. It then attempted to shift perception of itself on this attribute and marginally increase the mental rating consumers would give it on 'length of hold'.

The next brand of hair spray to enter the market, instead of tackling that brand head-on, cleverly avoided doing battle on 'length of hold'. The new brand claimed that it was 'long holding', but also that it 'brushes out easier'—a dual benefit. In doing so it successfully capitalized on the fact that hair sprays that hold longer were harder to brush out (or were until then). Many years later came the attribute of 'flexible hold'.

These examples of image advertising for hair spray and cars illustrate how one effect of advertising is to alter our perceptions of a brand. Advertising can marginally change our image of a brand by leading us to associate it with a particular attribute (like ‘longer holding’ or ‘brushes out easily’), and to associate in our minds that attribute with the brand more than we associate it with any other competitive brand.

Gauging the effects image advertising has on us is made even more complex because these effects may not operate directly on the image of the brand itself. Image advertising may produce small, incremental differences in the image of a brand, as in the case of Volvo—but sometimes it is aimed at changing not so much the image of the brand itself but who we see in our mind’s eye as the typical user of that brand.

User image

In advertising for Levis, Revlon, Guess, Louis Vuitton, or Dolce & Gabbana, the focus is often on people who use the brand. What changes is not so much our perception, or image, of the product as our perception of the user-stereotype—the kind of person who typically uses the brand, or the situation in which the brand is typically used.

When these brands are advertised, the focus is very much on image but often with this important, subtle difference. The advertising aims to change not how we see the brand itself—the brand image—but how we see:

- the stereotypical user of the brand—the user image;
- the stereotypical situation in which the brand is used.

If the user image of a brand resembles us, or the type of person we aspire to be, what happens when we come to buy that product category? The user image acts as a feather on one side of the beam balance. If everything else is equal it can tip the scale (but note, only if everything else is equal).

User, or situational, image changes usually fall short of the kinds of rational, heavyweight reasons that make perfect sense of any choice.



Figure 1.4: Jim Beam ad reinforcing the stereotypical user image—young, single males.

But they can nevertheless tilt the balance in favor of one brand. Minor effects such as these constitute much of the impact of advertising. Yet they are usually much more difficult for us as consumers to analyze introspectively, and we tend to discount them because they clearly fall well short of persuasion.

Product image: bottled water

Advertising can marginally change our image not just of a brand but also of a product. When we associate a product in our minds with a desirable attribute, it can influence our behavior. Let's examine the question posed earlier. Why do people purchase so much bottled water when perfectly good water is available almost free from the tap?

The question is, are we in fact drinking bottled water as a substitute for tap water? It may seem that way . . . but is it? Certainly that is not the way it started. In the USA particularly, bottled water's success can be traced to its original positioning as a substitute not for water but for cocktails and non-alcoholic soda/soft drinks. The image appeal and usage evolved from there.

Let me explain.⁸ In 1977, an American, Bruce Nevin, brought Perrier bottled water to the USA and launched it as a pure and healthier alternative for when you were having a cocktail or some non-alcoholic soda.⁹ Consistent with the new emphasis on a healthy lifestyle, it was positioned as an accepted, healthier alternative, especially (though not exclusively) when consumed in social situations. The brand name 'Perrier' helped this social acceptance, giving it an up-market 'designer' connotation consistent with France's fashion and wine image. In addition, the Perrier launch commercials starred Orson Welles, thereby blending celebrity associations with this product. Its appeal as a healthier substitute was buttressed by purity and celebrity and this worked to make Perrier a huge success. With the media constantly urging us to eat more healthily and drink less alcohol, the brand took off. Perrier bottled water became a socially acceptable alternative to drinking alcohol and drinking soda/soft drinks that were not so healthy. Perrier sold US\$20 million of bottled water in its first year in the US and tripled its sales to US\$60 million the next year. This ultimately attracted other 'me-too' entrants.

The next major entrant in the USA was Evian, coming seven years later in 1984. Evian did a 'me-too' with pure and healthy while at the same

time playing the spotlight of attention on difference in taste. Reportedly, research showed that Americans preferred a still taste to a sparkling taste and Perrier was a *sparkling* water. So Evian offered a still taste and avoided claiming that it was healthier, but instead cleverly associated the brand with a different aspect of health i.e. active lifestyles and the gymnasium—images associated with young, healthy, toned bodies. Consistent with this active lifestyles image, Evian matched Perrier on celebrity associations by using cool, young celebrities like Madonna (who would drink it on stage).

Such positioning was reinforced even further by Evian being the first to offer a lightweight plastic bottle nationwide. Evian's lighter, unbreakable bottle was easier to carry and more suitable for on-the-go lifestyles than Perrier's signature glass bottle. In other words, Evian not only matched Perrier on purity, health, French name connotation and celebrity endorsement but it also projected a user image appeal of toned, active, good looking bodies. If that was not enough of a feather to tip the balance, then being more convenient to carry meant that it was not only 'cool' but functional. This paid double dividends for Evian; it extended the way bottled water was consumed and broadened the market to 'active lifestyle', socially visible situations.

As new, lower cost entrants like Dusani (from Coca-Cola) and Aquafina (from Pepsi) came in, the usage of bottled water evolved and extended, further becoming somewhat more commodified. Nevertheless the basic heritage of health and purity is intact and bottled water remains better for us than either soda/soft drink or alcohol. As Charles Fishman noted in his article 'Message in a Bottle', '. . . today, water has come to signify how we think of ourselves. We want to brand ourselves—as Madonna did—even with something as ordinary as a drink of water . . . We imagine there is a difference between showing up at the weekly staff meeting with Aquafina, or Fiji, or a small glass bottle of Pellegrino.'¹⁰

The reason we drink bottled water today is partly self branding and partly self statement about healthier lifestyle choices. Did advertising persuade us to use bottled water instead of tap water? No. Did it persuade us to use bottled water instead of less healthy alcohol and sodas? Perhaps that's closer to the mark, but did anyone feel any persuasion? No. It was not persuasion so much as a series of image influences where virtue, convenience, self branding and self statement were aligned.

Persuasion is the exception

We have been told so often that the role of advertising is to persuade, that we seem to have come to believe it.

How often do we hear the comment, ‘It wouldn’t make me run out and buy it?’ This is common in market research when participants are asked to analyze introspectively how they react to an ad—especially if it is an image ad. It demonstrates the myth of how advertising is supposed to influence. No one really believes that any ad will make them run out and buy the advertised product. Nothing has that kind of persuasive or coercive power. So why do people say, ‘It wouldn’t make me run out and buy it’? Because they can’t think of any other way the ad could work. The effect of advertising is not to make us ‘run out and buy’. This is especially true with low-involvement products and especially true with image advertising. Rather, it is beam balance stuff.

High involvement

High-involvement buying contrasts with low-involvement, low cost purchases. When people are parting with substantial sums of money to buy a TV, a car or a vacation, they do not take the decision lightly. These are high-involvement decisions for most consumers. Before making them, we actively hunt down information, talk with friends and generally find out all we can about our prospective purchase.

Furthermore, the alternative brands available will usually have many more differences. They are unlikely to be almost identical, as is the case with many low-involvement products.

Advertising is one influence in high-involvement buying decisions, but it is only one among many. Often it is a relatively weak influence, especially in comparison with other influences like word of mouth, previous experience and recommendations by ‘experts’. In the case of high-involvement products, much of advertising’s effect is not so much on the final decision as on whether a brand gets considered—whether we include it in the set of alternatives that we are prepared to spend time weighing up. This is one of the ways that advertising influences our thinking indirectly. For example, there are hundreds of brands and types of cars, far too many for us to consider individually in the same detail. We seriously consider only those that make it onto our short list. But what determines which cars make it onto our short list? This is where advertising comes into play.¹¹

If we are unlikely to be in the market for a new car, television or wall unit for several years, the advertising we see and hear for these products falls on low-involved ears. However, if our old car or appliance unexpectedly breaks down today, we may find ourselves propelled into the market for a new one. Suddenly, the ads we saw yesterday or last week or last month under low-involvement conditions become more relevant. One test of their effectiveness will be whether they have left enough impact to get their brand onto our short list.

A lot of advertising, even for high-priced items, thus has its effect in a low-involvement way. Again we see that, in looking for the effects of advertising, we need to look for subtle effects. It is a case of ‘feathers’ rather than persuasion—‘feathers’ that influence what alternatives get weighed up as well as ‘feathers’ that add their weight to one side of the weighing-up process.

Two mental processes in decision-making

There are two fundamentally different mental processes at work in choice decisions. We have already considered the most obvious one, the weighing up of alternatives. But there is another process that consumers and advertisers tend to be less conscious of. *Weighing up the alternatives is one thing. Which alternatives get weighed up is another!*

Which alternatives get weighed up?

What determines the alternatives that are actually considered?

Think about a consumer decision that you probably make every day. It’s getting on for noon, you are feeling hungry and you ask yourself, ‘What am I going to have for lunch today?’ Your mind starts to generate alternatives and evaluate each alternative as you think of it. The process goes something like this:

- ‘Will I have a salad? No, I had a salad yesterday.’
- ‘A sandwich? No, the sandwich store is too far away and besides, it’s raining.’
- ‘I could drive to McDonald’s. Yes . . . I’ll do that.’

There are two things to note here. First, what the mind does is produce alternatives, one at a time. This ‘mental agenda’ of alternatives is ordered like this:

What's the choice for lunch?

1. Salad
2. Sandwich
3. McDonald's
4. TGI Friday's
5. Subway

Second, the order in which the alternatives are arranged is the order in which they are elicited by the mind. This order can influence your final choice. You may enjoy Subway more than McDonald's. But in the example, you didn't go to Subway, you went to McDonald's.

Had you continued your thought process instead of stopping at the third alternative (McDonald's), you would probably have gone to Subway. But if Subway is only fifth on your mental agenda of lunch alternatives, it is unlikely to get much of your business. You didn't get to Subway because you didn't think of it before you hit on a satisfactory solution—McDonald's. You didn't get there *physically* because you never got there *mentally*. Even if we like or prefer something, if it is not reasonably high on our mental agenda it is likely to miss out.

How many times have you found yourself doing something and realized too late that there was something else you would rather have been doing but hadn't thought about in time? The most preferred alternatives are not necessarily the ones you think of first. (Anyone who has ever left an important person off an invitation list will appreciate this.) Next time you go out for dinner and are trying to decide which restaurant to go to, observe your thought pattern. There are two separate processes at work. One is generation of alternatives; the other is evaluation of those alternatives.

To affect the outcome of buying decisions, advertisers can try to influence:

- the order in which the alternatives are evoked;
- the evaluation of a particular alternative; or
- both.

When we think of advertising's effects we almost invariably think of how advertising influences our evaluation of a brand. Yet much of advertising's influence is not on our evaluations of a brand but on the order in which alternative brands are evoked.

Agenda-setting effect

Influencing the order of alternatives has its basis in what is known as the agenda-setting theory of mass communications. This says: the mass media don't tell us what to think. But they do tell us what to think about! They set the mental agenda.

The agenda-setting theory was originally developed to explain the influence of the mass media in determining which political issues become important in elections. Adroit committee members and politicians claim that if you can control the agenda you can control the meeting. The relevance of this to advertising was recognized over a quarter of a century ago.¹² We can produce mental agendas for lots of things.

Table 1.1 Mental agendas for lots of things

What's news?	What's the choice for lunch?
1. Presidential election	1. Salad
2. The stock market	2. Sandwich
3. Youth suicide rate	3. McDonald's
4. A child abducted	4. TGI Friday's
5. The Olympics	5. Subway

We can discover our mental agenda by pulling out what is in our minds under a particular category and examining the order (in which it emerges). The category may be 'What's the choice for lunch?', 'What's news?', or 'What brand of soft drink should I buy?'

When we reach into our minds to generate any of these agendas, the items do not all come to mind at once. They are elicited one at a time and in an order. The items on top of the mental agenda are the most salient and the ones we are most likely to remember first. It's the same with choosing which restaurant to go to or which department store to visit or which supermarket to shop at this week. It is the same with the decision about which cars or televisions to short-list and which dealers to visit. The order in which we retrieve the items from our memories seems almost inconsequential to us but may be critically important in determining the chances of our going to McDonald's rather than Subway.

This effect also occurs if we have a list of the alternatives or a display of them such as in the supermarket. Even here, where the brands are all

set out in front of us, all of them do not get noticed simultaneously. In fact, they do not all get noticed.

Think about the process. We stand there at the display. We notice first one brand, then another and then another. It happens rapidly, but in sequence. So despite the fact that the brands are all displayed, they are not necessarily all equal in terms of the probability that they will come to mind or be noticed. For the last decade, supermarkets have carried more than 30,000 items, up from 17,500 a decade before.¹³ This raises a question. At supermarket displays, what makes a brand stand out? To use the marketing term, what makes it 'break through the clutter' of all the alternative packs and get noticed? What makes one brand get noticed more quickly than others at the supermarket display?

This introduces the concept of *salience*, which is formally defined in the next section. In this context we ask how a brand can be moved up from fifth, to fourth, to third, to second, to become the first one noticed. The higher up it is in this order, the better the chance it has of being considered and, consequently, the better the chance of being purchased.

The brand's physical prominence, the amount of shelf space it occupies and its position in the display are very important. But advertising can influence choice when other factors (like shelf space or position) are otherwise equal. Advertising can help tip the balance.

Asking what makes one brand more salient—more likely to come to mind or get noticed—than another is like asking what influences Subway's position on our mental lunch agenda. In the supermarket, instead of having to recall all the alternatives by ourselves, we are prompted by the display. However, the brands we notice and the order in which we notice them can be influenced by more than just the display.

Salience

We think much more often about people and things that are important to us than about those that are not. The psychological term for this prominence in our thoughts is *salience*. Advertisers would like us to think of their brands as 'more important' but they will settle for 'more often'.¹⁴ In other words, they would like their brands to be more salient for us.

My definition of salience is the probability that something will be in the conscious mind at any given moment. One way advertising can increase this probability is through repetition. We have all had the experience of being unable to rid our minds of a song we have heard a lot. The

repetition of the song has increased its salience; it has increased its probability of being in the conscious mind at any moment. Repetition of an advertisement, especially a jingle, can have a similar effect. Through repetition of the ad, the salience of the brand—the star of the ad—is increased in our minds.

Another way that advertising influences what we think about and notice is through ‘cueing’. To explain this, answer a few questions:

- What’s the first thing you think of when you see: *‘Just Do It?’*
- What’s the first thing you think of when someone says: *‘Don’t leave home without it?’*
- What comes to mind if you hear the remark: *‘I’m lovin’ it?’*
- What’s the first thing you think of when someone says: *‘Can you hear me now?’*
- What’s the first thing you think of when someone asks *‘Where’s the beef?’* in America or *‘Which bank?’* in Australia?

Words or expressions such as these come up naturally in everyday conversation. When a brand is linked to them through repetition, they become cues that help increase the salience of the brand.

An actor in a play takes his cue from a line or some other happening or event. The human mind takes its cue from its intentions and its immediate environment. Such cues can influence what we think about next.¹⁵ That’s how we go to sleep at night. We turn off the cues. We turn off the light and the radio. We try to reduce distractions or cues so that things won’t keep popping into our minds.

One way advertising can use cues is by tying a brand to something that frequently recurs in the ordinary environment. There are many common words, expressions, symbols or tunes that can be developed by means of repetition into mnemonic devices that trigger recollection of the brand.

Table 1.2 Common brand cues

Cue (mnemonic)	Brand/product	Country
<i>I'm lovin' it</i>	McDonald's	Global
<i>You're in good hands</i>	Allstate Insurance	USA
<i>Take care</i>	Garnier	Global
<i>Can you hear me now?</i>	Verizon	USA
<i>Gimme a break</i>	<i>Have a Kit Kat</i>	USA
<i>Have a break . . .</i>	<i>Have a Kit Kat</i>	UK, Australia
<i>Mmmmmmmmm . . .</i>	Big M flavored milk	Australia
<i>MmmmmMmmmmm Good</i>	Campbell's Soup	USA
<i>Don't leave home without it . . .</i>	American Express	Global
<i>Do you know me?</i>	American Express	Global
<i>Just do it.</i>	Nike	Global
<i>Where do you want to go today?</i>	Microsoft	Global
<i>The real thing . . .</i>	Coca-Cola	Global
<i>Always . . .</i>	Coca-Cola	Global
<i>Think different.</i>	Apple	Global
<i>Because you're worth it . . .</i>	L'Oreal	Global
<i>Reach out and touch someone</i>	AT&T	USA
<i>Thanks! I needed that!</i>	Mennen Skin Bracer	USA
<i>Have a good weekend . . .</i>	<i>(& don't forget the Aeroguard) insect repellent</i>	Australia
<i>Good weekend . . . good VSD</i>	VSD Magazine	France
<i>Which bank?</i>	Commonwealth Bank	Australia
<i>Wednesday . . .</i>	<i>is Prince Spaghetti night</i>	USA
<i>Good on you mum . . .</i>	<i>Tip Top's the one.</i> Bread	Australia
<i>Where's the beef?</i>	Wendys Restaurants	USA

Cue (mnemonic)	Brand/product	Country
<i>The car in front is . . .</i>	<i>(a Toyota)</i>	UK
<i>Oh what a feeling . . .</i>	<i>(Toyota)</i>	USA, Australia
<i>Ring around the collar</i>	Wisk detergent	USA
<i>Anyhow* . . .</i>	<i>Have a Winfield</i> Cigarettes	Australia
<i>I feel like . . .</i>	<i>. . . a Tooheys</i> Tooheys beer	Australia
<i>Who cares?</i>	Boots pharmacies	UK
<i>You deserve a break today</i>	McDonald's	USA, UK, Australia
<i>Thank you for your support</i>	Bartles and Jaymes wine	USA
<i>All because . . .</i>	<i>the lady loves . . . Milk</i> <i>Tray</i>	UK
<i>Cross your heart</i>	Playtex bras	UK, Australia

If the cue recurs in the circumstances under which the product is likely to be consumed, such as at lunch time, all the better. The ideal mnemonic cue is not just frequently recurring but occurs *at these strategic times*.

This cueing effect is so much a part of the way we respond to our environment that we are largely oblivious to it. As someone once said, fish are probably unaware of water because it is all round them. However, most people are aware of cueing to some degree. Almost everybody has had the experience of a particular smell evoking special memories. Cigars perhaps remind you of your grandfather; the smell of new carpet may trigger a vivid memory of the first day you moved into your new house. When these memories pop into our mind we are then prone to reminisce on those past days.

If you have ever had trouble getting to sleep at night because your mind can't switch off, you can relate to how involuntary this process usually is. In other words, what pops into our minds at any point in time is not totally under our control.

When you hear the words 'Don't leave home without . . .', the speaker may be referring to your keys or your coat or whatever . . . but your mind

is involuntarily reminded of American Express. When a driver assures you ‘You’re in good hands’, can your mind help but be reminded of Allstate Insurance? When someone says ‘Just do it’, can you help but think of Nike?

Celebrities, expressions and music extracts can come to be so ‘owned’ by a brand that they automatically prompt our thoughts in that direction. In the USA, Paul Hogan (Crocodile Dundee) was linked to the Subaru brand. In Australia he was traditionally linked to Winfield cigarettes. The word ‘Anyhow*’ still makes older Australians think of Paul Hogan and Winfield cigarettes because it was uttered by Hogan as part of the commercial (‘Anyhow* . . . Have a Winfield’). Like Joe Camel in the USA, Hogan and the expression ‘Anyhow*’ came to stand for the brand and automatically trigger it in people’s minds. Even the classical theme music behind the



Figure 1.5: In Australia, Paul Hogan triggered instant recall of the brand Winfield.

Winfield campaign came to be thought of as ‘the Winfield music’ and would recall the brand in people’s memories. The Marlboro brand did the same thing globally with the theme music from *The Magnificent Seven*, which came to be thought of as ‘the Marlboro music’.

Our minds are in a sense a ‘stream of consciousness’—an inexorable flow that is frequently diverted, sometimes paused but never stopped. Environmental cues can influence what enters the flow and what direction it takes.

One type of advertising focuses on tying a brand to one or more such cues, so that whenever we hear, see or think of the cue there is a high probability that we will think of the brand or notice its presence. It pulls it into our ‘slipstream of thought’.¹⁶

The product category as a cue

Advertisers want us to think of their brand, but they particularly want us to think of their brand when we are making a decision involving the product category. One important cue is therefore the category itself. When I say ‘soft drink’, what do you think of? When I say ‘lunch’, what do you think of? If our conscious mind is in the process of being cued by a

product category (e.g. it is noon and we are thinking ‘lunch’), then what is likely to flit into our head is not a brand of hair gel or a car—we are much more likely to see in our mind’s eye the first item on the mental agenda we have for the category ‘lunch’.

When our mind is cued in to a particular product category, we almost automatically begin to think of the ‘top-of-mind’ members of that category. In the case of the category ‘lunch’, we will think of McDonald’s or Subway or some other food alternative rather than hair gel or cars or anything else.

The technical term for this is *category-cued salience*, or the probability that the brand will come to mind whenever its product category does.

It is possible to measure category-cued salience and assess the influence of advertising on it. This is done by asking people what is the first brand that comes to mind when they hear or see the product category name, and then the next brand and the next.¹⁷ In this way the agenda of brands can be elicited. The rank of a given brand in the product category agenda indicates its category-cued salience. It is a rough index of the probability that it will come to our mind when in the normal course of events we are prompted by the product category name.

If this questioning procedure is carried out periodically with a different random sample of consumers, the agenda and the salience of each brand can be tracked, over time. Market research can detect any improvements resulting from advertising by the order in which the advertised brand is elicited. Advertising a brand generally improves its salience.

Point-of-sale advertising: how to upset the agenda

Many people wonder why Coca-Cola, which is so well known, needs to advertise so much and why it needs to ‘waste all that money’ on signage. The answer is that if it did not have its signs in these places, Pepsi or some other competitor certainly would. These other brands would try to upset consumers’ mental agendas by ‘jumping the queue’—by inducing us, at the point of sale, to consider them as well as Coke.

Both point-of-sale, reminder advertising and our own mental agenda of brands can prompt us with alternatives to consider, before we ask for what we want. Advertisers therefore try to influence a brand’s salience at the point of sale by not leaving it to our mental agendas alone. They erect signs in an attempt to visually cue us into their brand.

When we walk into a convenience store to buy a soft drink, we are already in a category-cued state. We are already thinking about soft drink and which one we will have. If Coke is not already top of our mind when we enter, it almost inescapably will be once we have been inside for a moment, because Coke as a brand is likely to be prompted in our minds by a) the product category cue and b) the Coca-Cola signs in the store.

Coke may be on top of most people's minds but if they are confronted with a Pepsi sign they may consider both brands. So Coke tries to dominate the clutter of mental alternatives as well as the clutter of point-of-sale advertising and point-of-sale display. This makes it difficult for other brands to cut through into people's minds at the point of sale.¹⁸ It protects Coke's category salience—something that it has invested a lot of money in building up through years of advertising.

Supermarket shopping: mental agendas vs brand displays

In the supermarket it may be thought that, because the brands are all displayed, they are all equally likely to be noticed—and considered. If this were so, then our mental agenda of brands would be irrelevant to supermarket shopping. However, this is not the case.

On average, people take no more than 12 seconds to select a brand and in 85 per cent of purchases only the chosen brand is handled.¹⁹ Observation studies of supermarket shoppers indicate that more than half of all buying is just 'simple locating behavior'.²⁰ That is, most people are simply locating the brand they bought last time, or the one that they came in to buy. They put it into their shopping cart with little or no attention to evaluating the alternatives.

For an alternative brand or pack to be noticed, let alone considered, it would have to cut through the display clutter and stand out in some way. In order to be considered it first has to cut through into conscious attention.

In low-involvement situations many people tend to do what they did last time unless there is something to interrupt the routine. Thus a brand or pack has to cut through the display clutter just as an ad has to cut through the clutter of other ads. And the two, the pack and the advertising, can work together.

The importance of being noticed shows up when regular buyers of a product category are shown color photographs of any new brand. Without advertising and promotional support, the percentage saying that

they have seen it on the supermarket shelves will likely remain very low. Of course supermarkets know this and that's why they insist on a new brand being backed by advertising and promotional support if they agree to stock it.

Just because something is present does not mean we will necessarily notice it or consider it. The more cluttered the environment, the more alternatives there are in the product category, the greater this problem is for the advertiser. Advertising signs at the point of purchase can help considerably here, especially when they tie in with advertising that we have already seen. They are then more likely to 'connect' with us and get us to notice the brand.

In the supermarket, it is not signs but usually the brands themselves that are displayed. Potentially we are able to be reminded of every brand in the display by its physical presence. So is our mental agenda of brands still relevant? Yes, though it is now one influence among several. In particular, it orients us by determining which brands we notice in the display.

To illustrate this, imagine you are in a supermarket doing the shopping. As you approach the detergent section, what is in your mind? The category 'detergents'. Why? Because the layout of the supermarket is familiar to you, or because when you approach that section the category is prompted by the display in front of you.

Even in the supermarket, then, the product category as a cue is likely to be triggered in our minds at a particular point and to trigger in turn expectations of the brands we are likely to see in that category. What we see first in the display is likely to be influenced not only by a brand's position and shelf space but also by our expectations of seeing the brand there. All other things being equal, we tend to notice first the brands we are familiar with. Of course, this is especially true when our mind set is that of looking to locate the one that we bought last time.

When something is heavily advertised, it is more likely to come to mind and, other things being equal, to be noticed faster in a display. We know from the psychological literature that people recognize the familiar more quickly, so it will come as no surprise that familiar brands will be very salient and be noticed more quickly.²¹ Advertising exposure of the brand and the pack helps to make the brand more familiar and increase its salience. Repeated exposure of the pack in advertising makes it more familiar and hence gives it a better chance of being noticed earlier or faster than its competitor.

T T T T	F F F F	U U U U
T T T T	F L F F	U U U U
T T T T	F F F F	U U U U
T T T T	F F F F	U U U U
T T T T	F F F F	U U U U
T T T T	F F F F	U U U U
T T T T	F F F F	U U U U
T T T T	F F F F	U U U U

Figure 1.6: Visual salience—the ‘pop-out’ effect. Inclined letters ‘pop-out’ more than upside down letters.²²

The importance of this marginal effect is seen in the finding mentioned above—that more than half of all purchases made in the supermarket are simply the purchaser locating what they want. Shoppers hardly pause at the display but simply reach out and pick up the item they are after. So in the supermarket a brand or pack has to cut through the clutter—to stop people walking at more than 1 mile per hour (2 km/h)—and get itself noticed.

Shelf displays, shelf ‘talkers’ and off-location displays are all ways to help a brand ‘pop out’ and get our attention. Advertising that we have been exposed to previously, however, also plays an important part in increasing the visual salience of a particular brand. The aim is to modify the degree to which the brand ‘pops out’ in the display and engages the shopper’s notice earlier than other brands.

Measuring visual salience

Advertisers can quantify the visual salience of a pack or brand through market research in much the same way as they uncover the mental agenda. They give each brand in a supermarket display equal shelf space and then take a photograph of the display. They show the photo to a random sample of consumers and ask them to name the brands they see. The order and speed with which the brands are noticed provide a measure of their visual salience. (Actually, researchers use several photographs and control for position in the display by randomly changing the position of each brand.)

Summary

One reason we find it difficult to analyze advertising’s effects introspectively and why advertising has remained a mystery for so long is that these effects are often so simple and so small that they fall short of outright persuasion. Advertising influences the order in which we evoke or notice the alternatives we consider. This does not feel like persuasion and it is not. It is nevertheless effective. Instead of persuasion and other

major effects we should look for ‘feathers’, or minor effects. These can tip the balance when alternative brands are otherwise equal and, through repetition, can grow imperceptibly by small increments over time.

2 IMAGE AND REALITY: SEEING THINGS IN DIFFERENT WAYS

In Chapter 1 we considered the ways in which advertising can influence our decisions by influencing the order in which we evoke or notice the options. Now let us turn to advertising and focus on how it influences our *evaluation* of brand alternatives.

Human beings have a remarkable capacity for seeing things in different ways. The same physical stimulus, the same product or service, if you will, can be seen in more than one way. Look at Figure 2.1 . . . is it a rabbit or a duck? It can be seen either way.

Look at the next figure, 2.2. Think of it as a brand. You should be able to see it in two different ways. When you see a vase in the figure your mind is seeing 'white figure on black background'. When you see two faces, your mind is seeing 'black figure on white background'. This white-on-black or black-on-white that you are using to make sense of what you see is called the *frame of reference*. You overlay a frame of reference on a stimulus to generate a perception.

A brand, company or service can also be perceived in different ways



Figure 2.1: *Is it a rabbit or a duck?*¹

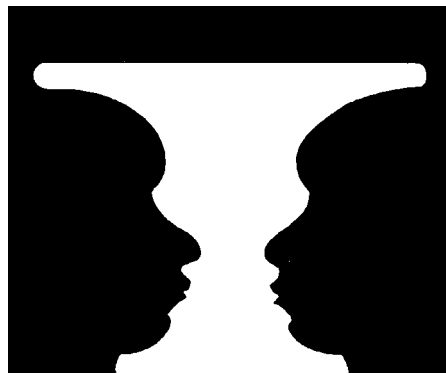


Figure 2.2: *A vase or two faces?*

depending upon the frame of reference that people bring to it. Frame of reference is a psychological term that refers to a mind set or previous experience.

Evaluating a brand

When we evaluate brands we try to do so by evaluating their attributes or features. This is not always a straightforward task, for two reasons. First, there is the problem of what attributes the brand has. Second, there is the problem of how to interpret these attributes.

For example, with the brand Volvo you might think of heavy construction, safety, conservative styling and so on. Heavy construction is closely related to safety, which you rate positively. But you may also associate it with poorer fuel economy, a negative feature. Thus the same attribute, heavy construction, can be rated positively or negatively depending on how you look at it. Similarly, large size may suggest either comfort (a positive) or poor fuel economy (a negative). And fabric seat coverings are more comfortable than faux-leather but are harder to keep clean.

Our minds can interpret any attribute positively or negatively. For example, our attitudes towards ground beef vary markedly depending whether it is labeled '75 per cent lean' or '25 per cent fat'.² There are upsides and downsides to almost anything in life and a brand's features are no exception.

Positively or negatively charged features

'Choice between brands is driven largely by simple associations between the brand and attributes or **emotions** usually created and sustained through advertising.'³ Attribute or emotional associations can greatly influence the way we feel about something. 'Cars are imaged variously as shields against accidents, reliable companions, virile athletes or purveyors of fun.'⁴ Similar variations occur in our images of other types of categories. Think for example of the image you associate with these:

- professions (lawyers, advertisers, doctors, car salespeople);
- countries (France, USA, Australia);
- cities (Sydney, London, New York);
- organizations (International Monetary Fund, United Nations, OPEC);
- corporations (Apple, Microsoft, Wal-Mart, Neiman Marcus);

- brands (Toshiba, Sony, Hewlett Packard);
- services (Speedy Mufflers, Qantas, Virgin Atlantic, DHL);
- product categories (pearls, wine, motorcycles).

Consider the product category ‘pearls’. Most people think of pearls as beautiful jewelry, whose salient associations are with gift-giving, attractive women, high fashion and expensiveness. But like any product, pearls also have non-salient features, aspects most people tend not to think of unless their attention is drawn to them for some reason.



Figure 2.3: An advertisement for Mikimoto pearls.

To pursue the example, a competitor of Mikimoto pearls (perhaps DeBeers diamonds) may seek to remind us of these other attributes because it wants us to buy diamonds instead of pearls. It may point out that a pearl is more easily damaged than a diamond (a small feather). Or it could point out that a pearl is an oyster tumor. Ugh! What unpleasant associations that statement triggers (a much bigger feather).

Under normal circumstances, however, we would never have cause to think about these aspects of pearls. Nevertheless, we would have to agree that both are true. The information that a pearl is more easily damaged than a diamond and that a pearl is an oyster tumor are both there in our heads. But they usually occur so far down on our mental attribute agenda that we would rarely, in the normal course of thinking about pearls, bring them to mind. Neither of them is a salient feature.

Calling a pearl ‘an oyster tumor’ plays the focal beam of our attention on an unpleasant aspect of pearls. This is a ‘feather’ but in this case a potentially large one and if it were repeated often enough its salience would be likely to increase. (In a sense, this is what animal rights group PETA has done by highlighting the cruelty involved in the product category of furs.⁵) It may not make us stop buying pearls but it might take some of the shine off our perception of them.

Under normal circumstances the focal beam of our attention is only wide enough to encompass a few of the attributes of a brand or product. By shifting the spotlight and playing the focal beam of attention on other

attributes, it is possible to marginally change our perceptions. This is what the graffiti artists are trying to do when they write 'Meat is murder' on walls and bridges. Most people eat meat. We also know where it comes from. But we don't want to think about it too much. If we did, we would probably all consider becoming vegetarians. The killing of animals in order to eat their flesh is hardly an association that we want to be reminded of.

Advertising influence on our brand attribute agenda

When you think of Volkswagen you perhaps think 'economical', 'quirky', 'cute', 'reliable'. You could consider many other attributes, but your mind only has time to touch on a few. The advertiser wants fuel economy to be high on the Volkswagen attribute agenda. So its advertising traditionally used words and pictures to highlight the brand's association with that attribute.

A confectionery brand could focus on attributes like fun, popularity, self indulgence, color, taste, shape or texture etc. M&M for example traditionally played the focal beam of our attention on one specific attribute: 'Melts in your mouth, not in your hand'. Lifesavers focused on shape: 'The candy with the hole'.

With drinks, too, there are all sorts of attributes on which an advertiser can play the focal beam of attention. Some that will be familiar are:

- Health: *Another day, another chance to feel healthy*—Evian
- Unpretentious: *Image is nothing. Taste is everything*—Sprite
- Pretentious/exclusivity: *Stella Artois—reassuringly expensive*
- Sport: *Life is a sport. Drink it up*—Gatorade
- Taste: *Just for the taste of it*—Diet Coke
- Modern/up-to-date: *Pepsi—The taste of a new generation, Generation Next*
- Thirst quenching: *Heinekin—refreshes the parts other beers can't reach*
- Ethics: *Don't be evil*—Google
- Flavor: *7UP, the Uncola*
- Ubiquity: *Always Coca-Cola*
- Quality/flavor: *Good to the last drop . . . Maxwell House*
- Origin: *Fosters—Australian for beer, Columbia Coffee—100% pure Columbian coffee beans.*

The chain of associations (visual or verbal) that a brand automatically triggers in our mind can be ranked in the order in which they are triggered, with the most salient ones at the top. This is the attribute agenda.

One of the most important aspects of advertising, then, is to play the focal beam of attention on a particular attribute and make that attribute more salient for us when we think of the brand.⁶ In other words, advertising influences the attribute agenda for a brand by rearranging the order in which we think of its attributes.

Using positively charged features: positioning

Words and images can be used to make the positive attributes of an advertiser's brand or product more salient; to increase the probability that when we think of that brand we will think of those positive attributes; to place them higher on the brand's attribute agenda.

What do you think of when I say 'Colgate'? Your stream of thought perhaps went something like this:

1. Toothpaste
2. Cleans teeth
3. Whitens teeth
4. Prevents decay
5. Long-lasting protection.

Now, what do you think of when I say 'Sensodyne'? Your stream of thought, heavily influenced by the name, elicits 'sensitive teeth' high up on the attribute agenda. Similarly the 'Close-Up' brand of toothpaste triggers a stream of thought that is heavily influenced by the name as well as the advertising which traditionally featured scenes of couples kissing. These play the focal beam of our attention on quite different attributes from those we associate with Colgate. Close-Up puts the brand's major selling point, the attributes associated with kissing, 'fresh breath' and 'sex appeal', high on our agenda of associations. Its attribute agenda is quite different from that of Colgate or Sensodyne.

Using negatively charged features: repositioning the opposition

Advertisers usually try to highlight the positive attributes of their own brand. An alternative strategy is to highlight the negative features of the opposition's product. We saw how this works with product categories when we discussed the examples of pearls and meat. Highlighting the negatives

in the opposition brand is referred to as *repositioning the opposition*—repositioning the opposition brand in people’s minds.

Sun OpenOffice software, for example, positioned its product against the competitor Microsoft Office by using the line ‘Don’t let a bully keep taking your lunch money’, thus highlighting the dominant, almost monopolistic position that Microsoft held in the office software area. This is not dissimilar to what the famous Avis rental car advertising campaign did in its classic campaign with the line: ‘Avis. We are number two, so why should you rent from us? We try harder!’ In that campaign Avis acknowledged that it was not the market leader and scored points and credibility for its honesty. At the same time it indirectly and subtly highlighted a negative attribute often associated with strong market leaders and monopolies—that they can be complacent and give poor service; that they don’t try hard enough. The proposition that Avis as number two in the market would be trying harder to deliver better service was the positive flip side of this. It was given more credibility by the company’s apparent honesty in admitting it was not number one.

Thus, words and images can be used to make particular negative attributes of an opposition brand or product more salient: to increase the probability that when we think of the brand we will think of that negative attribute. It is a matter of advertising influencing which attributes our minds focus on when we think of the brand. When we think of pearls or brand leaders we don’t usually think of the negative attributes, and this leaves them looking attractive.

The Sprite campaign: ‘Image is nothing. Taste is everything’ was another attempt at highlighting a negative attribute of opposition soft drink brands. Sprite positioned itself as ‘unpretentious’, focused on taste and not needing to play the focal beam of attention on image hype like other soft drink brands had.

It is the fact that our minds are usually focused on the positive attributes (like ‘jewelry’, ‘good-looking’, ‘valuable’, ‘great gift’) that makes them attractive. Just as there is a mental agenda of brands that we free-associate to the product category, so there is a mental agenda of attributes that we free-associate to entities like meat or pearls, or brands like iPod, Volkswagen or Google. Advertising can make certain attributes more salient and therefore higher on a product’s attribute agenda. As a consequence, when we think of the product we think of the advertised features before, and perhaps instead of, other negative but less salient attributes.

Point-of-sale advertising: attribute cueing

Just as ads or signs at the point of sale can remind us of a brand, so too they can remind us of a particular attribute of the brand.

- Coke Zero: *Great Coke taste, zero sugar.*
- BA: *The world's favorite airline . . . British Airways.*
- M&M: *Melts in your mouth, not in your hand.*
- Evian: *Your natural source of youth.*

The words and pictures used to label and describe a brand can direct our attention to quite different aspects of the same thing; they can help us to see it in different ways.

To illustrate, what do you think of when I say 'Bill Gates'? A biography of Bill Gates could conceivably carry any of the following subtitles: 'World's greatest entrepreneur', 'Computer mogul', 'Business mastermind', 'Philanthropist', 'World citizen', 'Family man'.

Bill Gates is one person but he has all of these attributes. Depending which subtitle was chosen, the book would attract a slightly different audience and have slightly different appeals. The same man is being described but what we expect to see in the book would be very much influenced by which title or description was used. Whether people bought it would be influenced by a combination of their own attribute agenda for Bill Gates and how much they are interested in business or philanthropy or family life or the state of the world. If a cue is used in the subtitle of the book, whichever one is chosen focuses our expectations differently. Each description of Bill Gates plays the focal beam of our attention and our expectations on a different attribute of the same person. It consequently influences our perceptions and our expectations and does not leave them solely to our own mental agenda.

Point-of-sale advertising does the same thing. It influences us by playing the focal beam of our attention on the brand and the featured attribute at the same time.

Influenced by the brand name

As we saw with Sensodyne and Close-Up toothpaste, advertisers try to choose the name of a brand so the name itself can help direct attention, influence people's expectations, and help determine the brand's most salient features. Names like Safe-n-Sound (baby car seats), Posturepedic

(mattresses), BeautyRest (mattresses), Revlon ColorStay (makeup), Head & Shoulders (shampoo), Chips Ahoy (cookies) and I Can't Believe It's Not Butter (margarine): these not only name the product but also make an implicit statement about its salient attributes. So we expect baby seats with the name 'Safe-n-Sound' to have features like quality and safety. We expect beds called 'Posturepedic' to be good for our back, and so on.

This has a very long history. 'Erik the Red named the country he had discovered Greenland, for he said that people would be more tempted to go there if it had an attractive name.'⁷ Erik the Red obviously had an intuitive feel for what influences people's expectations even though he did not think of it in terms of a product's attribute agenda.

Another example from history: before the Civil War, anything labeled alcohol had no market in the areas of the US known as temperance regions because of the social taboo. Patent medicines, on the other hand, found a big market in these regions—especially medicines containing up to 44 per cent of the preservative alcohol!⁸

Summary

How we evaluate a brand, a service or a product depends on how we perceive it. This in turn depends on the frame of reference we overlay on it. The frame of reference comes largely from our experience. Just as there is a mental agenda of brands that we associate with a given product category, so there is a mental agenda of attributes that we free-associate to a given brand.

Under normal circumstances the focal beam of our attention is only wide enough to focus on a limited number of the possible attributes of a brand or product. By shifting the spotlight and playing the focal beam of our attention on other attributes, it is possible to change our perceptions of the product. Words and images can be used to make its positive attributes more salient, to increase the probability that when we think of the brand we will think of those attributes.

Again, these may be 'feathers', but they may nevertheless be enough to tip the scales in favor of a particular brand—especially when all other factors are equal.

3 SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING: THE BIGGEST MYTH OF ALL

*Advertising is in an odd position. Its extreme protagonists claim it has extraordinary powers and its severest critics believe them.*¹

Andrew Ehrenberg

There are those who believe that advertising is all powerful and that the mechanism of advertising must be unconscious and subliminal and this is why its effects are not open to introspection. This chapter asserts that subtlety, not subliminality, is what is important and at the same time dispels the subliminal advertising myth. I also examine the reasons why ‘embeds’ which fan people’s fears continue to appear in advertising from time to time.

The never-ending story

In 2007 during an episode of *Iron Chef America* on the cable Food Network, a single frame of the McDonald’s golden arches was discovered, embedded in a part of the program.² Why was it there? The network later explained, ‘It was a technical error on our part and not a subliminal message.’

When *The Lion King* movie was released Disney found itself under attack from accusers who said the word s-e-x could be discerned in one scene in the dust as the lions were playing. I saw the clip (before it was removed from YouTube) and there is no doubt it was in there.

Some time later in the USA, in print ads for Camel cigarettes the image of a camel was barely discernible, embedded in the patterns of exhaled smoke and in the arrangement of ice water droplets. And in a number of visual ads with no apparent message the Mercedes three-point star appeared embedded in a variety of obscure places (see the example shown below).



Figure 3.1: An ad for Camel cigarettes, where an image of a camel appeared in smoke.



Figure 3.2: Only one word, 'Speed', appeared on this ad. Note the Mercedes three-point star in the sole of the shoe.

Not surprisingly these things make consumers very uneasy. Things that we don't understand make us more fearful. The natural fear is that somehow these images are seducing us in some way without our knowledge.

Anxiety increases even more when the subliminal image is found in political communications such as happened when George W. Bush was running against Al Gore for the US presidency. A pro-Bush ad flashed the word 'Rats' subliminally just as the ad was denigrating Gore's drug prescription plan.

Rarely does anyone ever really provide a satisfactory explanation as to how these things get in there so it naturally makes people think 'Hmm . . . why is it there? Maybe I really should be afraid.'

There has been so much nonsense talked about 'subliminal advertising' that there is always a risk that writing about it will again fuel the uninformed hype. But by understanding its mythical origins we will see how subtlety, not subliminality, is what is important in advertising. The fears of subliminal effects have been grossly overblown while subtle effects that are not 'hidden' from consciousness have much more impact.

The original scare on subliminal advertising came from a marketing consultant in the USA, James Vicary, who flashed 'Drink Coca-Cola' and 'Eat popcorn' on the cinema screen during a movie so fast that nobody

was supposed to be aware it was happening. He reported that sales of Coca-Cola and popcorn increased dramatically. This caused such a scare that legislation was quickly prepared to ban subliminal advertising.

If subliminal advertising did indeed have that kind of effect on our behavior, and without our knowledge, then we clearly would need protection from it. It is still widely believed that in the 1950s, subliminal advertising was made illegal in the USA. In fact, no such legislation was passed either federally or in any state. It was banned in a number of other countries including the UK and Australia, however, but as we will see, this was unnecessary.

That was a half century ago. Ever since, there have been numerous attempts—all unsuccessful—to replicate the substantial effect claimed by Vicary and more than 200 scientific papers have been published on the subject. Pratkanis and Aronson, after exhaustively researching that literature, concluded that ‘no study has demonstrated motivational and behavioral effects similar to those claimed by the advocates of subliminal seduction’.³ It is clear, in this case, enthusiasm and myth outweighed fact.

In 1984, when confronted with the overwhelming evidence against subliminal advertising, the marketing consultant James Vicary admitted to *Advertising Age* magazine that his original claim had been a fabrication.⁴ So, subliminal advertising was just a myth all along.

Self-help tapes

If that is so, you may ask, then what about those self-help tapes? The ones that are supposed to contain subliminal messages to help you give up smoking, improve your self-esteem and so on? Are they nonsense also?

In the same way that a sugar pill will relieve pain in about a third of sufferers if they think it is aspirin, so too will such tapes work on a proportion of the people who use them—because they expect them to. Pratkanis and Aronson convincingly demonstrated this several times by giving experimental subjects tapes of classical music marked ‘subliminally improve your memory’ or ‘subliminally improve your self-esteem’. A significant proportion of the subjects reported improvements in their memory or self-esteem, depending how their tape was labeled, but the proportion was the same whether the tapes actually had subliminal messages embedded in them or not.⁵

The practical jokesters: embedded words or images

What about the images and words like ‘sex’ that have been shown to be embedded in some advertisements? Don’t they prove that subliminal advertising is being practised and that it must be working? They prove nothing of the kind! Despite the furore and the paranoia created by such books as *Subliminal Seduction* by Wilson Bryan Key, I believe this is nothing but visual graffiti and practical joke-playing by those who design the advertising.⁶

It is similar to Hirschfeld, the cartoonist for the *New Yorker* who put his daughter’s name, ‘Nina’, in every one of his cartoons. You really had to look for them but they were there just the same.

Most of the examples Key cited have been in print advertising. It is very easy for an art director to put something in an ad, a caricature of his boss for example, without his boss being aware that it is there. An art director friend once pointed out to me a figure in a poster he had designed and which his boss must have seen hundreds of times. There, right in the middle of the crowd scene in the poster, was a caricature of his boss. Like the Waldo character in the children’s books, he was virtually invisible—until you looked. After a hearty laugh this art director swore me to silence. These things are rarely discovered. The *London Daily Mirror* once owned by the infamous Robert Maxwell ran a cartoon in which the cartoonist inserted the words ‘Fuck Maxwell’ in tiny letters among the squiggles.⁷

When the word ‘sex’ is found disguised in the shadows of ice cubes in a Gilbey’s gin ad, as likely as not it is an art director having a joke on his client or his boss or just seeing if he can get away with it without anybody noticing. This kind of thing, however, gives ammunition to the conspiracy theorists who interpret words or images as proof that subliminal advertising is practised and must therefore be seducing us without our knowledge.

Why did the subliminal myth take hold?

How, if subliminal advertising is just a myth, could the myth have been perpetuated for so long?

One reason is to be found in the fact that legislators in some countries moved so quickly to ban it. In doing so they lent a kind of legitimacy to unfounded beliefs about the power of subliminal advertising. The need to prepare legislation to ban it provided history with the *prima facie* evidence that subliminal advertising is a real threat. This helped enshrine and perpetuate the myth.

Another reason is that the myth fits the image of advertising that is perpetuated by the advertising industry. As we saw in Chapter 1, people believe that advertising has much greater powers to influence us than it really does. Once we started imputing witchdoctor-like powers to ad agencies, it was a small step to believing that they had the modern equivalent: the power to persuade us subliminally.

The media have also done their bit to foster this belief. Mystique makes for good copy and greater reader interest. Subliminal advertising taps into the same mystique as TV programs like *Heroes*, *The X Files* and *Ripley's Believe It or Not*.

But is that all there is to it? Just myth, hype and mistake? No. There is another important reason why the belief in subliminal advertising has persisted for so long. It is not totally without *any* effect. A high-jumper can leap 6 feet (2 metres) but this does not mean humans can fly. There are limits to how high we can go, unassisted. Similarly, as the earlier chapters of this book have shown, we are able to learn without full, conscious awareness—but only up to a point.

There is no doubt that we can be influenced without awareness, but as the earlier chapters show there is nothing necessarily unique or evil or manipulative about this. It is a quantum leap from here to believing in wholesale manipulation of people's minds through subliminal advertising. Just because we can learn without full awareness does not mean that advertising practises mass manipulation on us. People can jump 6 feet—but flying is something else.

Claims about subconscious learning had a kernel of truth. Claims about subliminal advertising were wildly exaggerated and they distorted this truth. Advertising often works without our being able to keep track of the process. There is no need for subliminal exposures on TV and cinema screens. The process happens naturally. It is what low-involvement communication is all about.

Thirty years of research later

So let's look at the claims a half century later—in light of the substantial body of scientific research on the human brain that has accumulated since then.

The notion of subliminal advertising was based on the belief that awareness was an all-or-nothing thing. That is, we are either aware of something or we are not. This is demonstrably untrue. Research in cognitive

psychology over the past 35 years has shown that *conscious awareness is a dimension and not a dichotomy. It is a matter of degree.*

By way of illustration, let me draw your attention to the sounds around you right now. What can you hear? Were you aware of the sounds before I drew your attention to them? Probably not. The reason is a matter of degree of consciousness. You were not paying attention to the sounds but that does not mean they were 'subliminal' in the sense that they were unable to be heard.

A more useful way of thinking about this issue is in terms of depth of mental processing. Instead of subliminal we could use the terms 'peripheral', 'shallow' or 'implicit processing'.

The logic and illogic of subliminal advertising

The concept of subliminal advertising was based on the notion of a threshold. Subliminal meant 'below the limen, or threshold'. This was thought to be a fixed point below which awareness does not extend. This 'limen' was just another name for the threshold.

We know that for some sounds, dogs have a much lower threshold than humans. They can hear sounds that we can't. This is the principle behind the dog whistle.

When we have a hearing test, the loudness of a tone is gradually increased until we indicate to the doctor that we can hear it. This is the threshold at which sound enters our consciousness. The same applies to sight. If a word is flashed on a screen for 50 milliseconds we will not be aware of it. If the time of the exposure is increased, at a certain point the word crosses the threshold and enters our conscious awareness.

Subliminal advertising was supposed to be pitched just barely below the threshold of awareness. If it was too far below it would not work. The theory was that the exposure should be sufficiently long for people to register the message unconsciously but not long enough for them to become aware of it. Research has since shown that there is no absolute threshold below which we are always unconscious of something and above which we are always conscious of it. (For example, when we are hungry we recognize food words at much shorter exposures than non-food words. The threshold is lower for these words when we are hungry and higher if we have just eaten.)

Thresholds therefore turn out to vary in the same person from day to day and even from hour to hour. This is partly because sometimes we

are more alert than at other times. They also vary as a result of tiredness, lack of sleep or drugs like alcohol or caffeine. And they vary from person to person.

For an advertiser always to pitch the ad message precisely at or just under the threshold would therefore seem impossible. Psychologists have now redefined the threshold of awareness in probabilistic rather than absolute terms—as the exposure level that enables a subject in repeated trials to detect a word 50 per cent of the time. To reach everyone, a message would have to be exposed for a relatively long period. But since this would put it above many people's threshold, the message could no longer be termed subliminal. Subliminal advertising as originally defined is therefore a myth.

Awareness and attention: limits to our capacity

Attention is not an all-or-nothing thing. Even though some people seem to be able to attend to more than one thing at a time, there are limits. Psychological studies show that the more things we allocate our attention to, the less the mental processing of any one of them.

Psychology experiments on shared attention show that there are real limits to our attention capacity when other things in the environment are competing for our attention. We only have a limited amount of mental processing capacity at any one time. Therefore some things are given shallow, implicit mental processing. Others are given deep attentional, or explicit, processing. There are just too many things around to process them all in the same depth.

Interestingly, the more attention that is paid to something, the easier it is for us to recall it later.⁸ For example, while driving and conversing on a (hands-free) cell phone, eye tracking research shows that even when we look directly at objects we are less likely later to recognize having seen them.⁹

So what happens on radio or TV when some of our attention is directed away from the ad? What happens when we are barely aware of the advertising? To answer, let me take you into the fascinating world of the experimental psychologist and introduce you to what is known as the 'divided attention' experiment.

Divided attention

Divided listening experiments at first glance seem akin to a slow form of torture. Psychologists get subjects to listen through headphones to two

different stories (or ads) simultaneously—one in the left ear and one in the right ear. (Experimental psychologists use stories while marketing psychologists might use radio ads.)

The subjects are tested immediately afterwards for what they remember. Not surprisingly, they recall only part of what they have heard and there is often a lot of confusion between what they heard in the right ear and what they heard in the left ear. Compared to subjects who are exposed to only one ad at a time, these people recall substantially less and their recollections are more confused. That is, the competition between simultaneous stimuli reduces the degree of recall.

This is not surprising. It is why many of us didn't do as well as we could have at school. And it's why television ads also have to be intrusive and interesting—to cut through and hold our attention, especially for low-involvement product categories.

Choosing what we attend to: selective processing

We can choose what to attend to and process deeply. The more interesting the stimulus the more we are likely to pay attention to it and the more of it we recall—in other words, the more impact it has.

What happens if the experimenter asks subjects to listen to the messages in both ears while 'shadowing' (repeating aloud) what they hear in one ear? In this way the experimenter can get the subject to direct even more attention to (process more deeply) the message coming into one ear. What happens when the experimenter tests for recall? It is no surprise that for the shadowed ear the degree of recall is very high. This illustrates that the greater the attention and the deeper the processing, the greater the recall will be.

But when the experimenter tests for recall of the message heard in the unshadowed ear, the result is zero. The subjects remember nothing—indeed, it is almost as if they have not been exposed to the other ad at all. (Poor recall of radio advertising is reflective of this phenomenon.) But if the subjects can't recall this message, does it mean it had no effect on them? Not necessarily.

The fact that some, albeit minimal, processing can occur at a very low level of consciousness is revealed by a further refinement of the divided attention experiment. In this version, the experimenter interrupts the subject while he/she is shadowing the ad in one ear and asks what he/she heard in the last second or two in the unattended ear?

Lo and behold, the subject recalls the previous 1–2 seconds of the unshadowed message. Perfectly! This is amazing, is it not? Especially since we know from the previous experiment that 30 seconds after the experiment the subject will remember nothing of that ad.

Thus the ad, even though it may not be recalled after the event, may nevertheless be processed, albeit at some very low level of attention.

Choosing what not to attend to: shallow processing

The problem is that the unattended message is not processed deeply enough. Its content is not retrievable after more than a few seconds unless we are induced to process it further by having our attention directed to it or by repetition.

It seems that a minimum level of attention is necessary for conscious awareness and recall to be retained. In glancing at ads as we scan through a magazine or newspaper, unless we spend at least three quarters of a second or more with the ad we will not even be able to recognize it later.¹⁰ The more stimuli one is exposed to, the less attention is left for processing other stimuli. Advertising which receives only minimal processing, far from being frighteningly powerful, is actually likely to be very inefficient, and almost certainly has less impact than advertising which is processed at a more conscious level.

This is not to say that such advertising has no effect—just that its effects seem to be marginal, and the more abbreviated the processing of the ad the weaker these effects are likely to be.

What are these effects?

The evidence is that so-called subliminal advertising can influence mood and it can affect feelings by cueing a primary drive (e.g. remind us that we are hungry or thirsty or arouse us to feel sexy) or activate our existing goals.¹¹ As with hypnotism, subliminal ads cannot induce goals that we don't already have but it can activate goals that we do already possess.¹²

This is no different to ordinary advertising. Even at a low level of conscious processing we can be reminded that we are hungry or thirsty. The implication of it is that a subliminal cinema ad may be able to increase drink or food sales, but cannot *direct* the extra demand toward specific items such as Coke or popcorn—unless these items are the only things immediately available.

That's not to say that it can't act as a feather to help tip an otherwise equal brand choice but that amounts to jumping 6 feet, not flying. Even when a stimulus is 'subliminal' and nothing breaks through into consciousness, research shows that it can marginally increase brand familiarity that could act as a feather to swing an otherwise equal choice balance.¹³ But why would advertisers do it this way, by flashing subliminal images, when, as Chapter 1 shows, there are less contentious and more effective ways to achieve even better results?

The late Anita Roddick reportedly put strawberry essence on the pavement outside her first Body Shop store.¹⁴ A well-known producer of freshly baked biscuits is said to pump out baking smells from its stores in shopping centres.¹⁵ Anyone who has ever walked past a Body Shop or a hot-bread shop knows that aromas can tweak our senses. There is nothing subliminal about it. Similarly it would be much more sensible for a cinema to use popcorn smells, or regular Coca-Cola advertising, to remind people that they are hungry or thirsty than to rely on less efficient stimuli such as so-called subliminal messages flashed on the screen.

Whether a stimulus is 'subliminal' or just subtle or whether it comes to us in the full glare of awareness, its main influence is on what enters the conscious mind.¹⁶ It can remind us that thirst is high on our needs agenda or that we are nearly out of fuel or it can remind us of a brand that we should consider. In other words, it can influence what products and brands get weighed up and research has shown that this in itself can influence the probability of the brand being chosen even if its evaluation is not changed.¹⁷

'Subliminal' influence on evaluation of the brand: image, attitude and choice

The laboratory study evidence is mixed on the ability of implicitly processed advertising to swing the brand decision by influencing brand image, brand attitudes and brand choice. Two experiments seemed to show it could, but another which attempted to replicate one of the earlier ones failed to find the same effect.¹⁸ Then another one found that in both high- and low-involvement situations, it added a decisive feather when everything else was equal.¹⁹

A problem with these laboratory studies is that subjects are usually exposed to only one or two repetitions of an ad. In the real world, the effect of one or two exposures may be too small to observe or even

measure. Laboratory studies with substantial ad repetition are rare but they do show that an attitude can be conditioned to the stimulus (even at low levels of awareness) by *repeatedly* presenting a stimulus (like a brand) with positive or negative pictures or words.²⁰ And more recent experiments investigating what happens when we are exposed to but ignore web ads have revealed implicit effects on ad liking and brand salience (see Chapter 25, ‘The web: advertising in a new age’).

Tracking many TV advertising campaigns continuously over weeks, months and sometimes years revealed this picture. The influence of low-involvement messages on the image and salience of particular brands seems to be much the same as, but less efficient than, advertising that is attended to more closely and processed more deeply. Over time, advertising appears to be able to produce small but cumulative image shifts and salience increments. Often, the advertising needs to be continued to maintain these effects. When it stops, the reinforcement stops and the gains are eroded.

These small changes are like the ‘feathers’ we talked about in Chapter 1. With repetition, they can tip the balance—assuming everything else is equal.

Nike and Mercedes may draw comfort from their brand being triggered by just a swoosh or a three-point star in the ad. It can be an effective supplementary branding device and certainly means a brand has achieved presence.²¹ That the brand can be recognized by this meagre cue testifies to and reinforces presence. It has more to do with that than any claims for subliminal effects in advertising.

When everything else is equal is when advertising is most effective

There is no evidence that low-involvement messages can directly influence or manipulate our conscious choices by *overriding* consciously received input or reasoning.²²

Whether it is processed implicitly or explicitly, however, advertising of a particular product or brand is likely to have greatest impact when the alternatives weigh in equally and we don’t care too much about the outcome. So its influence is in situations where we don’t care much anyway. Or, in situations where we do care and it helps remind us of a favorable alternative or a nice thing to do that we might not have thought about otherwise, when it puts a favorable alternative on the agenda.

As the story of subliminal advertising shows, we need to be very careful that we don't jump to the wrong conclusion in evaluating advertising's effects.

Summary

Human beings can learn without full, conscious awareness, but there are real limitations to this. We only have a certain amount of mental processing capacity at any one time. Therefore some stimuli receive less mental processing. Others receive focused, deeper processing. So conscious awareness is a dimension, not a dichotomy. It is a matter of degree.

It is true that there are situations where it can be advantageous for advertisers to communicate outside the full glare of attention. It helps obviate the triggering of conscious defences and counter-arguing (see Chapter 5, 'The advertising message: oblique and indirect'). Advertisers have little need to bury obscure images in ice cubes or rely on things flashed rapidly at sub-threshold speeds, all for uncertain effect. Advertisers have other ways to do the same thing, ways that don't provoke the same controversy or social concern. Oblique messages are one way, and product placement is another (see Chapter 6). Fears of subliminal effects have been grossly overblown while subtle effects that are not so 'hidden' from consciousness have much more impact.

So-called subliminal advertising, which began as a hoax in the 1950s, has become enshrined in myth. Legislators reacting so quickly in some countries to ban it lent a kind of legitimacy to beliefs about its power. Far from being frighteningly powerful, it is likely to be very inefficient and is almost certainly weaker than advertising which engages us at a more conscious level.

4 CONFORMITY: THE POPULAR THING TO DO

In our society a celebrity is a person who is famous for being well known.

Lee Iacocca¹

The same is true of brands. And companies!

Seeing things as others see them

I noted earlier that there are a number of different ways of seeing the same thing. What we perceive as ‘reality’ is very much influenced by how other people see it—the popular consensus. In making choices people are influenced by two things:

- what they think, and
- what they think other people think.

Let me illustrate this with an experiment (see Figure 4.1). Look at card 1. Imagine that the top line on this is a brand. Call it brand A. Brands have images and this one is no exception. I am going to ask you to compare this brand with others. The ‘image characteristic’ I want you to judge it on is its length.

Its competitors are the three lines below it on the card. Which one (of brand B, brand C or brand D) is most similar to the one at the top, brand A? Before reading any further, look at the card. Which one is closest in length to brand A? Brand B is the correct answer of course. It’s so obvious that nobody is likely to give any other answer, right? Wrong!

What happens if we get several people together in the same room? Unbeknown to our subject, all of them except the subject are stooges who are going to say what we have told them to say—that brand C is the same length as brand A. Imagine yourself as the subject. Everyone who answers

before you has given what you believe is the wrong answer. Now comes your turn. Imagine your dilemma. You break out in a sweat. Your senses are telling you that B is the right answer but all these other people seem so certain that C is correct.

How can this be, you ask yourself. What is wrong with me? Or them? What do you say? Can you resist conforming to the consensus?

This is a classic psychological experiment first performed by Solomon Asch many years ago. He showed that 75 per cent of people in this situation go against their own perception and give the popular response.

The thought process behind this will be familiar to anyone who has ever attended a business meeting. When we see things differently from others, do we always back our own perception and go public? Or do we play safe and go along with the popular opinion? Very often we play safe. We conform. But how does the conformity so vividly illustrated in Asch's experiment operate outside the laboratory?

Advertisers can't organize stooges or enforce conformity in everyday situations. So what relevance does this have for advertising?

To answer this, let's vary the experiment. We have demonstrated that when people make choice decisions, they do so on the basis of two types of information:

- objective evidence, and
- what they think other people think.

Popular opinion can influence not only compliance and conformity but indeed how we perceive reality.

When everything else is equal

In our experiment there was a real and noticeable difference between the brands (the lengths of the lines). When the difference is this obvious it takes a lot of peer pressure to get people to go against their own judgment

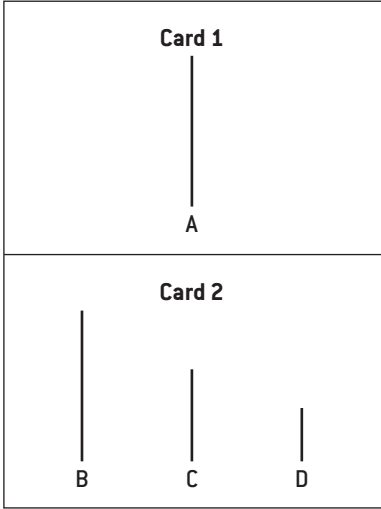


Figure 4.1: Card 1 and card 2.

and conform to the popular view. What happens if we reduce the differences? After all, in the real world, brands are often virtually identical.

We repeat the experiment, but this time, we have our subject compare the original brand A with three brands which are closer to it in length: brands E, F and G (see Figure 4.2). Which brand (line) on card 2 is the same length as brand A on card 1?

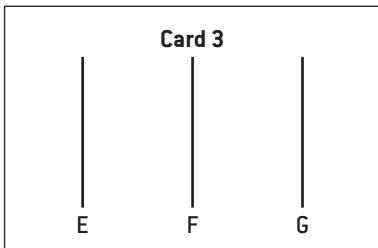


Figure 4.2: Card 3.

In fact, all of them are identical to brand A. But you have to choose, just as you do in the real world when faced with three identical brands (assuming you want to buy the product).

Imagine your surprise when everybody before you picks E (as they have been instructed to do). All the brands look the same to you. You must be missing something, you think. E looks about the same length as A—but so do the other lines. How is everybody else so sure the answer is E and not F or G or all of them?

In this situation people tend not only to conform by giving E as the answer but also to doubt the evidence of their own senses. This is the beginning of the belief in differences between brands.

It makes sense that in this situation the person will naturally have less conviction about the conclusion coming from his/her own senses. When there is less evidence to go on, or the evidence is ambiguous, people are less sure of their perceptions. The less sure they are, the more readily they will go along with other people's 'perceptions'. As the real differences between brands diminish, people rely more and more on outside cues to help them make judgments and decisions. This is when advertising seems to be most effective. When everything else is equal, it takes only a 'feather' to tip the balance and influence the choice.

The bandwagon effect: indicators of the norm

Conformity—being with the 'in' group, not being out of step—is a powerful human motivator. It can make the crucial difference in many brand choice decisions. When there is no real difference between brands or when the choice is not really important to a person, it takes much less than full consensus to influence their judgment. People will go with what they think the majority of other people perceive—the popular view.

This is known as the bandwagon effect. It occurs in situations as diverse as voting in elections and backing favorites in horse races.

Canned laughter, opinion polls and the Billboard Top 100 are all indicators of the norm. They tell us how others are reacting and thereby influence how we are likely to react. They provide signals about what to laugh at, what to think about and what to listen to.

How else do people form their impressions of what is popular or what is the norm? This is where marketing comes into play. TV and radio stations, newspapers and magazines frequently claim to be Number One. There is no doubt that this influences where media buyers and advertisers place their advertising. Some other indicators are even more subtle but nevertheless very powerful.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Billy Graham Crusades made a global name for this most powerful of evangelical preachers. How did he manage to get all these people to 'come forward for God'? Arizona State University researchers infiltrated the Billy Graham organization and revealed that: 'By the time Graham arrives in town and makes his altar call, an army of six thousand wait with instructions on when to come forth at varying intervals to create the impression of a spontaneous mass outpouring'.²

In the US, bartenders often 'salt' their tip jars with a few dollar bills at the beginning of the evening. This gives customers the impression that tipping with paper money is the norm.³

On telethons, inordinate amounts of time are spent reading out names of people who have donated money. The message is clear: everybody else has donated—what are you doing?

As real differences between choices diminish, people rely more and more on outside cues to help them make decisions. One such cue is what other people are thought to be choosing. Why do we *continue* to drink bottled water? On the streets, in the gyms, even in the movies, so many others are visibly doing it. When everything else is equal, the bandwagon effect may be the feather that tips the balance.

Insecurity: a motivator for conformity

People seem to have a natural aversion to being seen to be out of step with others, or different from the norm. This often leads us to take the safe course. We try to anticipate what others would do and then do the same. This can spare us embarrassment and it can sometimes save us from thinking too hard.

Management in bureaucratic organization is notoriously motivated by this. If a decision-maker does what everybody else would do, then if it turns out wrong, he or she won't be blamed. The personal risk is minimized. As the old saying goes: 'Nobody ever got fired for buying an IBM.'

People conform most when they are insecure. Adolescence is a time of great insecurity and uncertainty. It is no surprise, then, that teenagers are highly conformist. While rebelling against the out-moded values of their parents, they are at the same time the ultimate slaves to conformity—within their own peer group. Today, for reasons as varied as family breakdowns and longer working hours, the peer group has become even greater in influence. Adolescents increasingly define themselves by their friends and their possessions. Perceived popularity in the peer group determines and maintains success in the marketing of a widely diverse range of products such as music, cosmetics, jeans, fashion, sportswear, soft drinks, and radio stations.

Perceived popularity

How popular a brand is thought to be, or how familiar a company is thought to be, is an important dimension of image.

Popularity is a magnet. It attracts. And advertising can enhance its power to attract. Try to think of a single product of which the most popular brand is not advertised. Difficult, isn't it! Does this mean that advertising causes popularity? Not exactly. Advertising makes the brand appear popular. It influences its perceived popularity. The more a brand is advertised, the more popular and familiar it is perceived to be.



Figure 4.3: A Nivea ad promoting the brand as no. 1.

Advertising usually delivers specific messages that associate the company or brand with an image dimension or target attribute, such as 'reliability', 'environment-consciousness', 'value for money', 'good taste', 'ease of use'. Sometimes the attribute is 'popularity'. The advertiser may explicitly tell us that the brand in question is popular (e.g. 'British Airways—the world's favorite

airline’, ‘Budweiser—the most popular beer the world has ever known’, ‘Nickelodean—the #1 network for kids’, ‘Quicken—the world’s #1 selling financial software’).⁴ Or the popularity may merely be implied (e.g. ‘America spells cheese K-R-A-F-T’).

The interesting thing about communicating popularity, however, is that the advertiser doesn’t necessarily have to do so in so many words. We as consumers somehow infer that a product is popular simply because it is advertised.⁵ The psychological mechanism behind this is known as the *false fame* effect.⁶

A supportive study

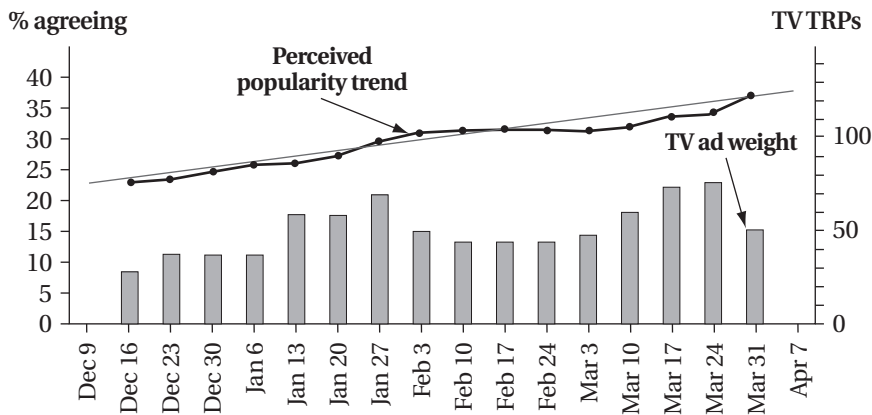
Some years ago I conducted a study in which people were asked which brand in various product categories they thought was the most popular.⁷ Irrespective of which brand they named, they were then asked why they thought it was the most popular. Thirty-six per cent of the responses took the form ‘It must be popular . . . because it is advertised so much’. (Others included ‘because it has so much shelf space in the supermarket’.) This was compelling evidence that presence, and especially a sustained advertising presence, translates into an image of popularity.⁸ It leaves a perception of popularity in our minds. Is it any wonder that advertisers are prepared to pay to have their brands appear as a ‘natural’ part of the script in movies, games and TV programs (see Chapter 6, ‘Under the radar’)? From such appearances our minds tend to infer that the brand must be popular or at least growing in popularity.

Advertising ‘side effect’

Unlike other image dimensions (such as reliability, taste, price, etc) this perception of popularity is largely independent of the specific advertising message. In other words, it is a ‘side effect’.

The graph in Figure 4.4 shows a brand which positioned itself largely on the attributes of taste and suitability. Note, however, the effect of advertising on people’s perceptions of its popularity. The mere fact of its being advertised significantly increased the proportion of people who associated it with the attribute ‘everybody seems to be drinking it’.

So, whether advertising is designed to communicate the image of taste, style, reliability or whatever, it is also likely to increase the perceived popularity and the salience of the brand. This is a ‘side effect’ of the advertisement that influences which brands come to mind, which brands we think are popular and which brands we include in our consideration set.⁹



Note: The mere fact of something being advertised can increase its perceived popularity.

Figure 4.4: Image of increasing popularity—everybody seems to be drinking it. (Source: MarketMind)

Agenda setting

A mechanism behind this side effect is one we have already met. It is ‘agenda setting’. The amount of media weight that an issue gets in newspapers, on TV, on websites and so forth indicates to people the degree of importance that the issue should have in their thinking. It sets their mental agenda. In marketing, the agenda that is set is not made up of political issues, but of the brands that are thought to be popular. For ‘popular’, read ‘important’. Our agenda-setting mechanism is not necessarily logical or rational. After all, is a brand advertised because it is important? Or is it important because it is advertised? There is a circularity here which is difficult for logic and rationality to come to grips with. But logic and rationality do not reign here.

Familiarity

A particularly subtle mechanism in this advertising side effect is familiarity. With frequency of exposure of a brand comes a feeling of increased familiarity. Familiarity makes the brand ‘stand out’ (e.g. on store shelves) and that is important in determining its chances of getting weighed up in the choice decision.¹⁰ However, familiarity not only increases a brand’s

chances of being noticed and weighed up, but importantly it can also influence brand evaluation and act as a feather that can tip the brand choice balance. This is because, other things being equal, familiarity itself is experienced as a positive.¹¹

We feel more comfortable with things that are familiar. Moreover, brands that we see frequently become somehow ‘easier on the mind’.¹² We recall them more easily and they spring to mind more readily than brands advertised less often. Crucially, when something springs to our mind readily, our minds assume not only that we must have seen it a lot¹³ but that it must be popular and we like it marginally more.¹⁴ Again we meet a circularity that is not logical or rational but is nonetheless real.

Is perceived popularity a plus?

If a brand seems to be popular, are people more likely to buy it? Yes.¹⁵

Advertising and media weight affect the perceived popularity image of a brand. They affect people’s feelings of familiarity with the brand as well as their perceptions of the popularity of the brand. And that, in turn, can affect their buying of the brand.¹⁶

There is clear evidence that advertising can impact on the perceived popularity of a brand, and there are strong indications that perceived popularity also lends ‘legitimacy’ to the continued purchasing of a brand—in most circumstances. To understand why, we need to explore what ‘having popularity’ conveys about a brand.

Perceived popularity conveys notions such as ‘a million people can’t be wrong’; that the brand is tried and trusted; that we are choosing the best. We have no reason to doubt or question our choice of a popular brand. We are reassured by the knowledge that others use it, that we are swimming with the tide.

So popularity is a positive reinforcer. It helps to reinforce our continued, unquestioning buying of the brand. It makes us less likely to question ourselves as to why we continue to buy that brand. It is a feather on the scales of repeat buying. For advertisers, therefore, it can provide a basis for developing a kind of defense shield, to try to protect the established market share. Promotion of a brand as popular does not rely on persuasion; rather it represents a pre-emptive effort to fend off the inevitable competitors who will try to take over the brand’s established mental territory. Used in this ‘defensive’ role, the popularity image of a brand is more akin to inoculation than to persuasion.

Popularity and the bandwagon effect

As we have seen, people tend to climb on the bandwagon of anything that seems to be gaining in popularity. If a new brand begins to acquire 'high visibility' and be seen as something that 'everyone is talking about' or that 'more and more people are using', this can be an attraction, a 'come-on', a temptation for us to try it too. Facebook, MySpace and YouTube took off exponentially when they passed a critical mass of users. The creation of high visibility can accelerate this take-off point and it has been the basis for many marketing fads over the years such as Ninja Turtles, Batman, 101 Dalmatians, Power Rangers, Teenie Beanie Babies, Tamagotchi virtual pets and so on, not to mention pop stars and politicians.¹⁷ People are tempted to try 'the latest'—the one that everybody is talking about.

Overpopularity

The expression 'fast up . . . fast down' is particularly relevant in this context of creating popularity. If pushed too quickly, or to extremes, perceived popularity can go 'over the top'. The pole of the magnet can reverse and repel us rather than attract us. Advertisers have to guard against creating overpopularity, which can suddenly become a liability for their brand.

This is more often a danger when perceived popularity is used in an offensive role, to get us to try a brand initially, than when it is used defensively, as simply a reinforcer reminding us to buy the brand again. It is no accident that this type of marketing is often associated with products with short lifespans such as movies, children's toys . . . and, perhaps, politicians. As the saying goes, 'One day a rooster, the next a feather duster.'

Using high visibility to persuade us to try a brand is very different from using it to maintain the brand's position. High visibility can help persuade us to try a brand but the success of such a strategy risks being very short-lived. For the brand, it may well be a case of 'fast up . . . fast down' and it may go the way of things such as the Macarena dance craze, Pogs and Jennifer Aniston hair cuts.

Why popularity can become a turn-off

Perceived popularity is not always positive. When too many people use a brand, it risks becoming perceived as common unless its image is carefully managed. It is not just a case of familiarity breeds contempt. Overpopularity can degrade the currency.

Peter De Vries, an American novelist, once said in another context: 'Everyone hates me because I am so universally liked.' Astute advertisers have learnt to guard against this type of reversal. They know that simply giving a brand as much 'hype' as possible in as short a time as possible is not necessarily a good idea. Instead, they try to manage the perceived popularity of the brand as part of a long-term process of image development and ensure that they consolidate a lasting market share.

This is particularly true with brands aimed at adolescents. Adolescents are often prone to rebel—especially against parents and the rest of society. The grunge trend made it cool for youth to resist the notion of cool itself and treat marketing with derision. Since then, teen brands have been increasingly built virally and cautiously.

Also in adult 'social' product categories like wine and beer, if a brand becomes the most popular it risks becoming less and less acceptable to take to other people's places or serving to guests. Why? Since everybody drinks it, it begins to take on an image of commonplace. It becomes too successful. To take a bottle of it to a dinner party can become unthinkable because of what this signals about how you regard your host and the occasion.

Gifts and special occasions

We mark special occasions by the use of things out of the ordinary: a very old bottle of red wine, hiring a stretch limousine, eating out at a fine restaurant. Such symbols mark the specialness of the occasion. Similarly, when we want to express our caring and esteem for others, we give or do something special.

Hallmark cards, for example, reinforced this by using the tag line 'When you care enough to send the very best' and urged us to 'Turn the card over and make sure it's a Hallmark'. Specialness for a brand, once it is achieved, requires careful nurturing and reinforcement in order to maintain it in the face of mass popularity.

Positioning a brand or product as suitable for gift-giving or special occasions can therefore be a successful strategy, but if it becomes too successful it has within it the seeds of its own destruction. Overpopularity can 'devalue the currency'.

Price, exclusivity and popularity

Unless a prestige brand's image is kept up through high price or other

image-lifting devices it risks gradual degradation from too much popularity (as seems to have happened to Pierre Cardin and Reebok).

International wine aficionados know that Veuve Clicquot champagne and Grange Hermitage (the premier Australian red wine) are 'popular' in a very different sense from brands like Gallow or Smirnoff. Because of their high price, Grange and Veuve Clicquot are most acceptable, but not very affordable—and this is the point. Like Lexus they have traditionally used price to try to protect the brand from the commonness that would otherwise go with great popularity. The high price and relative unattainability confers a degree of exclusivity, which in effect makes the well-known brand more an aspirational symbol.

Communicating popularity

Many advertising themes have tapped into the desire to conform. These include:

- *Fosters. Famous in Australia. Famous around the world.*
- *Why go with the number two when you can go with the number one in rental cars?*
- *The leader in digital audio . . . Sony.*
- *Nashua—number one in photocopiers.*
- *British Airways—the world's favorite airline.*
- *America's largest discount broker . . . Charles Schwab.*
- *America's number one nail protection . . . Hard-As-Nails.*
- *Oracle. World's #1 Data Base for SAP Applications.*

These are some of the more obvious examples. Others that are more subtle but work on the same principle include:

- *Wouldn't you like to be a Pepper too? (Dr Pepper)*
- *The word is getting around . . . Mitsubishi.*
- *The one to watch . . . Renault.*
- *Life Savers . . . a part of living.*
- *Chevrolet . . . Heartbeat of America.*
- *Join the 'regulars' . . . Kellogg's All-Bran.*
- *Tylenol . . . first choice for patients in pain.*
- *Going Ford is the going thing.*

Summary

As some wit once said, 'Conformity is something you can practice without making a spectacle of yourself.' In making choices we are influenced by two things:

- what we think, and
- what we think other people think.

Conformity is a powerful human motivator. Especially when everything else is equal, it can tip the balance in many brand choice decisions. We are more likely to go against our judgment and conform to the popular view if there are few real differences between brands. As the real differences become negligible, we rely more and more on outside cues to help us make our decisions. The more insecure we feel, the more likely we are to be influenced by others.

The more a brand is advertised or seen embedded in TV shows, games or movies, the more popular and familiar it is perceived to be. Popularity is like a magnet. Advertising can enhance its power to attract. We as consumers somehow infer that something is popular simply because it is advertised. If pushed too quickly or to extremes, perceived popularity can go 'over the top'. The pole of the magnet can reverse and repel rather than attract us. Overpopularity tends to 'devalue the currency'.

5 THE ADVERTISING MESSAGE: OBLIQUE AND INDIRECT

42.7% of all statistics are made up on the spot.

Anonymous graffiti

Like graffiti, advertising has moved a long way from simply imparting direct information messages. Advertising and graffiti often have succinct, clever messages that are not direct statements of information. Consider how much more powerful the above statement is compared to one that urges us to ‘Be careful of quoted statistics because they can be easily fabricated’. The message that we take away from it is the same thing even though the words don’t contain that literal message. Indirect

forms of communication sometimes register a point with more impact.

For example, an ad that shows a Volkswagen Tourag towing a Boeing 747 along a runway does not need any words; it communicates very effectively that ‘VW is compact but capable’. Or consider the print ad for Jewelry.com (Figure 5.1) used during the Valentine’s Day buying season. These advertising messages are oblique and indirect. Oblique communication can sometimes register a point with more impact.

In management boardrooms advertisers traditionally ask their advertising agencies questions like: ‘Are we getting our message across?’



Figure 5.1: Valentine’s Day ad for Jewelry.com. Oblique communication can sometimes register a point with more impact. (By Robert Chandler & Partners of Los Angeles)

or ‘What message are buyers taking out of our ad?’ This is based on the assumption that advertising is meant to be informational.

Usually consumers are asked something like: ‘What was the ad trying to say to you?’ or ‘What was the message that the advertiser intended?’ Even with the above type of indirect message, this process can provide valuable feedback to advertisers and quickly tell them if their commercial is communicating what they want it to communicate; if the commercial is an informational one, that is. However, the more the advertising moves away from *direct* message communication towards oblique message communication the less this makes sense. Entertainment commercials, including image, musical or drama commercials, are often oblique communications and very different from lecture-style commercials.

We mentally process ‘image’ ads, such as those for Honda, Nike, beer or perfume, quite differently from informational ads, such as those announcing this week’s special at Macy’s or Joe Blow’s Valentine’s Day sale. Indeed, it is difficult with many ads (especially image ads) to work out what message they intend to convey. Advertisers themselves find these ads the most difficult to evaluate, largely because there is little point in asking people what message they get from them.

There is a very real difference between advertising that has a clear, spoken, unambiguous message and advertising that is oblique, especially when it is more akin to drama or entertainment. We mentally process different types of ads in very different ways.

If you think of the current advertising for various image-advertised brands, you may find that the ad or the message, or both, is difficult to recall. What is missing from some of these ads is the sense that someone is trying to tell you something directly. This does not mean that they are ineffective—just that they do not work by way of clearly elaborated messages.

Australia has a brand of non-alcoholic drink called Clayton’s which was traditionally positioned successfully with the tag line ‘Clayton’s—the drink you have when you’re not having a drink’. Clayton’s entered the vocabulary as a name for a ‘social lubricant’ substitute for alcohol acceptable for drinking on occasions when others are consuming alcohol. It predated Perrier bottled water which positioned similarly and other acceptable substitutes that have overtaken it today (like lime and bitters, etc) but the word ‘Clayton’s’ remains linguistically generic amongst

Australians to mean ‘the one you’re having when you’re not having one’. Hence many image ads could be said to have a Clayton’s message i.e. the message you’re having when you’re not having a message.

What is a message?

Usually in image ads we are not being lectured to. Instead we are experiencing life or being entertained—but in the process, information gets in. If someone tells us ‘Muhammad Ali was tough’, that is a message. But what if, instead of telling us that Muhammad Ali was tough, you show an old video clip of him beating the hell out of someone? Answer: we get the same message! Yet if you asked ‘What was that clip trying to communicate to you?’ we would probably think the question quite odd. It is not obvious that the film clip is trying to communicate anything to us. Even so, after seeing it we would definitely be inclined to agree with the statement, ‘Muhammad Ali was tough’.

In other words you get the same message. But it doesn’t seem like a message. It’s a Clayton’s message . . . the message you’re getting when you’re not getting a message. Yet the impression, that Muhammad Ali was tough, is communicated just the same.

So, while advertisers frequently use *message take-out* (a.k.a. *message take-away*) as a measure of an ad’s success, it is not necessary that consumers be able to parrot back the message for an ad to be working. Communication of impressions can be just as effective as communication of facts.

Window on the mind

Let me ask you a question: How many windows are there in your home? Answer before you read on.

Now think about the mental process you went through to retrieve this information. Did you visualize each room in turn and add up all the windows? If so, you are now more aware of a way in which our minds arrive at information other than by simple memory retrieval: by re-processing other information that we have mentally filed away.

The stored information may be verbal or visual. We put these previously unconnected bits and pieces together in our minds and arrive at something new. Sometimes the ‘something new’ is another piece of information (like the number of windows there are in your home). At other times, however, it may be a new attitude or a new feeling about something.

As consumers, we often construct our attitudes to brands out of stored information in this way. The attributes or images that have become associated with the brand may have lodged in our memory without ever having been part of a verbal message. They may have originated in visual images from advertising or experiential learning or input from other people. It is therefore a mistake to think about advertising communication solely in terms of conscious message take-out.

Ask yourself who you think is the typical user of Apple Mac, of Harley-Davidson or of Volvo? While you don't have a complete answer, you are not without impressions either. For example, do you think the typical owner of a Volvo would be more or less conservative than the owner of a Ford? More or less affluent? Most people would agree that the Volvo owner is likely to be more conservative and more affluent than the Ford owner. Yet they have not acquired those pieces of information through any direct message.

Advertising for many product categories, such as soft drink, beer, confectionery, or perfume is dominated by ads that appear to have very little message. Image ads convey associations and are totally different from informational ads that communicate 'news' (such as one that communicates the existence of a new product or one that announces what's on special this week at Safeway supermarkets). Associations are like individual windows. Images are like the number of windows. The number of windows in your home is not a piece of information that someone has communicated to you in a message. It is not directly stored in your memory. But you have the bits and pieces to generate it, nevertheless. In this way we can learn things or know things or develop attitudes without being particularly aware of the process. There is nothing necessarily manipulative or devious about this. It happens all the time. It is part of life.

Learning without awareness

What is missing from some communications is the sense of someone trying to tell us something or trying to communicate a message. As we saw earlier this does not mean that they are ineffective—it is just that the learning is not by way of someone clearly elaborating messages.

Some psychologists have labeled this type of indirect learning 'learning without involvement'.¹ Others have called it 'implicit memory'² and still others have called it 'incidental learning' or 'learning without

awareness'.³ Strictly speaking this latter is inaccurate. It is not that people are unaware but rather that the 'focus of processing' is on something else in the communication. Our attention is focused on something other than the message per se.

In the venerable TV series *Sesame Street*, messages are embedded in entertainment. Messages such as 'cooperation' and 'sharing' are communicated through drama and song. Learning the alphabet or learning to count is not a chore for *Sesame Street* viewers, but an experience. These skills are effectively conveyed in an entertaining kaleidoscope of sounds and visuals.

We can easily process what we see and hear around us with the mind on autopilot and without any intent to learn. With repetition we can learn skills, information, image associations or almost anything by this implicit learning—provided it is not inconsistent with what we already know or believe.

We have thus discovered yet another reason why people find it hard to analyze introspectively the effects advertising has on them. Sometimes advertisements do not obviously impart information. Especially with ads based on image, emotion or drama there is a lessened sense of someone transmitting information—indeed if there is any sense of it at all. Such ads may communicate mood more than message; feelings rather than words.

Inconsistency—our protective shield

The mind on autopilot easily registers the identity of objects, people and events by a simple template-matching process and it registers or learns about relationships between them.⁴ It makes sense that the mind's eye might also have some sort of protection device when our mind is processing like this on autopilot—a mechanism to alert us if the ID of something is not quite right, or our interpretation of the events is uncertain. And indeed, it does. We have a kind of inner alarm that, when activated, switches our minds to more conscious, explicit processing and the potential intruder gets the full focal beam of our attention.⁵ As a leading researcher commented, 'When things match . . . the stream of consciousness flows smoothly . . . There may be fish in the stream of consciousness, but when an elephant swims by we sit up and take notice.'⁶

By switching on the full beam of attention, the learning situation is changed from implicit to explicit and any inconsistency is likely to invite

rejection or reinterpretation. The importance of this is that, just as a person under hypnosis will not accept a directive that conflicts with their own values, so too our minds won't passively accept things that are clearly inconsistent with our existing beliefs or our knowledge of the world.⁷ Communications that violate this principle risk being ineffective because they tend to trigger this 'intruder alarm'.⁸

Memory and association

As we saw earlier in the chapter, the number of windows in your home is not a message or a piece of information that someone has communicated to you. It is not directly stored as a piece of information in your memory. But you have the bits and pieces to generate it, nevertheless. Once again: How many windows are there in your home? That was quick! You didn't have to think about it this time; you already had the answer, because it is now stored in its own 'slot' in your memory in a more readily accessible form. Having put the component bits and pieces together, you can now access that piece of information much more quickly and efficiently at any time you want by accessing it directly. You don't have to go through the process. You have enhanced its 'availability'.

Just like a commercial, this chapter firstly helped evoke in you the necessary images or pieces of information to let you go through the process of arriving at that summary piece of information. Having arrived at it, you stored it yourself as a new piece of information in a memory slot of its own.

In the consumer world, what gets stored in memory slots like this is not just information. It may be an attitude, a judgment, a position or a conclusion. But once formed and stored, these things are more readily accessible and hence more available to influence future buying decisions—especially those types of decisions that tend to be made 'on the fly'.⁹

The all-important effect of a relatively subtle ad may rest on its ability to build the right visual or mood associations for a brand and lock them into memory; to put those associations on the brand's attribute agenda. Rather than communicating directly by a specific verbal message, the ad may be communicating indirectly, by associational imagery.

It is worth repeating that, strictly speaking, this is not learning without awareness. It is not that people are unaware but rather that the 'focus of processing' is on something else in the communication rather than the 'message'.

Learning by association

You visit a city for the first time, say Paris, and go to the top of the Eiffel Tower. What an experience! What a view! What is the view trying to tell you? What sort of a silly question is that? It is not trying to communicate anything. Views, just like some commercials, come across as an experience rather than an articulated message. Nevertheless, after just one or two exposures you may come to permanently associate a city with a wonderful visual experience. This splendid view is now higher up on the agenda of attributes that you associate with that city. An image can be built without any specific message. The process is not necessarily logical but it is real and natural, nevertheless.

In a sense it could be said that you have learnt much the same information as if you had simply been told 'Paris is a beautiful city'. In that case you would have received a clear verbal message. However, two things are different:

- You have learnt the information experientially instead of verbally. And this means that you probably have a much richer or deeper sense of it.
- You have learnt the information 'without awareness' i.e. without awareness of being taught something. There is no sense of any intended message.

This is not new. Years ago, the psychologist Charles Osgood demonstrated that when a given adjective is repeatedly paired with a given noun, the 'meaning' of the noun, as measured by a scale called 'the semantic differential', undergoes change—in the direction of the adjective.¹⁰ For example, when the noun 'snake' is repetitively paired with the adjective 'slimy', we begin to think of snakes as slimy creatures (even though they aren't). Little is made of such findings today but the phenomenon seems to underlie much of the process by which image advertising works.

Image advertising's effects

To 'play back' the message from an ad we need to be able to articulate our experience—to describe what we see as the message. As an index of an ad's effectiveness, this playback (or message take-out) is more appropriate for ads that are designed to communicate 'news' about a brand.

For the more subtle types of ads our inability to play back much in

the way of a message does not, in itself, mean that the ad is not working (though it may not be). How then, you may ask, does anyone detect these more subtle effects? How do advertisers know that any such effects are happening? How can the invisible be made visible?

The answer is, by inference—by looking at how the ad has influenced our image of, attitude to or behavior regarding the brand. We would be unable to see an invisible man but if he put on visible clothes we would know he was there. In the same way we cannot observe these invisible advertising effects directly but we can infer their existence by observing other things, such as:

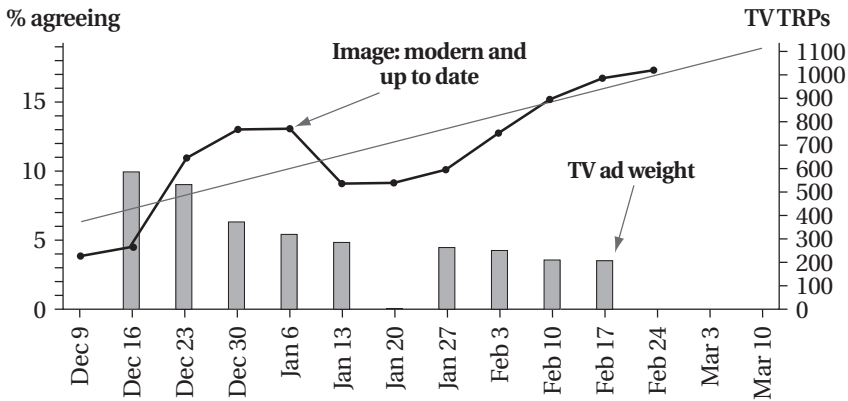
- changes in brand image dimensions, as measured by questions such as ‘Which brand do you most associate with ...? (safety/best taste/most popular, etc)’
- changes in brand attitudes, as measured by questions such as ‘How do you feel about brand X overall?’, ‘How much do you like it?’
- changes in behavior, as measured by changes in sales and market share.

With image commercials, the invisible can be made visible by measuring the degree of association with image attributes; the degree to which the image feature appears in the brand’s attribute agenda and how high up it is on that agenda. These measurements are often taken indirectly and calibrated in the form of belief statements about the brand (e.g. ‘liked by everyone’, ‘best quality’, etc).

A fairly typical image-building strategy is to make an ad (like those that were traditionally used for Coke, Fosters, etc) that featured the brand in a range of enjoyable situations. Blend in a mood soundtrack with appropriate lyrics and then serve with generous quantities of exposure. Again the important point to note about this type of advertising is that there is a lessened sense of someone transmitting information—indeed if there is any sense of it at all.

Communication by association

Some years ago a new brand was launched into a frequently purchased snack food category. The TV ad was musically based with a very catchy jingle. The words made musical reference to the glowing attributes of the new brand. Message take-out was measured by asking a random sample



Note: Even though ‘modern and up to date’ was not part of the audio message that people ‘took out’, the association with this attribute is clearly affected by advertising.

Figure 5.2: Image effects revealed—snack food product. (Source: MarketMind)

of people what the message was. They responded with the attributes that were verbalized in the jingle. These were: ‘better/best brand’ and ‘this brand is good for you’.

A subsidiary objective of the ad was to have the brand seen as ‘modern and up-to-date’ and ‘a brand of today’. This was not expressed in words but was to be inferred from other pieces of information as well as the ad’s tone, pace and fast-cut visuals. There was very little playback of this attribute. While some people said the ad was trying to communicate newness, almost no one mentioned ‘modern’, ‘up-to-date’ or ‘a brand of today’.

However, as the graph in Figure 5.2 shows, a growing number of people were positioning the brand in their minds in association with this attribute. When they were asked: ‘Which brand or brands do you most associate with the description “a modern, up-to-date brand”’, the associative linkages created by the ad became visible. The effect was more evident the longer the ad continued to be aired.¹¹

The increased association of the brand with this attribute was also linked with a significant improvement in overall attitude towards the brand and, to a lesser extent, increases in market share. Any advertiser who relied only on conscious message take-out as a measure of this ad’s effectiveness would be severely misled. People could articulate that the ad was trying to communicate ‘better/best brand’ and ‘good for you’—the message of the jingle—but the ‘modern and up-to-date’ message was

simply inferred. It was a Clayton's message. Yet it was in no way hidden; it was simply communicated visually rather than verbally.

Do you think in words or pictures?

When we are asked what message an ad is trying to communicate to us, the result is an index more than anything else of the success of the verbal communication in the ad. However, words are not the only way that we experience ads.

What does a television commercial communicate to you? Pictures, words or feelings? When you listen to a radio commercial, what goes on inside your head? Do you experience pictures or words? Or do you just experience the overall *feeling* of the commercial message?

Clearly, the answer depends to some extent on the type of commercial. An ad for Hawaii is vastly different from an ad for this week's specials at Safeway. But we now know from psychological research that different people tend to favor different modes of thinking. In other words, we differ in the way we mentally process information.¹²

You can start to get a feel for this by answering these questions:

- Do you think in words or pictures?
- Do you recall names better than faces?
- When you can't decide which way a word is spelt, does it help to write it down both ways and then choose the right one?
- When you hear a radio commercial, what do you experience? Pictures or words?
- When you remember a TV commercial, what do you remember first? Is it visual or verbal?

Compare your answers with those of your partner or a close friend. Most people are surprised to learn that the other person's answers are not the same as their own. We assume, without any real basis, that other people think the same way we do. Even advertisers tend to base their strategies on this assumption.

Individual differences

Over the years I have asked many groups of people the question: 'Do you think in pictures or words?' About a third say unequivocally that they think in pictures. Usually somewhat less than a third say unhesitatingly that they

think in words. And the rest say either that they think both ways, or that they can't answer the question.

The proportions vary from group to group but the really interesting thing is the reaction of the 'word thinkers' to the 'picture thinkers' and vice versa. The strict picture thinkers become positively astounded with those who say they think in words and not pictures. 'How can you think in words?' they ask disbelievingly. 'How can you possibly think in pictures?' some of the word thinkers throw back at them, not so much as a retort but in equal puzzlement and disbelief.

So even in an informal research exercise like this, it becomes readily apparent that people are not in agreement on the way in which their basic mental processes work. There are very definitely those who believe they are primarily visualizers (picture thinkers) and those who believe they are primarily verbalizers (word thinkers).

The significance of whether we think in words or in pictures comes when we retrieve the commercial or its message from memory—say at the point of sale when we recall that we have seen a commercial for the brand. Do we hear the ad in our mind? Do we see in words what it said? Or do we retrieve the visual images or impressions that are associated with it?

The cues that advertisers use at the point of sale, such as pack design, shelf talkers, slogans, and so on, are designed to remind us of the verbal messages or to retrigger the visual associations that have been communicated by the ad.¹³

Summary

What is missing from some ads is the sense of someone trying to tell you something or communicate a message. This does not mean that such ads are ineffective—just that they do not work by way of clearly elaborated messages.

We mentally process image ads and visual experiences quite differently from informational ads or messages. We can learn or know things without being particularly aware of the process or the result. There is nothing necessarily manipulative or devious about this. It happens all the time. It is not that we are unaware of this in any subliminal sense but rather that our 'focus of processing' is often on something else in the communication rather than a verbal message per se. We can learn skills, information, image associations, or almost anything by this incidental learning—provided it is not inconsistent with what we already know or believe.

This is yet another reason why we find it hard to analyze the effects advertising has on us. As consumers we use the many bits and pieces which we receive from advertising, experiential learning or other people. They are put together as information, attitudes, judgments, positions or conclusions. Once stored in their own memory slots, these are more readily accessible to us and more available to influence other related decision-making. They have the potential to influence our future buying decisions—especially those that tend to be made ‘on the fly’.

6 'UNDER THE RADAR': PAID PRODUCT PLACEMENT

As I pointed out in Chapter 3, advertisers have little need of subliminal techniques because there are other methods of advertising that don't provoke the same controversy or social concern. Fears of subliminal effects have been grossly overblown, while subtle effects that are not so 'hidden' from consciousness have more impact.

There can be advantages for advertisers in communicating their message obliquely or indirectly outside the full glare of attention, as we saw in the previous chapter. Despite a lessened sense of a message, we get the message just the same but it is less likely to trigger counter-argument. In a sense, it goes under the radar.

In this chapter I look at another form of advertising that goes under the radar: that of advertisers paying (either in cash or in kind) for their brands to be embedded in the storyline of movies, games, TV programs, song lyrics, music videos or books.

Sometimes called 'brand placement', 'product placement', or 'program integrations', this practice has grown explosively, driven along not so much by a need for stealth but as a reaction by advertisers to the threat posed by our newfound ability to fast forward through the TV ad breaks.

The scramble

When digital video recorders enabled us to fast forward through the ads, advertisers became more limited in their ability to engage us at a conscious level by using conventional advertising. This, along with a proliferation in the number of TV channels, was taking the 'mass' out of mass media audiences. Advertisers realized that they desperately needed to find other ways to reach consumers with their brand messages.

If consumers could increasingly screen out conventional TV ads by fast forwarding, what else could advertisers use to provide support

for their brands? Companies scrambled for other ways to reinforce and defend their market positions.

The alternatives

One alternative was to change the method of advertising delivery. That is, delivering the same or similar video material via other media such as the cinema, the web (through YouTube, for example) and mobile devices (see Chapter 25: ‘The web: advertising in a new age’). Another was to deliver the ads vicariously, for example, by viral email, and hoping that intriguing ads would be forwarded to friends thereby multiplying exposures.

Still another alternative was providing incentives for brands to appear in programs—product placement. For quite some years advertisers regarded this as very limited. Placing the brand in programs could help keep the brand in front of people’s eyeballs to maintain its ‘top of mind’ presence. However, this was regarded as an inadequate substitute for conventional TV advertising as it did not carry any advertising messages. So, while there was a choice advertisers still preferred to spend their ad budgets on conventional TV advertising.

Finding new alternatives to match the effects of conventional advertising proved difficult and left advertisers with little choice but to make the best of what they had. That meant embracing and exploring more effective use of these things called paid product placements as well as making the best of any communication to be had when ads were fast forwarded.

Communication in fast forward

Importantly, to avoid the ads we don’t skip them so much as we zip them—we speed them up. This difference is important. It is ironic that to avoid the ads, we end up watching and paying attention to sped up ad frames.¹ We are exposed to a stream of rapidly flashing ad content that is something akin to subliminal speed exposure. As we saw in Chapter 3, this is not something to be *too* worried about because the *exaggerated* claims made for subliminal exposure were a hoax from the beginning.

However, zipped ads are not completely without effect. They are at least akin to driving past a billboard or flicking through ads in a magazine. We know from the divided attention experiments earlier that the ‘learning without awareness’ effects are often quite small. An advantage that they do have, however, is that they fly under the defensive radar—we don’t think of fast forwarded ads as having any effect on us at all.

Despite this, it has been shown that when an ad is already familiar to us from seeing it at normal speed, then playing it in fast forward:

- reminds us of the brand;
- reminds us of previously watched instances of the ad seen at normal speed;² and
- fleetingly retriggers a reminder of the emotional reaction we had to the ad previously.³

Fleeting and limited though such reminders are, they have a reinforcement effect that can still influence brand choice, because as we saw in Chapter 1:

- even a weak effect can be a feather and swing the balance of choice if everything else is equal;
- furthermore, small feathers can build over time, through repetition, into a bigger, cumulative effect (just like kids grow imperceptibly by a tiny amount each day).

So, while the effects of fast forwarded ads are small compared to normal-speed ads that manage to successfully engage us at a more fully conscious level, they still have some value to the advertiser. Advertisers have been slow to exploit this effect but as with paid product placements they have begun to find there is more to them than first meets the eye. Both are capable of doing more than simply reinforcing brand awareness. This is particularly true of product placement.

The history of paid product placement

Commercial products and brands have always appeared in movies and TV shows but until the last decade they were rare and often *not* paid for. Today, with the release of each new blockbuster movie and each new television episode comes another chance to play 'spot the paid product placements'. What's new is the rush of advertisers who are now willing to pay for brands to make appearances and the openness of producers to accepting, and indeed soliciting, these deals.

What is surprising is that it took so long for advertisers en masse to embrace product placement. The potential for movies and other media to influence what we do, what we wear and what we think has long been

evident. When Clark Gable appeared without an undershirt in the 1934 film *It Happened One Night*, sales of undershirts fell by 40 per cent. In 1982, when Reece's Pieces confectionery was used to attract the loveable alien in the movie *E.T.*, sales of the brand increased by 65 per cent. Ray-Ban sunglasses claimed a 55 per cent gain in sales following prominent use by Tom Cruise in 1983's *Risky Business*, and in 1997 sales of Ray-Ban Predator 2 sunglasses are said to have tripled after Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith wore them in the movie *Men in Black*. As a final example, when the 2005 movie *Sideways* eulogized pinot noir wine, sales of that variety in the USA shot up 22 per cent.

The wonder is that more brands and companies didn't seek out opportunities to *buy* into these types of appearances earlier, especially given the low cost of product placement compared to conventional advertising.

Product placement remained rare for many years even though it existed in the very early days of movie making. In the 1950s movie *The African Queen* starring Humphrey Bogart as the gin-boat captain, the company manufacturing Gordon's gin was said to have paid to ensure that the gin in the movie would be theirs. And in the movie *Superman II*, Philip Morris paid to have the truck that Superman destroyed be a Marlboro truck.⁴ However, even by the time the 1990s came around paid product placements were still relatively rare.

Some suspicion prevailed amongst advertisers that many of the early success stories were hyped and indeed it was acknowledged that not all product placements worked. For example, Coors, which also appeared in the movie *E.T.*, reported that its appearance had no significant impact.⁵ What gradually became clear, however, was that the success stories were not just exaggerated hype and that even if sales impact was not seen immediately, product placement did represent opportunity for advertisers to build, and not just reinforce, brand reputation.

Despite this, product placement was still ignored by many advertisers even as late as the early noughties. It was, however, becoming considerably easier to spot product placements in movies and TV shows. Nowhere were they more obvious than in reality TV shows (such as *The Apprentice*, *Survivor*, *Big Brother* and *American Idol*) and in the James Bond movies (which have always featured a proliferation of brands including Aston Martin, BMW, Motorola, Microsoft, Omega, and Bollinger).

When advertisers opened the door on the new world of product

placement they discovered that it had more power than they had anticipated. They discovered more about how product placement really can work.

How product placement works

The main reason why advertisers were slow to embrace product placement was its inability to communicate *explicit* messages. The effect of brand appearances that placed the brand on an existing prop (e.g. an Apple logo on the notebook computer sitting on the TV newsreader's desk) was thought to be confined to reminding consumers of brands they were already aware of. It was acknowledged that advertisers could increase the sense of brand 'presence' (read 'brand importance')—but without any explicit message, what else could they do?

Product placement can, in fact, work much more broadly and it does so through a variety of mechanisms including implicit image association, reinforcement of familiarity, agenda setting and perceived popularity

Implicit image association

Our minds process movies and TV programs as experiences. We process such experiences quite differently to the way in which we process informational ads or messages. Even without any explicit message, the belief that Paris is a beautiful city can be built up from image associations such as experiencing the view from the Eiffel Tower or the Champs Elysées. So too can an image of a brand be influenced implicitly by images associated with it. Being seen in the same context as celebrities, for example, means that celebrity associations are likely to wash over onto the brand.

Because a brand can absorb its context associations despite no explicit message, advertisers are now using product placement to convey subtle associations and to communicate implicit messages. Brands, like people, are judged by the company they keep.

Research shows that the brand not only absorbs the image of celebrities but also absorbs the image of the program in which it appears.⁶ Simply integrating the brand into the editorial content of a program (like *American Idol*) can have a significant effect on brand image. And as we watch more episodes of the program where the brand appears, the brand image tends to become more in agreement with the program image.

Additionally with product placement, when a brand appears in the same context as a celebrity, it is the nearest thing to an implied endorsement by that celebrity. So implicit image association works with product placement as it does with oblique and indirect messages in conventional advertising. It doesn't need any explicit, direct message to convey associations.

Reinforcement of familiarity

It has long been recognized that product placement can impact on our sense of familiarity with a brand. We feel more comfortable with things we are familiar with because, as we saw in Chapter 3, familiarity itself is experienced as positive.⁷ Familiarity also has all sorts of indirect effects. It makes a brand 'stand out' on store shelves.⁸ It even improves our tolerance of repetition for the brand's regular advertising because we seem to cut it more slack and tolerate ad repetition better with brands that are familiar.⁹ Brands that remain unfamiliar are at higher risk of alienating us when they repeat their ads. So this is an important mechanism of broader impact for paid product placements.

Agenda setting

Agenda setting is yet another reason why product placement works. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the media *don't* tell us what to think. But they do tell us what to think *about!* They set the mental agenda. Paid appearances in the media raise the brand up on our agenda and increase the likelihood that it will appear in our consideration set and influence our choice.¹⁰ Especially in parity choice situations (i.e. when everything else is equal) it has been shown that this can add a decisive feather (in both high- and low-involvement situations).¹¹

Perceived popularity

A final reason why product placement works is the magnet effect that we met in Chapter 4. Popularity attracts. The perception of popularity, unlike other image dimensions (reliability, taste, price, etc), is a 'side effect' that is largely independent of any specific advertising message. Movies, TV programs, books, cartoons and pop songs don't tell us what to think but we infer from them what is popular and what we think other people think. Hence the product placement process is subtle and works partly by indicating what's popular or what's becoming 'cool'.

Each program appearance of a leading brand (like Coke, Nike or BMW) reaffirms its star status and helps maintain that leadership image. If smaller brands can afford the price of consistent appearances in this media limelight, they too may propel themselves into ‘rising star’ status.

Subtlety: under the radar

Paid product placements range from prominent to subtle.¹² For example, a Pepsi vending machine seen in Tom Hanks’s living room in the film *Big* might be expected to be better remembered than something more subtle, say a Pepsi logo that appears in the background of a scene. Understandably, advertisers equated the effectiveness of the product placement with the likelihood that consumers would remember seeing the brand in the movie or the program. So, particularly in the early days of product placement, advertisers sought highly prominent placements. This form of thinking is now under challenge.

Where a product placement is prominent it usually means it will be more obvious to viewers that it is a paid appearance. In which case, there is more chance we will process it as an ad. When it is subtle, we don’t; we process it as just another experience. To fly under the radar, product placement requires subtle positioning rather than conspicuous focus.

As we saw earlier, provided our defenses aren’t triggered the effects (on brand image, on familiarity and on perceived popularity) can take place by implicit learning through associative memory without any explicit message. It doesn’t matter whether we actually *remember* seeing the brand appear in the program.¹³ Memory of the appearance is not necessary to influence our subsequent choice behavior.¹⁴

Indeed, remembering seeing the brand in the program seems to be relatively *un*important and there is evidence that product placement may have more effect on us when we don’t become overly aware of it.¹⁵ This makes sense. As we saw in Chapter 5, oblique and indirect messages are less likely to trigger defense mechanisms or counter-arguing. When there is less sense of receiving a message, there is less sense of persuasion intent and less to trigger our defenses. Nothing shows up on the radar for us to defend against—or to become defensive about.

To the extent that product appearances fly ‘under the radar’ our mental defenses are quiescent. Accordingly, product placements may be most effective when they position the brand subtly and they fit right in as a natural part of the program rather than overly prominent appearances.

Extensions of product placement

A brand that arbitrarily pops up in a program without linking much to the storyline risks triggering the reaction ‘Ah ha . . . that’s a blatant ad’. Such realization interrupts the viewer’s immersion in the program and can detract from it. The mind dislikes mental interruptions so brand appearances in a program need to avoid being seen as a proxy ‘ad break’.

This interruption annoyance effect of course applies to traditional ad breaks themselves. While watching a TV show about the pyramids, we are less likely to hit the fast forward button if the ad break goes directly to a ‘Tour Egypt’ ad for Harvey World Travel than something entirely unrelated like McDonald’s. That’s why advertisers usually try to place conventional ads in programs where they have at least some loose fit with the program content. Imagine, though, if the whole thing could be turned on its head and advertisers could cut deals with programs to modify the program’s storyline and so engineer a better fit? It could enhance immediate engagement with the ad and probably minimize the likelihood of the viewer fast forwarding it. But how could this happen? Well, stand by because it is already happening.

Such a deal, for example, was engineered in 2006 by the Tease brand of body spray in the long running, popular Australian ‘soap opera’ series *Home & Away*. The program contracted with the Tease brand to create a new character in the series who would engage in flirtatious behavior. The idea was that the behavior of the new character would implicitly exemplify the positioning of the Tease brand. As part of the deal, the program would cut from these segments (starring ‘Belle’, who was the tease character) to commercial breaks with ads for the Tease brand.¹⁶

So, while the mind balks at interruptions, these deals can create a more natural ‘tie-in’ between the program content and the ad break. By lessening the sense of discontinuity such alterations exploit the fact that the mind embraces segues but dislikes interruptions. This is a potentially powerful way not only to reduce the likelihood of viewers fast forwarding, but also to enhance the effectiveness of the ad that appears in the ad break.

Summary

Subtlety is more powerful than subliminality and it is this subtlety of product placement that is blurring the distinction between programming and advertising. When brands pay to embed themselves in the

media, such paid appearances are often indistinguishable from natural appearances.

Today, product placement is everywhere, even in books, cartoons, and games. Nobody is surprised any more that the media seek 'incentives' for allowing brands to make appearances in programs and editorial content. Just as journalistic war reporting has become 'embedded' with the military, so with product placement has brand advertising become 'embedded' with the mass media.

When companies make undisclosed payments to convey implicit messages and push their brands into the public's awareness, this is called 'product placement'. When record companies do the same thing and pay radio stations to play their records, it is prosecuted as payola! While regulators 'look the other way' as to 'who is paying the piper', we are accelerating down a slippery slope.¹⁷ A mode of influence is emerging with product placement that has the potential to go well beyond what advertising has exercised previously.

7 SILENT SYMBOLS AND BADGES OF IDENTITY

Everybody repeat after me . . . 'We are all individuals.'

Anon.

In America wearing a Miami Dolphins sweater or a Green Bay Packers T-shirt makes a statement. In the UK the teams have very different names like Arsenal, Newcastle or Manchester United while in Australia, the teams that fans identify with have names like Collingwood, Sydney Swans or Brisbane Lions. Such names are brand symbols. Wearing them lets us, as individuals, make a statement about *our* association and *our* identification with that team.

Similarly, when we choose to consume a Perrier or a Pepsi or pull on a pair of Calvins or Levis, whether we are aware of it or not, we can be making a statement about ourselves, though in a much more subtle way. In the brands that we choose, our consumption behavior goes beyond the simple 'quenching of thirst' or selecting of 'something to wear'. Football supporters don't wear the team cap and sweater just to keep them warm and nor do people wear designer clothes simply for that reason. There is much more to it. Our choice of brands can become an expression of self identity.

We have become accustomed to celebrities such as Paris Hilton, Tiger Woods, Charlize Theron, Brad Pitt, David Beckham and the like being



Figure 7.1: Michael Schumacher for Omega.

used to endorse brands like Nike, Pepsi, Tag Heuer, Motorola, Loréal and Raymond Weil. When a brand is seen being consumed by these people, it becomes more than a brand—it can become a symbol of association with that person and with an ‘in group’.

By consuming and displaying brand symbols which are associated with these entities we:

- reinforce in our minds our identification and closeness with the person or group they stand for; and
- make an expression of our own identity—a subtle statement or symbol to the outside world about ourselves.

In this way the act of consuming a brand can become a way for us to express our identity—who we are, what we are like, what our concerns are, what we enjoy doing, what we value, who our friends are and so on.

Look closely at the advertising slogans below. Consider the subtle but unmistakable allusions to how the brand reflects your identity . . . as part of a group, and how consuming that brand expresses something about you:

- *You don't have to be rich, just smart.* (Ikea)
- *Our country, our truck.* (Chevrolet Silverado)
- *What are you made of?* (Tag Heuer)
- *Join the first team . . . reach for Winston.*
- *It's More you.* (More cigarettes)
- *You've come a long way baby.* (Virginia Slim cigarettes)
- *The best a man can get . . . Gillette.*
- *Canada Dry Ginger Ale . . . for when your tastes grow up.*
- *Pepsi . . . Generation Next.*
- *Wheaties . . . Breakfast of champions.*
- *The most unforgettable women in the world wear Revlon.*
- *Wouldn't you like to be a Pepper too?* (Dr Pepper)

Above all, choosing these brands becomes a way of sharing, of participating, of representing or identifying with something. There is something about being part of a group. Even mental membership has its privileges!

Expression and self-presentation

One can identify privately with someone or something without needing to tell anybody else. In this sense identification can be a very private thing.

The flip side, however, is that very often we want to signal our feeling of identification—who we are and what we stand for—to the outside world. We do this non-verbally in our self-presentation and self-expression. We use symbols, mannerisms, gestures, idioms, flags, etc, to communicate non-verbal messages to the outside world. We can do this by displaying symbols (wearing Levis, Lee or Calvins; driving a Lexus, a Landcruiser or a VW Beetle), or using products that are symbolically associated with our favorite entities (Omega, Nike, L'Oréal).

In the US, more students wear their college T-shirts on the Monday following a football game when the college team wins (especially after a big victory) than when it loses.¹ The motivation is not simply the desire to bask in reflected glory. It is related to the reasons people wear branded jeans, designer clothes and branded sportswear. The broader, underlying motivation is one of personal identity and participation in (or association with) a larger, symbolic group.

Identification and conformity

As a motivator, identification is to be distinguished from conformity. Conformity is the need to avoid standing out from the crowd. It is partly based on the fear of being different: the need to go along with the ideas or choices of others for fear of the consequences that might happen otherwise.

Identification is a very different flip side to this. It is very similar to, but at the same time very different from, conformity. Most humans enjoy feeling part of something greater than themselves: their family, their school, their nation, their church, their football team, etc. This is more than just trying to avoid being different. It is a positive desire to be like something; to be part of it; to find identification with it. It is a desire for the secure feeling of knowing we are not isolated—that we are not alone. There is a warm feeling in sharing common values, common symbols, common ideas with others.

In valuing the same things others do, we reinforce to ourselves and make a statement to others about the degree to which we value our identity as part of 'the group'. Teenagers, for example, find a great deal of camaraderie in worshipping the same pop idols and movie stars as their friends.

Such identification and bonding becomes even stronger when we share the same emotions or experiences with others. The more powerful the common emotions or experiences, the greater the feeling of

mutual closeness. As teenagers most of us share feelings of insecurity, of not knowing where we are going, and this brings us closer to those of our own age.

Pratkanis and Aronson adopted the term 'granfalloon', originally coined by American novelist Kurt Vonnegut, to refer to the entities we identify with.²

Granfalloon

Some granfalloon we are born into. The most important of these is our family. Most of us identify with our family and express this in our buying behavior at Christmas, Mother's Day and so on.

Other granfalloon we *choose* to identify with. Our choice here, however, is frequently influenced, if not determined, by the groups we already identify with. Many of us passionately support what we call 'our football team', but this often turns out to be the same team our family supported. Thus, identifying with one group such as our family can lead us to identify with other related groups such as a particular football team. The reason we consume certain products or display certain brand symbols (such as sweaters in the team's colors) can often be traced back through a chain of associations to the people and entities we identify with.

The stronger this feeling of identification, the more we defend the group and display its symbols. The more the group is attacked by outsiders, the stronger the feeling of comradeship within it. (This is why the promotion of nationalism, and even war, is sometimes used by politicians. It functions as a very powerful, cohesive mechanism.)

Even when our assignment to a group is random, such as in schools which have inter-house sporting competitions, identification takes place. When complete strangers are formed into groups on the basis of something as trivial as the toss of a coin, this same thing happens.³ Though our reasons for belonging are unclear or meaningless, we nevertheless identify with the group. Any brand or product that associates itself symbolically with our group, family, team or values taps into this motivation.

This even happens with groups such as Amnesty International, in which most members never meet, and it also happens with individuals. We can be influenced in our own behavior by observing what another person does or imagining what they would do in the same situation. We identify with them and model ourselves after them. The closer our identification, the more likely it is that our behavior will be affected. In other words, the

more similar we see the other person the more likely this modeling or copying influence is to take place.

Children who are terrified of dogs can be greatly affected by watching another child play happily with a dog for twenty minutes a day. In one experiment, after only four days of observation, 67 per cent of previously phobic children were willing to climb into a playpen with a dog and stay there alone petting the dog.⁴

The for and against position

Football team supporters often wear badges that say 'I support the New York Jets' or whichever team they identify with. They also wear badges that say 'I hate the Dallas Cowboys' or the team that they most love to hate in their country. Whether the hated team is called the Cowboys, Arsenal or Collingwood doesn't matter. It illustrates that one can find identity not only with being for something but also with being *against* something else. Our identification with something can be expressed either way.

Teenagers show their identification with their peer group by looking and acting like them but also by denigrating the tastes and preferences of the 'out group'—often their parents.

At its extremes this 'anti' motivation manifests itself in the form of jingoism and religious zealotry. In the super-strength, concentrated form it is a motivation sufficiently powerful for people to fight and die to preserve the integrity of the group and its values and symbols. Some people will even die in defense of the symbols alone (such as a country's flag).

At the opposite end of the scale the influence of this motivation is much more subtle and more difficult, though not impossible, to measure.

Reaction to symbols

Advertising has created some of the most recognized symbols in the world. Symbols such as the golden arches (McDonald's), the swoosh (Nike), the apple with the bite out of it (Apple), the cowboy (Marlboro) and the Nutrasweet swirl. Advertisers use symbols as shorthand communication and reap the benefits of investing for years in making the symbols mean something.

We react to symbols. At a red light we react by stopping. At a green light we react by going. When we see a swastika we feel revulsion. The 'man' symbol on a public toilet affects half the population one way and the other half another way.

Whether our reaction to a symbol is external (stop, go) or internal (revulsion) it is a learnt reaction. It is learnt by association of the symbol with other things. In this way a symbol gradually develops an ability to influence us in its own right and to evoke common reactions.

Meaning is an attachment

It is through a process that psychologists call ‘discrimination learning’ that a symbol or a brand acquires meaning. An odd thing about this is that once we have learnt via this process we become relatively unconscious of it. It is like our ability to drive to work without ever being conscious of having braked or being conscious of the process of changing gears. It takes place without much conscious awareness.

For example, when you see the letter

q

you are hardly likely to say to yourself ‘Hey, that’s romantic’. Nor do you say to yourself: ‘This is a symbol that I am meant to decode as representing the letter q.’ Instead you simply experience the letter q. You have become unconscious of the mental process whereby meaning is attached to the symbol. The meaning is experienced not as something that we attach to the symbol. The meaning is just there—in it.

Meaning is an attachment. It just appears as though the meaning is in the symbol. Another telling example is the word ‘window’. Its meaning has in fact changed over hundreds of years from ‘a hole where the wind comes in’ to ‘a hole where the wind does not come in’.⁵

A lesson in the origin of a kiss

Look at these symbols:

> <

What do they mean? Certainly there is nothing romantic about them. To us they mean ‘greater than’ and ‘less than’. In primitive society, however, either one could be used to represent a bird’s beak and, by extension, a mouth.⁶

If you bring these two symbols together what do you get? An ‘X’. If the symbols are read as mouths, you also get two mouths together—a kiss. Hence the shorthand symbol for a kiss that we often use on text messages, emails and greeting cards is an X.

We all use this symbol and understand that it means a kiss, yet most of us don't know why it does. (This is a vivid illustration of how the meaning of a word or symbol, once established, can become divorced from its origins and operate independently of any knowledge of them.)

Our ancestors, looking at this symbol, decoded it as signifying two beaks in contact and deduced that this was meant to convey a kiss. As time passed, however, the intermediate associations gradually disappeared and the symbol came to elicit its meaning more directly.

The origins of such symbols and their meanings are often buried under layers of antiquity. But once a symbol's meaning is learnt, it is no longer necessary for us to know its origin or how our reactions to it came about. Even though we are no longer conscious of how it was learnt, we all use it and we all react to it just the same. That's why our consumption of bottled water is so hard to explain. Its symbolic statement about our identification with a healthy, active lifestyle was learnt in the late 1970s and hangs over in our behaviour today (see Chapter 1).

So symbols are like adults. We usually react to them as they are. But in order to understand them more fully we need to know something about their childhood and how they developed into and became what they are today. This is important because once learnt, we regard meaning as being in the symbol itself rather than an attachment process that takes place below the level of consciousness. Any sense of the mental process of attachment disappears.

To learn how brands are built into symbols we need to understand the way symbols acquire meaning and how we interpret that meaning. The real differences between brands such as Coke and Pepsi, or Perrier and Dasani, or Colgate and Close-Up may be quite small, but when the focal beam of attention is played on these symbolic aspects of the brand the differences may be significant.

Discrimination learning

Let's illustrate how crucial small differences can be. What do the following symbols mean?

q p 6 b d

To us they mean 'the letter q', 'the letter p', 'the number six' and so on.

When one of my daughters was about six years old she was learning numbers. She counted up eight toys. She was then given another one and

I asked her how many she had now. She was asked to write it down. She said 'nine' but wrote it like this:

p

This is not so uncommon when kids are learning to write. They sometimes get the symbol correct but write it back to front.

What happened next should teach us all a first-hand lesson about discrimination learning. I told her that she was correct but the number nine was written this way:

q

She looked at it, puzzled, then drawing on childlike logic said: 'But Daddy, that's a q.'

Father, after recovering his composure, explained to her: 'No darling, this is a q,' and drew a tail on her symbol, while realizing how small a difference it really was.

q

How subtle our learning of symbols and labels is! We take for granted that the same basic symbol is a nine when its tail is bent to the left but when it is bent to the right we are expected to have an entirely different reaction—it transforms it into an entirely different symbol.

Interestingly this is exactly the type of confusion that turns out to be the origin of the phrase 'mind your p's and q's'. Apprentice typesetters were urged to mind their p's and q's because of the similarity in the shape of the letters.⁷ As adults we are so accomplished at making the distinction that we are too close to it. We are no longer conscious of how we come to instantly recognize:

q p b d g

as five quite different symbols.

Making brands into symbols

Brands are like letters. They can be transformed into symbols. They can become shorthand ways of communicating. They can be made to summon up or stand in for associations. In this way small differences can have big implications. They can become triggers for different mental associations.

The expression ‘Just do it’ cues us to think of Nike; the expression ‘Take care’ cues us to think of Garnier. In the same way brand names themselves can cue us to think of people and images that are closely associated with them. Nike may cue us to think of Tiger Woods, Shiseido may make us think of Angelina Jolie. Estée Lauder is more likely to trigger Gwyneth Paltrow.

If we want to identify with and feel closer to a particular image we can express it to ourselves and others by drinking, wearing, driving the same brand. Just as drinking alcohol can be to a teenager a powerful sign that he or she is now no longer a kid, so the consumption of other products can make powerful statements about us.

The importance of this as communication is as much for the user, the driver or the wearer as it is for the outside world. When an ad for Mercedes uses the line ‘People will stare. Are you comfortable with that?’ then owning a Mercedes lets you say something implicitly about yourself to the world. Drive a Prius and it says something entirely different—that you are environmentally concerned. Drive a Hummer and it communicates environmental ‘nose thumbing’ and that you are probably someone not to be messed with. One Hummer ad targeting female buyers used the headline ‘Threaten the men in your office in a whole new way’. Think about it . . . the brands we buy and the brands we associate with often make powerful statements about us to ourselves as well as to others.

A brand can become a badge of identity in several different ways:

- by being a symbol of the group (e.g. football team logo);
- by being seen to be valued by members of the group (e.g. Mac owners are often passionately proud of others that make the switch from a PC to a Mac);
- by being seen as supportive of the group (e.g. sponsorship of a football team);
- by being seen as characteristically used or displayed by members of the group.

Summary

We react to symbols. Whether our reaction is external or internal it is a learnt reaction. It is learnt via association of the symbol with other things. In this way a symbol can influence us in its own right by evoking certain reactions. Symbols come to stand for other things in our mind and the act

of consuming a brand can become a symbolic way for us to express our identification with the entities associated with it.

Our internal reaction to a symbol may be emotional or unemotional. Brands are initially unemotional marks; advertisers use advertising (and now product placement) to try to transform these (trade) marks into symbols that summon up certain mental associations. When a symbol elicits a cognitive or emotional response in us, we in turn can use it to express that idea or emotion to others.

We can identify privately with another person or a group without needing to tell anybody else. But often we want to signal this feeling of identification to the world. We do this by displaying and consuming symbols (such as football team badges, old school ties or brands symbols like Perrier or Prius), or using products that are symbolically associated with our favorite entities (Tag Heuer, L'Oréal). Identification is the flip side of conformity. It is not just the avoidance of seeming to be different. It is a positive desire to be like something; to be part of it; to find identification with it.

The difference between brands in the same product category may be quite small, but when the focal beam of attention is played on these symbolic aspects the difference can tip the balance. Consuming or displaying certain products can make powerful statements about us. The importance of the communication is as much for the user or wearer as it is for the outside world.

8 VICARIOUS EXPERIENCE AND VIRTUAL REALITY

*The theater is a form of hypnosis. So are movies and TV. When you enter a movie theater you know that all you are going to see is twenty-four shadows per second flashed on a screen to give an illusion of moving people and objects. Yet despite this knowledge you laugh when the twenty-four shadows per second tell jokes, and cry when the shadows show actors faking death. You know that they are an illusion yet you enter the illusion and become a part of it and while the illusion is taking place you are not aware that it is an illusion. This is hypnosis. It is a trance.*¹

Robert Pirsig

Virtual reality technology has been developed partly from video games, partly from cinema and partly from flight simulators. It is based on the concepts of illusion and immersion. It creates the illusion of being immersed in an artificial world.

Years ago Morton Heilig (the inventor of Sensorama), after he had seen Cinerama and 3D, said: 'When you watch TV or a movie in a theater, you are sitting in one reality, and at the same time you are looking at another reality through an imaginary transparent wall. However when you enlarge that window enough you get a visceral sense of personal involvement. You feel the experience and don't just see it.'² Anyone who has been in an Imax big-screen theater will relate to this. As Heilig put it: 'I felt as if I had stepped through that window and was riding the roller-coaster myself instead of watching somebody else. I felt vertigo.'

What has this got to do with advertising? Sometimes studying the extremes of a phenomenon can provide insights into its milder forms

that would not otherwise be intuitively obvious. Ads that are mini-dramas work by mildly immersing us in a story rather than talking to us as viewers sitting out in front of the TV set or computer screen.

Just as there are technological ways (like 3D, Cinerama and virtual reality) to increase the feeling of immersion or involvement in movies and games, so too there are ways that advertising can be designed creatively and structurally to increase the immersion of the viewer in a commercial—and thereby enhance its effect.³

Ads as mini-dramas

Ads that are mini-dramas are those that depict a story or vignette. Mini-drama ads usually invite viewers to mentally migrate from their own reality and step into the fantasy world of the ad.

Take for example the ad that starts with a man on his morning run by the side of a misty lake. An attractive car sitting alongside the lake intrigues him and he can't help but stop to look. He reaches one hand out to touch the car and it falls over as it is actually a cardboard cutout. Immediately, a Loch Ness type sea monster strikes from the water and, in one hit, grabs the guy with its tentacle and takes him under. Meanwhile these words appear on the screen 'The irresistible Toyota Vios . . . you'll want one'. In the last scene, a tentacle comes back out of the water to stand up the cardboard cutout once again and reset the trap. This ad uses mini-drama to very effectively get across a message about this car's 'irresistibly attractive looks' but without ever actually saying it.

Take as another example the Land Rover commercial that starts with a little kid knocking on the door of a Land Rover to ask the woman who lowers the car window if his friend, Jason, is in there and can he come out and play. She says 'I'll check'. After about 20 seconds of silence in the ad she lowers the window again and says: 'I'm still looking'. Using mini-drama the ad very effectively gets across the message for Land Rover of a 'hugely spacious interior' but without ever actually saying it.

Perhaps the most famous example of mini-drama ads on TV was a series of ads that ran back in 1993 and then again in 2003 for Nestlé (Taster's Choice in the USA, Nestlé Gold Blend in the UK and the Nescafé brand in Australia). These featured two flirting neighbours whose relationship gradually developed over cups of instant coffee. Such ads invite us to step into the role of the characters in the same way as we would in a book or a movie. In fact the Nestlé ad series



Figure 8.1: *The characters from the (US version of) Taster's Choice coffee commercial.*



Figure 8.2: *In the 1990s Jerry Seinfeld starred in mini-drama ads with the American Express card as the hero.*

Role-play

Children's games are full of role-playing. Kids pretend to be firefighters, truck drivers, doctors, and nurses. They also imagine themselves in the role of their favorite TV or movie characters: James Bond, Spiderman, Catwoman.

eventually inspired a best-selling novel called *Love Over Gold*.

Part of the reason for the popularity of drama is that it offers us a kind of out-of-body experience—a chance to be someone else for a little while—to experience life as someone else. Compared to movies and drama, TV ads offer a less complete out-of-body experience, but an out-of-body experience nevertheless. They offer a chance to experience life, if not as someone else, then at least as someone else experiences it.

The experiences may be those of celebrities like Robert de Niro or Kate Winslet in the 'My life. My Card' series of ads for American Express, or of Jerry Seinfeld's famous ads for the same company. Or they may be the experiences of fantasy characters like PC and Mac in the award-winning ads launched by Apple to counter the introduction of Microsoft's Vista operating system.

Stories as well as biographies and sketches often cast the product as hero or an essential part of the hero's life. In the Mac versus PC ads, the understated Mac character emerged as the 'cool' hero, able to accomplish things easily. The 'My Life. My Card' ads cast the American Express card as an essential and valued part of each celebrity's life.

Television and PC video allow us to role-play and imagine ourselves in a character in the same way. With drama we have the opportunity to 'try on' other people's identities. We do this with TV serials and soaps, our favorite movies, and even advertisements. These ads often portray situations in which an individual experiences a problem where the product is part of the solution. In this way, we indirectly experience the self-relevant consequences associated with using or consuming the brand. We learn how the brand or product is (purported to be) instrumental in attaining the desired goal.

Identifying with a character

Our feeling of immersion in a drama or an ad seems to be greatly enhanced if we find ourselves identifying with one or more of the on-screen characters. This not only increases the feeling of involvement but also increases the likelihood that we will adopt the trappings of that character. These trappings may be the character's:

- lifestyle solution (American Express Card, Evian);
- behavior style (e.g. using Nestlé/Taster's Choice/Nescafé instant coffee);
- badges of identity (e.g. Nike, Harley-Davidson, Mercedes).

Because identification with a character in an ad is much more fleeting than with a movie character, it tends to be less conscious. It takes place quickly and evaporates. But it is fleetingly resurrected at the next exposure of the ad, and in this way permanent associations or links can develop between the feeling of identification and the brand itself. 'During identification with an ad character, empathizing consumers begin to feel as if they are participating in the character's experiences. That is, consumers imaginatively experience the story's events from the perspective of the character with whom they identify: consumers begin to perceive similarities between aspects of their own self-identity and that depicted by the characters.'⁴

Immersion and empathy

Identification with a character is not the only way immersion can take place, although it is probably the most powerful way. So what else might make these ads work? If you can't have identification, empathy is probably

the next best thing. Some ads invite us to observe the character and take in what the character is experiencing without any expectation that we will necessarily identify with, or want to 'be like', that character.

Take for example the US insurance ads acting out the message that Geico.com is so easy to use that 'even a caveman could do it'. The caveman character, so upset at being demeaned in various Geico commercials, was such a hit with the public that in 2007 the ABC network gave a green light to making 'Cavemen', a sitcom based on the Geico character.

Empathy means that we understand at a deep level what the character is experiencing and feeling. It means that we have the impression we are experiencing some of the same feelings as the character. But we don't necessarily identify with the character. Identification goes one final step further in the process. It is a more complete projection. A viewer who identifies with a character desires to be like that character or feels like that character.

Immersion and image

Mini-drama commercials are not addressing us as the audience 'out there', but rather inviting conscious identification with the characters. Even if we don't identify with the characters, we are entertained by observing their interactions. Our 'vantage point' is not out front as audience but inside the character or somewhere in between. From this vantage point we are nevertheless able to immerse ourselves in the experiences of the characters and soak up the associations with the brand.

There are often no direct claims made. The focal beam of attention is not on a claim as such but on characters who are experiencing the brand and its attributes. This is particularly useful for advertisers in product categories like beverages, for example, where it is often very difficult to claim specific differences between brands and the differences are more associational (e.g. 'The Coke side of life', 'The real thing', 'The taste of a new generation', 'Time for a change').

Advertisers now have an alternative to creating mini-dramas as ads for the brand. As we saw in Chapter 6 it is possible for advertisers to use existing dramas and embed their brands (such as the James Bond movies where brands like BMW, Motorola, Microsoft, Omega and Bollinger have all appeared). Any existing drama, TV sitcom or reality TV show that is consistent with the desired image for the brand can be a candidate for paid brand appearances. If no program currently exists to suit the brand's

image, it is even possible to do deals to modify an existing one to include a new character or a sub-plot storyline. Or indeed sponsor the creation of an entirely new program.

Emotions

Just as we experience life by observing the neighborhood out of our window, so too can we vicariously experience life through our television window, our YouTube window or our Xbox window. These frequently show characters experiencing life and experiencing emotions. In the midst of these situations the advertised brand is cast either in a feature role or as a central prop.

Such ads utilize qualitatively different channels of communicating which may be visual, musical or associational. They tap into our existing associations with things such as:

- personal desires (for fun, social recognition, achievement, dominance, power);
- belonging (acceptance);
- caring, human values (feeling good about and valuing others).

In other words, they tap into emotions and desires that we already experience.

Just as advertising can associate a piece of information with a brand (e.g. safety and Volvo), so too can it associate an emotion with a brand (excitement with Mazda Miata MX5). If we are concerned about safety then Volvo is a symbol of it. If we are interested in fun and good times then the ‘zoom, zoom’ of Mazda Miata MX5 is a better symbolic fit.

The connection of a brand with an emotion by means of characters experiencing life and that emotion increases the brand’s relevance for us. It connects the brand with an emotion that is already there inside us. It may be something that was previously inactive in our mind or active but unassociated with the brand. The brand takes on associations and the more the brand takes on these associations, the more it can function as a symbol—one that expresses or stands in for that emotion and tends to elicit that emotional response. Instead of being connected to a piece of information, a brand may thus be connected, in our minds, to emotion. The emotion may be:

- a generalized positive emotion (e.g. *You can't beat the feeling*—Coke; *Oh, what a feeling*—Toyota; *Bud light . . . Bring out your best, Come to Marlboro country*).
- a specific emotion, like caring (*Reach out and touch someone . . . AT&T*; *Because there are other books that need doing*—Quicken), fun (*It's a good time for the great taste of McDonald's*), achievement (*Benson and Hedges—when only the best will do*; *Inter-Continental Hotels—the place to stay when you know that you've arrived*), power (*Feel the power*—Drakkar Noir; *The power to be your best*—Apple Computer), self reward (*You deserve a break today . . . McDonald's*; *You take life's disappointments on the chin, why dodge its rewards?*—Porsche).

The viewer's vantage point

Ads can work without generating identification or even without generating much empathy with the characters, but if so they usually rely on registering in our minds the claims or associations they convey about the product. The more entertaining ads invite us to immerse ourselves in the mini-drama and experience events from the vantage point of a participant or a bystander in the commercial.

These commercials vary in the degree to which they invite the viewer into a 'participant' or 'bystander' role. The role in which we are cast influences the way we are likely to mentally process the ad and what details of it we recall.

The implication of this is that in analyzing any commercial we should ask: What role are viewers being cast in? What character are they expected to identify with? Or empathize with? Are there structural aspects of the ad that enhance or inhibit identification? (Voiceover, for example, can be an inhibitor. Many narrative ads use voiceover to tell us what the character is thinking and feeling. This tends to interfere with the development of empathy by distancing us from the characters, in much the same way as does using the third person in a story rather than the first person.)

Immersion as attentional inertia

Observational studies of children watching TV indicate that for much of the time they do not actually watch the screen. In one study 54 per cent of all looks at the screen were for less than three seconds.⁵ However, if

a look lasts longer than about fifteen seconds, a child is very likely to become progressively 'locked in' to the program. After about ten seconds, the researchers often noted that the child's body relaxed, the head tended to slouch forward and the mouth to drop open.

This phenomenon is called 'attentional inertia', but at least one writer has directly related it to the 'hypnotic or trance-like quality of television watching'.⁶ This 'attentional inertia' is not confined to children. It has been documented in adults as well.⁷

TV, hypnosis and reality

The quotation by Robert Pirsig at the beginning of this chapter likens TV watching to a mild form of hypnosis. TV and hypnosis do have some striking similarities.

A popular belief about hypnosis is that people have no knowledge of what they are doing while hypnotized; that they are compelled to do what is suggested to them; and that afterwards they can remember nothing of the experience. The truth is very different.

First, people do remember what happens to them under hypnosis and they feel completely conscious of it at the time. Only if the hypnotist gives them a posthypnotic suggestion to forget everything will they be unable to remember.

If they know what is going on, why, you may ask, do they follow the hypnotist's suggestion? This is an intriguing question. Most people who have been hypnotized will tell you that they felt as though at any time they could have ignored the hypnotist's instructions but went along with them anyway. In other words, they did not feel compelled to act as suggested.

However, this begs the question: Why do they go along? Most subjects say they just felt like it—that they could have acted differently if they wanted to, but they didn't want to. This is not unlike our own response when we ask ourselves why we have just spent several hours in front of the TV set. It is because we wanted to. We could have turned off the set and got back into reality at any time. We watched because we wanted to; because we felt like it. Just like the person under hypnosis.

The more an ad can immerse viewers (i.e. make the mediated experience momentarily more interesting, more involving, more immersing than what is otherwise going on around them), the more successful it will be. The best advertising does not remind viewers that they *are* viewers.

Tactics for increasing immersion

Immersion and identification are a matter of degree. The difference between reading a story written in the first person and reading a story written in the third person is that the former is like listening to somebody tell you directly about their own experiences, whereas the latter is like listening to somebody tell you about somebody else's experiences. The action is more easily experienced in the first person because we project ourselves into the identity. The difference is in the degree to which we are reminded of our own identity or the external reality.

This is related to virtual reality. By decreasing the awareness of stimuli other than those coming from the cinema screen, TV or book, we increase the 'reality' of the mediated experience and lessen the sense of it as mediated. It is like the difference between listening to music on headphones versus loudspeakers. With headphones one feels more immersed in the musical experience.

Advergaming

Things like Xbox, Wii and PlayStation immerse us even more completely because they are like headphones for the eyes as well as the ears.

The more complete the experience of virtual reality becomes, the more we can let go temporarily of one reality and become immersed in another. As a result, advertising is increasingly becoming part of that other world experience with electronic drama games. Product placement has extended to advergaming so that as we play games like *Grand Theft Auto*, part of that other world experience exposes us to brand names (like Mercedes). These product placements have increasingly become part of the gaming environment, again blurring the distinction between programs and advertising. Regulators are 'looking the other way' as paid product placement heads us down a slippery slope. What slippery slope? Play the game *First Person Shooters* and don't be too surprised to be exposed, as part of the experience, to ads for branded firearms (e.g. Mauser C96) in the form of product placements. Gaming drama represents the ultimate in 'switching off' from our own current reality and immersing ourselves in a fantasy world increasingly influenced by ad makers.

Summary

When we watch TV or sit in a cinema or play a computer game we are in one reality, and at the same time looking at another reality through an

imaginary transparent wall. Just as we experience life by observing our neighborhood out of our window, so too can we vicariously experience life through our television, cinema, YouTube or PlayStation windows. Advertisements frequently show characters in ‘real-life’ and emotional situations. In these situations the advertised brand is cast either in a feature role or as a central prop.

Ads that are mini-dramas work by mildly immersing us in a story rather than addressing us as viewers who are sitting out in front of the TV set. We have the opportunity to ‘try on’ other people’s identities. Identification with an ad character can build permanent associations or links between the experience and the brand itself. Some ads invite us to observe the character and take in what he/she is experiencing without any expectation that we will necessarily identify with, or want to ‘be like’, that character. Fantasy may not be true, but we can learn from it nevertheless, as is evident with shows like *CSI*, *Sesame Street* and *The Simpsons*.

Commercials vary in the degree to which the viewer is invited into a ‘participant’ or a ‘bystander’ role. The role in which we are cast influences the way we are likely to mentally process the ad and what details of it we recall. What we often recall is the association of a piece of information or an emotion with a brand. The more the ad immerses us—the more the mediated experience is momentarily more interesting, more involving, more absorbing than what is going on around us—the more we can feel the experience and not just *see* it.

Registering a claim or an association in our minds in this way does not necessarily imply anything about believing it. We will, however, recall differences being depicted between the brands and will recall the name of the brand that was cast as the best or safest or most exciting. These are ‘feathers’ that, when everything else is equal, may be enough to tip the balance of brand selection—even if only to prompt us to see if the association or claim is true.

9 MESSAGES, REMINDERS AND REWARDS: HOW ADS SPEAK TO US

With this chapter we begin to enter the mystical realm of the creative department of the advertising agency, whose art has traditionally been intuitive rather than encoded in any set of well formulated principles. The way an ad speaks to us can influence not only how the ad works but also *if* it works. The creative team's job is to design and make ads and good creative teams are paid a lot of money for their intuitive sense of what will be effective advertising. Their task is to make ads that are not only interesting and attention-grabbing but will also influence our brand choice and leave us feeling warm toward the brand and not alienated by it.

Articulating what makes for creative success in advertising is an underdeveloped science. In the past, researchers and psychologists who intruded on the creative team's domain risked finding themselves under hostile attack in enemy territory. However, their role has increasingly become more accepted, leading as it does to better understanding of the principles of psychological processing to underpin better predictions of ad effectiveness. In this chapter we bring these psychological principles to bear on messages, reminders and rewards and then in the following chapter we examine the individual elements of ads.

'News' advertising

As we saw in the previous chapter, we tend to process ads differently depending on whether we feel we are being talked to as prospective customers or whether we see ourselves as merely bystanders looking on. A related way of conceptualizing this is by asking, 'Am I being informed or entertained?' because we can process an ad as 'news'—or as 'entertainment'.

Some brands are heavily into 'news' commercials. Others are more 'entertainment' focused. There is evidence that ads seem to work

best when they have something new to say.¹ As one US ad man put it: 'Ads are essentially about creating or broadcasting news about a brand' and 'News is the oxygen that lets brands live and breath and grow.'² ('News' advertising is closely related to, but not quite the same as, 'informational' advertising. The latter term is used in advertising in a very specific way.³) 'News' advertising provides news or information about the brand. It may be:

- a new formulation (new, improved Colgate);
- a new benefit about the brand (removes plaque, lemon-charged, sugar free);
- a new variant (100% Natural 7UP, Whiskas Organic, Fat free Pringles);
or
- a price comparison (now half the price of the leading brand).

Our minds are invited to process 'news' advertising in the same way that we process the evening news on television or when we are reading the contents of the morning newspaper. The focus of processing is on what it is telling us that we don't know; what it is adding to our store of knowledge; how interesting the news is; how surprising it is; and how important it is to us or to people we know.

With news programs we don't necessarily have to enjoy what is being communicated. We watch news and current affairs programs for the information and not just for the entertainment. Evidence is emerging that the same applies to 'news' ads. It is not necessary that we like the experience of it provided the ad is imparting valuable information to us.

This explains why some ads which are disliked can still seem to work. Each country has its hated ad examples which, to the amazement of consumers, nevertheless seemed to work. The 'Ring around the collar . . . Wisk' commercials and the 'Mr Whipple . . . don't squeeze the Charmin' commercials irritated Americans for years. As did the Daz 'Doorstep Challenge' laundry detergent ads for UK viewers and the



Figure 9.1: You don't necessarily have to like this ad for it to be effective.

'Mrs Marsh' Colgate ads in Australia.

When a 'news' commercial reveals a solution to a problem we have, then experience and enjoyment can take a back seat. For such ads to be effective it is not crucial that we like the ad if it gives us some news about the brand that is relevant to removing some irritation or problem we have with the product we are currently using.

In our society, the history and culture of advertising has its roots in communicating news about products and brands. Sometimes we see advertising messages delivered as though they are new when they are not. Unrequited expectations of being told something new tends to annoy us. News ads, by their very nature, are ads with messages formulated in such a way that they are almost guaranteed to irritate us if they keep being repeated. Yesterday's news, like yesterday's leftovers, is stale. So a problem for advertisers is that pure news advertising can wear out more quickly than other types of advertising.

Advertisers know they have to keep their brand salient in our minds and keep reinforcing its key attribute(s) so this inevitably leads to some degree of repetition, because there is a scarcity of new things to say about a brand. Even brand managers and ad agencies can run out of new things to say about humdrum, old products. They may then look for ways to 'create news' rather than reporting it. Trivial and often irrelevant differences are sometimes created in order to have something to say (e.g. caffeine-free cornflakes). In the past there has been a certain degree of reliance on 'beat-ups', as with 'new and improved' (yet again) laundry detergent! These pieces of 'news' are mostly harmless creations which ultimately risk boring us. There is a limit to how many times we can accept without questioning the idea that an old brand of laundry detergent can be once again 'new and improved' in any meaningful way.

Fortunately for us as consumers, news is not the only way that advertising can prevent a brand from becoming tired and boring while keeping it salient in our minds. Instead of messages that give us new information about the brand, advertisers can wrap up an old message in fresh, entertaining ways. They can reposition their message as an entertaining reminder rather than a new message. The essential difference is not in what they say but how they say it.

Some ads speak to us in a way that irritates us and we detest their repetition. Others can be appreciated and enjoyed, time and time again. The way in which we as consumers mentally process an ad is influenced

by our individual interests, but it is also heavily influenced by how an ad speaks to us. It is not just what the ad says to us but how it says it. And the way the elements of an ad are blended can help determine which of our mental processes become engaged and which do not. In short they can help modify how our minds opt to mentally process the ad.

Liking of an ad

Liking of an ad doesn't necessarily make it work, but for the advertiser, all other things being equal, they would prefer to have us like it than not like it. There are two reasons for this:

- A brand's advertising is similar to its packaging in that it is part of the brand's personality wardrobe. Just as good clothes make a person more attractive, so a brand's advertising attire can make a brand more attractive. All other things being equal, we find ads that are dressed up as cute and enjoyable more acceptable than ads that speak to us in such a way as to grate on us and annoy us.
- Just as we feel more inclined to argue with someone we dislike and less inclined to argue with someone we like, our minds tend to react similarly with advertising. We are less inclined to counter-argue when we find ourselves enjoying an ad.

Entertainment

When brands have nothing new to say they do not have to irritate the audience by simply repeating yesterday's news. Advertisers have become very adept at wrapping up old messages in fresh, entertaining ways. So in product categories when brands are well established and there is little that is new to say, advertisers rely increasingly on reinforcement of the old message and the entertaining quality of their ads. These ads are not news and our minds do not process them as news. But when news is removed and the ad relies on entertainment and reinforcement, it becomes correspondingly more important that we, as consumers, like the brand's advertising.⁴

When the differences between brands are marginal or non-existent and the brands on the beam balance of choice weigh equal it only takes a feather to swing the balance. It is important to reiterate that the advertising for a brand is in fact one attribute of a brand's personality. If we like something about someone's personality, then the chances are greater that we will like that person. If we like a brand's advertising, the

chances are greater that we will like that brand—however marginal this difference may be. It may be marginal but when everything else is equal, it can tip the scales

When we watch entertainment programs like *Desperate Housewives* or *The Simpsons* or feature movies, our interest is not in any information they may be communicating but in the entertainment they provide for us. It is important that we like the experience, otherwise why would we continue to watch? ‘News’ ads, like the news bulletins, clearly cast the viewer as the recipient of information. Entertainment commercials are different. We are not being addressed but simply experiencing. With entertainment commercials we react like an audience rather than a sales prospect.

Entertainment ads may take the form of ‘drama’ (see the previous chapter) or ‘musical variety’ (as used in Gap commercials) or ‘animation’ (the Geico gecko; Snap, Crackle and Pop; or the Keebler elves). Or they may be artistic, clever pieces of print or radio communication. As consumers we can and often do appreciate ads for their cleverness in wrapping up an old message in a fresh new way. While they may not communicate news about the brand in the sense of delivering a new message, they nevertheless create ‘feathers’. They increase the salience of the brand and continue to reinforce the image or feeling that we have about the brand (or its users).

One of the crucial ways these entertainment commercials vary is in how integral the brand is to the execution and what role it plays. This can take various forms:

- the brand as a prop;
- the brand as a setting (e.g. various McDonald’s and Pizza Hut drama ads);
- the brand as the hero (e.g. Mac vs PC).

Some ads relegate the brand to a bit part, while for others it becomes the star. The more integral the brand is to the ad the more likely the ad is to be effective.

Wrapping an old message in a fresh, entertaining way

After we have heard them, ad messages start to get boring. Most people already know for example that Asics make running shoes. And they know

that Asics make running shoes for women as well as men. So how does a brand like Asics keep reminding people of its brand name and keep getting its message out to women?

Consider this print ad:

- Visual: A picture of rural surroundings where women are jogging.
Headline: *We believe women should be running the country.*
Advertiser: Asics.

To take an advertising message and communicate it in this way is to re-package the message in a creative way. Shakespeare used the same technique. He was the master of the play-on-words and of course his plays are regarded as poetic works of art. At times ads are likened to aesthetic phenomena—just as though they were works of art (iPod ads or Absolut vodka ads for example).

Our conscious reactions to such ads are quite different to our reactions to straight ads. We typically react with at least mild appreciation of how ‘cute’ or ‘clever’ the ad is. And such ads do more than just entertain. Research indicates that all other things being equal we recall these ads better, we have greater liking for them and we are less inclined to engage in counter-arguing against them. Most importantly, when the brand is well integrated and communicated, it can nudge our attitude towards the brand in the positive direction.⁵

Why is this? What is the process going on here? An important point to note about such ads is that they often seem to stop us momentarily. There is a very brief ‘interrupt’ in the flow of our normal mental processing. Mostly we don’t have to stop and think about an ad. Mostly we understand the communication immediately—usually automatically and without effort.

Techniques such as play-on-words, ambiguity or incongruity are used as creative material to force such an interrupt. Here is another example:

- Visual: A close-up of a sandwich with a bite out of it.
Headline: *The next thing that gets eaten is your teeth.*
Advertiser: Colgate.

We are stopped fleetingly by a headline, ‘The next thing that gets eaten is your teeth’ when it is juxtaposed with a picture of a sandwich with a bite taken out of it. Our momentary reaction is likely to be ‘Huh? What was that

again?’ But in virtually no time at all and almost without effort, we puzzle out its meaning. ‘Oh . . . I get it . . . Colgate helps prevent the decay that begins to attack teeth immediately on eating . . . hey, clever!’

This ad, like many others, plays on the fact that words have multiple meanings and can represent more than one mental address in our mind. In this ad the word ‘eat’ is used to mean both ‘ingestion of food’ and ‘something that decay does to your teeth’. One reason why there tends to be less counter-arguing with such ads is we expend more effort on understanding the ad and, consequently, less cognitive capacity is available to be used in contesting the ad’s claims. This is a very fine line because if the puzzle is too hard it can fail completely as we are not going to be bothered . . . we just give up and turn the page.

However if we do successfully ‘get it’, then such ads are a brief mental diversion not unlike a crossword puzzle.⁶ Making sense of something from limited clues is rewarding. We get a mild satisfaction when we are able to make sense of what is initially puzzling. The difference with ads is that we want to invest much less time on them and we are much less committed to puzzling them out than we are with crossword puzzles. So while ads and crossword puzzles that are too hard are likely to make us so frustrated that we escape from them, ads that puzzle us just momentarily, holding us just long enough so that we get closure on them and make sense of them, are accompanied by a mild positive sensation—a sense of fleeting reward.

Repeating yesterday’s news

As I said, the problem with simply repeating yesterday’s news is that it becomes stale. Creating and announcing new variants or new developments with the brand can provide the source for new messages about the brand. Otherwise, wrapping up the same messages in a fresh way provides a solution for the advertiser.

Consider with the Colgate sandwich ad discussed above that in the unwrapping process we are reminded of both:

- the brand—Colgate; and
- its key attribute—‘protects against decay’.

The ad reinforces the strength of both. Furthermore, it does so in a mildly entertaining way. How much more boring and irritating would this ad be

if it simply repeated the old message that we have heard so many times: 'Colgate provides protection against tooth decay'?

When exposed to an ad like this one, we immediately recognize it as an ad for Colgate. Then we store any 'new' information about Colgate (i.e. 'protects against decay') at that mental address. However, if we find we already know this—in other words we find it is already stored in our mental Colgate pigeonhole—our focus is on the message's clever wrapping rather than our otherwise reaction of 'Why are you telling me that? I already know it'. So we tend to appreciate ads such as this for their cleverness and are somehow more tolerant of seeing them repeatedly because they are much better than ads that simply assail us with the same information repetitively. The essential difference is in the way we process it.

How we understand ads

We are exposed to hundreds of ads like this every day but we fully process only a fraction of them. Some of them jump out at us immediately, others we miss completely and still others we deliberately ignore. When an ad catches our attention our minds automatically *try* to make sense of it. In this we may succeed or fail. We may fail because we find the ad 'too hard' to understand or there is not enough time or we are distracted by something else. Just how our minds go about trying to understand an ad goes something like this:

1. First, we recognize that it is an ad.
2. We then immediately try to identify what it is an ad for. To do this we look for something familiar. We look for something that corresponds to a memory address—something that already exists in our memory. (For example in the ad at Figure 9.2 we recognize Pringles. Aha . . . we know that name and we know this must be an ad for Pringles.)



Figure 9.2: 'New Fat Free Pringles taste just as good as Original because they are made with Olean. Tasting is believing.' (© The Proctor & Gamble Company. Used by permission.)

3. Once we have located this familiar memory address, our minds can then store any new information from the ad (such as ‘fat free chips’) in that (Pringles) pigeonhole.

Brand reminders

Before any new information (like ‘fat free’ or ‘protects against decay’) can be stored in our minds, a familiar mental pigeonhole or address has to be first activated (in this case Pringles). The opening of the mental pigeonhole, the triggering of that mental address, serves to remind us of the brand. This happens whether or not the information ‘fat free chips’ is new or is already stored there, and whether or not ‘fat free chips’ is important to us. In other words, it reinforces the salience of the brand in our mind and this result is independent of any new information. So brand reinforcement is one effect. Then, depending upon how important the new information is to us, the news itself may have an effect over and above the brand reinforcement effect.⁷

If there is no new information or if the information is considered trivial, this risks irritating us. This is where humor can deflect such irritation. Take as an example this billboard ad. A customer stands at a Burger King counter wearing a large trench coat and hat—he is clearly in disguise and wants to remain unnoticed. What we as viewers of the ad can see, however, is his trademark clown’s red shoes, his red-and-yellow striped socks and his very familiar ‘Ronald’ red hair. We locate the mental pigeonhole address immediately from the store and the Burger King logo. What is the new information to be stored there? Ronald McDonald buys his burgers at Burger King? No, we chuckle at the realization this is a joke. In successfully puzzling this out, it creates fondness for the ad as well as two reminders. It delivers a reminder of the Burger King brand and its oft cited claim that the burgers there are better. That’s using humor to wrap up the same message in a fresh way.

Heralding

New information—a special promotion, a new deal, a new pack or whatever—can be announced by ‘heralding’ the new information. Some ads virtually scream the news at us (e.g. used car dealers shout ‘Have I got a hot deal for you!’). The more heralding in the ad, the more it focuses our attention on the information as new. The more ‘in your face’ the ad message, the quicker the ad may impact on us. But once we have seen

the ad and understood it, we don't really want to see it again. The more it is repeated the less affinity we are likely to feel both with the ad and the brand, and the more tired and boring they will start to look.

On the other hand, when the ad is pitched somewhat lower-key, and especially if it is done in a clever way that we can appreciate (such as the Burger King example), we are not only tolerant of its repetition but we can actually enjoy the information being repeated. The way in which an ad talks to us influences our reaction to it. Just as in our everyday interactions with people, *how* we are spoken to can heavily influence how we react. We like people who are fun, who make us laugh, and who don't harangue us. We feel more affronted by people who are strident; they put us in a less receptive state of mind to what they have to say and we are therefore more inclined to want to argue with them.

Non-heralding

As we have seen, when strident messages are used the more the ad heralds the new message, and the quicker the message becomes old. New information, once exposed and registered, is not new any more and repetition of it violates our cultural expectation that advertising is only supposed to communicate new information. That is why we encounter a lot of advertising that seems to persist in delivering old information as though it were new. 'Heralding' ads get the message across quickly but they also wear out very quickly.

Ads that communicate in a lower-key manner, aiming to get the information across more incidentally or as a reminder, tend to be longer lasting and less annoying in their effect. Once the new message has been communicated and before the repetition of the 'heralding' begins to annoy us, most advertisers would like to substitute more toned-down ads. But in order to reach the mass of people some degree of repetition of the heralding ad is almost inevitable.

An alternative for the advertiser is to use this lower-key form of communication in the first place. It does not get the message across as directly or perhaps even as quickly sometimes, but it does minimize annoyance and the ad will have a much longer life.

Even advertisers who do this would be hard pushed to articulate exactly what they do. Rather, advertisers can instinctively sense when an ad is in the consumer's face and when it is lower key and less likely to irritate. This result is governed in large part by the amount of focal stress

placed on the newness of the information. In the lower-key commercial, often there is not the same focus on the newness of the information and there is much less heralding of this newness as would be found in a high-key commercial. The difference is often in how it is said rather than what is said.

Assertions and non-assertions

Information can be communicated by way of simple assertion—heralding—or with varying degrees of subtlety.

Consider for example the statement:

- Pringles are now fat free and taste just as good as Original.

There is no subtlety about this. It is a pure assertion and puts the focus on the information ‘fat free’ as being new, as well as that they taste as good as Original. Assertions like this wear out quickly because when they are no longer news, continual repetition risks the assertion becoming boring if not irritating.

But ads often use more oblique techniques such as descriptive adjectives or juxtaposition in place of assertion. These can slip in the same information more gently and with much less focal stress on the newness of the information.⁸ For example, consider:

- Fat-free Pringles. As good as the original taste.

Using ‘fat-free’ as an adjective like this rather than using direct assertion (that Pringles are fat free) causes the focus of our processing to be directed on to the other part of the communication—‘as good as the original taste’. Here ‘fat free’ is seen more as an identifying description than as an assertion. Adjectives are less like assertions of new information and operate more like matter-of-fact descriptions.

Granted, such differences are subtle and the smallness of the effect may risk a ‘so what’ reaction. However, these more oblique forms of expression can, by toning down the communication, soften the degree of assertion while communicating the same information.

The part of the ad we focus on

As we have seen, within a communication not everything attracts the focus of our attention equally. Indeed our minds tend to process information that we already know quite differently from things that are

new. The content of any communication seems to get classified by our minds into two parts:

- Things that are already ‘known’—called the ‘given’ information. We are being reminded.
- Things that are ‘new’.

It is important to appreciate how our minds treat ‘given’ and ‘new’ information quite differently. Think about your school days. Did you ever ask the other kids trick questions like: How many of each species did Moses take with him on the ark? The unsuspecting kids always gave the answer ‘two’. You laughed derisively and pointed out to the other kids’ embarrassment that it wasn’t Moses who went on the ark. It was Noah!

This schoolyard trick worked because you positioned Moses in the question *not* as new information but as ‘given’ i.e. already known. The kids assumed the given to be true and focused their processing elsewhere. It is easy for our minds to skip over something and take information as given, when it is positioned in this way.

The trick worked even though we were unaware of the mechanism underlying it. Similarly, while there are ads that to varying degrees may work because of this mechanism, very few advertisers would be able to articulate it or how it works. What we regard as ‘given’ simply registers in passing while we focus our attention on what we regard as new in the communication. Our minds tend to regard ‘given’ information merely as a reminder and assume the information to be true, leaving our processing capacity free to focus on verifying the truth of the ‘new’ information.

Reminders

There are various ways our minds pick up cues as to what is ‘new’ and what is already known or ‘given’ in the communication. In everyday conversation the prefix ‘as you know’ is frequently used. Consider the expression:

‘As you know, Mac take less time than other computers to learn. Mac is the number 1 computer used worldwide in schools.’

The prefix ‘as you know’ has the effect of redirecting some of our focus of processing away from evaluating the statement ‘Mac take less time than other computers to learn’. If we are going to focus on evaluating anything

it is likely to be the statement ‘Mac is the number 1 computer used world-wide in schools’ because this is the new information that is being asserted in the communication.

The expression ‘as you know’ operates as a signal to the listener that this is a reminder—the information is just to be regarded as a lead-in to something else. It pre-empts any annoyance that we might otherwise have that might get in the road of the communication and avoids the annoyed reaction, ‘I already know that! So why are you repeating it?’

More importantly, when something is signaled as a reminder instead of new information, we expect what is being said to be already stored in our memory. We expect it to be already known and therefore true.

Malleability of memory

When something is positioned as a reminder it has the effect that we expect it to already be in our memory. Just as we often see in people what we expect to see, so too do we often find in our memory what we expect to find. Why is this important? To answer this, let me tell you about the classic experiments concerning eyewitness testimony. They reveal a lot about how we as human beings process information differently when it is positioned as new versus when it is positioned as a reminder of something we already know.

In this famous series of experiments, psychologist Elizabeth Loftus showed people a videotape of a car accident and later asked them questions.⁹ For example, ‘How fast was the blue car going when it ran the stop sign?’

In fact there was no stop sign in the videotape. But the form of the question led people to assume it was there. People gave their speed estimates. When they were asked later if they saw a stop sign, more than half of them (53 per cent) claimed they had. The mental representation of the event had been ‘altered’ in their minds by the form of the earlier question.

Note that the information that there was a stop sign was positioned as ‘given’ information in the question. Using this technique of positioning the information as ‘given’, Loftus found repeatedly that we as human beings are prepared to add buildings, see people who aren’t there, make cars go faster or slower, and in general witness actions that do not actually occur.

This is startling evidence of how we normally assume the given information in a communication to be true and concentrate on verifying

what we see as the new information. As an aside, this is what lies at the heart of the controversy surrounding ‘recovered memories’ (of being sexually abused as a child, for example). The courts have to judge whether patients undergoing psychiatric therapy have been helped to ‘recover’ genuine memories or whether the memories have been accidentally created or altered in some way by the psychiatric questions themselves.

The general point is that expectations can be set up by the syntax or by other means that can significantly influence our focus of processing.

Silent signals

Our minds receive signals from communications indicating to us what we should presume to be new and what we should presume to be given. When we are listening to a radio ad, the amount of vocal stress in each part of the sentence helps signal to us what is new and what is given.

With written material and print advertising, it is the syntax as well as the graphics that provide the cues. For example, the use of an adverb rather than an adjective usually invites more focus of processing by signaling new information. Consider the statement ‘Total clean Fab is gentler.’ What is being signaled as new is that it is gentler.

Adverbs (like ‘gentler’) tend to signal that this is new information. Adjectives, on the other hand, do the opposite. They signal ‘given’. Consider for example the statement: ‘Gentler Fab gives total clean.’ What is now being signaled as new is that Fab gives total clean. The gentler attribute is still being communicated but this time as an adjective. As an adjective, the fact that Fab is gentler is positioned more as a given—as something we already knew. So adjectives can communicate the same information more incidentally and more rapidly, with less focus on the information as new.

In an earlier chapter we saw how our minds mentally process image ads and visual experiences quite differently from informational ads. We can now see that information in ads can be processed by our minds in different ways depending on how directly or obliquely the information is asserted. What is involved here is a shift in our ‘focus of processing’ away from the information as new, to a focus on enjoyment, entertaining reminders or something else in the communication.

Oblique, less heralding ways have the effect of inviting less annoyance than when the information is repeated and they do not invite the same degree of counter-arguing. Wrapping up old information in fresh ways is just one form of rendering the information oblique and less heralding.

Summary

There are at least five ways that ads can minimize the likelihood of us counter-arguing with their messages and hence influence how we react overall to the ad:

- by not making assertions;
- by toning down any assertions made;
- by positioning the information as something that is already known;
- by packaging the information as entertainment; or
- by casting us, the audience, in a bystander role, ‘overhearing’ the information.

In Chapter 8 (‘Vicarious experience and virtual reality’) we saw how casting us as bystanders, rather than talking directly to us, can work for ads. In this chapter we focused on the other four points above—where instead of heralding the new information the ad is toned down or more subtly positions the information as a reminder.

Essentially, all communications work by triggering memories. Old images or concepts are triggered in our minds by something in the ad. We recognize various things as familiar. In the process, something new may be introduced and we are shown how to link this up with the old.

When something is positioned as ‘new’ the focus of our mental processing tends to be on evaluating: a) whether it is new and b) whether it corresponds to our own experience, knowledge, and beliefs.

The other parts of a communication, the ‘given’, we treat more casually. We assume we already know about it, so we tend not to spend as much time evaluating its validity. In other words we tend to take it as given.

Sentence construction, vocal stress and camera focus can be used to send signals as to what is given and what is new. While very subtle, these can also be very important. Don’t let the subtlety distract you from their importance. Advertisers themselves are largely unaware of the mechanisms involved.

10 WHAT'S THIS I'M WATCHING? THE ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP AN AD

In the last chapter we saw that the way an ad speaks to us affects our processing of it—that news is processed differently to reminders. Ads vary enormously even though their basic elements are much the same: sound, voice, music and pictures. A brand like Coke will often have several different ads exposed on TV in the same week, not to mention what's on YouTube etc. The message is often the same but the ads may all be executed in different ways. As we have seen, the way the executional elements of an ad are blended can help determine which of the consumer's mental processes become engaged and which do not.

Again, the art of the creative departments in ad agencies is traditionally intuitive rather than encoded in any set of well-formulated principles. Articulating what makes for creative success in advertising is an underdeveloped science and even more especially when it comes to analyzing the individual elements of an ad. This chapter draws on advertising findings and principles of psychological processing that are gradually coming to light, that jointly further our understanding of how the executional elements of an ad work, or don't work as the case may be.

Interaction of words and visuals¹

It is important to note how elements can interact, such as music with visuals or words with visuals. For example consider the statement: 'The stripes expanded'. We can't effectively process it. What does 'The stripes expanded' mean? There is no mental address that is activated in our mind that corresponds to the stripes. Unless we can locate one we can't make sense of it. If on the same page, however, there is a picture of a man blowing up a striped balloon, we easily make sense of it.

In this way the visual element can be effectively used to manipulate what is 'on stage' in our minds and help us locate the appropriate mental

address for a word. Ordinarily this interactive process is extremely fast and automatic rather than conscious. So we will rarely have any sense of having to expend any effort to put these elements together. At other times it takes just a minuscule amount of effort to make meaning out of it. Consider this example:

Headline: 'This year, hit the beach topless'—Pepsi.

Visual: The cap from a Pepsi bottle lies crumpled on the sand.

Our minds are easily able to discover the underlying connection that makes this ad comprehensible. The process is rapid but goes something like this. Our mind locates two addresses. One in response to the headline—appearing partially nude. The second is a soft drink bottle-cap. How to make sense of the two? We must first search for and locate an alternative address for the expression 'topless'—ah, the Pepsi bottle with the cap removed is, of course, topless. Suddenly the image of opening a Pepsi has been triggered by something linked to nudity, rebelliousness and risk-taking. The link is implicit and associative rather than explicitly asserted. And along with understanding it goes a fleeting satisfaction of having successfully puzzled it out and an appreciation for a cute or clever ad.

Such interactions and the minuscule effort we expend in the almost instant problem solving is partly what underlies our greater appreciation of such ads. But as consumers we are rarely motivated to expend much effort trying to puzzle out what a creative copywriter meant. So up to a point there is a certain reward that goes along with puzzling out the right meaning. But this works only if the ad first gets our attention.

Attention-getting devices

To maximize its effect, advertising has to get your attention. It has to 'cut through' the clutter of other advertising and be noticed. The first principal of advertising is that it needs to stand out. To this end, advertising uses a variety of attention-getting devices—the best known of which are sex and humor. In addition there are other more subtle elements that almost involuntarily capture our attention.

As Giep Franzen has written, 'People are social beings. Their attention often proves to be activated by other people, especially the portrayal of their faces and hands. Eyes in particular have an activating effect.'² Emotional characters, erotic stimuli, small children, and animals are just



Figure 10.1: An ad for Lever body wash.

some of the things that increase the probability of capturing attention. ‘It is not for nothing they have frequently been used in advertising over the years—but not always functionally.’³

For example, advertisers who import sex into an ad and use it purely as an attention-getter when it has no intrinsic relationship with the product certainly gain attention, but contrary to popular consumer belief this stands little chance of being effective if it is not directly relevant to an advertisement’s primary selling point.⁴

Many readers will be surprised to learn that ads they are highly aware of may nevertheless be ineffective. This is because getting attention is just one component of making ads work. Eggs are necessary for baking a cake but the cake will fail if you rely on using eggs alone. Attention alone will not necessarily make an ad work.⁵ In fact, all too often in tracking I have seen that the very device being used to direct audience attention to the ad also serves to distract the audience from the brand and its message. Devices such as humor, sexual arousal and emotion can give an illusory impression to the audience that an ad is highly visible and therefore must be a great ad—but is it in fact working?

An ad that compels our attention but fails to register the brand and its message is next to useless for any advertiser. Though they stand out, such ads frequently don’t work unless advertisers make sure that compensatory emphasis is given to strengthening of the brand and the message sufficient to outweigh this distraction effect. (See for example Chapter 17, ‘The effectiveness of funny ads.’)

Sex

Sex is a natural attention-getter that is fairly widely used. Various products are bought in part because we want to feel more attractive and they have a ‘natural’ association with our drive for sexual attraction. Products such as clothing, lingerie and fragrances often tie in to this ‘natural’ association—brands like Victoria’s Secret (lingerie and swimwear), Fruit of the Loom (underwear) and numerous labels of fragrances for both males and females.

'Controversial' communicable ads

Some brands use attention-getting devices in a way that seems calculatingly designed to generate outrage. The effect is that they become 'talked about' ads and are passed on by word of mouth. Like communicable diseases they are spread, virus-like, by people who say to us 'Did you see that ad for . . .'.

Three examples of ads that became 'communicable' by using sex in an explicit or controversial way were:

- *Nothing comes between me and my Calvins*—Calvin Klein jeans.
- *Are you wearing any protection?*—Bolle Sunglasses.
- Jaipur perfume ad showing a nude female from the back 'handcuffed' by Jaipur. The bondage overtones caused huge controversy.⁶



Figure 10.2: Victoria's Secret lingerie advertising.

Humor

There are three main mechanisms by which humorous ads are supposed to work more effectively than straight ads:

- Humorous ads are noticed more i.e. they work through gaining greater attention.
- There is less counter-arguing with humorous ads because viewers process them as entertainment rather than engage in a true/false evaluation.
- They are liked more and there is evidence that ads that are liked have a higher probability of being effective.

These three points are dealt with in more depth in Chapter 17. Suffice to say at this point that while humor is another element that has the capacity to attract attention as well as entertain the audience and reduce counter-arguing, it does so at the possible risk of distracting us from attending to the brand and the message. Humor may hijack attention away from these other important elements. Consider for example this airline ad: a man bursts naked into his living room with a rose between his teeth, only to find that his wife has flown her parents over on a cheap weekend return flight.⁷

If you remember this ad, do you remember which airline was the advertiser? It is a very humorous commercial and while the message is well integrated, the brand is not. Nothing in the execution ties in to the brand itself. It could be used as a commercial for just about any brand of airline. In fact it was—because the same ad was used in different countries by *different* airlines. Where a brand is not inherently integrated into the execution, ads like this that use humorous executions have to make doubly sure the correct brand gets successfully registered in people's minds. Otherwise the commercial, while highly entertaining, may be doing a job for airlines generally but not the advertiser specifically.

Sometimes creative teams seem to feel a need to introduce humor almost gratuitously—for no functional reason other than because it appears clever—especially in sign-off lines at the end of commercials. Irrelevant throwaway lines at the end of commercials do little to attract attention to commercials. Furthermore they are likely to erase short-term memory and interfere with the main message of the ad.⁸ These are to be contrasted with sign-off lines that *reinforce* the message e.g.

Volkswagen—it doesn't go in one year and out the other.

Such reinforcements at the end of a commercial are sometimes called 'klitchniks'.⁹

Testimonials

Testimonials can be used to increase attention, particularly with radio and print.¹⁰ Though sometimes very effective as a form of advertising, they are not always done well.¹¹ The intention behind real person endorsements is to depict a simulation of word-of-mouth advertising. They may show an 'expert' (e.g. the 'doctor in white coat' technique) but more often they present 'typical people' who appear to be just like us. This is the 'satisfied customer' technique. For example, in the USA ads for Broadway musicals frequently show a lot of real people gushing about the show.

The process of empathy and identification indicates that the more like us the 'satisfied customer' appears to be, the more effective their testimonial. Consequently in many countries testimonials are often used by companies marketing to specialist occupational groups like farmers, plumbers or builders.

Music

Music is the ‘rhythm method’ of advertising. There was a time when music appeared in about half of all TV commercials.¹²

The inclusion in an ad of a tune that is already well known can help get attention as well as set the appropriate mood and act as a memory jogger. That’s what Luv diapers were hoping for in buying the right to use the vintage Beatles hit *All You Need is Love*. They used it in an ad for their products with the lyrics suitably modified to ‘All You Need is Luv’s’. Consider these:

- The Resource, *Gimme That*—used in an iPod nano ad;
- Johnny Cash, *I’ve Been Everywhere*—used in a Choice Hotels ad;
- Louis Armstrong, *A Kiss to Build a Dream On*—used in a Visa ad;
- Hot Chocolate, *You Sexy Thing*—used in a Dr Pepper ad;
- Spice Girls, *Wannabe*—used in a Citibank ad.

Association of the brand with a popular piece of music increases the salience of the brand in our minds and makes it more likely that we will think of that brand whenever we hear the music.

When we are engaged in an entertainment experience, whether it be listening to a song or reading a novel, there is not the same motivation to *evaluate* ‘information’ as when we are told directly. *Persuasion by proxy* takes place when the focus is on the entertainment and not on the information.

Damping down the evaluative process and triggering emotion are not the only important effects of setting words to music. Rhyme, rhythm and repetition (the three Rs) give words a mnemonic quality, making the message more catchy and enduring in memory.

For years, Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* serenaded us into seats for United Airlines. British Airways set the *Lakme* duet behind their famous ‘face’ commercial. The Partridge Family provided lyrics for Levi . . . ‘I think I love you’. Later the Johnny Cash theme, *I Walk the Line*, provided the background for a whole series of Levis ads. Cell phone carriers often urge us to ‘mentally migrate’ to music. Dinah Washington gave us a rhythm-method reminder for Double Tree Hotels with ‘Relax Max’ while Budweiser urged us ‘Don’t hold back’ with the musical assistance of the *Galvanize* track from the Chemical Brothers. Many thousands of advertisers have used hit tunes and other music to support their advertising.

Words to music: the jingle

Many ads set their own words to music. When Pepsi aired its first radio jingle in 1939, it was so popular that it was played in jukeboxes and became a hit record. In the 1970s Coca-Cola was so successful with its jingle 'I'd like to buy the world a Coke' sung by an international youth choir that it was extended, recorded and released to become an international chart hit called *I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing*.

Jingles have been around for over 80 years—the very first jingle was for Wheaties in 1926 at a time when sales were sagging and the brand was close to being discontinued. It turned the fortunes of the brand around and jingles took off. For about three quarters of a century, they flourished with many unforgettables such as:

- 'I am stuck on Band-Aids 'cause Band-Aids stuck on me'
- 'You deserve a break today. McDonald's'
- 'Just for the taste of it . . . Diet Coke'
- 'Stayin' alive . . . Volvo'
- 'Heard it through the grapevine'—California Raisins
- 'Take good care of my baby'—Johnson & Johnson baby shampoo
- 'You can tell a Wella woman by the way she wears her hair'
- 'Be all that you can be'—US Army
- 'A little dab'll do ya'—Brylcreem

Such jingles can easily be dredged out of our memories. A host of extraordinarily memorable campaigns owe much of their longevity in memory to the fact that the words were set to music. Music is a cutting edge that helps etch a commercial into long-term memory.

McDonald's even set to music the incredible line: 'Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun.' A Canadian, Toronto-based pizza chain called Pizza, Pizza put its telephone number to a jingle so successfully that if you were to ask a Toronto resident what number they should call for pizza, they would 'sing': 'nine-six-seven, eleven, eleven/phone Pizza Pizza, hey, hey, hey!' On the strength of this, the company expanded to new locations across North America.

Wash-over effect of music

When words are set to music it can even create a *desire* for repetition. With great songs, we don't just want to hear them once; we want to listen to

them over and over. Of course, most jingles hardly rate as great songs and that's part of the problem.

There is another effect that music seems to have. When the words of an ad are set to music they tend to wash over us rather than invite us to intellectualize. Why is it that when the words of an ad are set to music we do not have the same sense of somebody trying to convince us or sell us on something? By setting the words to music, somehow the edge is taken off what might otherwise be a strident message.

This is because we seem to process lyrics differently from spoken messages. As teenagers particularly, we seem to learn to process lyrics and music in a different way to other communications. And we do this in terms of 'enjoy/don't enjoy' rather than in terms of truth or falsity. We learn to process the experience as an experience rather than as a proposition which is supposed to faithfully represent real-world reality. Indeed much of the content of cable music television channels (like MAX or MTV), when processed in a rational way, is clearly unrepresentative of reality. It is designed to let fantasy and feelings in rather than shut them out.

Music is for appreciating and letting wash over us, not for arguing with. The mood that it sets can take the edge off potentially controversial topics. Words that might otherwise be processed in terms of truth/falsity get processed quite differently.

Musical commercials have become so much a part of our advertising environment that we almost forget they are there. We seem to respond to them as we respond to traffic lights: without thinking much about them. Putting words to music is a well-established creative technique—the rhythm method of advertising. In putting words to music it lessens the chance of us forming the idea that anyone is trying to tell us or sell us something and it reduces our tendency to counter-argue with what is being said.

Who is talking to whom?

It should be obvious that analyzing the executional elements in an ad requires some rather subtle analysis. An invaluable starting point to the process is to ask two questions:

- Who is the ad talking to? and
- Who is doing the talking?

The way we experience a commercial depends on what role the ad casts us, the viewers, in. This in turn influences who is seen to be talking to whom.

Lecture-style ads

Consider ads like ‘This week only at Merv’s supermarkets we have the following red-hot specials . . .’; ‘I’m Joe Blow and have I got a deal for you’. Who is speaking to whom? These ads take a relatively traditional form in which it is clear that the advertiser (Merv’s or Joe Blow) is talking to us, the viewer in front of the TV set.

We process these lecture-style ads in terms of the relevance of the information they convey. The advertiser hopes we will listen to what is said, find it of interest and see its relevance to us, then remember the information and act on it. For this to happen the ad has first to capture our attention and our interest. In advertising jargon, it has to *cut through the clutter*.

Look who’s talking: face vs voiceover

Ads that reason with us often feature a presenter putting the case for why we should try or buy this widget rather than some other widget or why the presenter’s brand is superior to the leading brand.

One important way in which lecture-style ads vary is in whether or not we can see who is talking; whether we can see the face of the advertiser. In the typical supermarket ad announcing the week’s specials, the advertiser is usually unseen. The focus is on the specials. The person doing the talking is invisible. He or she is merely a ‘voiceover’. If there is any real sense of a human being in the commercial it is merely a disembodied voice informing us how much we will save. Car dealer ads, on the other hand, often have the dealer as the on-screen speaker. The words come out of the dealer’s mouth. In the advertising jargon, the ad has *lip-sync*.

These ads are like lectures and the person doing the talking is the lecturer. Some lecturers and some ads stick in our minds much more than others. Some lecturers like to work in a darkened room, hidden behind a lectern, with the audience’s attention focused on a screen. Other lecturers are more lively. They work the audience from up-front, doing demonstrations and interacting with the audience or attempting to elicit participation from them.

So it is when we have a lip-synched, on-screen presenter like Jay Bush for Bush's Baked Beans or the now deceased Dave Thomas, who was the presenter for his own fast-food chain Wendy's for many years, or former Senator Bob Dole when he did the erectile dysfunction ads for Viagra. Advertising has gone more global over the years and because voiceover ads can be transposed more easily into other languages, such ads are seen more frequently. Nevertheless, it remains true that lecturers and presenters who engage us with their person and are not just background voices communicate more effectively.

Voiceover commercials attract less attention.¹³ I have personally found that in tracking lecture-style ads of this type over more than fifteen years, the ones with an on-screen human presenter and lip-sync almost invariably outperformed those with a disembodied voiceover. This is no doubt related to why many people don't like talking on the telephone and prefer to talk to people face to face. Talking to someone on the phone is just not the same when you can't see the other person's face and expressions. This type of news or lecture-style communication where the advertiser is imparting information usually comes across as more meaningful and more effective when there is a human face, a personality who is doing the talking either on the screen or in your mind. That is why so many car dealers are persuaded to appear in their own ads—because somebody whose face we can see is talking to us and becomes a known face. It helps when we can see the human face of the organization that is talking to us, whether it is Jay Bush for Bush's Baked Beans or August Busch IV for Annheiser Busch (Budweiser) beer.

Presenters

This raises the question of whose face? Some advertisers choose to use a human face but not their own. Just as governments use ambassadors to represent them overseas to be the human face of the government, some corporations prefer to use a presenter to represent the organization. So the presenter is not always the advertiser. He or she may be a model or actor with the 'right kind' of face (e.g. the Maytag repair man or Anthony Hopkins for Barclays Bank or Kathie Lee Gifford for Carnival Cruises).

The use of celebrity presenters is a global phenomenon. In Japan the majority of all commercials feature a celebrity. In the UK, Rowan Atkinson (alias Mr Bean) was the face of Barclays Bank for many years. More recently Barclays has used Anthony Hopkins. In Australia, where sport is almost

a religion, Olympic medalists appear in ads for everything from breakfast cereals to cars.

Chances are you will recall one or more very old ad campaigns featuring the face of some celebrity—testimony to the durability of the memory trace that the use of such presenters can create. Celebrities and actors act as surrogates for the advertiser. They can put a human face on the image of an organization.

Apart from giving the advertiser a human face, the use of a presenter also acts as a mnemonic device to increase the salience of the brand. Who can think of Kirstie Alley without thinking of the ads she has appeared in for Jenny Craig weight loss programs? In years gone by, who could think of Karl Malden without thinking of American Express? In Australia Paul Hogan (Crocodyile Dundee) was ultimately prohibited from doing Winfield cigarette ads because of his huge popularity with kids and his mnemonic association with the name Winfield. A similar ban was imposed on Camel cigarettes using Joe Camel, the animation character's face in the USA. Whether it be a face like Marcus Welby (Robert Young), Joe Camel, Paul Hogan or Kirstie Alley every appearance of that face in a movie, a variety show, or a TV interview inevitably reminds us of the brand.

The use of a presenter instead of the advertiser to do the talking in an ad seems to create a lessened sense of someone with a vested interest talking directly to us and doing a hard sell on us. We receive the message from the company but through a congenial and familiar figure who presents the advertiser and the product in a favorable light (e.g. Angelina Jolie pitched for luxury apparel brand St John and David Beckham pitches for Motorola).

The pros and cons of voiceovers

Whether the presenter is the advertiser in person or a hired face it is almost always more effective and more memorable than the use of anonymous, disembodied voiceovers. Why then do so many advertisers continue to use voiceover? One reason is cost. The ads are cheaper to make and as indicated they are more flexible, especially if they need to be modified (e.g. to dub in another accent or language for use internationally).

Advertisers sometimes have more success with voiceovers if they can vary them in some way. One way is the use of Hollywood's biggest stars as voiceover talent in major campaigns. When stars lend their familiar

voices to ads, we say, 'I recognize that voice!' and we sometimes see the face in our mind rather than seeing the face directly in the ad.

Another way is if they can appropriately set the voiceover words to music. If we go out to an entertainment event like *Phantom of the Opera*, we clearly approach and assimilate the experience quite differently from a university lecture. When the voiceover of an ad is set to music it has a similar effect. These ads are more entertaining and enjoyable than they would be if spoken as straight voiceover commercials. They are processed differently—i.e. more as an experience—and their effects are more subtle. It seems to subtly change the way the ad is cognitively processed by the viewer, which becomes more akin to the way we mentally process musical drama.

Who is the ad talking to?

What is important in an ad is not just who is talking or singing but who they are singing or talking to.

Take the famous PC versus Mac ads that are really a dialogue between the two characters representing PC and Mac. Or cell phone ads with people talking to one another about the advantages of being with that particular telco supplier. Or an old spot for Chiffon margarine, 'It's not nice to fool Mother Nature'. A woman talks to the narrator about how nice and creamy the butter is, and the narrator corrects her that it's not butter; she gets angry and lightning and thunder flash around and she utters the famous 'not nice to fool Mother Nature' tag line.

Ask yourself who is the character on screen or the voiceover talking to? If we think carefully about this we will often find that the voice or character is not addressing us directly but some other character on the screen. At the same time we on our side of the screen are also experiencing the commercial and getting the message, but in the role of bystanders or passive observers.

The difference between being a bystander and being the obvious target of a communication was demonstrated way back in 1962 in an experiment by Walster and Festinger.¹⁴ Subjects listened in on a conversation between two graduate students. Some subjects believed the students knew they were listening. Others believed the students were unaware of their presence.

The first group believed what the students said could conceivably have been directed at influencing them, the listeners. The second group

were more influenced by the opinions expressed in the students' conversation. In other words, being in bystander mode seems to reduce the motivation for us to engage our defensive reactions and reduce our tendency to be as critical of what is being said.

We as viewers get messages from these ads indirectly rather than directly, much as we do when viewing a play or a soap opera or a movie. Our minds are not set to receive a message but to be entertained. This contrasts with the traditional type of ad which addresses viewers directly, such as the many retail supermarket ads in which the two main components are:

- voiceover and
- illustrative visuals (usually of the products).

Such ads clearly and unambiguously talk to the viewer. Most early TV advertising was like this, and we still tend to think of it as typical, probably because advertising's heritage is in the print medium. Straight words with illustrative visuals is an approach very much in the style of, and a carryover from, print advertising. But if you watch today's TV and video ads closely you will see that this style has mutated considerably. Often the (off-screen) voiceover appears to be talking not so much to the viewer but talking to, or about, an on-screen character.

Voiceover talking to, or about, an on-screen character

Having the voiceover in the ad appear to address an on-screen character is one of the primary ways in which a shift can be induced in our mental processing. It is one of several elements that invite us to take a bystander perspective. Oral B did this with the voiceover addressing Rob the dentist on screen and asking him to show us which toothbrush he used.

An Australian ad for Caro (a coffee substitute) illustrated the purer form of this technique where the voiceover throughout the whole commercial was not addressing the audience but addressing a product-user on-screen character. In it, the man on the screen was told by the off-screen voiceover that there are many people just like him who now drink and enjoy the product. The viewer is a bystander and the viewer's 'focus of processing' is the bystander's perspective.

The difference between being a bystander and a target is the difference between overhearing a conversation and being told something directly. What is different in overhearing information in a conversation

between two other people is that our attention and cognitive processing are focused differently.

When we are being told something directly we are more likely to engage our defensive, counter-arguing mechanisms; we are more on the alert and ready for counter-arguing. The information gained from overhearing someone else's conversation may or may not be the same. However, the defensive processing applied to it is likely to be quite different.

Often this type of ad is very subtle and it is not immediately obvious that the primary role the audience is being cast in is bystander. The key to these ads is that they are addressing the people shown on the screen rather than addressing us sitting out front.

The on-screen character as receiver

An interesting question to ask is, who is the voiceover talking to? The long running Mastercard 'Priceless' ads use voiceover talking about the on-screen characters making purchases. Each commercial concludes with the line 'There are some things money can't buy . . . for everything else there's Mastercard'. The voiceover seems to be talking as much to the characters on screen as to the viewer sitting out front.

In the famous 'Gillette, Best a Man Can Get' commercials the voice sang to the on-screen character, 'You're looking good'. In the classic Dr Pepper commercial the off-screen voice sang to the people on screen, 'Wouldn't you like to be a Pepper too?'

When a commercial imparts a sense that it is the on-screen character who is being spoken to, or sung to, this further helps disengage the viewer from taking on the role of defensive customer. It engages the viewer more as a passive observer, a bystander enjoying the entertainment. The voiceover is not selling, talking or even singing to the viewer. Rather, it seems to be singing to the on-screen character.

To the extent that viewers identify with the on-screen character, they also receive the message indirectly and see it as relevant to themselves. Consider an 'erectile dysfunction' ad that depicts a mature age couple enjoying a romantic dinner with the headline 'Choose the treatment for him that suits your sex life'. It appears to be talking to *her* but not all is quite as it seems! While the message is *ostensibly* not directed at him, think about this: readers of this ad are *both* male and female. The message to her is 'overheard' by male readers. The difference is subtle but important.

In this type of ad, the pronoun 'you' or 'your' occurs often (e.g. 'You oughta be congratulated', 'Aren't you glad you use Dial?', 'When you care enough to send the very best'. This style engages us as passive observers and invites us to enjoy the ad while being invited to interpret the 'you' as referring to the on-screen character. However if we identify with the on-screen character, we can simultaneously interpret the 'you' as referring to us.

Tuning in to the on-screen character's thoughts

In some ads, it is as though the characters on screen are thinking the sentiments expressed in the voiceover or the song lyrics. Viewers have the impression of sharing what the characters are thinking or feeling. In these ads the words could be being spoken or sung by the characters, but they aren't. Instead the message seems to come from the characters' thoughts. Setting a message to music lessens the sense of being lectured to and this technique probably lessens that sense even more. We seem to be simply overhearing someone's thoughts. The on-screen characters in all these commercials are depicted doing other things while simultaneously we hear what seems to be their thoughts, desires or remembrances coming through the audio track. The style is frequently characterized by use of the pronouns 'I' or 'we'. To the extent that we find ourselves sharing the feelings of these characters and identifying with them, the pronouns 'I' or 'we' can be taken as referring to us as well.

Drama

Earlier we saw that people seem to process lyrics and music quite differently from spoken messages. Such processing, far from shutting out fantasy and feeling, deliberately lets it in.

'Drama' commercials are similar to music in this respect. Drama, like music, is supposed to be experienced and enjoyed. Experience and enjoyment are the focus of our mental processing. Our mental processing is not usually set to engage in analysis of the drama in terms of truth or falsity. Nor is it set to analyze what information goes into our heads in the process.

A classic drama commercial was Pepsi's 'archeological dig' which showed a bottle of Coke found at an archeological dig in the next century and the 'professor' admits that he doesn't know what it is. Another example is the delightful McDonald's ad that opens with a team of cute seven- to eight-year-olds preparing to play for their basketball championship.

They are discussing with their coach what to do because one of them is away ill. Overhearing them, Los Angeles Lakers basketball star Kobe Bryant walks over and offers to play for them. The kids don't have a clue who he is but they agree that 'he is tall' and so they decide to give him a go. One of them takes Kobe aside and whispers 'Hey, if we win, we get to go to McDonald's . . . so don't blow it. OK?'

These ads are like plays or dramas and they not only have people and faces but also characters and plots. All of these elements help the ads stick in people's minds. Classic long-running drama commercials include Impulse body deodorant (*If someone gives you flowers, it may be just 'Impulse'*), AT&T's 'Reach out and touch someone' and the Nestlé Gold/Taster's Choice/Nescafé serialized ads. These ads appeal to us emotionally. We can relate to them and they entertain us at the same time as 'educating' us.

They are mini-movies rather than ads that reason with us. There is a world of difference between listening to a lecture or a debate and attending a concert or a movie. The former are an invitation to reason; the latter are an invitation to experience. With drama commercials, this is the difference. We tend to record the incidental information or message that happens to be conveyed while the focus of our attention is on being entertained. Sometimes by putting both music and drama together we get musical drama. An example was the Pepsi commercial that starred Britney, Pink and Beyoncé as gladiators facing each other at the Colosseum while the emperor looks on drinking Pepsi. Instead of fighting, the three throw down their weapons to declare in song to the crowd 'We will . . . we will . . . rock you!' As the crowd get with the gladiators, the emperor's iced cans of Pepsi end up being drunk by the three gladiators on the Colosseum floor and the commercial closes with the emperor in the pit facing a growling lion.

Characters

When developing a commercial, ad agencies consider what is the target audience for the product (ie. who buys it) so they can make decisions about the characters. 'Young products' (e.g. jeans) usually feature young people and 'older products' (e.g. retirement plans) usually feature older people. Similarity in age between characters and audience is usually a plus.

The ad maker attempts to weave roles and characters into the ad that we will welcome, that are consistent with the way we see ourselves or would like to see ourselves, roles and characters that we can easily identify with.

The closer we feel to a character and the greater the similarity between that character and ourselves, the more effect a commercial is likely to have on us. This is why ads for Mattel toys usually star children, ads for Coca-Cola feature teenagers, and ads for All-Bran breakfast cereal show the whole family. The age, sex and lifestyle of the characters are chosen to maximize the probability that the target audience for the brand will identify with the character.

Multiple target audiences

Many ads have one specific target audience and the target character is designed accordingly. It is possible, however, for one commercial to address multiple target audiences and still achieve identification.

An example is a McDonald's ad that shows a working mom in a business suit showing her husband and kids everything in the refrigerator and freezer. She's going on a business trip and has color-coded all the plastic wrap around certain foods—blue is for broccoli, red is for . . . and the dad and kids are just looking at her, but paying attention. The ad then cuts to the dad pulling things out of the refrigerator for dinner and he asks the kids, 'What do you want for dinner, blue or red?' He then says, 'Let's go to McDonald's.' Lots of McDonald's spots work with multiple targets.

The point is that various people can identify with one or other of the character targets. Children can identify with the kids, males can identify with the dad while females can identify with the mum.

Two questions are pertinent when we examine an ad and its characters. First, are we members of the target audience for the ad? Or is it aimed at people in some other age, sex or socio-economic group? Tampon ads are not aimed at me, nor are women's fashion ads. Often, however, it is not that obvious. Assuming we are in the target audience for the ad, then which character or characters seem to be most like us? Which character in the ad do we feel some identity or empathy with? If the ad is working on us it is most likely to be through that particular character.

The person playing the character

Already admired characters generally have a head start in getting the audience to identify with, and project themselves into, the character. Almost every male adolescent in the USA 'wants to be' a Kobe Bryant or a Michael Jordan. Almost every female adolescent wants to be Beyoncé or maybe Pink. So the Colosseum gladiators mentioned in the Pepsi

ad earlier has not one but three female characters that a young female audience might want to identify with. (Britney was also admired at the time, which underlines the risk of using celebrities who might turn out to be 'loose cannons'.)

What if that Pepsi commercial had used unknown actors? It would probably still have worked—but almost certainly not as well. Viewers would need longer to develop a feeling of familiarity with the characters. This would have necessitated many more repetitions of the ad (and possibly even the making of multiple ads). The identification process would not have been anywhere near as immediate or as intense. In other words, where the character has to be introduced and developed from scratch, the advertiser has to spend much more money for on-air time to elicit the same degree of identification effect.

When advertisers develop identities and establish characters in their ads they therefore regard these as an accumulating asset. They have an investment interest in the development of these characters. It is important for them to have in their ads attractive, recognisable characters that we the audience will want to identify with—whether these are known entities or (initially) unknown. This explains the advantage in ad campaigns of maintaining continuity in the star character. It is why we now see more sequels of successful ads. Advertisers are discovering that there are advantages to be gained in not changing the characters with every change of commercial. (See Chapter 23, 'Sequels'.)

Animated characters

Fictitious characters in shows like *Desperate Housewives*, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Neighbours* and even *The Simpsons* get fan mail all the time from people who empathize or identify with them. The fan mail is addressed to the character, not the actor. Why does this happen when everybody knows the characters are fictitious? It is because even though they are only characters they are real enough for us to identify with and empathize with.

We can even feel warm towards cartoon characters and puppets. A generation of people felt empathy, if not identity, with the 'Peanuts' character Charlie Brown, the born loser. A different generation warmed to Big Bird and the Cookie Monster. And then came the Simpsons and later Family Guy.

Animated characters have been used as both positive and negative role models. For example in *The Simpsons*, Mr Burns and Barney (the

drunk) provide clear negative role models. As in *Sesame Street*, watching Oscar the Grouch is fun but acting like him is clearly absurd. Who wants to be perpetually grouchy? Oscar is the negative role model in *Sesame Street*; others, such as Big Bird and The Count, are positive role models.

Classic animated ad characters include the M&M characters, Charlie the Tuna and the Pillsbury Doughboy.

Ads starring animated characters, just like straight ads, seem to be most successful when the on-screen characters do the talking such as Bart Simpson did for the Nestlé confectionery brand 'Butterfinger', declaring 'Nobody better lay a finger on my Butterfinger'. In one ad, Bart is accosted by bad boy Nelson, who takes his money. Bart capitulates but when Nelson says 'I'll take that Butterfinger bar too', he snatches back the bar and escapes triumphantly up a tree to devour his Butterfinger bar.

Animation can be used to change the whole feeling and tone of a commercial. In particular it can be used to 'lighten up' what might otherwise be a serious, unpleasant message. Bug exterminators like Orkin and Terminex frequently employ the strategy of using animated or computer-enhanced bugs because they know that most of us are squeamish about seeing bugs on TV. AIDS campaigns around the world have used animated condoms to deliver a serious message. Similarly, many stomach-ache cures use drawings of the stomach to deliver their message.

In an ad for Kit 'N Caboodle cat food, advertising agency DDB needed to show a cat chasing a mouse. Instead of having cat owners watching their darling pussy on TV threatening the life of a real mouse, the ad agency used animation. The agency wanted people to respond to the realism of the cat so they mixed live footage of a cat with an animated mouse.¹⁵ The ad was a delightful example of animation's ability to lighten an otherwise unpleasant scenario.

One appeal that animated characters have for advertisers is that advertisers are in total control of the characters' behavior. Their investment is protected. Advertisers using real people always have



Figure 10.3: The animated M&M characters don't 'age' like regular characters. (Reproduced with the authority of Mars Confectionery of Australia)

to hold their breath and hope. The character may get into trouble and develop a bad reputation which can cross over to the brand (today advertisers are acutely aware of disastrous examples like O.J. Simpson, Mike Tyson and Michael Jackson). With cartoon characters like Snoopy for MetLife or the M&M characters this can't happen. As one US film-maker put it: 'Animated characters are . . . appealing because they don't age like regular characters and won't be caught in a crack house and then try to gang rape the arresting officers . . . They give advertisers control.'¹⁶

Length of commercial

Sixty-second commercials are almost an extinct species today. Even the 30-second standard is threatened. Commercials on TV are getting shorter while on the web they tend to be getting longer. Think about this: a 60-second TV commercial is only about one-hundredth the length of a movie. This means that getting us to project ourselves into it and identify with a character is much, much harder to achieve than with movies. In the time it takes to screen a movie you could watch about one hundred 60-second commercials or two hundred 30-second commercials. So any identification that does occur is much more fleeting with advertising. This is one reason drama commercials seem to work better as longer commercials of 60 seconds or 45 seconds, rather than as shorter 30- or 15-second commercials. And it is another reason why there are now more longer ads on websites like YouTube where costs are much lower than TV advertising.

Time is both an enemy and a challenge for drama commercials. There is extremely limited time in which to develop the characters, depict the situation and get a message across. (See Chapter 18, 'Learning to use shorter-length TV commercials'.) It takes time to build involvement and identification with characters. This is why sequels can work so well—because the characters have already been developed in an earlier ad.

Negative roles or characters

Some ads deliberately use a character designed to be a negative role model. For example, in an attempt to get people to save water, a water utility used a thoughtless, mindless water-wasting character named Wally in its ads, the theme being 'Don't be a Wally with water'. It urged us not to be like this character. This use of characters in a negative role is one way to influence us not to engage in the same behavior.

Interestingly, some ads, in an attempt at humor, sometimes make the mistake of doing this inadvertently and depicting the target identification character as something of a 'goat'. Yet the advertiser still hopes that we will react positively to the character and what he or she is saying. These often fail and can sometimes be seen to have marked negative effects. An example of this is an ad showing a Fosters beer-drinker who is so naïve he fails to recognize the famous people he talks to in a bar. As the audience, if we squirm in embarrassment at a character's naïvety it makes it nigh on impossible for us to 'feel like' or want to 'be like' this character representing the brand user.

In another example, a one-time celebrity now regarded as something of a 'has been' appeared in an ad for a gas hot water service. Referring to his own fall from fame, he proudly announced that with this hot water service the water 'will still be hot when you're not'.

When we were kids we identified with the goodies, not the baddies. We wanted the attractive roles, not the embarrassing ones. Who wants to identify with the baddies, the 'has-beens', the losers or the naïve?

Some advertisers while not attempting humor can fall into this trap and be amazingly incautious or unthinking in their choice of characters. They are obviously not thinking of target identification. For example, in one country Toshiba inexplicably used a very obese individual in advertising its Toshiba notebook computer. While obese individuals might especially need lightweight portability in computers, not too many people want to identify with that image. Ads that contain negative characters are very risky for an advertiser when these characters are depicted as brand users.

A commercial is supposed to boost our positive image of ourselves, showing us as a user of that product, our positive self-image mirrored in the users of the brand: people we want to identify with. If on the other hand the users are people we reject any identification with, these ads start very much from behind the eight-ball.

So do ads like this work? I have not seen one that did, unless it was strongly informational. On the other hand I have seen a number of them have negative effects. It may seem surprising that ads can have a negative effect but in fact ads that have a negative effect are not so rare—especially if they are not pre-tested before they are run. In one study of 147 commercials, 45 per cent were shown to have had a negative effect and even if commercials were pre-tested, 6 per cent of them were still shown to have a negative effect.¹⁷

Negative role models is one of the problems here. Such negativity gets in the way of the identification process and can be the kiss of death for an ad—especially if the ad has nothing else going for it. The more that an ad has to rely on consumer identification with a negative character as the brand user, the stronger the risk that it will fail.

Comparative ads

Perhaps the best known of all comparative ads was the Pepsi Challenge, showing the blind taste-testing of two colas. It claimed that more people preferred the taste of Pepsi than Coke. Similarly, Duracell frequently advertises that it is longer lasting than Energizer. From pain relievers to automotive products we see many comparative ads that ask us, the viewer out front, to compare two brands. Especially in mature markets comparative ads are used by small brands to attack the market leader head on. For example, countless pain relievers have promoted themselves as ‘More effective than Tylenol’ or ‘Longer lasting than Tylenol’.

Claims and counterclaims by the two brands may lead to such confusion that we as consumers give up trying to differentiate and simply buy the two brands interchangeably because we don’t care which one we buy. We may be tempted to feel that this is another example of where advertising doesn’t work on us . . . but wait. If as a result of this confusion the smaller brand is then purchased half the time, i.e. as much as the bigger brand, then this has paid off in a big way for (what was previously) the smaller brand. So even though we feel we weren’t persuaded by either brand’s advertising, nevertheless the smaller brand achieves its objective of increasing its sales.

Much comparative advertising says to consumers: ‘Look, we’re just like the leader, only cheaper.’ It’s not about building a brand personality, it’s merely about setting a competitive framework and talking about one key attribute, which is often price. For example, Equal is a sugar substitute whose patent has long expired. So along comes NatraTaste, and creates similar packaging. It shows packs of Equal and NatraTaste side by side in its advertising with the line ‘Same great taste as Equal. Half the price’. It maybe makes for unexciting advertising, but its appeal is simple: ‘Hey, same stuff, half the price. What’s not to like?’

Word of mouth and viral advertising

Marketing has always benefited from recommendation. Happy customers spread recommendation by word of mouth to friends. Ads too can become

the subject of word of mouth. All of us have had the experience of a friend (or family member) exclaiming 'Hey, did you see that great ad for (insert brand) . . . that shows (insert description) . . . Isn't that so good/funny/clever etc!' Advertisers know their ad has got attention when people are talking about it. Indeed, sometimes ads are deliberately engineered to try to trigger this and become 'performance enhanced' by being spread not only through TV but also by the web and word of mouth.

The web has facilitated this and viral advertising has been a growth phenomenon. The email that arrives from a friend with an ad attached or a link to the ad on YouTube or elsewhere is likely to be so entertaining, funny or clever that you, like your friend, forward it (or the link) on to other friends. Because they in turn forward it, the ad spreads similar to a chain letter. Like a flu virus, the spreading process is self-replicating as it is passed from person to person. Hence its name 'viral advertising'. Social networking sites (like Facebook, MySpace and Bebo) make it ever easier for us to share our discoveries of that which is new, exciting, outrageous or just plain titillating.

The key to word of mouth and viral advertising is to keep the chain or network going. It has to have some kind of 'wow' factor so that people feel compelled to share and 'pass it along'. This means the ad has to be novel, outrageous or uniquely entertaining in some way. The way the web is changing advertising and the implications of advertising in a new age are discussed further in Chapter 25.

Summary

The art of advertising creative teams is traditionally intuitive but principles of psychological processing are gradually coming to light that further our understanding of individual elements and how these work. The blend of executional elements can help the ad capture our attention as well as influence the way our minds process the advertisement.

Visuals interact with words to influence what is 'on stage' in our minds and determine what interpretation we give to those words. Setting words to music influences the mental processes we use on those words, in addition to making the ad more memorable.

Advertisers using sex, humor or other attention-getting devices have to be careful of the device stealing focus from other key elements of the ad and interfering with the registration of the correct brand and message. Nevertheless, elements that capture attention are important ingredients

of ads. Sometimes they can be sufficiently novel, unique or outrageous that the ad becomes a topic of conversation in the community and becomes 'performance enhanced' as it is passed along, virus like, by word of mouth or passed along in links or emails to others via the web or social networking sites.

The type of ad also affects the focus of our processing. It is very different when we see drama or 'entertainment' advertising compared to when we see 'news' advertising. When there is no news, established brands often turn to entertainment commercials. With entertainment commercials we tend to record any incidental information or message that happens to get conveyed while the focus of our attention is on being entertained.

One important question to ask of any ad is this: 'Who is doing the talking?' Straight news ads and lecture-style ads have more effect when we can see the person talking to us on the screen with lip-sync. Using a presenter character as a surrogate for the advertiser seems to lessen our sense of a hard sell. The presenter character also acts as an important mnemonic device. In drama commercials, the choice of character is crucial for advertiser's hopes that we will want to identify with the character.

The second important question to ask of any ad is: 'Who is the ad talking to?' When it appears to be talking to an on-screen character, we tend to mentally process the ad as a bystander. The closer we feel to the character, the more effect the ad is likely to have on us. 'Overhearing' something can be more influential than being told it directly because we tend to apply less defensive processing to it.

Liking for a brand's advertising can be a feather—especially when everything else is equal. While ads don't necessarily have to be liked if they are imparting valuable news about the brand, a brand's advertising is nevertheless an intrinsic part of the brand personality. If we like its ads we have a greater chance of liking the brand. So, the more that things weigh equal the more important that liking of a brand's advertising is. Even as a feather, it can tip the balance of brand choice.

11 'BEHAVIORAL TARGETING': CONSUMERS IN THE CROSSHAIRS

This chapter introduces the practice of behavioral targeting, which is a way of targeting ads at us on the web so as to match what we are most likely to be interested in and most likely to respond to in a positive way.

To understand behavioral targeting, it is necessary to have an understanding of search engines and search advertising as well as ads that are placed on the web generally. There is more about these in Chapter 25, 'The web: advertising in a new age', so only the general concepts will be touched on here.

'Search' advertising

In this era of the Internet, most of us use a search engine like Google to access information from the web. The results of each query are displayed as a list of relevant links. Advertisers can buy the right to appear as a paid link (a.k.a. sponsored link) on that same page of results. *Search advertising*, as this is known, is not very exciting from a consumer's viewpoint but it does work and it has certainly been a growth phenomenon.

Of course, advertisers don't want their paid link to appear on the results page for any old query. This only works if their ad link is placed on results pages for queries that are related in some way to their product or service. That is, when search words are typed in that indicate that the searcher may be in a frame of mind to be interested in the advertiser's particular product or service.

So the paid links that are displayed are triggered by particular words or phrases that appear in our search query. Paid search advertising is sold to advertisers on the basis of keywords (Google calls them 'adwords'). Advertisers bid against each other for the right to have their link displayed whenever a particular keyword is searched in a query.

The point is that the keywords we search for indicate something

about us. They are pointers to what our interests are, what we are concerned about and what we enjoy doing with our time as well as what we may be aiming to purchase. Just as the books you have in your bookcase can reveal a lot about you, so too can your search histories. Our extensive use of search engines generates an accumulating database of our individual search histories as a by-product.

Traditionally, market research by advertisers has been labor intensive using methods such as surveys, panels and focus groups to help advertisers know who best to target with their advertising. By contrast, search engine histories are a ready made, potential source of market research information that can indicate:

- who is in the market for a particular product;
- which people are likely to be most responsive to a particular message/appeal;
- which demographic group a computer user is likely to belong to.

But search engine information is just the beginning. What about the websites we actually visit and what about what we do there? Such information can also be revealing about what our interests are and to what things we are more likely to respond.

Visits to websites

Many websites are able to identify us (as a return visitor) if we come back to that website. They do this by placing a cookie (an identifier) on our computers on our first visit. Our search histories, plus the ability for websites to identify us when we return (using that cookie), open up a hugely expanded potential for web advertising to target us with the right kinds of web ads. If websites can utilize the information from our past visits to their site as well as information from our past search behavior, the site becomes well placed to pitch web ads to us that we are more likely to respond to.

Web ads (a.k.a. banner ads)

Web ads are sometimes called *banner ads* but they can in fact appear anywhere on a web page—not only at the top in the website banner. Historically, advertisers adopting the Internet as an advertising medium discovered their use of these web ads to be very problematic. That is

because we consumers more often than not seem to ignore them and click on so few of them to find out more information; at the time of writing, the average is something like one click for every five hundred exposures. This 'click-through' rate, as it is called, has been in decline for many years.

Technological advances have enabled web ads to become increasingly animated and this is having some positive effect. Movement gives web ads greater capacity to attract our eyes and to a degree, this results in greater click-through.¹ At the same time it can be really distracting and annoying.² Eye tracking data reveals that we try not to look *directly* at web ads and that we have to make a conscious effort to do this.³ The same research indicates that web ads interfere with our reading and slow us down in finding information on the web page. So perhaps it is not surprising that we still click so few of them and that our opinion of them generally ranges from indifferent to negative. Many of us say that we rarely, if ever, find web advertising relevant.⁴ However, this is likely to change as a result of behavioral targeting.

Behavioral targeting

Ever shopped at Amazon? If you have you will know that when you return to Amazon.com, the site recommends a list of books you might want to purchase. Amazon infers your interests from your past purchases and any titles you may have previously searched or inspected on Amazon. The practice of *behavioral targeting* is an extension of this.

When you search and browse the web and visit various sites from day to day, chances are that other online publishers and advertisers are also collecting information about your behavior. Increasingly this information is accessed and 'shared' (via middleman entities called ad networks).⁵ Technically it is not you personally whose behavior they identify but mostly the behavior of your computer.⁶ Behavioral targeting infers your interests from the behavior of your computer when it is on the web and what you (or others using your computer) type into search engines and websites.

The sites you visit, the searches you make, the articles you read, and the purchases you make are all data collected and potentially used for market research purposes. Advertising platforms like Yahoo can use this to profile visitors and say to advertisers: 'Looking for car shoppers, soccer moms or recent shoppers in any category? We have them.'

Such information is not restricted to a single website (as it is with Amazon.com) but can include data on what you search for in a number

of search engines, which sites you actually visit and even what you buy at those sites. All this information is used to infer your interests, to enable advertisers to customize which ads to display to you when you are surfing or reading web pages. All this happens behind the scenes without you being much aware of it.

Those who sell web advertising space to advertisers have developed extensive capacity to merge and integrate this data that we reveal about ourselves on search engines and at web sites. To access many sites (like the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Washington Post*, etc) you are asked to register (or 'subscribe') and while this is usually free, it often requires you to enter demographic details like your age, sex and zip area code at the time of registration. Such sites can then use this information in conjunction with the broader data gathered from your general web surfing and search behavior to more precisely customize the ads they display to you on their pages.

On some sites, like social network sites such as Facebook, Bebo and MySpace, many people enter personal information that goes well beyond demographics. As part of their public profile, they include information such as who their favorite celebrities are, their favorite bands, favorite foods, their political views, their religious views, whether they are in a relationship, etc. This opens up a whole new dimension of potential targeting for ads to be directed at people based on their expressed interests, likes, and dislikes. Revealing such information about yourself makes it even easier to predict what appeals to you and which ads you will probably react to favorably.

Few consumers have any idea they are being tracked, profiled and targeted in this way. Like product placement, this is an area that is flourishing in the relative absence of regulation. And regulation has been slow in coming because in a sense this is regarded as an extension of ad targeting practices that have been accepted for many years.

Advertisers have always targeted advertising to particular segments of consumers. This is done by directing their ads into particular publications or into particular TV or radio programs that are known to attract a target group (e.g. eighteen- to 35-year-old males). The same can be done on the web. For example, if you frequently visit sports and car websites and read global warming articles on news sites and you bought tickets to a number of rock concerts recently then, statistically, the chances are pretty high that you are a male aged eighteen to 35 years.

But advertisers don't need to target their online advertising to *demographic* segments any more. Why should they, when they can directly target those who are in the market for their product. Are you in the market for a luxury car? If you recently searched for articles comparing the safety of Lexus versus Mercedes and visited various car comparison sites and one or more prestige car dealers' sites, then chances are pretty high that you are about to buy a luxury car. So, when you go on the web next time, don't be surprised if the ads on the pages you are reading turn out to be ads for luxury car brands. That is not too far removed from what has gone on in the past—except for one important difference: the extent of information collected about you that has been going on in the background without your awareness.

The ads displayed to you online can even be tailored on the fly, to match specific information about you. The technology to do this is very sophisticated. If, for example, you have recently searched information about coffee makers and you are now reading today's news headlines on your favorite website, you perhaps won't be surprised if an ad for a retail store (say Target) appears featuring coffee makers. You might, however, be taken aback that it lists the coffee makers in stock at the Target store *nearest to your address* and which ones are on special at that store this week.

Or, if you have been on a site comparing models of cars and researching the safety of various models, don't be surprised if, when you are reading today's news online, the ad displayed is not just any old ad but a Lexus ad—and not just any old Lexus ad but a Lexus ad that focuses specifically on safety. This is what the behavioral targeting information has pinpointed as your interest.

How much more precise can this get? In principle there is no real limit. In the absence of regulation, we are on a path of ever increasingly precise targeting.

Potential extensions

Applying pinpoint precision to messaging like this will inevitably be used for political campaigns. Political operators long ago learnt to target campaign ads into swinging seats or into key geographic battlegrounds. So tailoring local ads to feature local messages to run in local media (local newspapers, TV or radio stations) is nothing new. Indeed, these days key polling booth areas can even be targeted with direct-mail letters and specific cable TV ads that reach voters only in that micro-area and with a message that is highly relevant to it (e.g. a planned road redirection or a controversial high rise development plan for the area).

Behavioral targeting now increases this level of message precision to an even finer level. It enables political operators to target individuals not just in terms of locality but also in terms of interest and concern with particular issues (e.g. poverty, abortion or gender equality). As the chief marketing officer of a company providing this type of service explained: 'It becomes possible to identify people who are most engaged in and motivated by the issue based on sites they've visited, searches they've made, offers and ads they've been responsive to and communities of interest . . . Online there's a far richer pool of data to work with, including sites they visit, petitions, polls, or types of publications—and within those publications, specific articles they've read.'⁷

In the absence of regulation, this is another slippery slope. Tracking, profiling and targeting in order to accomplish pinpoint messaging doesn't stop with web advertising. If individuals can be targeted via their computer, there is no reason (except higher costs of production and delivery) why the same cannot be done with cable TV. Cable TV providers like Time Warner have already begun to move into this technology area by acquiring firms that possess this behavioral targeting know-how.⁸

Summary

Every new technology presents regulatory challenges and behavioral targeting is no different. We as consumers are increasingly in the cross-hairs as the web and web advertising assume more importance in our everyday lives. How will regulators respond?

And how will we consumers respond? After all, behavioral targeting is both a positive and a negative depending on how you look at it. The positive is that the ad spaces will, more and more, be filled with ads that we *want* to see. They will increasingly reflect products, brands, messages, and things that we are generally interested in. Less stuff of no interest to us will clutter up the web pages that we see.

The other side is the increasing temptation for us to spend that such targeting offers. And many people will be highly concerned about the privacy issue—the collection of information without our knowledge that goes on in the background. Privacy can be a very sensitive issue and nowhere more so than in the USA. The USA and indeed the world is grappling with policy in regard to the web and behavioral targeting.

As ads in cyberspace develop ever increasing allure, in more ways than one it will be imperative for us to 'watch this space'.

12 THE LIMITS OF ADVERTISING

It should be clear from previous chapters that traditional advertising's effectiveness has been much exaggerated. At the same time, newer forms of advertising, especially paid product placements, longer video commercials and web advertising (employing behavioral targeting) are all growing in potential influence and power. The exaggerated effectiveness of traditional advertising is based on what seem to be powerful psychological mechanisms: learning without awareness, making brands into symbols, having people see a brand in different ways, the influence of conformity and the use of brands to express identity. So why has traditional advertising not been anywhere near as powerful as many people feared?

This chapter explores the many factors that severely constrain and often frustrate the power of individual advertisers to influence us. It shows how difficult it is for advertisers to make these psychological mechanisms work and how their unbridled use in any wholesale manipulation has been virtually impossible. Just as democratic political systems are supposed to have various checks and balances to constrain the power of elected governments to dictate to us, so too are 'checks and balances' inherent in the competitive environment in which advertisers operate. In addition, we consumers vote with our feet—the most powerful constraint of all. When the brand or the product does not live up to its promise, when it does not meet the expectations created by the advertising, then we simply don't buy it again. So as we shall see, traditional advertising's power has been constrained as much by practical limitations as by absolute limitations.

Competitors' advertising

One of the most important limitations on any advertiser's power to influence us is the activity of its competitors. Competitors' advertising,

more often than not, severely blunts an individual advertiser's efforts. If McDonald's was the only brand that advertised in the fast food restaurant category, its advertising power and market share would undoubtedly be much greater.

For every advertiser there is at least one and usually several other advertisers in the same product category. This creates a lot of advertising 'noise' and clutter. The 'noise' of competing claims often neutralizes or at least greatly dilutes the effect of any individual campaign. It also makes it much more expensive for any individual company to advertise at a level and frequency that can be heard above the competitive 'noise'. This imposes a limitation of its own.

For example, in many countries ad wars between telecommunication brands have been in full swing for decades. In the USA and other major countries you no longer have to change numbers to switch phone carriers. Accordingly, if a company such as AT&T increases advertising spending, others like Verizon will correspondingly ramp up their spending to protect their customer base. So while AT&T has a huge budget and is usually one of the top ten advertising spenders, so too is Verizon. Quite a bit of this expenditure simply neutralizes or minimizes the effects of competitors' ads. Much the same is true of General Motors in competition with Ford, both of which, despite spending huge ad budgets, have been unable to prevent Japanese brands making long-term in-roads into their market share. While GM's ad budget is huge, the combined ad spending of Japanese vehicle makers is usually greater.

Money: limitations of budget

In the competitive environment it takes huge sums of money, sometimes over long periods, for mechanisms such as learning without awareness, making brands into symbols, having people see things in different ways, the influence of conformity and the use of brands to express identity to be really effective. Even the largest companies cannot afford the advertising that would be necessary to 'manipulate' us in the wholesale way that many opponents of advertising fear. This is especially true when the brand has no unique benefit or difference over other brands and the difference has to be created by advertising.

Even products that offer substantial real benefit over competitors must be prepared to spend very heavily to get that superiority message across.

Even dominant brands like Coca-Cola rarely account for the majority of advertising in their product category. In countries like the USA, the UK and Australia for example, Coke usually accounts for less than a third of the total soft drink advertising. The proportion is even smaller if we take into account other beverages which are less direct competitors of Coke, such as bottled water, fruit juice, milk, tea, and coffee. So even the huge brands rarely have the advertising field to themselves.

Creating needs

People who are ‘anti advertising’ often feel that advertisers create needs and manipulate us into buying things we don’t really need or want. To what extent can the psychological mechanisms of advertising be used to create needs or manipulate us in such a way? Before answering, there are two related questions to answer. What do we really need, and what role does advertising play in bringing new products to our attention?

Advertising announces new products. It is generally quite effective in at least making us aware of new products and new brands. This is one role of advertising that people rarely object to—unless the new product is trivial. Most people see this as a positive role, informing us of new events. In this sense it is like news, which is valued because it is informative.

People who are ‘anti advertising’ do not focus on the awareness role so much as the persuasive role of advertising—on its ability to make us buy things that we don’t need. I have largely dismissed persuasion in earlier chapters and pointed out that of the many psychological mechanisms underlying most advertising, persuasion is often the least relevant. If it were truly relevant its record would be rather poor. Estimates vary but everybody agrees on this much—at least 40 per cent of all new consumer products fail and some estimates go as high as an 80–90 per cent failure rate.¹ What advertisers and marketers would like to sell is influenced by what we as consumers can relate to, and in the end feel we want or need . . . and vice versa.

Advertising does not create these products. What it does do is help accelerate their diffusion into the mass market. The more truly new and beneficial a product is, the more informational its advertising tends to be. We have a choice: are we interested in this new benefit or not? Can we afford it? Are we prepared to pay the price?

Every household today needs a refrigerator, a washing machine and its TV sets. Even the severest critic of advertising is likely to have them.

What else do we really need? Heating, airconditioning, a microwave, dishwasher, DVD player? These are no longer regarded as luxuries. Digital cameras and mobile phones have also become pretty much universal. Wireless broadband also is becoming mainstream. And almost all homes in the developed world have a computer; twenty-five years ago almost none did. The list goes on and on. Yesterday's inventions and luxuries become tomorrow's necessities. Do we need these things? Those who argue that we don't are technically right. We could live without them. But do we want to?

These are acquired needs, not biological needs such as hunger, thirst, and sex. Were they created by advertising? No, they were created by inventors. Advertising's primary role is creating *awareness* of these inventions in the mass market. There is no doubt that without such advertising all these innovations (ranging from computers to low-fat foods and energy efficient appliances) would diffuse through each country's population very much more slowly.

How advertising accelerates mass markets

Communicating the existence of a new product (e.g. digital cameras, MP3 players, GPS navigators, satellite radios) to the mass market, even without persuasion, expands the demand for that product because just on the probabilities alone some proportion of us will always be interested in buying a new innovation. These purchases then have the effect of increasing the size of the production run for the new product, which in turn reduces the unit cost of production. This creates economies of scale in production and translates into a lower price tag on the new product that is offered for sale. When the product is advertised at a lower price, some of us who had previously decided against buying it because it was too expensive become interested. It has now become available to some of us who otherwise could not afford it. This expands sales further, which increases production runs further, which reduces price further, which makes the product more available and affordable for even more people. Electronic calculators, digital watches, mobile phones and personal computers are classic examples from the past. iPods, GPS navigators and digital video recorders are more recent examples.

The whole effect is circular. Advertising, in communicating first the product and then the affordable price, accelerates the diffusion of the innovation into the mass market. Without advertising the process would

probably still happen, but at an infinitely slower pace and we might still be using wringer clothes washers and manual typewriters, and computers might still be something that only businesses could afford.

The critics of all this often seem to be nostalgic for the simplicities of the past. Nostalgia is an attempt to create an idealized past in the present.² It tends to gloss over the unpleasant aspects of the past and focus only on the pleasant aspects. However, there is no argument for staying where we are. Only the most naïve romantics would argue that as primitive humans we were happier living in our caves. Who wants to go back to washing dishes by hand and stovetop heating of foods without a microwave? Of course, as sustainability becomes an issue, curbing the growth in our consumption may well become unavoidable. But only the most nostalgic conservatives would argue that our grandparents were happier doing washing in a kerosene tin boiled over an open fire than we are with our modern washing machine, refrigerator, microwave, telephone and many other creature comforts.

Ads for brands or ads for products?

The vast majority of advertising attempts to get us to buy one brand instead of another and not new products per se. Earlier chapters focused on the low-involvement effects of advertising, which can tip the balance in the weighing up of brands when everything is equal or can influence which brands are weighed up. Only the rare category leaders (like Campbell's soup or Microsoft) can afford to advertise just to grow the category. Hence only a very tiny proportion of advertising is directly aimed at affecting our decision as to whether to purchase a product or not, as distinct from which of the various brands to buy. (The main exception seems to be advertising of primary food products—milk, pork, beef, raisins, mangoes, cheese, rice, butter, bananas, avocados, etc—and direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising aimed at spurring visits to doctors to 'ask about' treatments for erectile dysfunction, sleep disorders, etc.)

Persuasion is not involved in the great majority of *brand* advertising that we are exposed to. To the extent that most brand advertising does influence our feelings of need for the product category itself, then this result is more a side effect than a primary focus of the advertiser. That is not to say that it is unimportant. Clearly, enough people think it is important to have banned cigarette advertising and impose restrictions

on alcohol advertising. And many believe that direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising should also be restricted.

Research into the ability of brand advertising to create demand for the category as a whole is sparse. The strongest evidence is within the USA where the legalization of direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising dramatically expanded the market for many pharmaceutical products. On the other hand extensive investigation into the role of brand advertising as a contributor to obesity, alcoholism and the like has remained frustratingly inconclusive. My own suspicion is that research will eventually show the spin-off effect to be substantial and that its mechanism is based primarily on agenda setting by creating an image of popularity and social acceptance for the product categories—but only if enough advertising for enough brands is aired for long enough.

If this turns out to be true, it still implies very severe constraints on the power of advertisers to foist just anything onto us. Unless a new product finds reasonable acceptance quite quickly, it is likely to be discontinued before the agenda-setting process has time to take hold. There are limits to how long advertisers are able or willing to keep advertising a product that is not selling enough to pay for the cost of production, simply in the hope that it will eventually ‘catch on’. This is why market research tries to determine beforehand what consumers would like to have, or at least what is likely to meet with ready acceptance rather than resistance.

In influencing taste, trend, and social acceptance, the mass media has always been much more powerful than advertising. However, the rise of paid product placement, as we saw in Chapter 6, gives advertisers the ability to influence program content so that the previous distinction is blurring. In the absence of regulation, there is little doubt that product placement will deliver advertisers greater potential to influence us than previously.

Resistance to change

There is another limitation on advertising’s ability to exercise unbridled influence and this is reflected in our resistance to change and the natural way our minds work. Our minds seem to have a strong inbuilt need for cognitive consistency. We tend to reject that which is not consistent with what we currently know or have come to expect. To succeed, an innovation usually has to find a line of least resistance.

For example, for years after it was developed many people rejected

instant coffee, which was advertised on the basis of ease of use. Research revealed that household food buyers (mostly women in the 1950s) saw the so-called convenience benefit as reflecting directly on their performance. Buying instant coffee (as distinct from coffee beans) was seen as the mark of 'a lazy housewife who did not care for her family'. Remember, female role models in the 1950s were quite different from today's. This negative association slowed the rate of acceptance of many innovations pitched at convenience and time-saving, including dishwashers, microwave ovens and automatic washing machines.

Another example was a noiseless food mixer, which was rejected for quite a different reason—because it seemed not to have much power. We tend to believe powerful machines are noisy. A noiseless food mixer is a contradiction. A machine that is both powerful and quiet is inconsistent with our experience, so we find it difficult to accept.

Similarly many packaged cake mix products will have you add eggs to the mix. The eggs are not in any way necessary to the cake's success but were added to the recipe after research discovered people did not feel satisfied making a product they didn't put enough effort into, especially something as indulgent and nurturing as a cake.

Perhaps the most telling example of this effect is dishwashing detergent. Before detergent was invented, when we washed dishes in soapy water in the sink, it was lack of suds on the top of the water that we used as a cue to tell us when to add more soap. Dishwashing detergent does not naturally foam, but manufacturers eventually had to add foam to the product to get it accepted. Without foam the detergent was not seen to be working. Unless new products fit with, or at least do not clash with, what is already in our minds, their advertisers are likely to encounter substantial resistance to the innovation. They are likely to face a long, hard and very costly battle over many years before the product eventually, if ever, achieves widespread acceptance.

Dishwashing detergent as a new product initially clashed with (was not consistent with) something that was well established in our minds—namely that when washing up sudsing indicated water was working and lack of suds indicated when it was not and it was time to add more soap. For a product to gain widespread acceptance, the product may also have to be made consistent with consumers' existing beliefs or expectations. This reflects a more general psychological principle which is often known as cognitive consistency.

Cognitive consistency

Our minds seem to have a need for consistency, in our attitudes and beliefs, and between these attitudes and our behavior.³ Let me illustrate the general mechanism that is at work here. If we drive a Toyota and believe that Toyotas are safe cars, and we read in consumer reports that more people have accidents in Toyotas than in any other car, what happens? A motivation is automatically set up in us to try to resolve the apparent contradiction. Either our original belief is wrong and we had better think again next time we buy a car, or there is something wrong with the report. We are experiencing the need for cognitive consistency. We either have to start to change our mind about Toyotas' safety or we have to find something wrong with the consumer report—to discredit it.

We humans try to keep our attitudes and beliefs consistent, as well as our attitudes and behavior. This is not a voluntary mechanism but more an unconscious one that goes into action automatically. It was first demonstrated by Leon Festinger in a classic series of experiments. During the Vietnam War, for example, Festinger gave experimental subjects who were opposed to the war an incentive to argue a position that was contrary to what they believed i.e. to argue in favor of the war. He found that these people's attitudes to the war tended to change in the direction that they had been paid to argue—in favor of the war.

This demonstrated that when our behavior becomes inconsistent with our attitudes, then those attitudes begin to change. Just as importantly, the same thing happens if we hold two attitudes or beliefs and then find out that they are not consistent. For example, what happens if you dislike large SUV vehicles because of their environmental impact and your closest friend, whose judgment you respect, tells you she has just bought one? You have two attitudes, one positive and one negative. Your attitude towards your friend is positive. Your attitude towards SUVs is negative. The two attitudes are inconsistent or out of balance. When this happens and we cannot avoid facing the inconsistency of two positions, then our minds automatically begin to change one or other of them in order to bring them into balance. It either weakens our prejudice against SUVs or weakens the respect we have for our friend and her judgment.

It is important to note that we don't have to be highly conscious of the discrepancy for the effect to be triggered implicitly.⁴ Even if our minds are focused somewhere other than on the discrepancy, it can be triggered

nonetheless. Indeed it has even been shown in people suffering amnesia i.e. even though they are incapable of retaining any explicit memory of the discrepancy, resultant change in their attitude or their behaviour takes place.⁵

Advertising is the weaker influence

Advertising is usually the weaker influence compared to what we already know or have in our minds. Any ad campaign is most likely to lead to advertising failure if the message is inconsistent with our existing beliefs and with what most other people believe. Advertisers have to strive to put forward a position that is credible, or at least is not inconsistent with what we as consumers already know and think.

For example, in a number of areas of the world light beer found great difficulty in gaining acceptance among young (eighteen- to 24-year-old) male beer drinkers. It tended to be much more accepted by older drinkers. The young tend to be searching for identity, and symbols of self-expression play a role in this. Despite successful efforts by advertisers to get light beer accepted, it was nevertheless strongly resisted by younger people for a number of years. For them, the image of light beer as a product was inconsistent with the strong male image that drinking beer was traditionally identified with.

Similarly, even where cigarette advertising was banned and health promotion ads urged our young people not to smoke, it took a long time to see any substantial effect—particularly amongst young females. As long as their friends smoked and it was seen to make you look ‘cool’, any messages that emphasized health consequences tended to fall on deaf ears.

It is rare that advertisers can afford to engage in protracted efforts to confront and change such entrenched attitudes or behaviour directly. Usually, they have to look for an approach that will be more readily accepted because it fits neatly with existing beliefs or aligns with more important motivations. When these anti-smoking health messages to young females fell on deaf ears, the advertising approach cleverly switched to making smoking ‘uncool’ (e.g. by emphasizing things like bad breath and smelly hair—things that can impact socially and romantically).

The point is that advertisers have to look for a message that is consistent with existing beliefs or motivations. An historical example is the famous ‘Avis—we try harder’ campaign discussed earlier. This capital-

ized on the widespread belief that monopolies and big companies tend to become complacent. Companies which are still trying to get to the top probably *will* try harder. The ad is cognitively consistent with what is already known, so it is more likely to be accepted.

Our need for cognitive consistency means that advertisers who simply try to persuade us against our will, who try to get us to accept something that goes against our existing information or attitudes, are almost certain to fail (unless they also have unlimited time and money to hang in for the long term). This is a big constraint on advertising's power that is contained in our psychological make-up. Like most of the other limitations, it is not an absolute constraint. Finding ways around it poses a real challenge to advertising agencies.

Positioning for cognitive consistency

Chapter 2 pointed out that humans have the ability to see the same thing (whether it be the same product or the same advertisement) in different ways depending on our frame of reference. The challenge for advertising agencies is to position the ad or product in such a way that it is seen to be consistent with, rather than to clash with, our existing mind set. All too often this is unsuccessful—as evidenced by the fact that so many new products fail.

It is a creative task and it is difficult to give examples of this 'creativity' at work without breaching client confidentiality, but let me illustrate how it works with a couple of hypothetical examples.

Consider Oscar Mayer, the Kraft-owned US brand heavily identified with 'food your kids will eat'. Suppose Oscar Mayer wanted to market a hot dog—one that is 'good for you'. However almost everyone knows hot dogs are made of leftovers—intestines and all the grossest possible parts of the animal. How can it be good for you? Even '100 per cent beef hot dogs' translates in our minds to 100 per cent leftovers from cows. Because there is an active predisposition not to believe it, positioning the product as 'good for you' would be most unlikely to succeed.

Consider another similar hypothetical example. This time a hypothetical brand of canned fish called Fine-C Foods, long established globally as a high quality brand, uses the slogan 'It's the fish that Fine-C rejects that makes Fine-C the best'.⁶ The quality image of the brand is paramount in its positioning. The company decides to enter a new but related category. In certain parts of the world there is a product category known as 'fish

paste', a spread that comes in a jar. Fine-C wants to get into this market with a quality fish paste to compete with the existing brands that are all of rather poor quality. Positioning it on the quality dimension 'Fine-C . . . superior quality fish paste' would make it consistent with the Fine-C quality image. It would fit with pre-existing beliefs and work in harmony with the pre-existing image of quality that the Fine-C brand has developed. So far so good. A real limitation, however, lurks below the surface. If there is a widespread belief among consumers (and indeed there is) that fish paste is made of leftovers—that is, all the good parts of the fish having been already used for something else (similar to the general image of sausages)—then 'Fine-C . . . superior quality fish paste' is likely to translate unconsciously in consumers' minds as 'Fine-C . . . superior quality leftovers'. This is hardly the desired image. It would also be disastrous for the product. The cognitive inconsistency is likely to doom the product to failure from the start.

What can an advertising agency do in this type of situation? One option would be to rename the product and market it as Fish-Paté. Paté is also a spread, but it has quite different associations that are consistent with the quality positioning of the Fine-C Food brand. This strategy is more likely to succeed than a strategy of directly confronting entrenched negative attitudes to fish paste.

Much of the art of advertising, then, lies in finding ways to play the focal beam of attention on the attributes of the product that are consistent with what already exists in our minds. That which already exists in our minds is a limitation or an inhibitor to what advertising can do.

When everything else is not equal

Advertisers are beginning to find that advertising seems to work best when it communicates some positive benefit, or when the brand is at least equal to other brands on the market and the advertising can tip the balance. Rarely can advertising succeed if a brand is inferior to the competition or if its qualities are cognitively inconsistent with the consumer's mind set. In other words, advertising is not magical. It is just one influence among many and when there are real differences between brands the truth generally wins out eventually. Advertising may get us to try a product, but our experience with the product then overrides anything that advertising may tell us. If the product does not live up to the promise, we don't purchase it again.

Conversion/persuasion vs reinforcement

This highlights the fact that advertising's principal effect is to reinforce rather than persuade. That is, it reinforces in us the decision we made to purchase the brand and increases the chances of us buying it again. Using panels of consumers reporting on what they purchase each week, Professor Andrew Ehrenberg in the UK has studied the effects of advertising on purchasing probably more than any other person in the world. His conclusion is that 'advertising's main role is to reinforce feelings of satisfaction for brands already being used'.⁷

This is consistent with my own observations from tracking many hundreds of ad campaigns in various parts of the world. Advertising has frequently proved quite ineffective by itself in convincing people to buy a brand for the first time. To achieve widespread trial of a new brand, advertising usually has to be heavily supplemented by promotions, in-store displays and free sampling. With supermarket brands this is very much influenced by simple locating behavior. The new brand has to stop us walking at more than 1 mile per hour (2 km/h) and cut through the clutter and get noticed. There are limits to how much advertising alone can do here. (Advertising does seem to be more effective at getting people to buy a truly new product for the first time than at getting them to try yet another 'me-too' brand in an established product category. But again, with supermarket products it often takes in-store displays and promotion to achieve widespread trial reasonably rapidly.)

Reinforcement is the reason why some ad campaigns, the ones conducted by the smart advertisers, talk to their own consumers. Users of a brand almost always react more positively to its advertising than non-users.⁸ Toyota trucks used this to good effect in various parts of the world with the 'I love what you do to me' line. One US commercial for Toyota trucks featured vignettes of Toyota truck owners saying what they were doing at the time their truck clocked up 100,000 or 200,000 or 300,000 miles. It closed with an invitation to Toyota truck owners to phone a toll free number 'and tell us where you were and what you were doing' at these milestones. This ad undoubtedly reinforced the repeat buying of those who already owned a Toyota truck by reminding them of the durability of their truck and the number of miles it had endured. Just as importantly, however, it also got the message across indirectly to the 'bystanders', to those who had never bought a Toyota truck, that these must be very, very durable vehicles.

The long-running Dial deodorant soap campaign is another example of using a brand's own customers talking about their product in such a way that the viewer is cast as a bystander rather than the target of the message. 'Aren't you glad you use Dial—don't you wish everyone did?' Another example, this time from Australia, is the leading Australian margarine brand, Meadow Lea. For many years, its ads would sing to an on-screen buyer of Meadow Lea, 'You oughta be congratulated' (implying 'because of your good taste/judgment').

Such ads, rather than placing the focus of attention on what might otherwise be perceived as an empty promise or claim, address those of us already using the product, reminding us that we are happy with the brand. (Would we be buying it if we weren't? So who is going to argue?) Consider how greater the invitation to rejection is when it says: 'If you switch to our brand, you will be glad', or 'If you switch to our brand you will be congratulated'?

So instead of the typical promise style (i.e. 'Buy X brand and you will get Y result'), this type of advertising provides a verbal 'pat on the back' to its own customers. At the same time, it casts people not using the brand as bystanders who 'overhear' a communication between the advertiser and the buyers of that brand. Because they are bystanders, there is nothing in the ad likely to motivate them to try to refute it. As we saw earlier, this can be even more effective than when it is addressed to that person directly.⁹ Of course should the bystander overhearing this be tempted to try the brand, he/she becomes a buyer and the commercial then becomes a verbal 'pat on the back' for them. The ad is a feather.

In a brilliant twist on this concept, Deighton pointed out that advertising tunes up our attention to a brand's key attribute(s) *at the time that we are consuming it*.¹⁰ It is more likely that we will think of some aspect of the advertising at the time we use the brand, and consequently take greater notice than we otherwise would have of the advertised attribute. In the same way as I can direct your attention to the noises going on around you right now that you were previously not consciously aware of, so can advertising draw our attention to or remind us to notice the advertised attribute when we are consuming the brand. As a result of repetition of the advertising, when we consume the brand we may think to confirm that the brand does indeed have the advertised attribute. The advertising sensitizes us to experiencing those advertised attributes and confirming them. It therefore has the potential to *transform* the consumption

experience.¹¹ Without first experiencing the advertising we might simply consume the brand without noticing the differences between it and its competitors.

Confirming that a brand has the advertised attribute has two effects:

- It reinforces the consumption experience and makes us more likely to buy the same brand again.
- It makes us feel more positively towards the advertiser and the truthfulness of their advertising. (People use their experience with the brand to judge an ad's truthfulness and therefore its informativeness. Whether people regard an ad as 'informative' is greatly influenced by their satisfaction with the brand.¹²)

Ads that work or ads that win awards

Far from being omnipotent ogres who can manipulate us at will, companies which advertise often struggle desperately to get advertising that works. They are often frustrated by the inability to get a campaign that has a measurable impact on sales and market share. Getting something that is a clever piece of art is relatively easy, but they want to sell product.

The people who are primarily responsible for making ads for them, the creative directors in advertising agencies, are artistic people. A number of them are making ads not because they choose to, but because they can't do what they most want to do—make feature films.

Denied the opportunity to make full-length films, it is natural that they will get at least some satisfaction from producing 30-second feature films instead. The result is that advertisers can end up with 30-second feature films disguised as TV ads and many of these win awards. Such 30-second feature films may look nice and they may be very clever and entertaining, but if the brand is used merely as a prop and little regard is given to the main purpose as a commercial, then the chance of it succeeding in its real purpose is very small. If it does work, it is likely to be more by accident than design.

Traditionally advertising industry awards were not based on any measure of effectiveness but on subjective evaluation and artistic creativity. Objective measurement of effectiveness in selling the product has not been the primary consideration. As a result many advertisers in the past have not known whether these mini-films worked or didn't work. More often than not, advertisers are unable to gauge effectiveness by their sales

alone because there are too many other things (price promotion, what competitors do) that also affects sales and, as we have seen, reinforcement rather than sales is often the primary effect. Advertisers have been able to do little more than grope towards effective advertising.

However, this is now beginning to change. With the advent of new market research technology and a more educated breed of product managers, marketing managers, and marketing directors, companies are becoming less and less reliant on their advertising agency simply winning artistic awards to reassure them that their advertising is working. Awards (such as the 'Effies') based on objectively measured evidence of advertising effectiveness rather than artistic merit are now operative in most major western countries. More and more, the advertisers themselves are putting in place the market research mechanisms which will allow them to assess what is working and what is not.

Summary

Most advertising tries to get us to buy one brand instead of another and much of it is not concerned with new products per se. It tips the balance in the weighing up of brands when everything is equal, and it can influence which brands get weighed up.

Advertising for new products announces more than it persuades. To the extent that persuasion is involved its record would be extremely poor, because at least 40 per cent of all new consumer products fail. When advertising does influence our feelings of need for the product category, this is more a side effect than something that the advertising is primarily focused on.

The effect of advertising is, therefore, more often not persuasion but reinforcement. That is, it reinforces in us the decision we made to purchase the brand and increases the chances of our buying it again.

Much of the art of advertising lies in finding a way to play the focal beam of attention onto the attributes of the brand that are consistent with our existing mind set. Positioning a product in this way is no easy task.

Advertising's power is constrained as much by practical limitations as by absolute limitations. These include:

- the fact that consumers vote with their feet;
- competitive advertising;
- money: limitations of budget;

- economic reality;
- resistance to change and need for cognitive consistency;
- the fact that advertising is usually the weaker influence compared to what we already know or have in our minds.

None of these limitations is absolute but taken together they make advertising much less able to influence us than has usually been thought by the average consumer. This notion will probably not convince those who want to believe in the manipulative power of advertising, because advertising is one of those things that some people love to hate. The reality, however, is that the power and mystique of advertising and the people who make it have been much exaggerated.

Nothing stays static, however, and the forms of advertising are now changing rapidly. Some of these, like paid product placement, are blurring the distinction between ads and mass media program content. When advertising masquerades as program content, some of our advertising defences are quiescent. Limitations that have protected us from undue influence of advertising in the past are not guaranteed to automatically protect us into the future. So, while the power of advertising has been much exaggerated, we should remember Thomas Jefferson's words that 'the price of freedom is eternal vigilance'.

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PART B

WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T, AND WHY

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INTRODUCTION

We saw in Part A that we can gain an important insight into advertising by asking the question, ‘Who is the ad talking to?’ The same applies to books like this one. Who is this book talking to? If it is aimed at the general reader it will have a different feel and style than if it is aimed at advertising practitioners or students of marketing or mass communication. Part A talked primarily to the general reader.

At this point in the book the general reader will sense a change of key. Many of the chapters that make up Part B had their origins in articles that were written for trade publications. The readers of these are advertisers and marketers who want to know more about how to make advertising work more effectively.

While this section talks primarily to these professionals, general readers should find it an interesting ‘bystander’ experience. In fact they may like to imagine themselves as advertisers. By looking briefly through the advertisers’ eyes they will develop a greater understanding of advertising at work, and see the obstacles that advertisers strive to overcome in their attempt to influence us.

An understanding of only three technical terms is necessary for reading Part B. The first of these, *ad execution*, has already cropped up in Part A. A brand like Coke will often have several different ads on air in the same week. While the brand and the essential message are usually the same, the characters, dialogue or general scene may be different in each case. Each variation is referred to as an ad execution. Alternatively, you may see a 30-second ad and a fifteen-second one which is recognizable as a part of the larger ad. These are regarded as two different ‘executions’. The creative execution, then, is the way that a particular ad is carried out or executed.

The second technical term is *flighting*. Some advertisers schedule their brand’s advertising to appear every week. This is known as a

continuous advertising schedule. Others prefer to 'flight' their advertising, in other words to have a burst of several weeks of the same advertising followed by a few weeks off air, then go on air again with another few weeks of the same advertising and so on.

This is known as a flighted ad schedule. Each new burst of advertising is regarded as a separate 'flight'.

The third technical term is TRP which is short for *target rating points*. This is known by different names in different countries. In the UK the term used is TVR; in Australia the term is TARP. But the concept is the same. Loosely speaking, it is a measure of the exposure that an ad gets. Indirectly, it reflects the amount of audience exposure and the number of exposures the advertiser pays for. The number of TRPs is a measure of how many people from the target market had an 'opportunity to see' because they were sitting in front of the TV set around the time when the ad was shown.

Let me explain this with an example. Kleenex might define its primary target market for tissues as females aged eighteen to 45 years old. If the ad for Kleenex tissues went to air on NBC at 8.50 pm last night and 5 per cent of this group were watching NBC at that time, the ad has 5 TRPs. If the ad is shown again multiple times in the same week in various programs on various channels, each time the percentage of the target market watching at the time is added to the accumulated TRP figure. So the ad might accumulate say 210 TRPs for the week. Note that this is merely the gross total of people who had an 'opportunity to see'. Some of these will have also seen the ad when it was shown earlier in the week but they are nevertheless counted again in the TRP figure. The total TRP figure can be calculated from the percentage of the target market that has had an 'opportunity to see' the ad at least once, or the net reach, and average the number of times they saw it, which is known as the average frequency.¹ A total of 210 TRPs for the week could represent a variety of combinations of reach and frequency. Table BI.1 shows only a few of the possibilities.

For example, the whole target market may have seen the ad during the week and they may have seen it on average 2.1 times. Or perhaps only 50 per cent of the target audience saw the ad but they saw it on average 4.2 times. This still accumulates to 210 TRPs. In other words an ad can accumulate 210 TRPs through any combination of net reach (percentage of the target audience who saw it at least once) and average frequency

Table BI.1: Calculation of TRP figure

Net reach	Average frequency	Total TRPs
100	2.1	210
50	4.2	210
35	6.0	210

(the average number of times these people did see it) that when multiplied together totals 210.²

The majority of ad campaigns run at 100 to 300 TRPs a week. Fifty TRPs would be a light weight while 400 TRPs would be a heavy weight of advertising in any one week.

13 CONTINUOUS TRACKING: ARE YOU BEING FOLLOWED?

An increasing number of advertisers now track their competitors' activities as well as their own with continuous customer surveys. These are not once a year or once a quarter surveys. They are conducted every week—on small samples each week which accumulate over the year into a large database and provide a total, continuous picture.

Every week these organizations capture, in their computers, fresh information on a new sample of consumers. The information covers all players in the market. Ideally it would cover the state of play for that week in regard to people's behavior, attitudes, brand awareness, brand image as well as direct communication effects such as advertising recall, advertising recognition and message take-out. This is then related to other information such as media data (indicating which advertisers were on air during that week, at what times and at what advertising weight) along with sales and market share data.

Continuous market research technology has rapidly become accepted as the best way to accurately assess advertising effects in terms of what works and what doesn't.¹ Continuous monitoring of *purchase* information can reveal if something worked or didn't. However, knowing *if* it worked is one thing, while finding out *why* or *why not* is another. This diagnostic information also needs to be continuous and comes from continuous surveying otherwise known as *continuous tracking*.

Market research is traditionally characterized by the large scale, large sample survey representing a single point in time. Known as 'ad hoc' surveys, these were sometimes conducted before an ad campaign and then again after it. Any differences in key measures between these two surveys (such as in the levels of people's brand awareness, ad awareness or the brand's market share) were supposed to indicate possible effects of the advertising. This 'pre/post' survey technique, as it was known, slowly

but inevitably has been giving way to the new technology of continuous monitoring.

Conducting ad hoc surveys or pre/post surveys was the 'old' way of trying to understand what is happening in a market. It is like taking a couple of still frames from the beginning and end of a TV commercial and trying to get a sense of the whole commercial from just those two pictures. The difference between ad hoc surveys and continuous surveying resembles the difference between still photography and moving pictures: without continuous moving pictures, the dynamics of what is happening can only be guessed at.

Take this dramatic case of a shampoo brand in one country with around 2.5 per cent market share amongst females under 35. The brand launches a spectacular new commercial. The plot unfolds as follows: this new, different ad hits the TV. It is clearly an exciting and different commercial. The advertiser is putting quite heavy expenditure behind the commercial. Quickly we see, to no one's surprise, that this ad successfully breaks through the clutter of shampoo advertising and delivers a message. We see this in the first two weeks of data (see Figures 13.1 and 13.2). So far so good, but will the ad sell product? If you are a competitor, do you react? Panic? Sit tight? You recall a previous ad for this same brand which broke through very well, but ho-hum, it didn't sell. Maybe this will be the same. Let's not worry too much yet! The key issue is will consumer *behavior* change?

The continuous surveying that you are doing as a matter of course asks which brand the respondent last bought and the answers come in each week in the weekly sample data. You wait and watch agonizingly. Will brand purchase behavior move in response to the ad?

Figures 13.1 and 13.2 tell the story. Within a month of the ad coming on air, you know the hair-raising truth. By the third or fourth week of the new advertising, this brand's market share is clearly moving. By the fifth week it has doubled from 2.5 per cent to around 5 per cent. There is now no doubt this new ad is working. If this is a competitor, you had better move fast to try to find a way to counter it. Or start revising the annual market share projections for your brand *downwards*.

In fact, nine weeks after the launch of the new ad, the brand had successfully increased its market share in this target group to more than 10 per cent—a phenomenal achievement. If you are a competitor of this brand the news you are getting from your tracking is depressing. The

upside of this, however, is that you know at the earliest possible moment. While it may be cold comfort, you do have more time to formulate a retaliation strategy.

I have also seen situations like this where the ad, while very visible and attention getting, did not sell the product (sometimes because there was no relevant message or the ad failed to correctly communicate the brand and link it with the message). In the absence of *weekly* information, it is sometimes an overwhelming temptation to react, when in fact there may be no need to. It is comforting to know at the earliest possible time whether you need to react to a competitor's move.

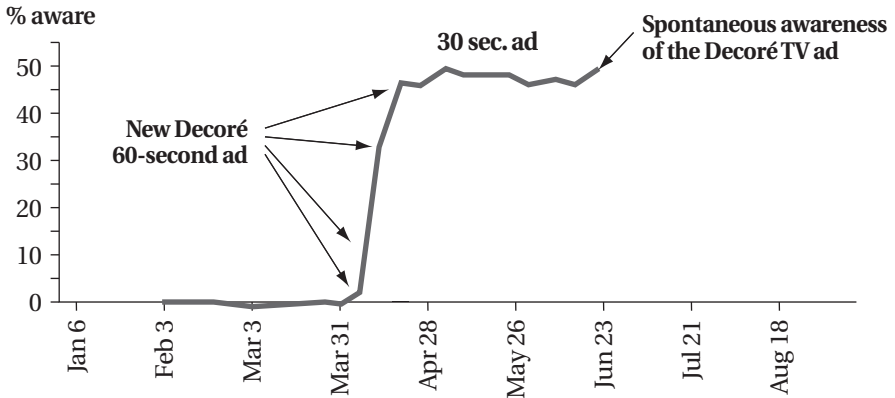
With the tracking results for this commercial, you have just received the clearest possible evidence that advertising can work in this market. Additional analysis over time allows you to draw conclusions as to the type of advertising that works and how it works in this market (because not all markets work the same way).

For example, in this market, did attitude change before behavior, or did behavior change before attitude? Did the advertising impact on image then attitude then behavior? What was the direction of the chain of events?

Product managers and marketing managers want to know what works in their market and what doesn't. If a competitor implements a new action, should they react? How do they judge what to react to and what not to react to?

While continuous surveying as a 'rear-vision mirror' has been around for a while, we can discern among advertisers a new trend in its use. The very astute advertisers are not just using it to see where their brand has been and evaluate the effectiveness of their moves, but to address the much larger question of how the market works. Increasingly, they are using it before making their important moves and to study their competitors' activities as well as their own. Their objective is to know what works and what doesn't before they make any important move in the market. The idea is to formulate the right move and ensure the maximum chance of success.

Not all are using it in this way—only the really smart ones. These advertisers are not just tracking their own brand. They are also tracking and studying their competitors' actions and the effectiveness of those actions. By getting a handle on what is effective and what is not, they move towards closure on the question of what works and what doesn't in their particular market. They address such questions as:



Note: Continuous tracking of people's spontaneous awareness of the Decoré advertisement.

Figure 13.1: Shampoo advertisement awareness. (Source: MarketMind²)

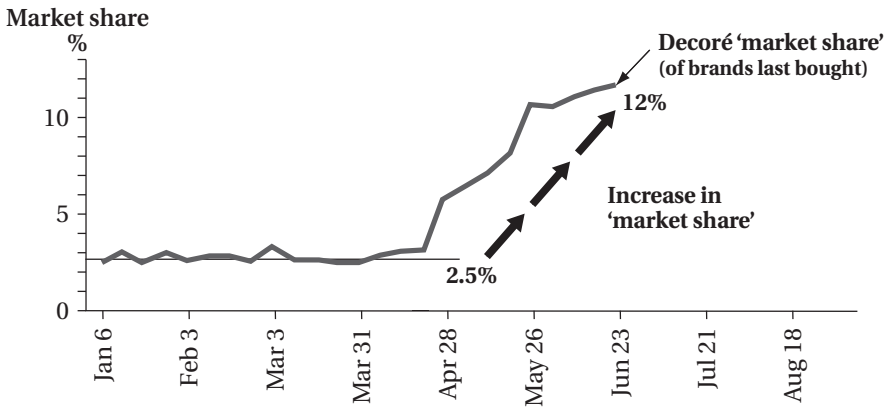


Figure 13.2: Shampoo market share as affected by new advertisement. (Source: MarketMind)

- Does advertising work in this market?
- What type of advertising works?
- How does it work?
- Does the advertising change attitudes and then behavior? Or behavior then attitudes?
- Should we have advertising that primarily reinforces behavior ('Aren't you glad you use Dial?')? Or do we need advertising that will primarily generate trial ('Four good reasons to try brand X')?

In other words, 'What works? And what doesn't?'

It is important to note that we are not just talking about advertising here. Product managers and advertising managers are also interested in promotions, changes in media lighting, different media weights, a switch to shorter length ads, new ads uploaded to YouTube, a free sampling campaign, a change in pricing, new positioning, a new presenter, or new creative advertising ideas. (The graph at Figure 13.1 shows what happened when this brand switched from 60-second to 30-second commercials. The flattening out of the growth in ad cut-through is very common after such a switch. It also happens after a switch from 30s to fifteens.) Almost any action or event that takes place in a market can be plotted on the time line and subjected to this type of effectiveness analysis.

Snapshot, single-point-in-time surveys do not cope with this. Dynamics are needed. Snapshot pictures are too slow, and they don't capture unexpected events—such as the launch of this new ad campaign by a competitor. Pre/post or periodic snapshot surveys of the market every quarter or half year or so are yesterday's technology. The problem with them is that the time dimension is missing.

With dynamic measurement, market modeling and market knowledge accumulate over time and let a company know much more than its competition about how the market works, what works in it, and what doesn't. The objective is to do more of what works and less of what doesn't.

It is no accident that Ronald Reagan was the most popular president than any before him—or that George Bush (the first) came from miles behind to take out the US presidency in 1989. The Republican party discovered very early the 'missing link' in research. This missing link was the time dimension: the use of continuous tracking. Bush was ultimately defeated in 1992 by Clinton which demonstrates the point made earlier—there are real limits to what advertising and promotion can do when the product does not perform or is looking old and tired. By the time re-election came around in 1996, Clinton and the Democratic party had mastered the new technology of continuous tracking, using it to great effect in evaluating and fine tuning the effectiveness of their ads—especially in swing states.³ Such expertise was then 'loaned out' overseas, in the form of former Clinton experts assisting Tony Blair become elected as prime minister of the UK, and the rest is history. Continuous tracking research is now accepted as invaluable in the political campaign arsenal.

By contrast with such overtly successful results, traditional, single-point-in-time market research has often failed to produce actionable information. It has often been difficult to assess its value, precisely because the time dimension, reflecting the dynamic nature of markets, was either missing or very much mistreated. The time dimension has to be treated as a continuous variable and factored into marketing research methodology instead of being ignored or treated as a dichotomous variable.

Web tracking

In essence the concept of continuous tracking is the same with the web as with telephone. However in some ways the Internet makes continuous tracking easier and quicker, and can provide even better information.⁴ Consider for example that:

- Measuring recognition of TV and print ads becomes better and easier, because visuals of the ads (or packs or displays, etc) are able to be shown so that people are reacting to the actual stimulus instead of verbal descriptions. Indeed, for your own ads the total ad can be shown in full video.
- People exposed to web ads are by definition on the web and potentially accessible using that (much less expensive) medium.
- The Internet enables very rapid, very cheap access to very large samples via random sampling (e.g. of people visiting a website) or via pre-recruited panels of respondents.
- Pre-recruited Internet panels enable targeting of even low incidence groups—such as whiskey drinkers, expectant mothers, psoriasis sufferers, etc.
- The low cost and super-fast turnaround of information means that web tracking has the capability of providing finer-grained information on a daily as well as a weekly basis.
- The use of ‘control groups’ is all too often cost prohibitive with telephone interviewing, but the Internet makes these much more affordable and much more feasible.
- It is also possible to continuously track visitors to your site. Who are they? Where do they come from? What pages do they visit? What are the most popularly visited places on your site? (See Chapter 11, ‘Behavioral targeting’.)

Summary

The problem with traditional market research is that, with the time dimension missing, it is like taking still-camera snapshots. It is equivalent to taking the first and last frame of a television commercial and trying to guess from that what went on in between. With the time dimension included, you get the full dynamic picture. The research becomes richer and its value is much more easily demonstrable in terms of:

- its role as an ‘early warning system’;
- its ability to reveal changing patterns in a market;
- its ability to tease out inferences about causation and relate these to assessment of the effectiveness of advertising, promotions, etc;
- its ability to capture unexpected events; and
- its asset value as a cumulative database resource.

Markets are dynamic. They are a moving picture and they need dynamic—not static—techniques to capture their richness.

If you are not tracking your competition using continuous tracking, is your competition tracking you? In short, are you being followed?

14 NEW PRODUCT LAUNCHES: DON'T PULL THE PLUG TOO EARLY

Why do so many new products fail?

Over nearly two decades in many parts of the world I tracked advertising in hundreds of product categories. In many of these categories it was possible to observe a range of new brands or products being launched. There is no single reason for the high rate of new product failure but there is one fairly common one. This has to do with the fact that the care and attention evident at the pre-launch stage is not carried through after the 'go' button is pushed.

Not enough companies closely and continuously monitor what is happening at the product launch and in the immediate post-launch period. The result is that many of the all-important fine tuning adjustments necessary to marketing success fail to be made. And the product crashes.

Most companies these days put a lot of money and careful attention into development of a new product. They do the same with the development of the advertising and the promotional program to back it up. They pre-test the advertising and the acceptance of the product concept and try to put everything in place for the launch to succeed.

But then a funny thing happens. The launch button is pushed. And in this crucial immediate post-launch stage, the tendency is to do little more than take a deep breath, pray that they have done everything right, and wait anxiously for the judgment of the market. Will the product be a success or a failure? If NASA launched space shuttles the way manufacturers launch new brands, there would be fewer astronauts!

The advertising resources necessary to fuel these new product launches is huge and new product launches, like space flight launches, need continuous monitoring and adjustment.

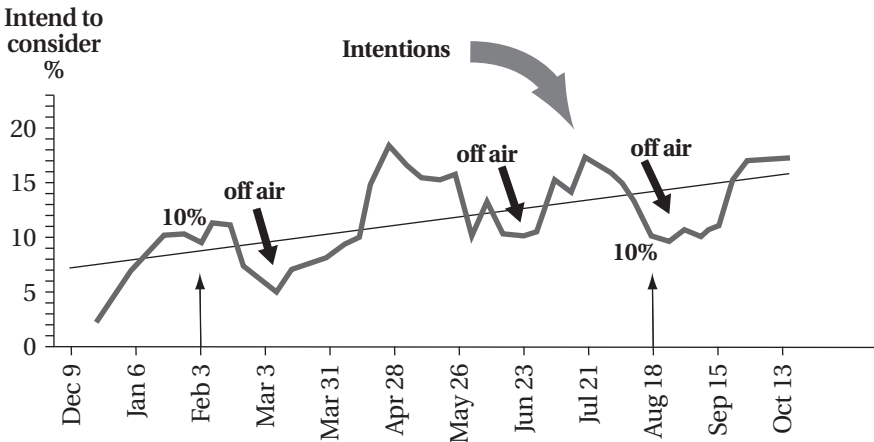
Durable products

Many new durable products fail because early sales do not come up to expectation. Pessimism then spreads within the company and often results in management 'pulling the plug' too early and abandoning the product.

Figure 14.1 shows a new brand of durable product which was launched with a continuous advertising schedule for seven weeks. At the end of that time the company abandoned the advertising 'because sales were not up to expectation'. The whole mood of the company and its marketing team projected disappointment and an expectation of looming product failure. This is a real danger point in new product launches because the gloom is likely to be self-fulfilling.

Fortunately in this case, and for the first time in this company's history, not only sales but also the effect of the campaign on attitudes towards the brand were being monitored continuously. On the basis of the continuous tracking data, the researchers were able to argue that the company should keep going; that just because sales had not yet responded was no reason to abort the advertising or to give up on the new product.

As a result the company went back on air with advertising for the product. The graph clearly shows that since then, each time there was a burst of advertising, attitudes toward the brand improved (with one exception, when the launch of another new, competitive brand muddied the picture somewhat). Three months after the launch the brand, far



Note: Intention to buy new brand increases when on-air and decays when off-air, resulting in an overall upward trend.

Figure 14.1: Advertising influence on intentions. (Source: MarketMind)

from being a failure, had a 15 per cent market share. The same brand is alive and well today, but if the abort decision had been made it might well have ended up in the annals of product history as just another new-product failure.

This case clearly illustrates the importance of continuous measurement—not just snapshot surveys. The market is a movie and its richness cannot be captured by a couple of snapshot surveys with a Box Brownie. It needs continuous measurement.

Consider the situation in the first eight months of the product's life. If a snapshot-type survey had been conducted on 3 February, it would have shown that 10 per cent of people were prepared to seriously consider the brand next time they bought that type of product (i.e. were 'short-listers' for the brand). A good result. If another snapshot survey were conducted on 18 August after 6 months of advertising, it would have shown no change as a result of all that advertising. Without continuous measurement, these snapshot-type surveys might well have given the false impression that further advertising bursts were having no further effect on people's attitudes.

However, as the trend line in the continuous data clearly indicates, there was a long-term positive effect of continuing with the advertising for this brand. Each time it went on air it was developing and strengthening attitudes towards the brand—it was strengthening the brand's consumer franchise. Between those on-air times, the mental territory that the advertising had previously captured would begin to erode because of the lack of advertising reinforcement, but overall, in the long haul, the product was gaining more than it was losing.

Repeat-purchase supermarket products

Continuous information on sales and market share is important for any product—not just newly launched products. You need it to know if what you are doing is successful in terms of behavior. Such top-level information is, however, not enough to enable you to *diagnose* why things are going right or wrong. It may tell you what worked and what didn't and as such it provides an important rear-view mirror. But to be able to decide on corrective or future actions you have to focus on the diagnosis, *the why* of what is happening (see Chapters 26–27).

Especially during the launch of a new product, it is crucial to monitor various other things—among them awareness (the proportion of people

who are aware of the new product) and trial (the proportion who have ever tried it)—and do this continuously. Why is this so important? Because a 10 per cent market share in supermarket-type products can be gained in either of two extreme ways:

- Ten per cent of people have ever bought the new brand and they are buying it 100 per cent of the time. That is, they are completely loyal.
- One hundred per cent of people have bought it, but they are only buying it 10 per cent of the time. That is, they are buying that brand only about once in every ten times they shop for that product category.

Depending which situation the new brand finds itself in, the strategic implications are quite different. In the first case the company needs to get more people to try the brand if it wants to increase market share. In the second case, the company has managed to get people to try it but the only way it is going to increase market share is to increase their repeat buying.

So it is vitally important in the lift-off stage to measure not just market share but also how many people have ever bought or tried the new product. Incredible as it may seem, some companies fail to do this. And in the cases when it is done, a reading is generally only taken in a survey repeated every six or twelve months.

This is not enough. Companies need to know how the trial is progressing continuously. NASA monitors its space launches *continuously*. It doesn't press the button and then come back after lunch to see how things are going. It knows that anything may have happened in the meantime. Things occur that need correction, adjustment or fine tuning! By the time some businesses come back and do a survey one month, two months or six months after launch, it is too late. What they frequently find is that the product is out of control or has crashed—or, sometimes, that it never even got off the ground.

A well-known cookie manufacturer used to launch new cookie products this way. The company spent huge resources developing new varieties of cookies and then conducting in-home placement tests in which consumers were asked which one(s) they liked best and therefore which were the best candidates to put on the market.

This type of testing revealed which varieties people liked, how much they liked them, and how likely they were to repeat-buy those varieties.

The problem that this company failed to come to grips with was how to get people to buy and *try* the cookies in the first place. This company looked only at sales and market share information.

Typically, after launching one of the new cookie products, the company would look at sales. If sales were not up to expectation in the first three months or so, it would simply abandon the product. While it had some successes, it had many more ‘failures’. The main reason for the failures continued to go unrecognized and the company continued to make the same mistake over and over.

The problem in most cases was not that the new variety was rejected by the market. It was to do with the inadequate level of marketing support put behind the launch and the over-reliance on advertising alone without promotional activity to generate that key first trial. The company failed to monitor closely what was happening immediately after the ‘go’ button was pressed and the launch had begun.

Because it didn’t know exactly what happened between the launch and the crash, the company kept having crashes, largely as a result of the same problems. This is what happens when businesses rely only on sales and market share to indicate new product performance and then make critical decisions on the basis of these indicators alone. This is a common cause of new-product launch failures.

In one case in point a new cookie was launched but discontinued after about four months. When the decision to abort was made this variety had about 3 per cent market share in its segment, which was regarded as ‘not enough’. Like so many of its previous new product attempts, the company regarded this as a failure. But this market share was primarily because only about 10 per cent of people had ever tried it. Its repeat buying rate was in fact quite good. The people who had tried it were buying it about once in every three times they bought cookies—which is not bad in the cookie market, where there are so many varieties to choose from.

The company had tested the product by in-home placement, i.e. ‘forced’ trial, and this had accurately predicted that people would accept and like the product once they had tasted it. The key words are *once they had tasted it*. Remember, only 10 per cent of people had tasted it when the product was aborted. It was not the product that failed—it was the marketing activities that were designed to get it trialed that failed! Not enough resources were put into the launch to ensure successful communication of the product’s qualities to enough people to prompt them to try it the first time.

The company aborted this variety and went off to develop a new one that it hoped would do better next time!

The point here is that initial trial is a key ingredient in new product launches for any low-cost product but particularly supermarket products. Even if the product was the greatest tasting cookie ever and got a repeat buying level of 100 per cent, it could not have gone above 10 per cent share if only 10 per cent of people had ever tried it. On the other hand with a 30 per cent repeat buying level, if the company had got another 60 per cent of people to try it the product would have gained a potential share of 18 per cent (i.e. 30 per cent of 60 per cent).

Our cookie manufacturer wasted a lot of money trying to find outstanding product formulations that would guarantee success. But once you look at its activity in the light of the very low trial figures for its new products, the lesson is clear. The world will not beat a path to any company's door, whether it develops a better mousetrap or a better cookie. The product has to be effectively marketed. The company has to get people to try it.

Fine tuning the marketing support

Instead of looking for ideal product formulations, the urgent need is more often to address the level and fine tuning of marketing support for new products. To ensure that these are adequate and functioning as they should requires that companies closely monitor their launches, making appropriate adjustments, fine tunings and corrections as required. Failure to do this is one of the most important causes of new product failure. Too often, marketers have too little information and pull the plug on the new product too early, i.e. before they have achieved the necessary awareness and trial.

Trial needs to be gained early, while the product has a newness and freshness about it. If it does not achieve good penetration in the first six months it is unlikely to succeed. This is particularly important for seasonal products such as new varieties of canned soup or chocolate cookies in winter or of ice confections in summer. If trial is not achieved quickly and in the first season, the 'new' product has to come back next season as an old product and this loses the 'newness' factor that can be so important in generating interest and trial. Generally, it doesn't work. (See Chapter 19, 'Seasonal advertising'.)

If the new product is going to succeed it has to get trial as quickly as possible before it loses its image of newness; that usually means in the

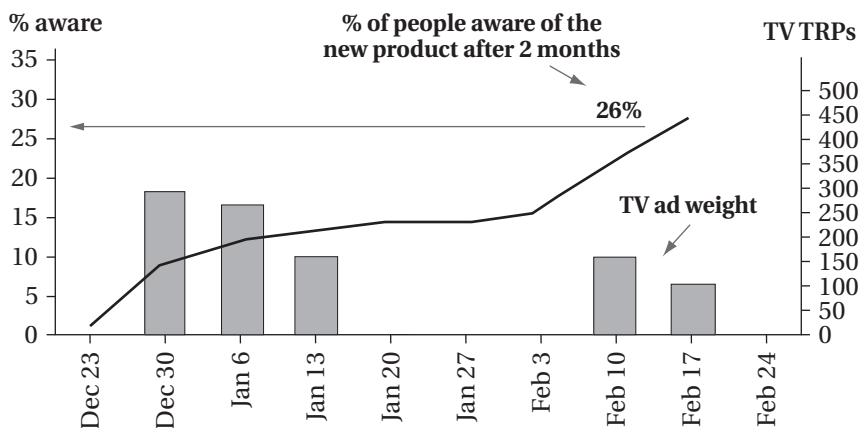


Figure 14.2: Awareness of a new food product. (Source: MarketMind)

season in which it is launched. An obvious part of getting this first-season trial is making people aware of the new product and getting them interested in it. This is a communications task and, like everything else, needs monitoring.

Figure 14.2 shows response to a new product two months after launch. Only 26 per cent of target consumers have heard of the brand, which means that advertising to this point has failed to communicate the existence of the new product to more than half of the potential market.

The implication is clear: it would be foolish to abort the product. What is needed is a change in the advertising or promotional strategy. Either the ad targeting and scheduling isn't effective enough, or the ad itself hasn't got the creative touch to break through clutter and get people to try the new product without more promotional support.

Launching new products should be like launching space shuttles—the successes should outnumber the failures. It is not an inevitable law of marketing that in the launching of products there needs to be more casualties than successes.

Summary

A key reason why so many new products fail is that the care and attention evident at the pre-launch stage is not carried through after the 'go' button is pushed. The fine adjustments so necessary for marketing success are missing.

Continuous information on sales and market share is crucial—but even this is not enough. In order to fine tune the marketing support, it is important to continuously monitor other key measures such as awareness, trial and repeat purchase. Otherwise, there is a real risk of ‘pulling the plug’ too early. All too often, new product ‘failure’ results from deficiencies in the marketing necessary to keep the launch on track.

15 PLANNING CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AROUND CONSUMERS' MENTAL FILING CABINETS

Ads are like alcohol: the more you have the less you remember. After only two or three drinks your faculties start to become impaired. After exposure to only one or two competing ads, your memory for the first one starts to become impaired.¹ What is true of alcohol is surprisingly true of consumer memory for advertising—at least for competing brands in the same product category.

Over a period of a week, the more competing commercials there are for a product category, the less the average person will remember about any one of them. Most people think that forgetting is simply the fading of memory with the passage of time. However, it is now well established that forgetting is due not to the passage of time alone, but to interference from additional learning that takes place in that time.² When time passes but little or no further (competing) learning takes place there is very little forgetting.

On the other hand, where a lot of activity and new learning, especially competitive learning, fill the time interval, these 'interference effects' become very great indeed. These effects are one of the clearest of findings on the way human memory works.³ They are also one of the most frequent findings to emerge from continuous tracking of advertising.

Is implicit memory an exception?

Some will argue this only applies to explicit memory and does not apply to learning without attention because there is evidence that implicit memory (see Chapter 27, 'Measurement of advertising effects in memory') is much more durable. The argument is a false one, however, because it confuses learning in the absence of awareness, i.e. implicit learning, with implicit memory. They are not the same thing. Do you touch type? If so, then the location of the keys is stored in your implicit memory.

As John Anderson has written, 'Many people are not able to recall this information but . . . they can remember where a letter is by imagining themselves typing a word that involves the letter and seeing where their finger goes.'⁴ The fact that this is implicit memory does not mean it was learnt without any attention. In fact it not only needed attention, it required repetition, persistence and hard work.

Implicit memory is not the same thing as learning without awareness and advertising effects in memory are rarely the result of learning totally without awareness. Explicit processing of a direct message is not the only way we receive a message. As we saw earlier, while we are paying attention to something else in the ad, implicit associations can be learnt. There is an interaction between the two. Robert Heath, who is perhaps the strongest advocate for implicit learning, acknowledges that: 'Implicit learning because it is subconscious, cannot access the analytical faculties within our working memory. It is only able to store what is perceived, along with simple conceptual meanings that are attached to these perceptions: it cannot interpret or decode messages, or draw conclusions from them.'⁵ So the point remains that with advertising generally, the evidence is that our ability to retrieve an event or message can be severely impaired when we are exposed to other similar events within a short time.

While this is a well established finding in psychology, it is less widely recognized in marketing. Too few people take account of it in planning advertising media schedules or when they are assessing why their ad campaign may have 'failed'.

Models of memory and forgetting

At a crowded party, if you want to communicate you have to speak very loudly. The more voices, the more competition and the louder the din gets. You have to shout to be heard above the clutter. On television you also have to shout for your ad to be heard. The greater the clutter the more you have to shout. In other words, the more competitors you have advertising against you, the more effort and money you will have to expend to get your message into people's heads.

Even when you shout, your communication may still not register successfully, especially if the target is distracted or tuned in to someone else's conversation, or is musing on something else. How many conversations can you tune in to at one time? Two? Three? How many commercials for different brands in a product category can a consumer hang on to

in his or her mind? There is no single threshold. Rather, each subsequent input progressively diminishes the memory for any and all others.

The popular view of memory is that a trace of the remembered thing is either there or it is not. You can either remember it or you can't. This model of memory is demonstrably wrong. How many times have you been unable to remember someone's name even though you *know* that you know it? Forgetting has more to do with 'inability to retrieve' than with failure to store the memory. It is usually not failure to store the memory that is the problem. It is inability to remember it when you want it.

It is sometimes helpful to think of memories as being stored in one of several mental filing cabinets. If you carefully file a new memory, a new ad, in a particular filing cabinet you should be able to retrieve it quickly and easily as needed. However, if you were distracted enough or unmotivated enough to casually stow the new memory away without paying any attention to what you were doing or which filing cabinet you were stowing it in, the chances are that you will have great difficulty retrieving it. More to the point, you will be unable to retrieve it quickly. The only way you can retrieve it will be to painstakingly look through every cabinet and every possible file.

With memory, the problem is usually not inability to retrieve, but inability to retrieve in any reasonable or functional time. So for all intents and purposes, the information becomes 'functionally lost'.

Information can become functionally lost because it is a long time since you filed it. It can also become functionally lost as a result of interference effects—the competing exposures discussed earlier. You can think of interference effects as the outcome of trying to store several similar memories all in the one file. The more cluttered the file becomes, the longer it is going to take to look through it and to retrieve any particular one.⁶

When a consumer is exposed to competing commercials, this is what happens. There is interference from previously stored ads which is exacerbated by the fact that the consumer is often fairly unmotivated or uninvolved when storing them. These types of memory inputs and the interference effect is all the greater when the viewer has low involvement.⁷

Advertising application

It is for this reason that the 'effectiveness' or impact of a commercial is very much influenced by how much competitors spend advertising against it. Especially when trying to get the message into people's heads in the first

place, it is rarely just a simple function of how much an advertised brand spends on advertising time (its media weight).

An advertiser cannot effectively plan or monitor a brand's ad strategy without information about competing activity. This is why anyone who is serious about maximizing the effectiveness of their ad strategy needs to have access to weekly data (monthly or quarterly is not good enough) as to which competitors were advertising on TV, on the web and in print in that week and at what weight.⁸

It is always worth looking at the raw relationship between the amount spent on a brand's advertising and indicators of effectiveness such as sales, market share or advertising awareness. But don't be surprised or disappointed if you don't see any clear relationship. This does not mean that the advertising is not working. Try looking not at the total amount of advertising for the brand but at the brand's *share* of advertising in the product category, week by week. A strong relationship may then emerge. (This is more likely when you are trying to get your message into people's heads than with reminder/reinforcement advertising.)

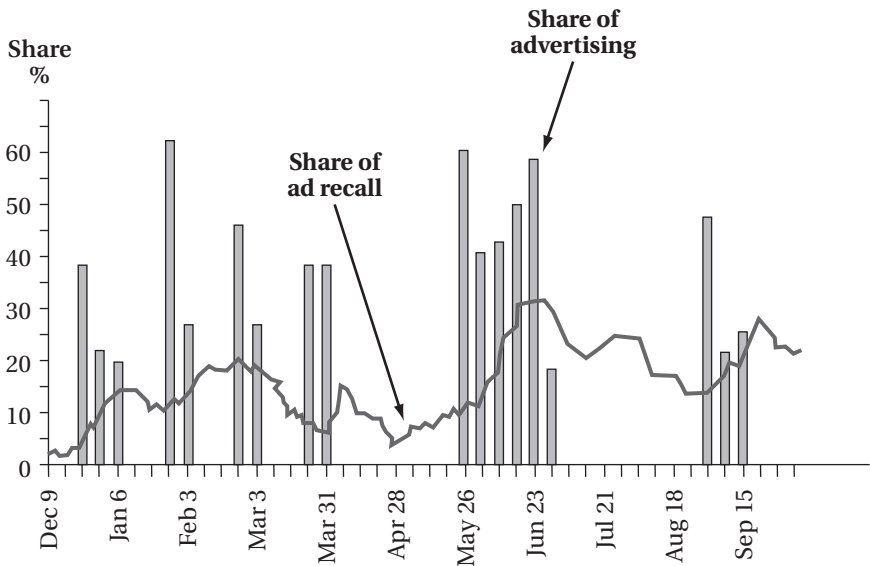
Figure 15.1 illustrates the point. The bars indicate the weeks when this brand's advertising campaign was on TV. Their heights indicate the brand's *share* of the total TV advertising in its product category (share of media weight or share of voice).

The product is a consumer product and its share of voice is plotted against a measure of people's spontaneous awareness of the ad. This latter is a relative measure and is called the brand's TV ad share-of-mind. It is the brand's *share* of total ad awareness in the product category; in other words, memory for that ad relative to all other ads in the product category. It is indicated by the line graph.

A clear relationship is evident each time the brand comes on air with a flight of advertising. With each flight the brand's TV ad share-of-mind trends upward. (The graph also gives valuable indications of how quickly or how slowly memory of the ad decays between each advertising flight.) This performance graph can be compared with a similar graph for each competitor and inferences can then be drawn about whether the brand's advertising strategy is more or less effective than ads for the competing brands.

Components of clutter

This raises the question: what other ads does a particular brand compete with? In the broadest sense it competes with all other ads—even those



Note: For this brand a clear relationship is evident between its share of advertising and its share of advertisement recall.

Figure 15.1: Television share of mind and share of voice. (Source: MarketMind)

not in the same product category. This is known as the general level of clutter and any ad has to break through it. This general level of clutter is relatively constant, at least in the short term. However, it has tended to grow over the long term not only because of more time given to ads but also because of an increase in the use of shorter length TV commercials.⁹ Shorter length commercials boost the total *number* of commercials on air and that people see in any given time period and this increases the general impression that there is more advertising on TV overall.

There is the general level of clutter but, even more importantly, there is also ‘category clutter’. The ad in question competes with other ads in the same product category which is called ‘category clutter’, and this *does* vary from week to week.

What may be surprising to many readers is that the ad also competes with any other ads for the same brand which may be aired in the same week. That is, multiple but similar advertising executions for the same brand frequently compete among themselves and can set up interference effects that impede their individual effectiveness (especially with low-involved audiences).¹⁰

Can a company compete with itself?

Is your ad being limited in its impact by competition from other ads run by your own company? If you are a multi-product, multi-brand company, the answer is almost certainly 'yes'. A Toyota Corolla commercial competes against ads for other vehicles manufactured by Ford, GM, Nissan, BMW, Volvo, etc. It is not as obvious but nevertheless real, that it also competes with all other ads screened by Toyota itself in the same week. These are also competing for the consumers' mind and memory.

Commercials aimed at audiences with high involvement may be less subject to these effects than those aimed at audiences with low involvement.¹¹ This is because with high-involvement situations the consumer may consciously and deliberately process the message in such a way as to make it more resistant to forgetting. That is, it gets filed in a careful way that anticipates a future need to retrieve it. With high-involvement messages, unlike low-involvement ones, the viewer anticipates a future need to use the information.

The key point here is the level of involvement of the target audience. If vehicle ads are aimed at people intending to buy a new car in the next two or three months, then these people are likely to be highly involved. However, around a third of all new-car purchases are made by people who did not intend to buy a new car but were overtaken by events. These include people whose old car suddenly gave them problems and the growing number of people who separate from their spouse and find a need for another car. Such people are likely to be low involved at the time of exposure to the advertising—at least up to the point before the 'need' is triggered by the unforeseen event.

So advertising for high-involvement products (such as cars) doesn't just impact a highly involved audience. It generally impacts a relatively uninvolved one as well as the highly involved one. And this uninvolved one will at some time in the future become an involved one harboring memories of past advertising.

Summary

Successful advertising planning and evaluation demands detailed analysis of more than just one's own ad expenditure. It especially necessitates an understanding of consumer memory processes in regard to interference effects as well as memory decay. The on-air effectiveness of an ad is influenced by several things—not necessarily in this order:

- The execution. Is it a great ad?
- The dollar spend. How much 'weight' was put behind it that week?
- The reach. What percent of the target audience had at least one opportunity to see?
- The flighting. How is the ad being scheduled from week to week?
- The number of competitors who are on air in the same week and how much they spent.
- The number of different ad executions for the same brand that you have on air in any one week.
- The number of commercials for the same umbrella brand that you have on air in any one week.
- The level of involvement of the target audience and the complexity of the message that needs to be communicated.
- The ad objective. Is it a reminder of a message already established or communicating a new message?¹²

16 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU STOP ADVERTISING?

In tight economic times, the pressures are always on to cut advertising. Can a company do this? Can it get away with it? What will be the effect on the company a bit further down the track? These are the questions that start to be asked when the recessionary animal starts to bite.

If the company stops advertising and sales stay at the same level, the cessation of ad spending generates an immediate improvement in the bottom line. Hence the strong temptation to cut advertising in tough times and make the company's profit performance look good. What are the consequences? What do we know about stopping advertising?

What happens when advertising stops?

We do not know a lot about what happens when advertising stops but what we do know is enough to warrant caution. Most companies don't know what happens when advertising stops because they only look at the immediate sales figures. If sales don't go down, they breathe a sigh of relief. But it is critical to look at what is going on underneath, at the brand image and 'brand value' level. Here is where the early warning signs of erosion in brand value are likely to be seen first.

For example, let's look at what happened when one US food manufacturer was forced to cut its advertising budget in half. Before the cut, ratings of the brand in taste testing studies differed greatly if the brand name was on the pack when tasted. While the brand was supported by advertising at adequate levels, the brand name provided a lift of 24 per cent over blind taste tests (24 per cent higher than respondents who tasted the exact same product, but without the brand name). Four years of greatly reduced advertising saw this differential erode so that there was only a 10 per cent lift over blind taste tests! The brand name lost more than half of its power. Consumers were less impressed with it as a brand and it lost much of its ability to influence people's impressions of quality and taste.

Another example. Some years ago a leading brand in another food category and the only major advertiser in the category decided to stop its previously consistent advertising. As might be expected this premium brand's share eventually deteriorated along with perceptions of its value and quality. It not only eroded on these indicators but also in market share and in association with an image of 'good value for the money' and 'high quality'. What was particularly revealing, however, was that ratings for the other brands, the low advertised, low price, so-called 'value' brands began to *increase* over that time. In the absence of advertising reinforcement by leading brands, consumers are freer to raise their perceptions of alternative products and base their decision on what is visible on the shelf. It took a long time but this once leading 'premium' brand ultimately came back to the rest of the market and today it is viewed as being at parity with the category bottom-feeder.

So stopping advertising could be a smart decision. But then again, it could be a time bomb. A doctoral thesis on milk advertising in the US some years ago revealed the delayed nature of the time bomb. In a prolonged series of test market experiments, it was found that when advertising of milk was stopped, nothing happened to sales. Nothing, that is, for twelve months! After a year of no advertising, milk sales suddenly went into a sharp decline and continued to decline at a sickening rate. This underlines the fact that maintenance of sales in the short or medium term after stopping advertising is no reason for complacency.

Advertising immediately re-started. But it was too late. It took another eighteen months to halt the decline and then begin to reverse it. So beware of the delayed time bomb. 'To regain a favorable position that is lost during belt tightening can cost more in the long run than to try to retain it by continuing advertising at a maintenance level.'¹

For how long can a company afford to stop its advertising?

Rather than ask the question 'Can we stop advertising?', it may be more meaningful to ask 'can we maintain our advertising support of the brand but at the same time reduce advertising cost overall?' Capturing the mental territory for a brand requires much more effort and resources than holding it. The cost of funding your occupation forces can be significantly lower. It implies cuts in frequency, how many times people are exposed to the message within the week, rather than cuts to reach, how many people you reach with the message in the week.

However, in really tight recessionary times there may be no choice but to accede to a corporate board edict to pause the advertising. How long before you can you expect the effect of this to show up?

Much depends on how much residual or carry-over effect the current and past advertising has had. Some campaigns have amazingly strong residual memory effects. Other ads have almost none; they are forgotten almost as soon as they go off air. Continuous tracking of campaigns and advertising flights can reveal how much 'residual capital' has been built up and how quickly it gets eroded once the advertising is stopped.

Some experiences

Figures 16.1, 16.2 and 16.3 demonstrate some case experiences with stopping advertising. Compare the first two graphs. They show what happened when two brands (from different product categories) stopped advertising.

Brand A and its advertising had a lot of residual recall even after the ads stopped. There is almost no memory decay of the brand or the advertising after three months. In the case of brand B, on the other hand, the brand itself had good residual recall but the advertising didn't. When the advertising stopped, recall of the advertising declined rapidly while awareness of the brand held up well.

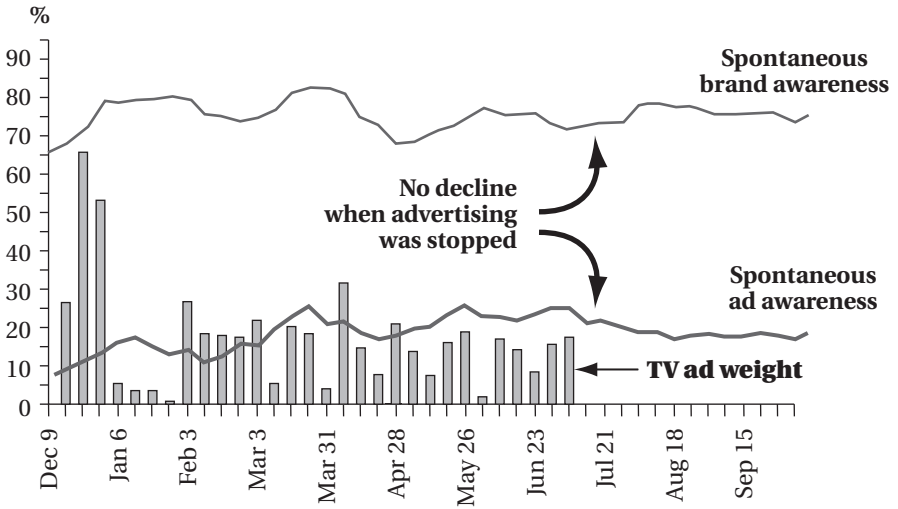
Brand A had been off air for four months. Brand B had been off air for seven months. Market share did not show any decline in either case. But that is where the complacency ends. When we look more closely, the indications are that other things are going on which could be very detrimental in the longer run.

Erosion of brand franchise

The third graph shows total advertising exposures (TRPs) in one of these markets. Advertising stopped in this market three months previously. There had been no marked changes in sales or market shares for any of the brands in this market *at that point*.

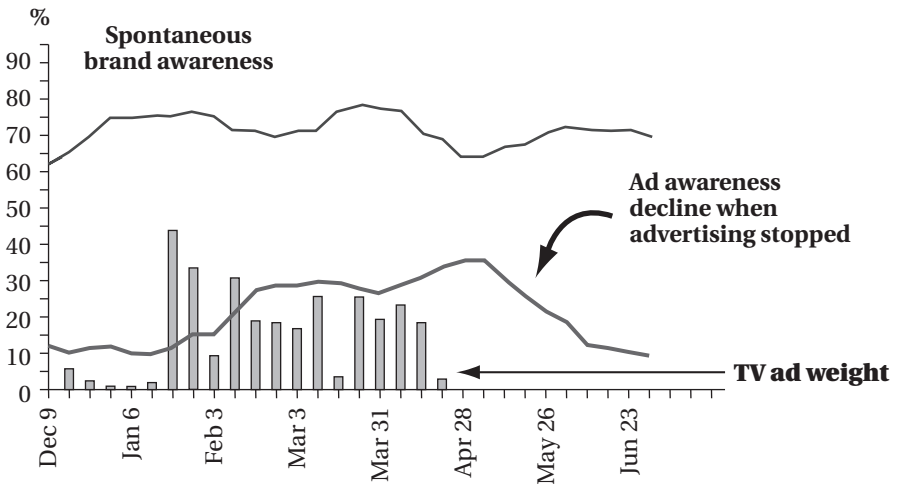
However, if we look further below the surface we find a worrying trend emerging. Brand loyalty is declining. People are still buying the brand but any feeling of 'commitment' that they may have to the brand is eroding.

The market shown in the graph has two major segments—'brand loyals' and 'habitual buyers'. The brand loyals believe there are differences between brands and always buy the same brand. The habitual buyers also



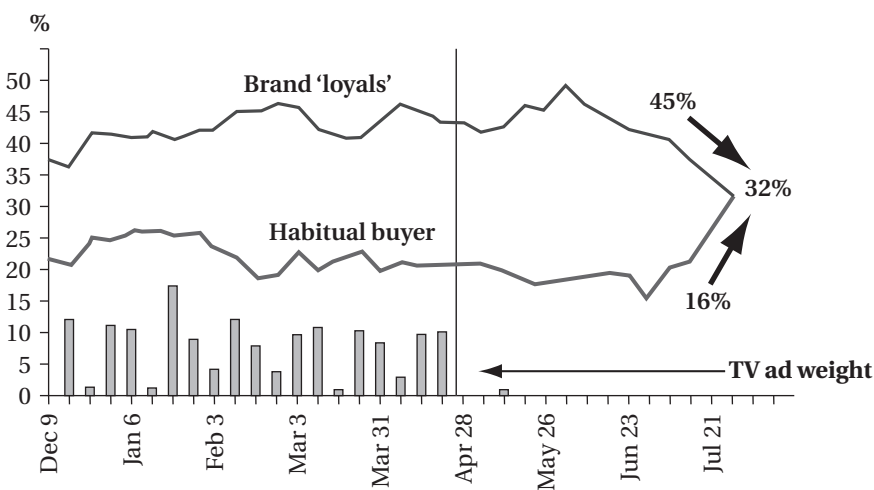
Note: When advertising was stopped for this product no significant decline was observed in spontaneous awareness of the brand or for spontaneous awareness of its advertising.

Figure 16.1: Spontaneous awareness—brand A. (Source: MarketMind)



Note: When advertising was stopped for this product the spontaneous awareness of the brand did not decline significantly but a rapid decline in spontaneous advertising awareness took place.

Figure 16.2: Spontaneous awareness—brand B. (Source: MarketMind)



Note: When advertising stopped there was no visible effect whatever on sales. But after two months the ‘commitment’ of buyers eroded rapidly. The absence of reinforcement created habitual rather than loyal buyers, leaving the brand vulnerable to attack.

Figure 16.3: Size of market segments. (Source: MarketMind)

tend to buy the same brand each time but they believe there are *no real differences* between brands.

Habitual, repeat-buyers of a brand are not the same thing as brand loyals. Habitual buyers repeat-buy the brand for reasons of inertia rather than loyalty. With the cessation of advertising, the brand loyals diminish in the market and habitual buyers increase. While sales may not change immediately, the major brand(s) in the market become more vulnerable—more open to attack. They lose their brand franchise.

Even though sales and market share have not changed, if this trend is allowed to continue the market itself would be very different. Whereas the market in the past has been characterized by brands with strongly promoted brand franchises, it could well become more of a commodity market with little differences perceived between any of the brands. The market leader’s sales could thus become wide open to a price attack from a new or existing competitor.²

Opportunity

William Moran has written that ‘Rather than wait for business to return to normal, top executives can cash in on the opportunity that the rival

companies who are stopping their advertising create for them. The company courageous enough to stay in and fight when everyone else is playing safe in times of recession can bring about a dramatic change in market position.’³

Now we can see why. The above case illustrates how a market can be made vulnerable even though sales and market shares do not appear to have changed in the short term. For a company that is a smaller competitor in the market, this is the time to go after the market leader. Like a pilot taking off in an airplane and picking out holes in the cloud cover to climb through, the smaller advertiser can take advantage of these situations to steer its brand up to a higher level of market share and salience. At such times there is less advertising clutter and the smaller advertiser, even with a small ad budget, is more likely to be heard when the large advertisers are silent and mental commitment to these brands is beginning to erode.

Reinforcement effect of advertising

So the effects of advertising must not be looked at just in terms of increasing sales. To do so ignores the fact that advertising has a very important *reinforcement* effect.

One of the most important effects of advertising is consolidating and protecting what has already been built. It reinforces behavior. People are more convinced of the ‘rightness’ of their brand choice if they see the brand advertised. ‘Good advertising provides people with the means to rationalize their brand preferences.’⁴ And, all other things being equal, they are more likely to buy that brand again.

Some of the most avid readers of car ads are people who have just bought that brand of car. The ads provide reinforcement of their decision. This may not make a whole lot of rational sense, but that’s the way we human beings are.

Alternatives to stopping advertising

In recession times, if the pressure is on, the key question should be how you can take surgery to the advertising rather than simply eliminate it. How can you improve the bottom line without jeopardizing the brand in the long run?

We have seen the dangers of stopping advertising altogether so, if you are not going to stop but are under budgetary pressure to economize, is

there anything else you can do? Yes! You need to consider some belt-tightening strategies for tough times.

Some belt-tightening strategies for tough times

You need to make the ad budget that is available work more efficiently. Rather than stopping advertising, consider these ways of trimming the waistline and tightening the belt:

- A 'drip' media strategy, i.e. rather than stopping advertising altogether, use reduced exposures (reduced weekly TRP weights) to at least try to hold the ground you have already captured.
- Look for ways to trade off frequency while maximizing reach on the target market.
- *If necessary* examine the feasibility of having longer gaps in your advertising flighting pattern. How long can you afford to stay off air between flights without jeopardizing your brand franchise?
- If you are using several ad executions on air at the same time, cut back to just one ad and put all your media weight behind it. Be very single-minded. Most companies use too many executions anyway and have too few exposures (TRPs) behind each execution. In other words, avoid 'executorial anorexia'. (See Chapter 20, 'Underweight advertising'.)
- If you want to cut back, consider shorter length commercials—but use them not as attack forces but as occupation forces to hold the mental territory that has already been captured. Make sure you build ad awareness to a high level with longer commercials before you switch to the shorter ones. Don't just use fifteens as substitutes for 30s. (See Chapter 18, 'Learning to use shorter-length TV commercials'.)
- Finally, if you have been successful with your TV and other attack forces and established a high level of ad awareness, consider switching to a more economical maintenance strategy using the occupational forces of lower cost media (print, web, outdoor, viral etc). The occupation forces come at a lower cost. Often it is surprising how long the mental territory that is already captured can be held by these lower cost, maintenance media. Remember, it is harder to get into the mind in the first place than it is to stay there.

Summary

In this financially driven world with so much emphasis on short-term performance, brands are often tempted to cut ad spending to improve the bottom line—not just during recession but at any time. When advertising stops, any effect on sales may not be visible for several months.

If, in response to cutting advertising, sales appear stable, it is critical to look at what is going on underneath those sales figures. Look at the ‘brand value’ level because this is where the early warning signs of insufficient advertising support are likely to be seen first. If the brand franchise erodes, it can take a long time to rebuild the brand’s market position. An alternative to stopping advertising in tight economic times is to focus on ways to make the ad budget work harder—ways to guard the brand franchise and improve the bottom line at the same time.

17 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FUNNY ADS: WHAT A LAUGH!¹

A very young baby is sucking the side of his father's face like a teat. The only other thing in the ad is a picture of a Bic disposable shaver.

An Argentine ad shows a pair of underpants on a washing line with a ragged hole burnt eloquently through the rear. (Advertiser: a brand of spicy tuna sauce)

I have had the opportunity to track many humorous ads. Increasingly we encounter them on YouTube or as viral ads but they are also still there on TV and radio. And every now and again a print campaign comes along that also makes people chuckle.

It is striking how little is actually written and known about humor in advertising and its effects. There is an amazingly small body of research on it, given how important it is to us. And what little laboratory research has been done has frequently produced contradictory findings.

Part of the problem is that it is so easy to treat all humor as the same and generalize about it—when it isn't the same. Slapstick humor for example is very different to wit.² And what is funny to one individual can be uninteresting or even irritating to another. So you can't assume something is funny. British humor for example is very different to American humor. It is not surprising therefore that research which treats humor as generic often produces confusing and sometimes contradictory findings.

This chapter will also generalize about humor but on the basis of what is different in the way people mentally process ads with humor in them. How is this different from straight ads? We will see why humor can have both positive and negative effects depending upon how it is used.

History of humor

To have a sense of humor is a good thing. Everyone agrees, right? To not have a sense of humor is a bad thing. Well, prepare yourself for a shock. Did you know that this idea is only about 400 years old? You don't have to go too far back in our history to find a time when laughter and humor were viewed negatively, not positively. Indeed, they reflected 'the satanic spirit of man'.

Greek philosophy depicted humor as a cruel and brutal affair. Plato thought it was based on an unfortunate lack of self-knowledge and that it was motivated by envy, which made it morally inferior and reprehensible. Aristotle described laughter as 'degrading to morals, art and religion, a form of behavior from which civilized man should shrink'. And Lord Chesterfield wrote that 'there is nothing so illiberal and so ill-bred than audible laughter'.³

The historical origins of humor lie in the darker side of humankind—in derisive rather than friendly, enjoyable laughter. If you don't believe this, then consider the expression 'pulling your leg'. It means having fun at your expense. It does today—but what's its origin?

Up until the nineteenth century public executions by hanging were a great source of entertainment. Often the victim's neck would not break and he/she was left to writhe and strangle slowly. Friends were allowed to pull down on their legs in order to put them out of their misery. This was an added source of amusement for the onlooker crowd.⁴

So much for the modern view that a sense of humor is something intrinsically good and has always been that way. Only 400 years ago laughter was 'seen as a socially disruptive force'.⁵ Not exactly the stuff that ads are made of.

What has this got to do with commercials? Not much today perhaps—except that it should serve as a warning that humor is not as simple as it often seems. The more you study humor and the more you track the effects of humorous ads, the more that it emerges as a Jekyll and Hyde phenomenon that can have negative and positive effects.



Figure 17.1: Some humor relies on wit—this Suede-ish massage ad for Weatherproof brand clothing is an example.

Anatomy of humorous ads

What makes ads humorous? Let us explore this with an actual ad. Readers may recall a classic ad that showed a lovebird pecking at what seemed like food but was really the keypad of a telephone. The beeps indicated it was accidentally dialing someone. Of course this had to be accidental. Everyone knows birds don't dial. And even if they did, who would they call? Ah, but then in the next scene we see a courier arrive, pick up the sleeping cat with delivery note attached and depart to the off-screen sound of the bird twittering—or maybe chuckling. We suddenly realize it wasn't just random food pecking behavior—the bird phoned the courier company to dispose of its nemesis, the cat.

So what makes a commercial like this one humorous? What's in it that makes us laugh? The key is in the incongruity. A bizarre combination of the bird pecking is mixed up with what we identify as a peculiarly human trait i.e. intelligent, manipulative behavior. Seemingly random pecking by a dumb bird at a telephone turns out to be cunning, manipulative behavior that you just don't expect from a bird.

So writers create humor by surprising us—but in a particular way. They force us to momentarily fuse together two things that already exist in our minds that are otherwise unrelated and incompatible (in this case food pecking and dialing). Incongruity is something of a general formula.

Our minds lead us up this garden path—a bird pecking at a phone is naturally interpreted in terms of buttons being mistaken for food. But only momentarily, before we are then forced to accept the alternative interpretation of the scene that the bird was purposefully dialing and not just pecking. This happens when we see the courier pick up the cat. This interpretation makes the two things consistent and while it is experienced as 'bizarre' it is also enjoyable. And therein lies the key to humorous ads.

The interesting thing is that jokes as well as humorous ads are often built intuitively by writers.⁶ They notice the ambiguity in something (e.g. a visual scene, some word or phrase or some concept) and then create an incongruity. Instead of adopting the expected interpretation—which is the most obvious interpretation that everyone will take—they develop an alternative one, an interpretation that 'fits' but which is highly unlikely or bizarre in the context (i.e. the bird is dialing someone).

The conceptual elements that go into humorous ads such as this and induce a mental switch from information to humor and hence enjoyment of the ad are these:⁷

- two concepts (e.g. dumb bird and human intelligence);
- incongruity/incompatibility between them i.e. one violates the other;
- confidence that the stimulus elements occurring as depicted are impossible or highly unlikely; and
- a way of ‘fusing’ the two and making them momentarily ‘compatible’.

The evidence suggests that the greater the degree of incongruity the funnier the humor is seen to be. The more impossible or incompatible the two things are that are fused together, the more enjoyment people seem to derive from it.

Humorists and scientists

Fusing incongruent ideas like this is part of the much broader process of creativity. Humor has a lot in common with scientific creativity, for example. Arthur Koestler pointed out that humor is ‘the bringing about of a momentary fusion between two habitually incompatible frames of reference’.⁸ The creativity involved in writing humorous commercials is not unlike the creativity of scientific discovery. One strives for the ‘*ha ha*’ reaction, while the other strives for the ‘*ah haa . . .*’ reaction. The difference is that scientific discovery is the *permanent* fusion of the ideas previously believed to be incompatible. Humor is only a temporary fusion.

Comedy writer Herbie Baker, who wrote for the comedian Danny Kaye, had an intriguing way of looking at incongruity. He believed that ideas struggle against each other to fight their way up to our conscious mind from the unconscious. But under normal circumstances, certain of these ideas are incapable of combining with one another. It is their incongruity that normally blocks these other ideas from making it successfully up into the conscious mind. Creatives, like scientists, are people who can somehow circumvent this and by various means bring incongruous ideas into their minds in spite of this otherwise natural blocking tendency. Marty Feldman, another of the great comedians of history, expressed this pithily when he said: ‘Comedy like sodomy, is an unnatural act’.

Humorous ads

Ask the members of your family what advertisements make them laugh? Chances are they will spontaneously say ‘Oh, lots of them!’—and then fall

silent. If you persist, eventually they will dredge out of memory a specific commercial that made them laugh. You will probably note how difficult it is for them to immediately bring to mind such specific examples and when they do, it is even more striking how much difficulty they often have in remembering the brand name of the product advertised.

However, what emerges clearly from this as well as the tracking of numerous funny commercials of various types is the underlying Jeckyll and Hyde phenomenon. They are entertaining and a lot of fun, but when they come to mind why do they so often come without the brand? The first step in being able to make humor work effectively is to recognize these two faces; that such an approach to advertising has the potential for positive effects but it can have negative effects as well. You will see that much depends on precisely how the humor is executed.

How humorous ads work

There are three main mechanisms by which humor is supposed to work in advertising:

1. Less counter-arguing. Because we process it as entertainment (rather than engage in true/false evaluation of the content), there is less counter-arguing with humorous ads.
2. Humorous ads are noticed more i.e. they draw greater attention.
3. Humorous ads are generally *liked* more. Ads that are liked have a higher probability of being effective—all other things being equal.

Counter-arguing

The first mechanism is that humorous ads seem to invite less counter-arguing. When we read a fiction book we mentally process it differently to non-fiction. With fiction we engage in escapist enjoyment rather than a true/false evaluation of what we are reading. Humor is entertainment and tends to be mentally processed in a different way to informational commercials. We are less likely to process the ad in terms of a true/false evaluation.

Freud observed that the world of humor is ‘a place to which we temporarily and symbolically return to the playful and happy mood of childhood’. When we switch into our enjoyment, humor appreciation mode, we switch off our attempt to process the ad in a normal, informational, or logical way.

The incongruous elements in the ad tip us off that this is meant to be humorous and triggers a re-set switch in our minds. We stop normal processing and sit back—hopefully to enjoy the absurdity and a momentary return to the playful, happy mood of childhood. But Mr Hyde is lurking because a reduction in counter-arguing can often be at the expense of correct branding of the ad. The risk with humor in advertising is always that we may be so focused on processing it as entertainment that little if any processing registers for the brand and the message.

Attention and recall

The second mechanism is the humorous ad's ability to draw greater attention. In helping the ad to get attention and break-through we see perhaps the most positive sides of humor. But Mr Hyde is never far away and whether that extra attention has a positive effect or a negative effect depends greatly upon *where* that attention gets focused.

People who are mugged at gunpoint often find it difficult to give the police much in the way of any description of the mugger. Why? Because if someone points a gun at us, the gun hijacks our attention. Understandably, we become so focused on the gun that we take little notice of anything else.⁹

Humor may provide big guns for advertisers to help them get noticed in amongst the clutter but humor can hijack attention so totally that people don't take in the message or even the brand that is in the ad—they are too preoccupied with the humor. Now we begin to see why it is not really surprising that a number of studies researching humorous ads have found that humorous ads were no more effective than straight ads or worse—they even impacted negatively on results.¹⁰

If you conduct your own 'family poll' as suggested above, chances are you will confirm that humorous ads have an unusually high risk of suffering a message and branding problem. Just as the use of high profile presenters can distract us from processing the important elements of the brand and the message, so too can humor. If not used properly it will hijack our attention from the brand and the message. That does not mean we should stop using humorous ads. We don't stop using high profile presenters because of this effect. But we do have to take deliberate actions to overcome this problem. We have to make sure that the brand/message communication in these commercials is *so much stronger* in order to compensate for this overshadowing effect.

Integration of brand and execution

How do you do this? Apart from making the brand *very* visible, the best answer is to try to heavily integrate the brand with the execution. How often do we see an ad produced that is an entertaining piece of film but where the brand/message is hardly integrated at all into the story? All too often the brand appears in the commercial—almost as a ‘tag’—at the end of the ad.

Ideally, the brand should be made an integral part of the execution, not just with humorous ads but especially in the case of humorous ads because of the ‘attention overshadowing’ effect.

What do I mean by integration? To illustrate, consider the classic Budweiser frogs commercial in the USA. Three frogs croak in turn and at first it just sounds like nonsense croaking. But as the croaks speed up and run together, the camera pans so that a large Budweiser sign comes into view and it becomes clear that the sound the frogs are making is ‘Bud’, ‘Weis’, ‘Er’. Here the brand is well integrated.

Here’s another example. An ad for male fragrance brand Clix (made by Axe) shows an attractive male going through his day receiving admiring, amorous looks from various women. Each time this happens, he clicks a hand counter. As he gets into an elevator at the end of the day, he shows his click count for the day to another male but is disconcerted when the other guy’s counter totals many, many more clicks. And the brand of male fragrance that he was using was of course Clix.

A good test of how integrated the branding is in any ad is to play a little game of imagine. Imagine the ad but with your competitor’s brand substituted in it instead of your own. Does the ad still make sense? Does it do any violation to the ad?

If the competitor’s brand could fit the execution just as well as yours, then you are at risk. It is especially likely to brand poorly (unless you are the market leader or take other steps to strengthen the branding in the commercial). The creator of the famous Volkswagen ‘Beetle’ campaign went so far as to say that if you take the brand out of the ad it should no longer be funny.

Consider an alternative example—the Land Rover ad where the little kid knocks on the door of the Land Rover, and when the woman winds the window down he asks ‘Is Jason there—can he come out to play?’ She says ‘Hold on, I’ll check’. This is another great ad but with the potential to ‘slip’ in memory to some other competitor such as Landcruiser or Jeep. There are no integrative branding elements.

Many ads have good integration of the product category with the execution but not with the brand. For example, consider the ad mentioned earlier with the lovebird who successfully disposes of the cat by pecking at the telephone keypad to dial a courier, who then comes to pick up the cat as a package. This was a great ad that ran globally and that many people will still remember. Which courier company was it for?

If you can't answer that question then you are among many who could not recall the brand even when the ad was on air. In fact the ad was for DHL couriers. Note that you could easily substitute FedEx into the commercial in your mind and it would do no violation to the ad whatsoever. The brand is not integrated with the execution. However, the product category is. You couldn't as easily change the product category to something else. A courier company is fundamental to the storyline and a key ingredient in making the humor work.

Poor branding is especially likely to happen in commercials where the humor is peripheral to, rather than integrated with, the brand message. This is because the audience is overly occupied with processing the humorous, executional elements of the commercial—things that have little if anything to do with the brand message—and this is hijacking attention from the brand.

Ideally the brand name itself should tie in, as in the Budweiser and the Clix commercials. This is rarely an easy thing to do. In fact some would argue that when it does happen it is pure genius. By way of illustration consider for example that the lovebird, courier ad would have worked much better with some kind of tie-in to the DHL company name. The ad would have worked wonderfully for a company called, say, Kruger Allstates Transport because it would have been much harder to confuse it with any other company (like FedEx). The K.A.T. courier brand could easily have been integrated as an executional element in the ad as Budweiser was in the frogs ad and Clix in the Axe fragrance ad. The cat, like the chorused croaks, would form an integral element of the commercial and act as a retrieval cue for the company brand. While it is much harder to do, if it can be done this works far better than simply tacking the brand on at the end.

So one of the guidelines is: wherever possible try to integrate the execution with the brand—not just the product. Ads like the DHL example, where only the product is inherently integrated with the execution, are very common and have to rely on other factors to stamp in the

correct brand association. Unless the brand is integrated into the execution, even great humorous executions must be extra careful to make sure they get the brand across and register it in memory and guard against just doing a generic advertising job for the product category as a whole.

Liking

Liking of a brand's advertising is the third mechanism. Just as a brand's packaging is part of its brand attire, thereby adding to the liking of the brand, so too a brand's advertising reflects the characteristic way it communicates. Liking for the way it communicates can add to the liking for the brand. A brand's advertising is one dimension of its personality. Just as humorous public speakers are appreciated, so humorous ads are *liked* and this has the potential to wash over onto the brand itself.

As we have seen earlier, liking of a brand's advertising is a feather that can tip the balance towards that brand. In low-involvement categories where all brands in the category are virtually identical—where there is often nothing new to say about the brand—then the 'beam balance' theory comes into play. If all brands are equal then it only takes an additional feather on one side of the beam balance to tip the decision to that brand. Liking of the brand's advertising can be that feather. This is of somewhat less importance in high-involvement categories.

Humor therefore tends to be more effective in low-involvement categories because it can be an effective feather. But there is another reason as well why it does not usually work as well in high-involvement categories. To the extent that people are already highly involved, humor can be somewhat superfluous in attracting their attention. If the advertiser has some important information to tell people about a product that they are highly involved in, then they are likely to be all ears. It won't necessarily get any more of their attention if you include humor. Indeed it may distract them from the key message elements. So for both these reasons humor is less relevant to high-involvement categories than it is to low-involvement categories.

Wear-out

Conventional wisdom says that humorous ads wear out quickly and certainly wear out faster than other ads. But do they? It is nowhere near that clear cut. There are studies finding that they do wear out more quickly and other studies finding no difference between humorous and normal ads.¹¹

In tracking I have seen situations where humorous TV ads worked very effectively for over a year without showing signs of wear-out. In one case, for example, the ad was on air for two years before showing any signs of wearing out. The advertiser and the ad agency would have pulled the ad off air eighteen months earlier but for the clear evidence coming from the tracking data.

Why do such contradictory results exist? One clue is in the social dimension. Laughter and humor is contagious—that's why laughter tracks are added in comedy shows. When we watch a funny ad our reactions are likely to be different depending upon whether we are viewing it alone or with others. Ads that are viewed by audiences that typically consist of just one person have less chance of being seen as funny. Studies are fairly consistent in showing that people laugh more if they are with other people and the more people, the more they laugh.¹²

One suggestion by two leading researchers is that this is why we get contradictory findings on wear-out of humor. As they put it:

... some [ads] seem to get better, as *anticipation* of what will be presented evokes an anticipatory humorous response. If in fact, a listener or viewer laughs because others do or have ... wear out of humor may be postponed ... certain television commercials seem to become 'funnier' over time as their punch lines enter the language of popular culture and are repeated by professional comedians, as well as the general public.¹³

This exposes the fact that humor not only helps an ad break through and get attention but it may also succeed in making the ad itself a point of discussion and attention of the social group. Quiz shows like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* owe a considerable amount of their success to this. Unlike most other TV programs they stimulate participation and discussion between members of the living-room audience ('I got that one right', 'Wow ... how did you know that?', 'I know the answer to this one!' etc).

This is not just a case of getting greater attention. The ad takes on a significance and an enjoyment that comes about by it emerging out of the TV to become the focus of a conversational interaction with others. ('Oh look ... here comes that great ad again ... Doesn't that just break you up! I love that ad.')

Summary

Humor remains one of the least understood elements in advertising and indeed one of the least understood sides of life. We have a lot to learn yet about how to maximize the chances of humorous commercials working effectively but we are getting there. The available research is thin and hardly provides anything like a clear view. The glimpses of insight can be extremely valuable, however—like peeking through venetian blinds. The view is not perfect but as someone once said, ‘If it were not for venetian blinds it would be curtains for all of us’!

18 LEARNING TO USE SHORTER-LENGTH TV COMMERCIALS

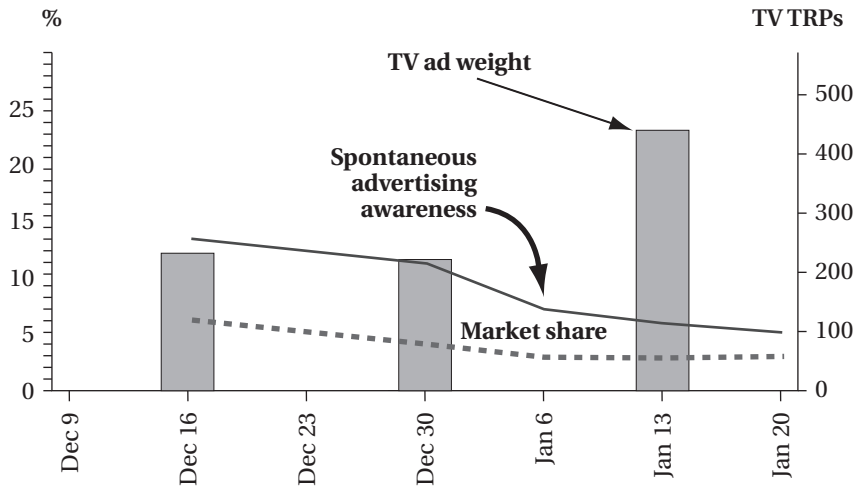
Fifteen-second commercials were first introduced in the 1980s. They were attractive to advertisers previously unable to afford advertising on TV, with the result that money was redirected out of print into fifteen-second TV commercials. At the same time regular TV advertisers also began to experiment with changing from 30-second ads to fifteen-second commercials, hoping for better value for money.

At the time, when all this was beginning, I was continuously tracking all the ads in a client's product category and browsing through information on which advertisers were on air in the previous week. I noted one advertiser that went on air with a single ad but with a large media weight of 450 TRPs for the week. With such a lot of exposures you would expect the ad to be generating a reasonable return. However, I was amazed when I inspected the advertiser's ad awareness and market share information. Figure 18.1 shows that ad awareness and market share did not go up. They actually went down—despite all this weight of advertising! Crazy!

Intrigued by this, I played the ad to check it out. I wanted to see what ad could possibly be that bad. Fifteen seconds later I knew! It was a fifteen-second commercial, it had a fairly complex message and it was being aimed at a low-involved audience and being used as a solo.

I had increasingly observed in tracking fifteen-second commercials that when used on their own as a solo with low-involved audiences, they rarely seemed to work. Here was the starkest evidence yet. Even with heavy media weight this ad seemed all but invisible. It did not break through; it was doing nothing for market share and nothing in the way of reinforcing people's feelings about the advertiser. It was a waste of money. The advertiser might as well have not been on air.

Conventional wisdom at that time was that a fifteen-second commercial is 'about two-thirds as effective as a 30-second commercial'. Driven on



Note: The percentage of people spontaneously aware of this 15-second advertisement actually declined while it was on air as did the brand's market share.

Figure 18.1: A fifteen-second advertisement failure. (Source: MarketMind)

by this erroneous belief, fifteen-second ads grew explosively in number throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s before leveling off. Yet, my experience of tracking many of them was that all too often they just did not seem to work.

Tracking numerous ad campaigns provided me with the opportunity from time to time to compare the performance of a 30-second ad aired in one region with the fifteen-second version of the same ad running simultaneously in another region. The results emerged as generally clear cut. Simply trying to use fifteen-second ads as cut-down versions of 30-second ads rarely seemed to work, especially when they were used on their own as solos. *When they work, fifteen-second commercials seem to work very differently from 30-second commercials.*

At that time US researcher Lee Weinblatt also questioned the merits of fifteen-second commercials, making the point that ‘You can’t communicate a believable message in so short a time, unless you started with 30-second commercials and built a case of communication, then brought in a fifteen-second commercial as a reminder.’¹ This began to be supported by the research findings of others.²

Researchers Von Gonten and Donius concluded in 1997 from panel data: 'Wherever it has been possible to isolate the effect of 15's from 30's, the overwhelming majority of 15's have behaved as if off-air. Some few 15's perform strongly, but they are rare exceptions to the general finding.'³

When my 'early warnings' were first published in the first edition of this book, they aroused a lot of reaction. I was careful not to say that solo fifteen-second commercials cannot work. I did however emphasize that in my experience they almost never did. I had tracked a lot of commercials and it was the exception to come across a solo fifteen-second commercial that worked. Fifteen-second ads can work; but the ones that do are the exceptions and not the rule. However, studying exceptions can be revealing.

One exception is shown in Figures 18.2 and 18.3. This ad had a lot of media weight behind it but it did work exceptionally well. Why? How did this campaign differ from the overwhelming number that failed? One difference was that it was extremely simple and single-minded, both visually and verbally. It did not try to do too much. The message was strongly communicated in both the visual and the verbal medium and it was an extremely simple message.

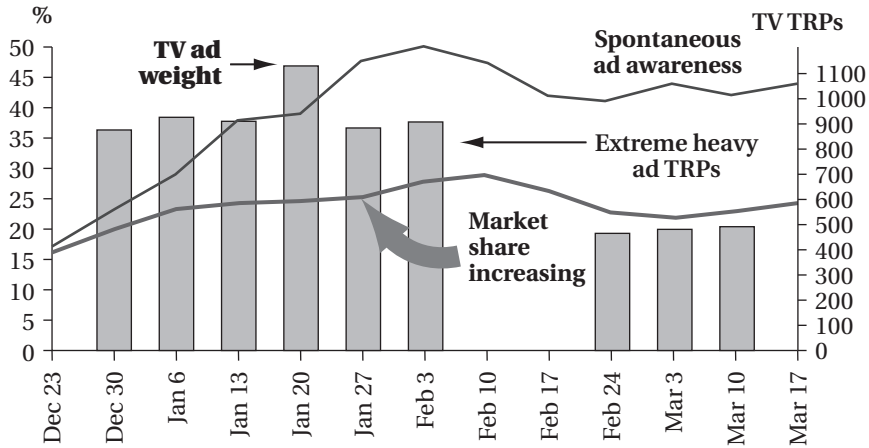
As a result of observing exceptions like these, we now have a greater understanding of how shorter commercials work and how they *can* be used to effect if advertisers learn how to use them and also learn how *not* to use them. If you are going to use fifteen-second or ten-second ads successfully they need to be designed differently and used in a different way.

Getting into people's heads vs staying there

A general principle in the psychology of learning is that it is harder to get into people's minds than it is to stay there. In other words, there are two processes: the process of learning and the process of priming and reinforcement. One is original learning; the other maintains and reinforces the freshness of that learning. The process of reinforcement is not the same as the process of originally communicating something. It usually takes a longer commercial or more repetition to get an ad into people's minds in the first place than it does to keep an ad and its message there.

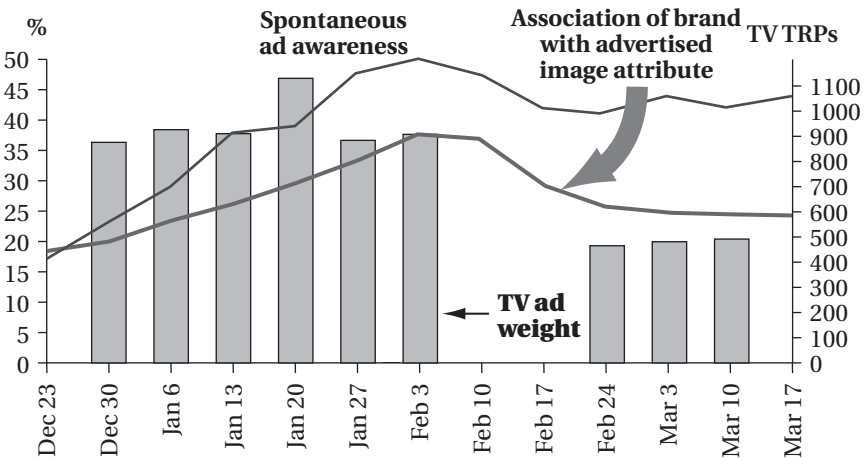
Familiarity

We know from psychology experiments that it takes much less time to recognize and process something that is familiar.⁴ The more we prime



Note: This 15-second advertisement had an extremely simple and single-minded message along with extremely heavy advertising weight. It worked and market share increased—while it was on air!

Figure 18.2: A fifteen-second advertisement campaign that worked!
(Source: MarketMind)



Note: The same 15-second advertisement also increased the percentage of people associating the brand with the advertised image attribute.

Figure 18.3: Percentage of people associating the brand with the advertised image.
(Source: MarketMind)

(or activate) something, the more familiar it becomes. It is like priming a pump. The more it is primed the quicker it works.

A new commercial with new images and new messages takes longer for our minds to process than an established commercial. Ten or fifteen seconds may be too short a time for our minds to process these properly. Like fast cut commercials they may just get lost. Even with words, the less frequently a word occurs in the language the longer it takes our minds to recognize it and process it.

Familiarity and speed of processing

Our minds process words and ads much more quickly and much more easily when they are familiar. Highly familiar words like ‘book’ and ‘camel’ are recognized up to three times faster than less familiar words like ‘tome’ and ‘dromedary’. Similarly, our minds process highly familiar ads and brands more rapidly than less familiar brands. With more exposures, recognition becomes even faster as something becomes highly familiar.⁵

Hence, when we see shorter-length commercials (or we fast forward through ads on a pre-recorded program—see Chapter 25, ‘The web’), we are nevertheless more likely to be able to pick up the communication if the ad is already familiar.

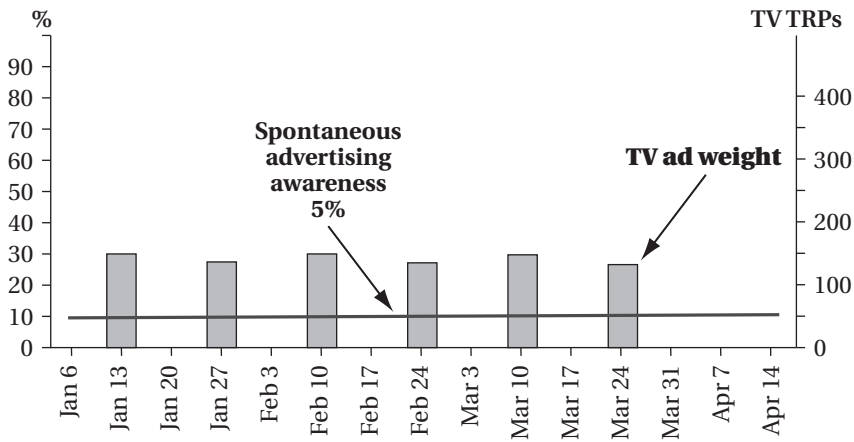
The general ‘take-out’ point here is that it is useful to advertisers to think about ads in terms of how much time our minds need to mentally process the elements of the ad and how many exposures it takes to develop a ‘mental model’ of it.

Shorter-length commercials are the occupying forces. They are best at occupying and holding the mental ground that has already been captured by the longer-length commercials. These longer-length commercials are the attack forces. They are good for bringing about learning. They are good for getting a message into people’s heads in the first place.

My years of tracking research convinced me that shorter-length commercials can be quite effective in holding mental ground *after* longer length commercials have been used to capture it. However, when used on their own, as solos, they often prove disappointing and ineffective (see Figure 18.4, for example).

Lost in the clutter

Usually the first thing you want an ad to do is break through the clutter and get noticed. Shorter-length commercials, when used as a solo with



Note: The percentage of people who were spontaneously aware of this 15-second advertisement never rose above 5%.

Figure 18.4: Another fifteen-second advertisement failure. (Source: MarketMind)

low-involved audiences, have great difficulty breaking through the clutter. Time and time again, I have found that they are generally disappointing at breaking through on their own except when the audience is highly involved with the product.

This is despite the fact that shorter-length ads are usually screened at greater repetition levels than 30-second commercials. One of the seductive attractions of shorter-length commercials is that advertisers can get more repeat exposure for the same ad budget than they can with a 30-second ad. But even at very high exposure levels, shorter-length, solo ads often fail to register at the level of conscious ad recall. So if you are going to use them as solos, confine your expectations to conveying implicit association and make sure any explicit message is ultra simple.

There have been amazingly few exceptions. And the exceptions are usually due to the great creative idea in the commercial or to the audience being highly involved with the product category. Or to the shorter-length ads building on each other like 'sequels'. You need exceptionally creative ads or a highly involved audience or an extremely simple message, or you need to build them up in a series if you are going to use shorter-length commercials as solos. Otherwise they just seem to disappear into the ether.

Message communication

Capturing mental ground means not only breaking through but also correctly delivering a message or an impression. I have found shorter-length commercials when used on their own to be extremely weak in message communication with low-involved audiences. So when they do break through (which is rarely), they seem unable to communicate anything but the simplest of messages.

Table 18.1 shows the results of yet another fifteen-second ad campaign, compared with a 45-second campaign for the same product category but run at a different time. The fifteen-second ad's performance is abysmal.

This fifteen-second commercial campaign went for six weeks with a huge number of exposures (a total of 1850 TRPs, or over 300 TRPs per week). Despite this heavy media weight it achieved only 25 per cent prompted recognition and only 4 per cent correct message take-out.

Table 18.1: Comparison of advertisement campaigns

	45 seconds	15 seconds
Length of campaign	2 weeks	6 weeks
Total TRPs	400	1850
Execution cued ad recognition	49%	25%
Share of voice	28%	19%
Correct message take-out	30%	4%

Source: MarketMind

This dramatically illustrates that a key weakness of shorter-length ads is in getting across a message. They can effectively deliver a reminder, i.e. reinforce an already learnt brand message. But they won't communicate unless the message is extremely simple or it is a reminder ad or a sequel ad following from other commercials where the message has been exposed previously.

I stress that this is when used on their own, when the message is anything more than a visually supported, very single-minded statement, and when the audience is not highly involved. When the message is a very simple one and one that has been established before (usually by longer-length commercials), then shorter-length ads can work cost effectively.

Blame the creatives?

Some people take the view that the failure of so many shorter-length commercials is the fault of the creative teams. They argue that when these ads fail it's because of poor creative work, and not the length of the ad. This argument says that any commercial will work if the creative and the media are right.

In light of the many that I have seen fail, I think it is unjust and far too simplistic to blame this on the creative teams. To do so ignores what is now more widely acknowledged—that there are inherent limitations to shorter ads. It ignores the fact that ten to fifteen seconds may be an impossibly short time to get across the great majority of messages—at least from a standing start.

Yes, part of creative team's job is to cleverly package messages in such a way that they communicate easily, quickly and entertainingly and there are a few shorter-length commercials that do that. But ten to fifteen seconds is an extremely short time in which to successfully communicate anything. In those few instants the ad has to:

- tune people out of the previous commercial or program that they are watching;
- lock their attention onto the ad;
- communicate the brand name;
- get across an effective message;
- consolidate the memory trace before the next ad comes along (with the potential to interfere with the mental processing of what has just been said).

It takes time to tune in

The first and last of these are important reasons why so many shorter-length ads turn out to be less effective than expected. It takes time for people to tune out of one thing and into another. This applies to conversations or any other abrupt changes in our stream of thought. And it also applies to ads.

It takes us time, even though it is brief, to switch from what we are currently thinking about or attending to and re-tune our thoughts to something else. All of us can relate to the experience of being interrupted while doing something and then having to ask the interrupter to repeat what they have just said. That's because we were tuned in to something else and it took time to switch over.

It is easy to be deceived by the fact that we are talking about only very small amounts of time for this mental switching to take place. It may only be a couple of seconds, but this is a couple of seconds out of our mental processing time. And it is sobering to realize that in a fifteen-second commercial a couple of seconds represents 13 per cent of the total exposure time that may be down time for this reason alone. This is also a reason why in the new environment of digital video recorders commercials will increasingly become more focused on reminder and reinforcement. There is evidence that even when viewed at fast speed, the brand and the key reinforcement images can still register.⁶

It takes time to tune out

A problem may exist in the final seconds of the commercial as well. The ‘interruption’ interference effect on mental processing may also apply to the last second or two of the ad content. The memory trace for this has the potential to be interfered with by the next commercial. Psychological experiments show that interruption by, and switching to, the next event (the next ad) attenuates the mental processing and memory of what went on in the few seconds immediately before the interruption.⁷

So what this means is that for up to a quarter of the time of a fifteen-second ad, the viewer’s mental processing may be subject to interference effects of one kind or another (at the start and finish).

Fifteens as cost-efficient reminders

Many of the shorter-length campaigns that critics cite as having worked turn out *not* to be solos or ‘stand-alones’. Instead, they are often reminders reinforcing a previous campaign. This is not what I mean by ‘solo’ fifteens. This is building on or re-triggering what has gone before. It is advertising that ties closely back into, and re-occupies, the mental territory that has already been captured.

The point is that it takes more to get into people’s heads in the first place than it does to stay there—or re-trigger memories that reside there and are well established. In such situations shorter-length commercials can work well.

The general implication is clear. If we need to get across a message then the preferred strategy is to use longer-length commercials to get it across, to firmly entrench it, before switching to shorter-length (*reminder*) commercials. Fortunately in the new YouTube world of video ads on the

web, creative teams are being freed up to make longer-length commercials. These can achieve big bang effect by being virally disseminated and without the prohibitive cost of relying entirely on frequent screenings on TV. Cut down shorter, ten- to fifteen-second versions can then work well to effectively remind and reinforce established memories of the longer ad.

Shorter-length commercials can definitely give us reinforcement and reminders at lower cost, but only if the main communication has first been established with the longer commercial. This is because it takes less time and effort to reinforce a message than it takes to internalize it in the first place.

Table 18.2: Various ways shorter-length commercials have been used

As a <i>reminder</i> : e.g. a 30-second ad followed, after initial bursts, by fifteen-second reminder ads.	This works.
As a <i>fast-follower</i> : e.g. a 30 and a fifteen cut down from the first one that appear in the same commercial break. The 30-second commercial shown first up with the fifteen-second shortened version used last in the same break.	More often than not, this also works.
As a <i>'sequel'</i> : e.g. a fifteen- to 30-second commercial first up in the break with a fifteen-second sequel commercial appearing last in the break.	More often than not, this also works.
As a <i>mixture-ingredient</i> : e.g. 30s and fifteens randomly scheduled in the same week.	This seems to have little going for it.
<i>'Back-to-back'</i> : e.g. two fifteens in a 30-second pod. Unlikely to work unless the ads are for two <i>related</i> products (e.g. toothbrushes and toothpaste for the same brand—say Colgate). These have the potential to appear as almost a seamless 30 seconds of advertising for the brand's dental hygiene products.	Unknown.
As a <i>solo</i> : fifteens used entirely on their own.	Usually don't work unless <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highly creative • simple message • high involvement • confined to conveying simple associations.

Audience motivation

How does the level of motivation of the audience change things with shorter-length commercials? How are the principles any different if we use them to advertise to a highly involved audience? People who are highly involved are more attentive and also have lower thresholds. To go back to our flash-card experiments, people who have not eaten for several hours recognize food words (like apple, bread, cake, etc) faster than those who have just eaten. Hunger makes them process food words faster because their minds are more attuned to any stimuli that may be relevant to that immediate need.

It is less demanding to get through to an interested, motivated audience. The communicator has to put in less work to get the message across because the audience is predisposed to understand and internalize the communication. Highly motivated students are likely to pay more concentrated attention to the lecturer and work harder at trying to understand and internalize what he or she has to say. There is less onus on the lecturer because the students are more naturally attentive.

We rarely find this level of involvement in advertising. However, when aimed at highly involved groups, a shorter-length ad can work in its own right—if the message is simple. It may apply, for example, to a business ad with something new to say that is aimed at an involved audience watching a business program. Or a Toyota dealer advertising a red-hot price on Corollas to people actively shopping around for a Corolla. The key here is involvement, which affects not only attention but also the amount of work the recipient is prepared to do to take out the message.

Summary

Shorter-length commercials need to be used in ways that maximize the chances for effectiveness. Solo, stand-alone, shorter-length commercials are all too often used inappropriately and rarely work, especially with low-involved audiences. If the audience is not highly involved and/or the message is not visually simple, then don't use ten- to fifteen-second commercials as solos.

Consider shorter-length commercials as cost-efficient reminder ads after the mental territory has been captured with longer-length commercials. Or consider using a shorter-length ad as a sequel, topping and tailing it, preferably with a longer-length ad at the beginning and a shorter-length ad at the end of the break.

Remember that shorter-length ads have extreme difficulty breaking through the clutter. They also add to the clutter. (A three-minute ad break can consist of six 30-second ads or twelve fifteen-second ads.)

19 SEASONAL ADVERTISING

All advertising is not created equal. And all product categories are not the same. It is clear from tracking numerous ad campaigns in various parts of the world that there are important seasonal influences on advertising. Products that are to a greater or lesser extent seasonal include:

- **Summer:** ice creams, suntan lotions, soft drinks, swimwear, beer and charcoal.
- **Winter:** canned soup, chocolate bars, chocolate cookies, cough and cold preparations.
- **Seasonal events:** electric razors (most of which are sold for Father's Day and Christmas), children's shoes and school supplies (start of school year), champagne (New Year's) and greeting cards.
- **In addition:** some public-authority and utility advertising campaigns may be distinctly seasonal, for example: save water (summer), prevent forest fires (summer), drink driving, speed kills (holiday seasons) etc.

Sometimes these things are pretty obvious, but all too often we realize this only in retrospect. It is easy to fail to be aware of them or to be distracted from them in the product management process.

Perceived popularity

I referred earlier to the 'perceived popularity' of a product and the role that advertising plays in it. Brand popularity can be self-fulfilling. If people see something as popular the chances are enhanced that, provided everything else is equal, they will follow suit and buy the brand. Perceived popularity can tip the balance.

Sometimes products gather momentum through their advertising. The brand is seen as increasingly popular. And just when it is about to

really catch on, the visibility and impetus suddenly stop. Why? Because 'the season' is over. This points to one key difference in marketing seasonal products—especially in the way one goes about developing a new brand.

The need for accelerated trial

With product categories that are seasonal, advertisers have limited time to build momentum. They have to make the product 'catch on' in much less time than they would normally have for a non-seasonal product. They are always racing to beat the seasonal clock.

Even with non-seasonal products there is an unwritten rule of thumb that you need to aim for maximum trial for a new brand in the first three to six months. Otherwise, it loses that sense of newness. It risks acquiring an image of having been around for a while and not having taken off. If this sets in, it makes gaining further trial all the more difficult to achieve.

With a seasonal product the problem is acute. If the advertising can't create a sense of the brand having taken off in the first season, chances are that by its return in the second season the brand will risk being perceived as 'old hat'. People will remember that it was around last season but 'didn't seem to catch on'. This can be the kiss of death.

Maximizing the proportion of people who try the product is crucial to success. Remember, a 20 per cent market share can be achieved in two very different ways:

- if only 20 per cent of people have tried the brand but they are buying it 100 per cent of the time;
- if 100 per cent of people have tried the brand but are buying it only 20 per cent of the time, i.e. once in every five times they buy the product category.

To give a brand the maximum chance of success it is important to aim for maximum trial as early as possible. If the trial rate at the end of the first season has only reached 25 per cent it means the brand is relying on a very high repeat-buying rate to achieve satisfactory market share and viability. More to the point, it will not be until next season that the brand will get a crack at the 75 per cent of consumers who have not yet tried the brand. By that time it may be too late.

The off-season pause

With seasonal products, the off-season period of inactivity is regarded by many advertisers as a temporary interruption. When it is over they expect to simply resume where they left off last season, in the same way as re-starting a video after pausing in freeze frame and expecting it to resume exactly where it left off.

But does it? It is dangerous to assume that even if it always has done that, it will do so again next time. Memories fade, attitudes change, people change and competitors may try to influence the market during the off season. If you have spent real effort and a lot of money during the season to capture the mental territory of the consumer's mind, can you leave the opening round of next season's battle to chance?

It is worth considering occupation strategies that attempt to hold on to the mental territory you captured during that off season.

Extending the season

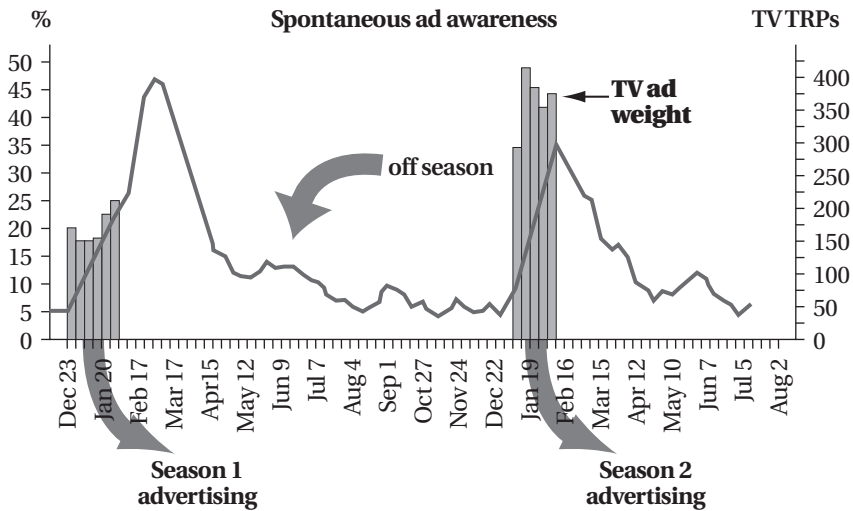
Lipton in the US very effectively expanded the tea 'season' into summer by promoting 'iced tea' so that today, a majority of all tea in the USA is consumed cold. In Australia, the 'speed kills' and 'Don't drink and drive' campaigns were traditionally seasonal. Now they run throughout the year, with demonstrable benefits. Kit Kat, formerly a winter product, extended its season from winter to embrace summer through its 'Cool Kat' campaign that urged us to keep our Kit Kats in the refrigerator and enjoy them cold.

The idea is to find ways to maintain during the off season that which has been built up in the season. This may be in people's minds or behavior or both.

An example

Figure 19.1 shows one example of a highly seasonal campaign. This was a 'save water' campaign which ran over two months each year. It was very successful. Note that it achieved about 48 per cent spontaneous advertising awareness in the first season.

The campaign was very successful . . . *while it was on air*. But it was on air for only two months of the year. This campaign built extremely good awareness but five weeks after the advertising stopped its effect had decayed and was virtually gone. Like 'speed kills' campaigns, this water campaign was aimed at influencing people's behavior. The need for the



Note: A seasonal advertising campaign that is successful but its effect is very shortlived.

Figure 19.1: Seasonal advertising campaign—spontaneous ad awareness. (Source: MarketMind)

behavior change is more acute in the key period, but it is also present throughout the year—albeit at a lower level.

A better strategy would have been to build the awareness in the key months (to the same or higher level) in the first year and then, instead of going off air completely until the next year, to implement a low-cost maintenance advertising campaign to run through the other ten months of the year. Instead of using such large media weights in that second season, it could have deployed the same budget throughout the year to implement a maintenance schedule of shorter-length TV ads. This alternative maintenance schedule could have alternated by having:

- one week on air followed by
- one week off air followed by
- one week on air, etc.

At a low exposure (a maintenance weight of say 75 TRPs per week), and/or reminder ads in magazines and newspapers in that off season, this organization would have spent the same amount of money but to much more continuous effect.

The point is that if you build public awareness to a high level and then let it come all the way down again by going off air completely, it takes just as much effort to build it from scratch next time. It is usually much more economical to build the awareness and then try to maintain it with lowered advertising weight or support media. The principle is that it takes more expenditure to get into people's minds in the first place than it does to stay there.

Get in early

If your product category is truly seasonal and you and your competitors always start advertising in a particular month, consider jumping the gun. Get in first. This recommendation is based on the principle that it is easiest to get into people's heads *when there is little or no competing advertising clutter*.

If you can capture the mental territory before your competitors come on air, your job, when they do come on air, is easier—a maintenance task, not a building task. You have already captured the mental territory and it is easier and less expensive in the face of clutter to hold the ground you have won. Getting in early can be an effective strategy. (But be sure to send in the occupation forces in the form of a maintenance campaign when the competitors come on air.)

Who determines seasonality?

Is your product truly seasonal? For some products, seasonality is almost dictated by what the advertisers do—or don't do—in the off season. With some products, all brands seem to observe a conventional promotional seasonal cycle. The dictum seems to be: We only advertise in the season.

As some of the previous examples show, it is sometimes the marketers as much as the consumers who determine if something is seasonal. If marketers believe it is seasonal, this is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Products are rarely as inherently seasonal as we are inclined to believe.

Take the soft drink market, for example. Users consume primarily because they are thirsty. And it is true people get thirstier more often in summer. Hence the soft drink product is seasonal. However, brands like Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola have been deliberately given a social overlay—an image that makes the drink function as a 'social lubricant' and not just as a simple thirst-quencher.

This adds functionality and at the same time reduces the seasonality

of these two brands compared to ordinary soft drink. Like beer, they tend to be consumed more in summer but are also drunk in winter in substantial volume for social reasons.

The changeover-to-daylight-saving trap

Seasonal products have limited peak season time on TV. However at certain times of the year, often the times when seasonal products need to advertise, there is a peculiar problem. In the summer holiday season for example, there is significant doubt about how many people are going to be away on vacation and will therefore not be as exposed to advertising.

Another, not so well recognized problem that is important in some countries with seasonal products is the changeover-to-daylight-saving trap. This is especially a trap for any brand whose manufacturer might think about relying heavily on advertising in prime time during the evening news. The changeover to daylight saving in summer means that a number of people this week, who last week at 6 p.m. were sitting in front of their TVs watching the news, may no longer be watching TV at that time. They may be out kicking a football or swinging a bat with their kids or doing something else in the new-found hour of daylight. Especially with seasonal products, beware this 'changeover-to-daylight-saving' trap.

Summary

There is limited time to build advertising momentum with seasonal products. Consider ways to extend the season and ways to hold on to the residual effect of your advertising during the off season. An 'occupation-force' strategy during the off season can often hold much of the mental territory. Be sure to get the jump on competitors by commencing seasonal advertising early—before the season proper. New product launches require maximum awareness and trial in the first season. Unless the brand is seen as successful in the first season, it risks being regarded as 'old hat' on return. For scheduling media, be mindful of the changeover-to-daylight-saving trap.

20 UNDERWEIGHT ADVERTISING: EXECUTION ANOREXIA

How many exposures does an ad need to be effective? And in what period of time? No one knows for sure. Another way of putting it is: is there a minimum threshold of media weight needed to make an ad campaign work? The answer seems to be ‘yes’.¹

A case example

I once saw a new campaign come very close to being cancelled by the client. A whole battery of effectiveness-tracking measures said the campaign was having a disappointing and marginal impact. The client was close to the point of concluding that the ads were ‘hopeless’.

The media weight for this campaign was around 150 TRPs per week. This means that the people who were the target market for the product were supposed to be exposed to it on average about 1.5 times a week.² At least that was what was planned. Before labeling any campaign a failure or concluding that ‘these ads don’t work’ it is crucial to look at the actual TRP figures, the actual *delivered*, as distinct from the planned, media weight.

Sometimes ads do not go to air because of some mix-up. Sometimes the buying of air time is not as good as it should be. Sometimes (as in the changeover to daylight saving, holiday periods, etc) there are not as many people watching TV as there were the previous week. In this example, when these actual TRP figures were obtained (some two months after the campaign had started), it emerged that only about 60 per cent of the planned weight was in fact achieved (i.e. about 90 TRPs per week).

Corrective action was taken and in the subsequent weeks the planned exposure rate, the full 150 TRPs per week, was achieved. With this weight the campaign went on to perform amazingly well in the test market and later nationally. The reason the campaign was not working originally had

little to do with the creativeness of the commercials. It was like listening to a signal from deep space. The signal was too faint. The volume had to be turned up.

Here was a perfectly good creative campaign which could have gone down in the annals of 'great advertising failures'. The problem was not the ads themselves but a level of exposure that was too low.

Execution anorexia

The difference between 150 and 90 TRPs a week may not seem like much. However, this campaign had three executions (three ads) being rotated on air in each week. This means that each ad was being exposed at the rate of only about 30 TRPs per week. This is a very low figure and evidently below a critical threshold for effectiveness—at least in that particular market.

There is a valuable lesson here. When planning a media schedule, the threshold TRP weights cannot be decided without taking account of the number of ad executions that will be used. The advertising weight must be set in terms of the number of TRPs per execution and not just in terms of an overall figure. Many advertisers use multiple executions (e.g. Coke, Toyota) but recognition of this point is all too often the exception rather than the rule. The rule is that in media planning it is important to factor into the advertising schedule the threshold number of TRPs per ad execution in addition to the overall campaign weight. (That is even more especially important if the executions share little in common.) Otherwise the campaign can end up, like this one, with execution anorexia and underweight advertising.

One execution or many?

This raises an important question. What is the optimum number of ad executions to air in any one week? One? Two? Three? Is it better to have one execution or many?

I wish I could tell you that the answer was straightforward and simple. It's not. One thing is for sure, however. Multiple executions have to be considered carefully in terms of tightness of integration, media weight, flighting of each execution and particularly the degree of involvement of the target audience. Especially with low-involvement products, the use of multiple executions can be counter-productive. I have seen as many as six ad executions used for the same brand in one week. Were they effective? No! If there is a general rule that emerges it is this: for low-involvement

products don't use multiple executions or if you do, make sure they are well integrated with each other and/or be prepared to back each one with substantial TRP weight in its own right.³

There are examples of tightly integrated campaigns where multiple executions have worked well but the general note should be one of caution. Being single-minded is usually best.

Low vs high involvement

How much media weight you need to get an effective response from advertising depends on the involvement of the audience as well as the number of ad executions you intend putting to air. Low- and high-involvement audiences process ads, and the information in them, quite differently.

Communicating to a target audience which is highly involved in what you have to say differs from communicating with people who don't care too much. How? Here is a potted summary:

- Highly involved target audiences are more motivated and actively looking for information.
- As a result the ad may require less repetition, and print media may often work very effectively.
- Advertising to highly involved audiences has been shown to be less subject to interference in memory when they see subsequent ads for competitive brands. The implication of this is that you should be able to get away with a lower share of voice (i.e. a lower share of the total ad spend in the product category) than would be the case for low-involvement products.
- Some evidence suggests that advertising to highly involved audiences is not as subject to minimum TRP thresholds as is advertising to low-involved audiences.
- Advertising to high-involvement audiences is less sensitive to the number of ad executions on air—but only relatively and it is important that the executions are integrated in some way. For example, a brand of door lock positioned on safety might have ad executions focusing on various reasons why it is safe i.e. one ad might focus on 'because it is drill resistant'; another 'because it is pick resistant'; and another 'because it has factory-only keys'.⁴ The message 'safe' is the constant. Only the 'reason why' changes with each execution so this is good integration.

Some guidelines for the low-involvement audience

A crucial difference with low-involvement products is that the advertising has to capture the attention of the low-involved consumer. This is certainly the case with most packaged goods.⁵ Advertising for low-involvement products puts a premium on highly creative and sometimes bizarre ad executions to make the advertising break through the clutter.

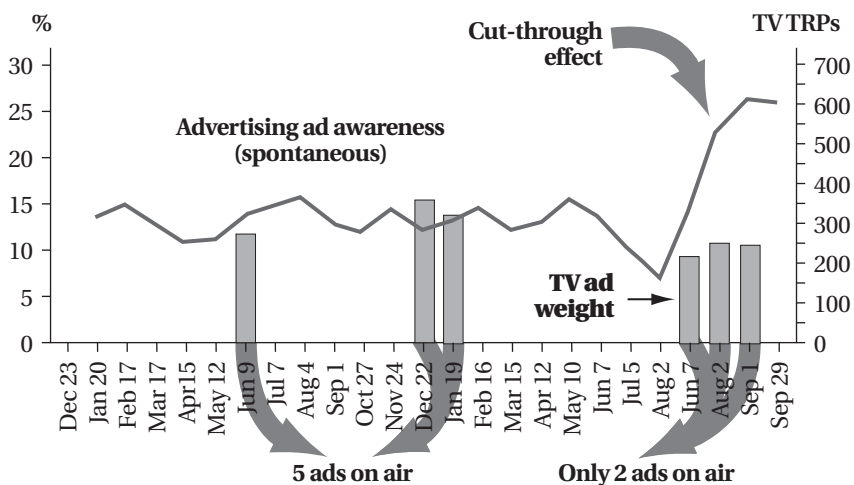
For low-involved audiences the overriding task is to break through the clutter of other ads and force people to notice the ad and its message. If you don't break through, the ad doesn't get noticed and the chances are that nothing happens. Consumers don't 'see' the ad and don't process the communication. (See Chapter 26, 'Mental reach'.)

The ad and the message needs to be very single-minded. Once you have forced attention, you have only limited time and tolerance to get your message across and have it processed effectively. The message has to be simple. The temptation to incorporate several messages in the same ad or in different ads needs to be cut off at the knees. An uninvolved audience just won't work hard enough to take in all the elements of your communication. If it requires anything other than easy processing, you have lost them.

Even when you get your message across with low-involved audiences, the way it has been processed makes it particularly subject to interference and memory degradation *through subsequent exposure to competitive commercials* for other brands. This is why, with low-involved audiences, repetition at that initial stage of getting into people's heads with the campaign in the first place is so necessary. With highly involved audiences the desired effect may often be achieved and maintained with much less repetition because a) the audience works harder on the message in the first place and b) this greater 'elaboration', as it is called, consolidates the information in memory, thereby rendering it less subject to subsequent interference and memory degradation from exposure to other competitive commercials.

With low-involved audiences you not only have to get the information in, you have to work to keep it there. This is where shorter-length commercials come into their own, along with print media and web ad tie-ins with the TV commercial—that is, to provide repetition and reinforcement. (See Chapter 18, 'Learning to use shorter-length TV commercials'.)

For all these reasons, the number of executions on air and the TRP weight behind each execution are critical for low-involved audiences.



Note: This graph shows greater overall advertisement cut-through associated with fewer on-air executions for this brand. Executions reduced from five to two in any one week had a dramatic effect on advertisement awareness.

Figure 20.1: The number of advertising executions. (Source: MarketMind)

Another case example

Research has revealed a number of occasions on which multiple executions have been a problem in effectively communicating a low-involvement product. Figure 20.1 illustrates one such case. This is a frequently purchased, low-cost and relatively low-involvement product.

This brand was advertised with up to five different ad executions i.e. five ads on air for the same brand. The company then cut back on the number of different executions being rotated on air. The difference is dramatic (see graph).

Mixed-involvement audiences

To make things even more complicated, some product categories have mixed audiences—something that some ad agencies do not seem to explicitly recognize in the ad planning process. For example, with most durable goods (cars, computers, appliances, home entertainment systems, etc) you have at one time some people who are ready to buy and highly involved and some who may not buy for several months or years and who are relatively little involved.

Audiences are rarely homogenous. Some people will be highly involved and some will be less involved. In the planning process the advertiser needs to know the mix of the target audience.

To take one example, the audience for new car ads is often thought to be 100 per cent high involvement because only people in the market for a new car are thought to be worth targeting. This is a mistaken view. Something like a third of the people who will buy new cars in the next three months don't yet know they will do so. These people are unaware of what is just around the corner.

Some of them will find their present car starting to break down over the next three months; or if not their car, their marriage or long-term relationship. So some will separate from their partners and find themselves in need of a different car. Some will be relocated in their jobs; and still others will experience some unexpected windfall such as an inheritance or a lottery win.

These are just some of the many things that put people into a market when they didn't expect to be there. Right now they may be low involved but very soon they may well be much more highly involved. So like it or not, in these categories an advertiser needs to communicate with both the uninvolved and the involved consumer. The ad strategy can ill afford to assume that the only people worth targeting and communicating with are the highly involved ones.

Summary

Not every ad campaign is going to succeed. But don't let your ad campaign die from underweight advertising. Here is a small check-list:

- Check that your *planned* reach, frequency and media weights are in fact achieved.
- Especially with low-involvement products, use a single execution unless there is a very good reason for doing otherwise.
- If you are using multiple executions, make sure you check for the possibility of execution anorexia. Check the number of TRPs per execution per week. (Execution anorexia can be fatal to a campaign's health.)
- As a rough rule of thumb, if you can't afford to put a reasonable number of TRPs per week behind each execution, don't risk using a multiple execution strategy. Stay with a single execution and do it well.
- Check the involvement mix of your audience.

21 WHY RADIO ADS AREN'T RECALLED

Why is a lot of radio advertising so poorly remembered? It doesn't have pictures and it doesn't have the reach of television, but is there more to it than that? Even saturation campaigns don't seem to make it into the consumer's mental filing cabinet to the extent that one might expect. For example, one 'successful' saturation radio campaign which ran for a sixteen-week period in a specific target market was one of the highest-scoring campaigns I have seen in regard to radio ad awareness, yet it did not get more than 40 per cent of listeners to spontaneously recall the advertising.

Attention and pictures

Radio is not TV and it is not a substitute for TV. It could be used more effectively, but advertisers often seem to use it wrongly. The two main problems with radio seem to be listener attention levels and the fact that radio advertising doesn't have pictures. Advertisers can do something about both of these factors in designing more effective radio ads and media schedules.

Radio competes with its environment for the listener's attention—much more so than TV, which usually has its own, relatively quiet exposure environment. When people watch TV they more often do so with fewer distractions. That is not to say that TV audiences are glued to the set. Brands in low-involvement product categories particularly have to rely on very creative ad executions to grab and hold their TV audience's attention.

Radio, however, competes with all sorts of things. At breakfast it competes with the clatter of cutlery, the sounds of breakfast preparation and breakfast conversation. Again, in the morning and drive-time slots, radio has to work exceptionally hard to break through a different kind of 'attentional clutter'. This 'clutter' is made up of the peak-hour traffic, the

business of driving, and passenger conversation, as well as the person's own thoughts.

So at certain times of the day, many listeners just aren't listeners in any full attentional sense. Radio's traditional listeners, who in its early days sat glued to programs like *Amos and Andy* or *The Goon Show* emanating from the bakelite mantle radio, have gone to television, MP3 players and the web. Nowadays, peak-time radio listeners are a low-involved lot. They are increasingly pressured from minute to minute by the many stimuli that compete for their attention.

Whether it is radio, TV, or point-of-sale advertising, the ad has to break through to deliver its message. At the same time it has to successfully register the correct brand. However, it is important with radio and low-involvement advertising generally not to look just for people's ability to recall the ad. Advertisers also need to look for behavior, attitude, image or salience effects before concluding simply from the lack of recall that the advertising is not working. (See Chapter 28, 'The buy-ology of mind'.)

Lessons for using radio

The message I want to communicate here is certainly not that advertisers should use less radio. That would be throwing out the baby with the bath water. Rather, the need is to use radio more intelligently and more effectively. Here are a few pointers:

- **Don't rely solely on recall as a measure of effectiveness.** Also look for other shifts, especially gradual image shifts and any influence on stimulating product-category consumption (as distinct from brand selection).
- **Use more selective time periods.** Clearly advertisers are likely to have more effect with radio (and TV) if they choose periods (or programs or stations) that offer less competition in the environment—less likelihood that the audience will be distracted. These may be the times when the listener base is at its lowest. So each spot may be more effective in itself, but amongst fewer people. This means using more spots but at a lower cost per spot.
- **Create better radio ads.** Put money into making better ads—ads that demand attention and break through. Too many radio ads are awful. There is a logical reason for this. Radio is regarded as the low-budget

medium. But keeping costs down at the expense of skimping on good writing and production seems to be the ultimate in false economy with radio.

- **Use TV, web, video (and perhaps even print) first to provide faces and visuals. Then generate reminder and reinforcement through radio.** Most people process something more easily and retain it better and longer when they associate pictures and faces with it. Pictures or 'visuals' act as memory hooks of the mind. This puts the focus on concrete messages and imagery. Use TV or the web or print media to give people the pictures and then use radio as a retrieval cue i.e. to *reinforce* the brand and the message that have already been associated with those pictures (for example you might use the soundtrack or audio excerpts from the TV commercial). Shorter-length TV commercials usually fail when used alone as attack forces. However, when used as occupation forces they can be remarkably effective. Radio can be used in the same way with low-involvement products. Establish the visual mental territory first with visual media and then tie in radio as a reminder/reinforcement. It takes more effort to get into people's heads than it does to stay there. Use the visual media for the attack. Use tie-in radio as a reinforcement/reminder.
- **Use radio to boost web ad effect.** The effect of radio when combined with web ads can be particularly attractive, as indicated by a number of research studies.¹
- **Take advantage of the immediacy of radio.** Exposure to advertising is attended to more and has more effect the closer the customer is to the purchasing occasion. Schedule radio tactically where possible to hit the maximum number of consumers immediately before the purchase occasion (e.g. prior to people's supermarket shopping.)
- **Take advantage of the flexibility and immediacy of radio to stimulate consumption.** For example, Campbell's Soups in the US sets aside a substantial budget each year to run radio commercials on days when a storm threatens.² People are more likely to think of soup and eat soup when the weather turns bad.
- **Mention the brand name in the first eight seconds and a minimum of three times during the ad.** This finding emerged from studies in the US of 30-second TV commercials. My guess is that it is probably even more important for radio than for TV.

Summary

The aim must be to break through the clutter and get attention in order to deliver the ad message, or the chances are that your communication won't have anywhere near the desired effect. The more attention an ad gets, the more effectively it is likely to communicate and the more it is likely to be recalled. If it gets only a low level of attention it is likely to be at best inefficient and at worst ineffective. It will certainly require a greater level of repetition.

There is scope for using radio a lot more intelligently and to greater effect. Radio is a medium that is rarely well done!

22 MAXIMIZING AD EFFECTIVENESS: DEVELOP A UNIQUE AND CONSISTENT STYLE

Category conformity

Sameness, sameness everywhere! You can't see the forest for the trees. Too many product categories gravitate towards a single style of 'look-alike' advertising. The style becomes 'generic' to the category and we end up with entrenched category conformity.

For many years analgesics (aspirin, paracetamol) was one of these categories. Almost every brand's ad showed a glass with a tablet being dropped into it while the voiceover advised: 'If pain persists, see your doctor.' This is what I call the chameleon commercials syndrome. Instead of standing out from their environment, ads like this blend in with and virtually disappear into the background. The problem is that the ads are not distinctive enough to break through the clutter in the category and deliver the brand and the message.

In one dramatic case, before the commercial went to air I showed several still shots from it to respondents and they were asked if they had seen this ad recently. The ad was for a brand of pain reliever. Forty-three per cent of the group claimed to have seen the ad on TV recently—before the ad went to air. Not surprisingly, most of these people said they had no idea who the advertiser was, or thought the ad was for some other advertiser.

How can people claim to have seen a commercial that has never been aired? What does this mean? It means that the visuals (and the audio) in the commercial were generic. They were similar to those used by other brands in the category. They could belong to anybody. If the brand were changed, it would do no violence to this commercial. One brand name could have fitted this ad just as well as any other.

Beware of generic elements in commercials, whether these are visual

or verbal. A high level of false recognition before the ad goes to air is a good early warning indicator of this. It is telling you that the advertising is 'look-alike' advertising i.e. an ad that people already have a mental model of. If such advertising is allowed to go ahead, many of those who do see the ad will not remember who the advertiser was.

So here's a suggestion to improve your advertising. Conduct a small test. Take your ad. If it is a TV ad turn down the soundtrack and, as you watch it, imagine a competitor's brand being substituted for your own brand. You can do the same thing with a print ad. Imagine a competitor's brand substituted for your own. Does it do violence to the ad execution? Or does the competitor's brand fit just as well as your own? If a competitor's brand would fit just as well, the chances are that your ad execution is lacking something and is suffering from 'category conformity'. The ad execution that works best is the execution that uniquely ties in to both brand and message.

Mistaken identity

One of my acquaintances wears a distinctive style of clothing. I can pick him out easily in a crowd. One day in a crowded airline lounge I caught sight of him, grabbed his arm and said 'Hi, Bob.' It turned out to be a case of mistaken identity: I realized that Bob had come to 'own' that style or position in my mind. Once somebody becomes inextricably associated with a particular style, it is natural to think of them whenever you see somebody dressed the same way.

Mistaken identity also occurs with commercials. If your brand is identified with a particular style, then anyone else who tries to use that style risks advertising for you.

'Owning' a style

In the USA, put a stage coach in a bank ad and you will communicate Wells Fargo. In bank advertising Wells Fargo 'owns' stage coaches. They are almost a surrogate for the brand just as the red and white bull's-eye is a surrogate for the Target department store brand.

As an example of another global style consider the iPod silhouette ads. In the category of sound devices, iPod owned this style. Any competitor copying it would very likely do a great job of advertising for iPod instead of their own brand.

The consistent style is helped by consistency in logo and packaging.

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1. All investments carry some risk. What level of risk is most comfortable for you? (Investment risk is measured on a scale of 1-100.)

2. How often do you want to make contributions to your investment?

3. How often do you want to make withdrawals from your investment?

4. What is your target investment objective? (See our Glossary of Investment Objectives at [www.metlife.com](#).)

5. How long do you want to hold your investment?

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1-800-MetLife
GET MET, IT PAYS!

THIS METLIFE DISABILITY INCOME QUIZ CAN HELP YOU ANTICIPATE LIFE'S NAUZY SURPRISES.

1. How often do you want to make contributions to your investment?

2. How often do you want to make withdrawals from your investment?

3. How long do you want to hold your investment?

4. How much do you want to invest?

5. How much do you want to invest each month?

6. How much do you want to invest each year?

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100. How much do you want to invest each year?

GET MET, IT PAYS!
1-800-MetLife

**YOU HEARD RIGHT:
WE REDUCED OUR TERM LIFE RATES BY 23%.**

1-800-MetLife
GET MET, IT PAYS!

Figure 22.1: Consistency—MetLife advertising. (Reprinted with permission from Metropolitan Life Insurance Company 1999)

For example, capitalizing on the easily recognizable and always consistent brand-logo treatment that is on every wrapper, Snickers ran a billboard and bus sides campaign *without ever mentioning Snickers by name*. They featured a quirky word (like ‘Hungerectomy’ and ‘Substantialicious’) designed to amuse and trigger us to think about the ad and of course think about a Snickers. The brand was unmistakable because of this consistency of style.

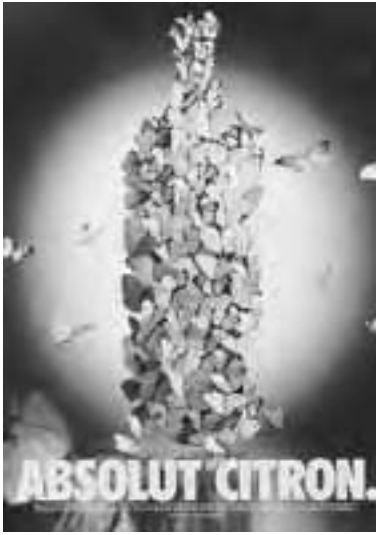


Figure 22.2: Consistency—Absolut vodka

An example of using characters as the consistent style is a series of ads for MetLife in the USA which has for many years advertised using one of the Peanuts characters to put a happy recognizable face on something that would otherwise be really boring. MetLife ‘owns’ this style and if any other competitive company tried to use a Peanuts character in their advertising, they would risk doing an advertising job for MetLife.

This is exactly what happened in Australia when a soup manufacturer tried to use a similar style to that used for many years by the market leader, Heinz. The Heinz brand outside the USA has a high profile as a canned soup manufacturer and for many years used high-profile presenters. Along came competitor Continental soup which, for one year only, tried to use a similar high-profile presenter in the form of Dame Edna Everage (an alter ego of Australian entertainer Barry Humphries). What happened? The commercials broke through and people remembered the Dame Edna commercials. But almost as many remembered them as being for Heinz as for Continental. They were mistakenly recalled as being ads for Heinz because Heinz ‘owned’ that ‘high-profile presenter’ style of advertising in the soup category. When a brand comes to ‘own’ a unique and consistent style in its category, it prevents any attempt by its competitors to copy what it is doing without giving that brand free advertising.

Absolut vodka has been another classic success story of a brand that

has capitalized on a unique and consistent style of advertising. Absolut used this unique and consistent style based on the shape of its bottle and its name, and until it recently changed Absolut managed to maintain this for over a quarter of a century.

Other examples include:

- In its own unique style Chanel No. 5 consistently features multiple bottles on a yellow ‘see through’ style background.
- Altoids. Through consistent use of a pale green background, the style instantly communicates the brand. The very first ad featured a strongman flexing his muscles with the headline ‘Nice Altoids’, followed by similar quirky representations of strength (such as the dominatrix, a girl with whip) and alluding to the strong flavor of the mints.

The award for boring sameness in ads probably has to go to the retail industry and in particular supermarkets. From time to time this changes a little but all too often we still see ads where there is nothing distinctive to differentiate one advertised store from any other. In department stores, apparel stores and home hardware stores there has been much more individuality. Target has been a standout.

To escape the category conformity trap it is useful to understand some of the key dimensions of style (see Chapter 10, ‘What’s this I’m watching?’), then apply this knowledge in your search for opportunities to differentiate your advertising and develop a unique style. A key dimension of style is constancy because of how constancy influences memory retrieval.

Style influences memory retrieval

Monet, Kandinsky and Picasso are all artists who painted. But their styles were totally different. A style implies some sort of constancy. That is, the execution varies but some element remains the same. As a result, you don’t have to be told that a painting is a Monet. You don’t have to inspect its signature. You know it from the style.

There is constancy in the style that acts as a memory trigger—a retrieval cue. It automatically retrieves from memory the identity (the brand) associated with it. Far too many advertisers have only one constant in their advertising from one campaign to the next and that is the brand or logo. The brand or logo is important: it is the equivalent of the advertiser’s signature.

However, the most successful advertisers and the most successful artists don't rely on signatures alone: they have a unique and consistent style!

So what types of constants are on the menu? What should you be looking to include in your advertising? Here are some thought-starters on things that might potentially be constants you can use.

Slogans

A word, a phrase or a sentence can function as a constant. This is so common today that we even have a word for it—'slogan'. When we hear the expression 'Just do it' what do we think of? We don't need to be told who the advertiser is. We know the ad has to be for Nike. Similarly, when we see the expression 'The ultimate driving machine' we know it has to be BMW. In the USA the expression 'You're in good hands' can mean only one brand if it is an insurance ad and that is Allstate. Slogans are obvious constants. But there are other types of constants, discussed below, that we don't use as frequently. What makes it more difficult to discuss them is that we do not have any unique words, like 'slogan', to sum them up.

Symbols

Nike has come to own the 'swoosh' symbol so completely that it is synonymous with the brand. You need only see the swoosh on some article of clothing and it immediately registers Nike in your mind. This means that ad branding is not just dependent on the brand name. Indeed this advertiser has flaunted its ability to advertise effectively without actually using the word Nike by just using the swoosh as a sign-off in some of their ads.

In a similar way Mercedes uses the 3-point star symbol. At Grand Slam tennis competitions the symbol often appears embedded in the tennis net and immediately communicates Mercedes.



Figure 22.3: The Nike 'swoosh' symbol.

Disney ads always have the Mickey Mouse ears and/or Cinderella's castle included as constant symbols. The point is that symbols are one form of constant that can act as a powerful branding device in the total style mix.

Visual devices

An action is used very rarely as a constant but it can be quite effective. For example, Nestea always included in their ads someone falling

backwards into a swimming pool. Tinactin treatment for athlete's foot used for many years the action of a foot on fire and the tag line 'Tinactin . . . puts the fire out'. Similarly in Australia, for several cough and cold seasons, ads showing people with sore throats could have been for any brand of lozenge except as soon as the people started 'breathing out fire', everyone knew it was for Anticol.

When a brand uses a visual device like these as a constant, it comes to establish it as something that brand 'owns'. We can't see the device without thinking of that brand.

It doesn't have to be an action. Milk has for years used the milk moustache successfully. The milk moustache device even carried through to chocolate milk. And globally the Energizer bunny represented a constant icon associated with longer lasting batteries ('Keeps on keeping on').

Sometimes these highly visual and dramatic action devices are used just as part of the sign-off in the brand's ads. For example in the USA, Sprint (the long distance telephone company) consistently used a pin dropping in slow motion, providing a visual for the telephone number to call, 1-800 PinDrop. The Toyota jump is a further example. The freeze-frame jump that often went along with the lyric 'Oh, what a feeling' was as an action constantly incorporated into the signature sign-off for Toyota in various parts of the world for many years.



Figure 22.4: The Energizer bunny. (Used by permission of Eveready Battery Company Inc. Energiser Bunny® is a registered trademark of Eveready Battery Company Inc.)

Gesture

Sometimes these visual devices take the form of gestures. For example in the USA, ads for the insurance company Allstate featured an open uplifted palm in every commercial accompanied by the line: 'We're the good hands people . . . You're in good hands with Allstate.' This and the Sure deodorant campaign's 'Raise your hand if you're Sure' are

examples of tying your brand to an action that is commonly observed in everyday life. (When Sure brand deodorant urged audiences to ‘Raise your hand if you’re Sure’ there were pictures of people all over raising their hands without, of course, any perspiration marks on their clothing.) Something like ‘raise your hand’ can become a cue that almost involuntarily brings the brand to mind.

A simple gesture used as a constant can be very effective, especially if it can be easily mimicked by the audience. Mimicry can be performance enhancing and help broadcast an ad and its brand by giving it free registrations beyond the advertising itself. For example, in the USA at one time everyone was encouraged by introductory ads for a new Dodge Neon to say ‘Hi’ to the Dodge Neon, with the result that kids could be seen calling out ‘Hi’ as a Neon drove down the street. The technique is not new but it is effective. Way back in the 1960s, in Australia, the ‘Hey, Charger’ campaign for the Chrysler Charger did a similar thing. The ads showed people holding up two fingers in a V sign and saying, ‘Hey, Charger!’ Anyone driving a Chrysler Charger could expect to be greeted by people making the ‘Hey, Charger’ gesture. Kids in particular love such mimicry, which can range from V signs to hand raising to making a flapping wings action, as was used by the Chicken Tonight brand.

Presenter

Sometimes a presenter—often a celebrity—is used as the constant. If it is a celebrity, this also helps the advertising break through. In past years we have seen Michael Jordan for Gatorade, Kathie Lee for Carnival Cruise, and Cindy Crawford for Revlon Color-Stay. Despite the death of KFC presenter Colonel Sanders, KFC managed to resurrect the presenter icon by bringing him back as an *animated* character.

It is worth noting, however, that the person as constant does *not* have to be a ready-made celebrity. The alternative is the ‘do it yourself’ celebrity (or DIY celebrity for short) created by the advertising agency itself. Examples include the Maytag man and Wendy the Snapple lady. We may not know their real names, but they may become consistent visual properties for the advertisers. Another alternative is for a proprietor to consistently front the commercials such as Jay Bush and his dog Duke do with Bush’s baked beans ads in the USA. Some of the original DIY celebrities were cartoon characters: Tony the Tiger for Kellogg’s Sugar Frosties; Snap, Crackle and Pop for Rice Bubbles. There are many candidates for

constants and many possibilities. Some have been used extensively; others represent untapped opportunities.

Characters

The constant may be characters who always appear but who are not necessarily presenters. Examples include:

- the Marlboro cowboy
- The Aflac duck
- Jack for Jack in the Box restaurants
- the Michelin man
- Rob, the dentist who uses Oral B toothbrushes
- identical twins for Wrigley's Doublemint gum, acting as a mnemonic to reinforce the slogan: *Double your pleasure double your fun with Wrigley's doublemint gum.*

Layout/format

Some brands make effective use of a unique layout. In remaining constant it may come to instantly identify a particular brand. Absolut vodka has been very successful using its bottle shape in various guises both as its branding constant and also its layout. Similarly, Altoids uses its packs on a pale green background as the context for its constant layout.

Music

Music can function wonderfully well as a retrieval cue. The table below shows some of the songs used by various brands in their advertising. While music is frequently used in commercials, it is used surprisingly rarely as a deliberate constant, across campaigns.

Sounds/sonic branding

It is sometimes amazing what can act as a retrieval cue. I discovered this while once tracking for Nabisco. The sign-off for each Nabisco commercial was the brand. The brand name was sung, Na . . . bis . . . co . . . followed by a little ping.

One could be forgiven for believing that the ping was irrelevant, incidental and hardly even noticeable. It was just a sound effect that punctuated the brand sign-off. However, when the ping was temporarily

Table 22.1: Some examples of popular music used in commercials

Song	Product	Song	Product
Beatles: <i>All you need is love</i>	Luvs diapers	Cole Porter: <i>Don't fence me in</i>	Embassy Suites
Dinah Washington: <i>Relax Max</i>	Doubletree Hotels	<i>Sing, sing, sing</i>	Nissan
<i>The best is yet to come</i>	Nestlé	Gershwin: <i>Someone to watch over me</i>	H&R Block
<i>You are my sunshine</i>	Johnson & Johnson	<i>I want to take you higher</i>	AT&T
<i>The more I see you</i>	Estée Lauder	Marlena Dietrich: <i>Falling in love again</i>	Mercedes Benz
Gershwin: <i>Rhapsody in blue</i>	United Airlines	<i>Peter Gunn</i> theme	Apple computers

dropped to make room for a promotional tag to be included at the end of the ad, an amazing thing happened. The ads did not break through as much. More importantly, they lost a lot of their ability to link the execution in people's minds with the Nabisco brand. The principle was crystal clear. Even a simple sound like a little 'ping' can have far-reaching mnemonic effects if kept constant. Intel harnessed this principle with their musical string of bleeps now unmistakably associated with Intel. In more recent years this tactic has been labeled *sonic branding*. Think of it as the aural equivalent of a graphic logo.

Color

What about color? Can color function as a retrieval cue? No doubt it can, but I can't think of many good examples of where it has been used in TV commercials as a constant. Chanel No. 5 uses yellow, as does Kodak. Pepto Bismol use hot pink. And De Beers used the black and white silhouette style commercial to good effect. But there seems to be surprisingly little use of constant color specifically related to commercials themselves, although color is more often carried across from the brand colors. For example BP has certainly used the masses of green and gold to great effect in the design of its service stations. Shell is similarly identified by yellow

and red. While in soft drinks Coke is red and Pepsi is blue (Pepsi changed some years ago from green).

Others

Various other things could serve as constants but have rarely, if ever, been used. For example, there is no reason why one could not make more use of things like:

- a place i.e. always incorporating the same well-known place in the executions for the brand (as Transamerica does for insurance—see Figure 22.5)
- a feeling
- an emotion.



Figure 22.5: Transamerica ads show the landmark Transamerica building.

These are all potential memory cues that could enhance the ability of an ad to automatically trigger recognition of the brand identity. The general point is that the ad does not have to rely on the brand as the only constant.

When used consistently, such memory cues help develop a style that is unique to the brand advertiser because they become part of the brand identity—just as the flashy style of dress became part of our friend Bob’s identity or image. They are symbols as well as memory hooks.

Voiceover . . . and over and over and over

One of the key dimensions of style is the use of voiceover. As discussed in Chapter 10, voiceover seems to be ubiquitous in TV advertising. While it has the advantage of being cheaper and, in an increasingly global world, more flexible, using voiceover is almost always less effective than using on-camera presenters, whether direct or indirect.

Voiceover does not break through anywhere near as effectively as using on-screen speech and I have seen this many, many times in the course of tracking various campaigns. However, there is voiceover and voiceover. And just so we don't toss out the baby with the bath water, let me be clear that I am talking about traditional voiceover with on-screen demonstrations or illustrations.

The traditional voiceover style

This traditional style uses voiceover with on-screen illustration. In its loud form with fast cuts this is the classic retail advertising style (e.g. supermarket weekly specials). In its more subdued form, with slower cuts and more extended scene shots, it is used by car manufacturers, perfume manufacturers and so on. This traditional voiceover, when used for packaged goods, cars and the like, does not break through anywhere near as well as the voice of a person speaking on-screen.

Musical voiceover with visual illustration

This is typified by someone singing for the commercial, but not appearing on screen. This style engages the viewer as a passive observer, a bystander enjoying the entertainment. The voiceover is talking/singing to the on-screen character/s. The viewer is expected to identify with the on-screen character/s and hence the message is received indirectly. The musical voiceover appears to be addressing the on-screen character/s rather than the viewer directly.

A subtle but important variation on this is where the on-screen character/s are not speaking but the voiceover is meant to represent what they are saying or thinking. The on-screen character/s are 'sharing their thoughts' with the viewer. Because these are in the form of a sung voiceover, the sense of being 'talked to' directly is very much reduced and there is a particular style and feeling to the ad.

The integral constant

The constant (character, gesture, sound or whatever) may become associated with the brand just through paired association. Ideally, however, it is better if you can find something that is, or can be made into, something that is integral to your brand identity.

For example, Aflac insurance in the USA had such success with the duck in their commercials that they added the duck into the brand logo so that the two would work integrally together. By contrast, the pink bunny in the battery ads is a constant character but is not integral to Energizer (except by simple paired association). It would be possible to take Energizer out of the commercial and substitute Duracell without doing any real violation to the commercial. Constants like these that rely entirely on paired association are potentially subject to more competitive memory interference and forgetting. (Is the bunny in those battery ads for Duracell? Or Energizer?) Others (like the milk moustache) are unmistakably for their particular product because they are more integral to the brand.

Ad style—the brand's attire

A brand's advertising needs to be thought of as one of its most visible features. It is an attribute of the brand, no less real than the price, the package, and what is inside it. A brand's advertising represents the brand's attire if you like. Imagine if your mother walked in with her eyebrow pierced, sporting a tattoo and dressed like a sixteen-year-old. Just as it would be disorienting if our family, friends and acquaintances suddenly became wildly inconsistent in the way they dress, so too do we expect the brands we value to maintain a reasonable degree of consistency in their substance, their image and their dress. If the brand keeps changing its style of attire capriciously every few months it is not only disorienting, it is difficult to get to know the brand. So we expect brands to remain true to themselves if we are going to get to know them and be attracted to them.

Traditionally, advertisers have not been encouraged by ad agencies to get involved in advertising style. Some creatives fear that constants like those discussed above can all too easily become 'creative handcuffs' that restrict their freedom and make it harder to come up with great ideas. There is some truth to this. Just as a constant strategy constrains the creative team to only those ideas which are *on-strategy*, so too does

a constant style constrain the team to ideas that can be executed *on-style* i.e. consistent with the brand's style.

A brand's advertising style is a component of its ad strategy because it is part of the way the brand's communications are identified in people's minds. Advertising is part of a brand's wardrobe attire. The brand's advertising constants and its advertising style are therefore valuable equities that with successful brands become woven into the fabric of that brand, constituting part of its heritage and thereby lending stronger identification and presence to it. Hence it is a legitimate component of the strategy brief to build in a legitimate constraint in regards to ad style within which the creative team must work.

The winds of change are beginning to blow and an increasing number of advertisers and agencies recognize the benefits of maintaining a unique and consistent style. The style you choose can be a powerful form of nonverbal communication that identifies you and your ads.

Summary

Style is such a subtle characteristic of advertising that our language is hardly adequate for analyzing and discussing it. To maximize ad effectiveness, maintain a unique and consistent style. In order to do this it is useful to understand how style varies. Style is like hair: it needs careful grooming, it is crucial to your identity, and how you look depends on how you cut it!

A consistent brand strategy supported by a strong symbol can produce an enormous cost advantage in implementing communication programs. It is much less costly to reinforce an established image than to create a new one.

David Aaker¹

23 SEQUELS

Sequels are a particular form of advertising style where the character/s are held constant and become associated with the brand. Sequels are something of a natural answer to the often over-exaggerated problem of ‘wear-out’.¹

Why is it that every new campaign for a brand has to be a total change? If your ad or campaign is worn out, it usually means people are bored with it or irritated by it. If you develop an entirely new ad that bears little if any relationship to the old one, then out goes another baby complete with the bath water!

Why change *everything* when your ad wears out? All too often, we seem driven to come up with an entirely new ad concept. The message may be the same but the new execution is a total departure from the old. We may have just spent a year and \$30 million to break through the clutter—to build a strong awareness of the ad in people’s minds. It has been a hard, competitive and expensive exercise but we have succeeded in taking the high ground. The ad campaign now dominates the category in share of mind. Then suddenly, for some reason, someone decides to change the ad. The focus is now on unleashing some other, entirely different type of ad execution. Why do so many advertisers make it hard for themselves by being intent on doing it all over again from scratch?

‘Wear in’

Think of a new ad as having to ‘wear in’. Like a new shoe, it may take a little time. The better the quality of the shoe the less time it should take to wear in. Some ads wear in very quickly. A great creative execution can capture the mental ground very quickly with a minimum of media weight. Other ads are of lesser creative quality and require more time and media weight to wear in. Unfortunately there are very few great creative executions.

Most ads are more pedestrian and reliant on many media bursts over a period of time to build the assault and then hold the mental territory.

Residual recall barriers to mental entry

The more successful an old ad is in capturing and holding the mental ground, the longer it remains in people's minds even after the advertising is removed. (This is one reason why it is difficult for a new competitor to break through in the face of a long-advertised market leader.) When a totally new ad for a brand is launched, it will be some time before the old one disappears from people's minds. In fact, the more successful and better-performing the old ad, the longer it will dominate and the longer it will take for the new ad to wear in.

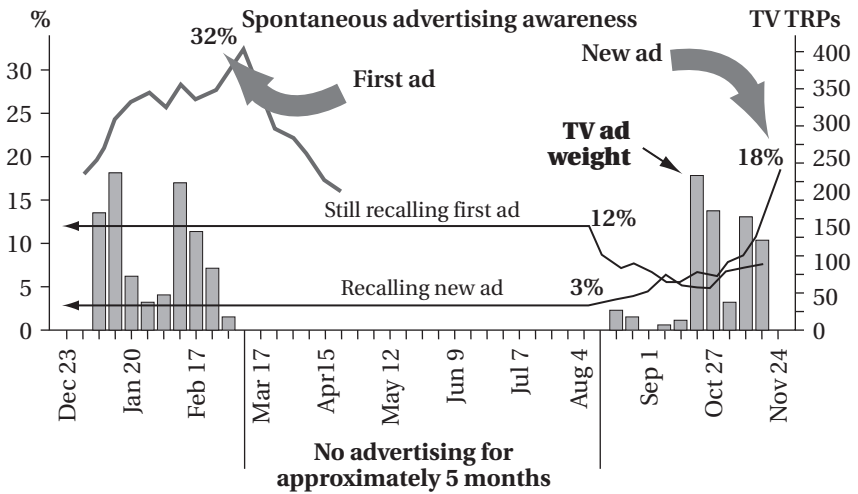
A truly great ad execution does not take much time to wear in. But if it comes hard on the heels of another good performer, it will generally take longer. This is because it takes some time for the new ad to displace all those well-consolidated memories that surround the old ad and are linked to brand recall and recognition.

The consumer's mind is not a vacuum. It retains for some time the residual memories of the last ad for a brand. And this can act as an inhibitor or a 'barrier to entry' for the new ad.

An example of this is illustrated in Figure 23.1. An old ad dominated for seven or eight months after it had come off air even while a new ad was being aired. The bars represent the weekly media weight (TRPs). The lines represent advertising awareness for i) the old ad and then ii) a new ad for the same brand. There are a few points to note:

- The first ad peaked in August/September (at 32 per cent recall rate).
- With no further screenings, its recall rate declined.
- Despite not being on air it was still in people's minds five months later (at 12 per cent).
- In the meantime, an entirely new ad had been introduced and aired.
- Not until ten weeks later did the new ad break through and dominate over the old ad in people's minds i.e. the old ad held sway in people's minds for seven to eight months.

We might note that while this 'in-fighting between ads' is going on in people's minds, the sum total of ad recall for the brand (i.e. the old plus the new) is very low. It is not until the new ad breaks through and begins



Note: Despite not being on air, the first ad was still in 12% of people's minds five months later. Not until about ten weeks after the new advertisement was introduced did it break through and dominate over the old one in people's minds.

Figure 23.1: Residual recall of old and new advertisements. (Source: MarketMind)

to dominate that net ad awareness for the brand starts to return to its previous levels.

The implication of this is that considerable time and media money could be saved if only the advertiser could somehow bypass or avoid this transition period when there is 'in-fighting' in memory between ads. Is there a solution? Yes!

Greater use of sequels

Modern movie-makers know that it is better to build on something you have already established than to start from scratch each time. In movie-making in the last quarter of a century there has been a multitude of sequels, including *Shrek*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Spiderman*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *Indiana Jones*, *Rambo*, *Mad Max*, *Die Hard*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Jaws*, *Home Alone*, *Gremlins*, and *Terminator*. For longevity *Rocky I, II, III, IV, V* and finally, *Rocky Balboa* have been outstayed only by the inimitable *James Bond*. They all testify to the success of the sequel strategy.

The success of this strategy consists of harnessing the interest and familiarity that has already been built by a previous success with a movie

(the equivalent of a successful ad ‘execution’) and tying in the next movie (the next execution) to the consumer recall of the previous one. This is such a clearly successful strategy, so why do we so often launch totally new campaigns after the old one has had its day? Why not make more use of sequels, as has proved to be successful for movies?

A few great sequel ads

One of the most successful sequel campaigns in the USA began in 2000 and was deployed for many years by the insurance company Aflac. All the commercials featured the live duck that became one of America’s favorite brand icons.² The duck in the ads quacked an answer, ‘Aflac’ (that sounded like a double quack), whenever various characters asked ‘Where do you get (supplementary) insurance?’ The duck was the constant character and it was so successful over so many years that it became part of the brand logo.

A sequel offers continuity of style (see previous chapter) where one or more of the characters are held constant. Apple did this with its two characters PC and Mac representing the PC as a nerdy, stuffy, older guy and the Mac as a cool, creative younger guy. A decade before that, across the globe the budding romance between the character Gillian and her next door neighbor unfolded over convivial coffee and many sequels and the coffee just happened to be a Nestlé brand. This campaign started in the UK for Nescafé Gold and was used in the USA for Taster’s Choice and in Australia for Nescafé. It portrayed an ongoing flirtation between two neighbors when one of them runs out of coffee and turns to the other to borrow some. Ultimately the campaign shaded into the next generation of characters as the focus shifted to Gillian’s daughter.

Over the years there have been some great sequel ads like this—built around holding the characters constant. Wendy the Snapple lady in the USA was created by the advertisers as a receptionist character for Snapple drinks who read the fan mail sent to the company by consumers. Wendy’s quirky New York attitude and humor ran for years as the many sequels drove Snapple along in the non-carbonated soft drinks category.

What the character Wendy did for Snapple, Mr Bean did for Barclays Card in the UK in a series of sequels that also ran for many years. And for Oral B toothbrushes, in a campaign that started in Australia and eventually went global for Oral B, the dentist character always brushing his teeth

with his back to the camera was Rob ('This man is a dentist. . . . we can't show you his face on camera'). Eventually the ads showed Rob's young son alongside him, also back to the camera, using an Oral B toothbrush. Sequels in this way can offer a clever, smooth transition to the targeting of the next generation of buyers for the brand.

In the USA many sequels of white haired Orville Redembacher, a maker of popcorn, smoothly transitioned to his grandson. Orville appeared in all his own ads for many years, proud as he could be about his company and its popcorn, which had his image on the package. His grandson was introduced into the ads, appearing for a while with Orville in what was apparently a bridging campaign before Orville sadly died soon thereafter.

Resisting 'natural' forces

An anecdote often related in the ad industry tells of the head of a company complaining to his ad agency that fourteen agency people work on the brand but he never sees any changes. To which the canny punch-line response is: 'We have fourteen people working on your business precisely to see that nothing ever changes!'

Constancy in style in sequels such as this takes a lot of discipline on the part of the advertiser and the agency in order to keep them going. This is because the people involved tend to get bored with the characters and see them as 'creative handcuffs'. Also, brand managers frequently tend to move on after a couple of years and any new brand manager naturally would like to put his/her own 'creative stamp' on the brand through introducing a totally new campaign rather than continuing to develop the old one. It takes discipline from the top management levels for a company to resist these 'natural' forces and determine to keep things on track.

With a sequel the ad doesn't have to wear in. Nor does it have to displace what is already there. It just hooks in immediately to existing memories. No waiting. No delay!

Continuity is the key

Like a good soap opera program, such examples hold constant the main character/s and vary the situations. When new characters are introduced they are introduced through their relationship or relevance to the established characters. Each new ad is like a new episode. It provides continuity

and the communications from the brand form a continuous unfolding story.

The important thing is that the new ad has a meaningful relationship with the one before; it is encoded or linked into the existing memory like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which fit together. In this way people can file the two ads together in memory and retain both. I have previously likened this to storing things in a mental filing cabinet (see Chapter 15). Many people defer office filing. It's a chore. People are even less motivated to file ads in their mental filing cabinets, let alone file them carefully or correctly. They have little motivation to store a new ad in their mental filing cabinet at all—let alone under the correct brand name.

However, if something in the new ad immediately reminds them of something already stored there and then clearly presents a further development to it, the job is done almost automatically for the consumer. Instead of having to store everything that comes in as a separate file, we will store anything new that is related to an existing item in the most obvious existing file. This saves us having to create an entirely new file for every new thing, every new ad, that comes in.

The more closely the contents of a particular file are related, the more it can act as a chunk—an integral whole in memory. *Human memory works best when new things that are introduced have an integral fit with, or can be related in some way to, old things that already exist in memory.*³

Owning an ad style

Sequels are the epitome of maintaining a constant style. Absolut vodka had a unique style built entirely within print medium. This clearly illustrates how it is possible for a brand to own an advertising style and maintain it for over a quarter of a century.

The advantage in owning a style is that when a viewer sees that style of ad, it instantly triggers an association with the brand. The brand comes to stand for the style and the style comes to stand for the brand. So if a competitor should try to use the same style, he/she risks communicating the wrong brand (your brand) and doing an advertising job for you. It will be difficult for any other spirit brand to use the Absolut style without advertising Absolut, as it will be difficult for any other insurance company to use a cartoon character without advertising MetLife.

If you see an ad that shows a Peanuts character, which company do you think of? MetLife of course, which has been clearly associated with

that style or mnemonic. It now owns that execution style. Not all ads are created equal. A sequel holds the character/s constant and varies the situations such that the unfolding brand communications are identified with the character/s. Sequels have a lot going for them. Too many ads start anew every time.

Summary

If your old ad has been successful but is now wearing out, consider a sequel rather than a totally new ad. If you do have to change horses and go for an entirely new ad, and if your past advertising has been very successful, then expect the new ad to take some time to 'wear in'. If you hit on a unique style that works, then continue it in the next ad. Strive to 'own' that style in the consumer's mind.

24 CORPORATE TRACKING OF IMAGE AND ISSUES

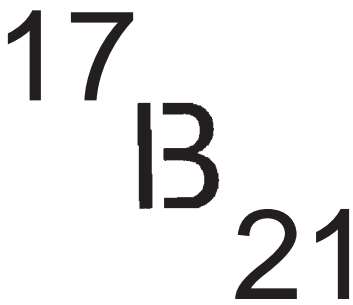


Figure 24.1: What do you see?

Look at the figure. I want you to think of the thing in the middle as a company. What do you see? You see the number 13 of course. Think of it as company 13. Note that it is surrounded by companies 17 and 21. Now read on and we will see the relevance of this when we come back to it later.

We saw in an earlier chapter that the same person, brand or company can be seen in different ways depending on the frame of reference we bring to it.

Image is elusive. Your own image stares you in the face every morning, but do you have in your mind's eye the way you see yourself or the way others see you? Clothes, cosmetics, possessions and reputation can sometimes perform startling transformations of image and completely change the way others perceive us. Image is in the eye of the beholder!

The opponents of corporate image and corporate advertising argue that this is irrelevant for companies; that people buy products, they buy brands, but they don't buy companies. Even if it were true that corporate image has no effect on consumer behavior, how people perceive the company would still be important because a well-known and well-respected company will always enjoy advantages in at least two non-consumer markets.

First, it will attract and retain better quality employees. A well-known and well-respected company is very different from a nonentity. When you are asked where you work, the importance of a corporate image is quickly apparent. If there is an instant recognition of the name and what it stands

for, the response is very different from a response like: ‘Who are they? What do they do? Never heard of them.’

Second, corporate image can and does affect the company’s stock price. Even the people the company uses in its advertising can influence it. Stock prices often increase when companies sign on a famous celebrity to endorse their brand.¹ People do buy companies! At least they buy shares in companies and the price they are prepared to pay for the shares is influenced by the company’s profile, image and perceived respectability.² This is so basic it is difficult to see how it could ever be far from the minds of top management.

A company’s share price, like any other price, is a subjectively derived value—what people are prepared to pay. People pay more for brand-name products than for generics. A Gucci toothbrush is ‘worth’ more than a Woolworths house brand toothbrush. The physical product may be the same but perceptions of its value can be significantly affected by image. So too can share prices. People perceive more value in, and expect the price to be higher for, something that has a substantial image. This has been very evident in the stock price of the high-flier companies such as Apple, Virgin, Disney, Microsoft, News Limited, Amazon, and eBay.

Companies increasingly recognize investors and the stock market as one of their key publics. In recent years it has for example become beneficial to be seen by the stock market as aiming to be ‘green’ and socially responsible. Investors know that, increasingly, consumers demand environmental responsibility from the companies they buy from, and they avoid brands associated with negative impact on the environment. Targeting this doesn’t necessarily mean using corporate advertising exclusively aimed at investors. GE for example ran an extensive campaign around the theme ‘Ecomagination’ ostensibly aimed at consumers but which would be expected to impact investors also. Similarly the campaigns for Toyota with its Prius and Ford with its hybrid Escape (that starred Kermit the frog saying ‘Maybe it is easy to be green’) could be expected to impact buyers of stock as well as buyers of cars.

Defense as well as offence

Corporate communication plans and corporate image development can be used strategically for both offence and defense. In a protective sense, corporate image is like a condom—both need to be used discreetly. By

rolling on a strong corporate image and managing it effectively, management can get the prophylactic protection needed to keep out unwanted corporate invaders. A healthy corporate image, along with a strong share price, is what keeps the corporate immune system intact.

Private equity companies make a science out of hunting companies with undervalued or undermanaged assets. So top management's attention must be tuned to corporate defense as well as corporate survival. To survive corporately, the management of listed companies needs to keep the share price up and be seen to be effectively managing the company's assets. If the company is undervalued by the stock market compared to the true value of its assets, this invites takeover attention.

Corporate raiders target undermanaged companies where changes in strategic direction can dramatically increase the value of the shares. Or they look for companies with high liquidation values relative to their current stock price. If the management of a company is seen to be weak, this can imply to the stock market that the company could be worth more under new management. This too could invite takeover attention. So it is important for the company not only to be well managed but also to *be seen to be* well managed. Perceived share value is not something traditionally thought of as a marketable entity. But there is no better means of avoiding a takeover than a healthy share price.

The most astute companies track the perceptions of their own shareholders—individual as well as institutional. They realize that it is important to know, week by week, month by month, how they and their management are perceived, what their strengths and weaknesses are. Is the company seen to communicate well with its shareholders? Is it vulnerable? At what price would shareholders sell out? To what types of communications do they respond best?

Forewarned is fore-armed. This type of tracking provides an early warning system of any weakness or vulnerability and forms the basis for managing the corporate image and the corporate communications plan.

The basis of image

Before you can change or create an image in people's minds you need to know what thoughts and associations are already there. The first step in image research is to find out:

- Which attributes are important in people's minds with regards to the (product or industry) category?



Figure 24.2: A Hyundai ad showing the diversity of its products.

- Which attributes differentiate your company from companies generally?

A key aspect of this is to establish what things people know about, or associate with, your particular brand or company.

Research may reveal, for example, that people know you only as a manufacturer of one product and they are relatively unaware of the much larger scope and size of your company or its product range, or that it competes in many other product categories. In some parts of the world Hyundai is known almost solely for cars. People have very little in the way of associations with the company other than as a car maker. The Hyundai ad featured above shows the company attempting to work on broadening that image by showing the various other products it makes (such as airplanes, ships, etc).

When researching people's knowledge and associations in regard to the company you may find that such associations may be blurred, half-formed or even plain wrong—but they exist nevertheless. So the next step is to determine how you want your organization to be seen. Which image attributes does the organization *want* to have dominate its perception? How does it want people to perceive it?

The same may be true of an issue that critically impacts on the organization's success. The organization needs to find out the consumer's current perception in order to then be able to 'engage the consumer in a dialogue' and put forward another way of seeing the issue. The timber and oil industries have for years engaged the environmental movement in a dialogue. More recently companies involved in producing genetically engineered foods have done the same thing. The objective is to begin setting the agenda by giving people specific facts about the issue and playing the focal beam of attention on those facts. The starting point is finding out how people currently perceive the company or the critical issue.

Attributes like size, credibility, stability, national interest, human, caring, responsible corporate citizen, non-polluter, environmentally conscious are all possible associations that a company might want to position on.

In choosing an attribute to position on, organizations need to develop a unique and consistent positioning around that attribute dimension and resist the temptation to chase every other positive dimension to its burrow. Trying to position on more than one or two at a time is fraught with the danger of image diffusion—trying to do everything and accomplishing nothing.

Being seen as a good corporate citizen is an increasingly common goal of many companies especially, but not exclusively, those working in environmentally sensitive fields. For example companies such as BP ('Beyond petroleum') and Toyota ('Aim: zero emissions') have tapped into the energy environment issue.

When an organization decides on the image it wants to communicate, and confirms that it can deliver on that image, it should then track public perceptions and closely monitor the effectiveness of its corporate communications. The image dimension may be of the 'good corporate citizen' type or it may be focused on more pragmatic platforms that address different types of customer concerns. Often it is a matter of keeping people focused on the positive side of what you offer corporately—keeping the perspective on the 'half full' rather than the 'half empty' aspect.

If you don't keep the focus on the positive perspective, the way is left open for your opposition to emphasize the negative. For example, Microsoft is a huge company and being number one can be a positive (see Chapter 4, 'Conformity: the popular thing to do'). But at the same time, people can also think of big companies in terms of abuse of that power.

Thus lurks a negative in the background potentially open to be exploited by competitors (e.g. the ‘Stop giving a bully your lunch money’ campaign for Sun OpenOffice software suite from Sun Microsystems).

Changing an image

There are three elements in an image, whether it is a brand or corporate image:

1. That image is a function of the attributes which are associated with it;
2. The degree of those attributes it is perceived to have; and
3. How important that attribute dimension is in people’s minds when they make a decision.

What advertising or corporate communications are trying to do is:

- Move the organization along an attribute dimension e.g. honesty or corporate citizenship; or
- Add a new attribute dimension to the image e.g. environmentally responsible, financially secure; or
- Influence the perceived importance of an attribute dimension for the public in evaluating organizations i.e. change the importance that people place on a particular attribute.

By monitoring each of these three elements over time, an organization continuously knows how well groomed it is and this acts as an ‘early warning system’ for any changes. Image, like grooming, is something that needs continuous attention, not a once-a-year inspection.

Tracking the agenda of concerns

In this era of environmental concern and corporate responsibility, the ‘green’ movement has had a real impact on corporate communication philosophy. Some organizations deliberately undertook to keep their heads down. Holed up in the trenches, they hoped that by keeping a low profile they would avoid being targeted by environmentalists. Others took a more proactive approach and mounted specific ad campaigns that took their case to the people.

I would argue that whatever approach is taken, there is usually a need to know what is going on outside the trenches—to at least know

how many people are out there firing at you, and what they are most concerned about. To this end, a number of organizations (corporate, government and industry groups) track what might be called the agenda of concerns among the general public in regard to their particular organization or industry.

By asking people what concerns if any they have in regard to organization X (or industry Y) an agenda of concerns is generated. For example, see Table 24.1.

Table 24.1: Agenda of concerns

Concern	% spontaneously mentioning the concern
Too big and uncaring	24%
Pollutes the environment	12%
Poor handling of its industrial relations	8%

This agenda is monitored continuously. It changes over time in response to the topicality of the environment, to strikes and to the organization's own news releases and radio and TV appearances.

The important thing about this is that the information allows the organization to detect events that have had a positive or negative impact on people's perceptions and concerns. Furthermore, it allows the detection of these at the earliest possible moment. This is crucial if an organization is going to take a proactive approach to managing corporate communications and corporate image.

Image: you can't leave home without it

Image is not something that companies can choose to opt out of. Nature abhors a vacuum, and so does the human mind. If an organization doesn't effectively communicate the way it sees itself and its beliefs and what it is associated with and what it stands for, then the public will do so for it. The environment will fill the vacuum and allow people to construct their own image of the organization based on whatever evidence is around and what things the company seems to be associated with.

To illustrate this, take a look at Figure 24.3 below. What do you see?

The image changes when its associative context is letters rather than numbers.³

In the middle is the same organization you met at the beginning of this chapter. Do you now see it in a different way? With a few changes to the associative context you now see this company as it sees itself. It is company B. Now with a few changes to the way the company presents itself you see it in its true light as company B—not to be mistaken for that unlucky organization 13.

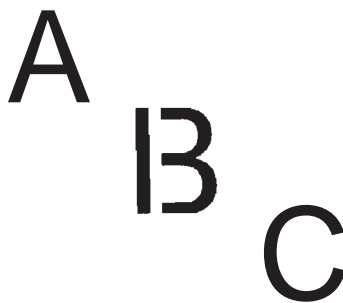


Figure 24.3: When the context is changed, the middle figure is now seen as a B.

Summary

Note that the two perceptions, the letter B and the number 13, are as different as you can get. Yet it is the same physical stimulus that you were looking at in the beginning of this chapter. What has changed is your perception of it—influenced purely by its associations, the things that it is paired with. Changes to the way that real companies are seen are not as immediately dramatic but over time can end up just as substantive. There is a lot to be said for a proactive, continuous tracking approach in the management of corporate communications and corporate image.

25 THE WEB: ADVERTISING IN A NEW AGE

Home is where you hang your @
Anon

The focus in the first two editions of this book was primarily on TV advertising. The way TV is watched has been changing since the last edition and not only because of the Internet but also because of the penetration of multiple screens into our everyday lives. Today, many of us not only have our own TV screen but our own personal computer and our own personal mobile-device screen, all of which are increasingly giving us ready access to the world wide web. Even the tradition of family television i.e. gathering together in the living room to watch the TV, is all but gone. ‘Such viewing,’ one newspaper article noted, ‘now seems alien to kids, many of whom have their own TVs, computers and iPods. By the age of six, 33 per cent of American children have TVs in their bedroom.’¹

The Internet is the medium of the current millennium. It affects the way we do almost everything. ‘We write to our mums by email, we shop and bank online, we find new friends and hang out with them, play games, pursue passions, research products and flex our creative muscles, all via a keyboard.’²

Website: a ‘home’ on the web

For any brand of any substance today a website is a must. It is perhaps the brand’s biggest ad of all and an important part of a brand’s image. It also provides a point of contact with potential and existing customers and increasingly it focuses on ways to engage them and use the site to build closer relationships with them.

Having somebody visit your home is a form of traditional hospitality—a conventional and small but significant step towards building a closer relationship with them. Having people visit your website and

inviting them to stay a while is also a significant step in hypertext hospitality. In this 21st century, the web has become the company's 'virtual' home. For many companies (in particular think Amazon, Dell, eBay, Microsoft, Yahoo) this is where people find the company and interact with it so this has become the company's real home as much as, if not more than, its physical address. The web is the primary point of contact—the place where people know where to find them. It is the place where the welcome mat is (in theory but not necessarily in practice) 'always out'.

Prior to the web, if a consumer wanted to contact a manufacturer for service or information on a product, or to complain or interact with that company, he or she would look for the physical address of the company. More and more consumers today locate the companies they want, not by contacting them at a physical address but at their virtual home on the web. Indeed for a growing number of companies, consumers have little idea of the company's geographic address and nor do they have any need to care or think about it. The company's primary home as far as the consumer is concerned *is* the web.

If you want any information on any product just click on a link to that company's front door and you can enter, browse around and generally make yourself at home. Jim Beam lives here at jimbeam.com. Jack lives over there at jackdaniels.com. Can't see what you are looking for? Google it or ask—interactively—or leave a message and someone will get back to you.

Web ads

Before search engines, the way to attract traffic to the company's website was primarily TV advertising. The rise of search engines has in a way partially displaced some of that TV advertising.

The other way of attracting traffic to a website was to take advertising space on other companies' websites. These are called website *banner* ads but they can in fact appear anywhere on a web page—not only at the top in the banner. Often they were not much more than cybernetic signposts that pointed readers to the advertiser's website and allowed the visitor to click through to it. These website banner ads also suffered some displacement from the rise of search engines and the inclusion of paid links in search engine query results.



Figure 25.1: An eBay cybernetic 'signpost'.

Today the web address (the URL) of any company, product, brand or solution is easily found from a simple query typed into a search engine. However, such links on search engines, even when they are paid ads, generally incorporate only the barest of messages. The main message emphasis has customarily been *after* the person clicks through to the website.

This is changing for two reasons. The first is technology. Improvements in technology mean that more elaborate messages can today be incorporated into the rich media content of the web ads themselves—without having to first click through to another URL. Indeed, the online ad formats today already range from simple text ads to animated ads to dynamic rich media and broadband video ads. So, just as outdoor advertising improved its capability by becoming ‘animated’, so too are website banner ads improving. Just as outdoor ads were enabled to do much more than remind people of a brand, so too can these ‘virtual billboards’ increasingly display not just the brand name and a relevant link but also more elaborate brand messages.



Figure 25.2: Outdoor ads for Federal Express and Lotto.

The second reason why increased messaging is likely to become more incorporated in the ads themselves is that there is accumulating evidence that such messages seem to work implicitly even when they don't command attention. In the absence of click-through, there has been a strong tendency for advertisers to believe that these messages were not

working and not really doing anything. This attitude is likely to change as the evidence further accumulates that web ads, even when static and even when 'ignored', can leave residual effects.

Residual effects without click-through

As this book goes to press, only about one in five hundred website banner ads are clicked on and that low level of click-through has given considerable impetus to paid search engine advertising. Higher click-through rates were easily obtainable from paid ad links on the search engine results pages so this shifted the advertisers' emphasis dramatically from website banner ads to paid search ads. But before abandoning website banner ads, be sure to take a closer look because you can't just assume that nothing happens in the absence of click-through.

Justifiably, most of us feel that we pretty much ignore web ads and we probably believe that in general they don't work on us.³ However, the evidence is accumulating that this introspection fails us. Mostly the effects from website banner ads are not huge. The evidence is that they are usually feather effects and as we saw in Chapter 1, and feather effects by their very nature are hard to introspect. So curiously, even as we try to ignore web ads, they do seem capable of leaving residual effects that may influence us a little further down the track. Let me explain.

A number of research studies show that when we are exposed to ads while reading publications online (such as a news site like CNN or the *New York Times*), even though we probably don't notice the ads and we probably won't even recognize having seen them, there are likely to be residual effects. It has been consistently shown that readers of a web page where such an ad is placed are subsequently able to identify that *brand*, and perceive that *ad*, faster in the future as a result of the incidental exposure.⁴ That is, it increases perceptual fluency without our awareness. Another way of saying this is that it tunes up the brain's processes that we use to identify the brand and its ads.

Not only do readers who are exposed in this way (i.e. incidentally or 'without awareness') identify the brand more quickly (important for the pop-out effect in cluttered product displays) but there is also an emotional 'knock-on' effect imparted to future displays of the ad. If we do notice the ad in the future, the research shows that we are likely to react more favorably to it. So although at the time we are 'unaware' of seeing it, our liking of a web ad marginally escalates after being incidentally exposed to it.

The effect is not great but research shows that people do *like* the ad more than they would had they not had the prior, incidental exposure.⁵

Importantly, this 'knock-on' liking response to the ad becomes progressively more positive as people are exposed (without much awareness) to additional repetitions of it.⁶ So, as we saw in Chapter 1, even a small feather like this may be influential in swinging the balance of choice if everything else weighs equal . . . and small feathers can build over time, through repetition (just like kids can grow imperceptibly by a tiny amount each day). The bottom line is that despite website banner ads rarely being clicked on, there is reason nonetheless to believe that somehow they are curiously unique in having more brand building effect than we give them conscious credit for.

Some of this positive effect from website banner ads comes through *reminders* of the brand and the message and it is much the same as driving past a billboard or flicking through the ads in a magazine. Such fleeting exposures can deliver messages or reminders that are very short and compact and that communicate very rapidly. Similarly, web banner ads even in the absence of animation have been shown to reinforce existing messages provided they are packaged as short, sharp and very compact reminders. Like the real, outdoor billboards these are capable of impacting brand salience, perceived presence, image, and attitude.⁷ So in addition to pointing the way to a company's site, website banner ads can:

- help build brand awareness and perceived advertising presence;
- reinforce/remind people with extremely compact, very simple messages that help consolidate the brand building process.

Click-through

For advertisers, click-through is understandably important but let's put it and its implications into perspective. Click-through has been likened by some people to a TV or print ad for say a brand of car that prompts some percentage of the people who see it to visit the company's showroom. Other people have likened it to when a TV or print or radio ad prompts people to dial the advertiser's 1-800 telephone numbers. All of these are about prompting a behavioral 'follow up' response. However, such behavioral responses vary in the amount of effort involved. A visit to a showroom involves considerable inconvenience and time to travel to the showroom. People are more likely to do something that takes less

effort such as dialing a 1-800 number. Clicking on a banner ad or a search link is even lower on this effort scale. On a dimension of effort in making the response, click-through is more in company with things like opening a direct mail envelope or accepting a taste of a free sample in a supermarket.

This begs the question that since it is such a minimal-effort response, why is it that click-through rates are so low? A key reason is poor ad placement. Another is that we develop a resistance to distraction as we become more experienced with using the web.

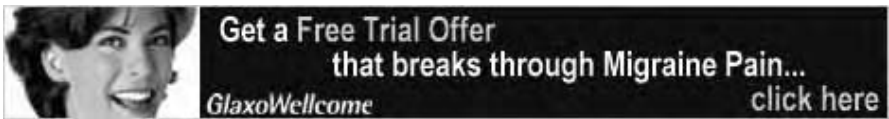


Figure 25.3: Banner ads often focus on a behavioral response—click-through.

If, for example, we are reading on a website a highly interesting news story about pets dying because of contamination in imported pet food, we try to suppress distraction from the ads on the same page. Whether they are for low rate mortgages, a new model Lexus or online retailers, our reaction is the same: we try to shut them out in order to maintain our focus on the story. If the ad is for pet food, however, our reaction is likely to be quite different. Rather than a distraction, it can become a bit of a segue to the pet food story we are reading. The difference in impact is illustrated by the following example. In April 2007, as pets were dying across the USA and panic-stricken pet owners flocked to the web for news about pet-food recalls, the results of their searches also displayed paid ads for brands of *natural and organic* pet food. These ads offered a solution to the problem and generated huge click-through traffic to the advertised websites along with significant sales of natural and organic pet food brands.

The organic pet food ads offered a segue slip-lane that was relevant to the current mind set. They were not a distraction requiring a switch in mind set but were able to seamlessly merge their message with people's current mind set. When there is a match between the ad and the story (or the search content), the two can work together because our minds easily segue from one to the other. No mental effort is needed and no suppression of distraction is involved because we don't feel that there is any real change in topic or mind set. Reading the ad becomes somewhat akin to reading another bit of the same story.

It is no surprise therefore that paid search engine ads that are displayed when we are looking for something on the web have been a big growth phenomenon. When there is a match between the ad and the person's mind set (indicated by the words typed into a search engine query), this segue slip-lane principle comes into play.

Paid search advertising

As this book goes to press, this type of paid search advertising accounts for around half of all Internet ad spending. Paid search advertising is sold and delivered on the basis of keywords that are typed into search engines when we make a query (Google calls them 'adwords').

A simple query may display tens if not hundreds (and sometimes even millions) of relevant unpaid links. The decision as to which links to click is not unlike the decision process we met in Chapter 1 where the outcome of buying decisions can be influenced by influencing the order in which the alternatives are considered. We saw that advertising's influence doesn't just come from influencing our evaluations but also from influencing the order in which these alternative brands are evoked/considered. The same principle applies with search queries. We don't consider every alternative link before making a decision as to which to click on. Rather it is more of a sequential process. We look at the first link and if that appears satisfactory, we will click. If it is not satisfactory, we consider clicking on the second link . . . and so on.

Clearly, only the top handful of search positions have much real chance of ever being considered, let alone clicked on, and that's why search engines sell paid links and why companies are happy to pay to have their ads listed as links at the top or in the side bar of the search results page.

The natural or unpaid links represent clutter with a capital C. (Type 'pet food' into Google and it presents you with at least 10 million unpaid links that would take two years to look through even if you only scanned each one for no more than two seconds without ever clicking.) This is a key reason why search advertising is so successful! It enables advertisers to influence the order of consideration by paying to locate their cybernetic signposts in positions that are more 'in your face'. But even then, a signpost won't get clicked if it is not clearly relevant to the person's search direction. Clues to that direction are contained in the words typed into the search engine and advertisers bid for these keywords

(i.e. for the right to have their ads linked to them).

The rate of click-through for an advertiser's paid search ads is very much influenced by which keywords are bought by the advertiser and how well the ad matches the search direction indicated by those words. The closer the match, the more likely the ad will be seen as a segue slip-lane rather than a dead-end distraction to be ignored. The closer the match, the greater the click-through is likely to be.

A kitchen design company for example would want its ad to appear when someone types the keywords 'kitchen designers' or 'kitchen design' into a search engine. The click-through rate on their ad linked to those keywords is likely to be higher than it will be for other words that are not quite so close a match (e.g. the keyword 'cooking'). Nevertheless, there is business to be had from not so perfect matches like this when they are roughly pointing in the approximate direction.

Contextual advertising

A person's likely interests can be inferred not just from search words but also by editorial context. If the word 'cooking' works as a reasonable match for the ads of a kitchen design company on a search engine, then chances are the cooking section of online publications or articles about cooking will perform similarly. Therefore, instead of search words, another matching mechanism is editorial context and matching on this is known as *contextual advertising*. Just like paid search advertising, the closer the match of the ad with the page's editorial content, the greater click-through is likely to be.

To improve this match and determine what ads to display on a page, account can also be taken of profile information that is known about the site's typical visitors. For example, an ad for tampons on the cleo.com website makes much more sense than it does on the nytimes.com website. Females are Cleo's target audience whereas probably half the readers on the *New York Times* site are male and have no real interest in the product; the ad does not match the reader profile. It makes sense to match the ad where possible with both the editorial interest and the demographic profile of the likely readers of a page. And as we saw in the earlier chapter on behavioral targeting, the ultimate extension of this is to combine all this data with information about that visitor's past searches and past purchases at sites across the web generally and put all this together to get pinpoint precision matching. The more the ad matches the type of person

and his/her need state at the time, the higher the likely click-through rate will be.

Contextual advertising, then, was the forerunner to behavioral targeting and indeed page content can be used as one of the refining elements in behavioral targeting to help achieve more pinpoint precision, as can demographic profile information such as gender or zip code. For example, a Californian kitchen designer operating only in that state might want to restrict the display of its ads not just to articles and editorial about cooking but where possible also restrict them to site visitors from Californian zip codes.

The times they are a-changing

TV's position as the dominant medium of delivery for advertising is now under relentless challenge by the spectacular growth of the Internet and 'new media'. The dollars spent on Internet advertising are anticipated to eventually overtake television advertising and the only question is, when? In the UK, where people already spend substantially more hours on the Internet than in most other parts of the world, it is projected this will happen as early as 2010.⁸

Unlike television where you can sit back and let it wash over you, the Internet is a different medium. It is a high involvement, interactive medium with an environment that demands a continual stream of decisions from you. What is called the *click-stream* is in reality a 'decision stream'. Each click is a decision. At every step you have to make a choice. Do I go here or will I click on this? Which of these will take me where I want to go? That link looks interesting but if I take it will I forget to come back? Will I click or won't I? Have I got time right now? Will it be worth it? I don't want to wait for fifteen seconds and find it is irrelevant anyway! The web is therefore very different to TV as we have known it traditionally. It demands very active involvement in a very cognitive way.

An advantage that the Internet does have is that when we are exposed to an ad online, it puts us but one click away from the advertiser's virtual home. It only takes a simple click-through and we are transported to the advertiser's 'door'. Television has been unable to do this but digital television will increasingly provide this same capability for us to click on a brand or product in a TV ad (or indeed in a program) and visit a website to purchase it or get more information. For online retailers and other advertisers who sell directly through the Internet, this ability to click

through is a particular advantage. It is also an advantage for advertisers of information-intensive products (like finance, mortgages, phones, etc) that require active consideration before purchase. When digital TV has widespread web capability to enable such click-through, it will compete on a more level playing field with web advertising. This will likely serve as something of a brake on some of the migration of TV ad dollars that have been crossing over to the web.

The growth of advertising on the Internet in most countries has severely threatened print media advertising as well as TV advertising. By 2006 in the UK, the Internet's share of all advertising dollars overtook newspapers and the same is likely to happen in other countries. In many countries, amongst younger people, the habit of reading newspapers has been on the decline and some of the dollars previously spent on newspaper advertising have migrated to the Internet. Of course some of this decline in newspaper reading has been due to the fact that we are doing more of our newspaper reading online.⁹ We can read the news of the day, or the latest on business, entertainment or whatever news on the websites of the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* or almost any other major newspaper in the world. Increasingly we can access these stories wirelessly by mobile (phone) devices as well as our computers. Advertising dollars have simply been following the migration trail across to these new technologies.

Newspaper content and newspaper reading are not the only things migrating to the new technologies. So too is the viewing of video and TV. The Internet is increasingly popular as a means of accessing video and TV content.¹⁰ 'Internet TV plus mobile TV are liberating television from the domestic environment, enabling viewing in new situations: at the office desk or during commuting journeys.'¹¹ Far from being a threat to TV, some experts predict the Internet will prove to be a great ally of it and that the issue of TV audience fragmentation is only an issue 'about access points, not the content itself'.¹²

That ignores how bumpy this migratory journey of TV content to the new technologies might turn out to be . . . which is anyone's guess. Will it continue? One reservation as to its 'inevitability' relates to the interactive, active nature of the Internet. Whereas the major mode of TV watching is 'sit back and relax', the mode of the web is 'sit up and interact'.¹³ Sometimes referred to as the 'lean back, lean forward' distinction, it means that whereas TV is a passive experience, with a PC or a mobile screen we lean forward and constantly interact with it via mouse, keyboard or keypad.¹⁴

And with a mobile phone screen we intensely scrutinize it for short bursts of time.

All of this means the viewing culture itself is changing and being changed by the new technologies. In tandem, the content of the mass media is being forced to struggle for survival by adaptation and change. To the extent that reading and viewing behavior migrates across to these other screens, the new environment in turn drives changes to both format and content. 'YouTube changed the way many people experience video but it typically involves short low-res bursts more suited to the highly interactive nature of the PC. It is not a TV type of thing.'¹⁵

Accordingly, this media migration is being accompanied by a trend towards shorter-length snatches of content that can be watched in just a few minutes.¹⁶ 'We may watch snatches of TV highlights on mobile phones, or even longer stretches while we're waiting for a train or something, but we don't—and won't—settle down with a cold beer or hot coffee to watch a football game or movie on a mobile phone.'¹⁷ As online video and 'on-the-go' video become ever more significant, media companies like Fox, Disney and Sony see opportunity in their vast archives of past programs and have begun to adapt by shortening them to fit the new technology viewing situations. Series like *Charlie's Angels* and *Starsky and Hutch* for example have been turned into 'minisodes' able to be viewed in five minutes on a PC or mobile phone screen.¹⁸

At the same time as the mass media migration is driving program content into short burst formats more suitable for viewing in snatches, the trend with ads is showing signs of going the other way i.e. getting longer. Traditionally the very essence of advertising has been super-short and super-compact communications and as such, it had no trouble fitting right in to the new-technology viewing situations as evidenced by its early popularity on sites like YouTube. The low cost of web delivery by contrast with the high cost of TV delivery led advertisers to experiment with longer ads for online viewing. These were often quirky ads that people would seek out for fun and spread the word about them through social networks, emails, blogs and word of mouth. This viral advertising phenomenon, as it is known, has meant a freeing up of the 30-second limit that was the standard length for most commercials.

On conventional TV, a four- to five-minute ad would generally not only be cost prohibitive but would test viewer goodwill. However, when the ad is sought out on the web, it doesn't interrupt the lean-back

environment of TV program watching. And with an increasing number of programs being packaged for the web into snatches of 4 to 5 minutes so as to be more appropriate for viewing on the new screens, opportunity arose. Advertisers began to experiment with slightly *longer* ads that also began to blur the distinction between ad and program content. Entertainment hybrids known as ‘webisodes’ were developed and pioneered by advertisers like American Express. These short episodes (of just a few minutes) each hailed the American Express Card as the ultimate hero in the hilarious adventures of two unlikely close buddies, Superman and Jerry Seinfeld. Such webisodes were a merger of viral advertising and product placement into short, self-contained entertainment snatches.

Summary

The relentless pace of technological change is forcing much media to reinvent themselves. Adaptations to both program content and advertising formats have to be tried in a ‘suck it and see’ attempt to find what will work and what won’t. Just what will prove unsustainable in the longer term is extraordinarily difficult to predict. With the pace of change as frenetic as this, inevitably a number of these adapted, new-media vehicles will crash and burn because no one really knows what is coming around the next technological corner. Which ones will survive and prosper for the longer term is anybody’s guess. Being in technological hyper-drive means inevitably operating in a state of hyper-uncertainty. Or as Winston Churchill observed: ‘If you are going through hell, keep going.’

26 'MENTAL REACH': THEY SEE YOUR AD BUT DOES IT GET THROUGH?

Whether communicating the corporate or communicating the brand, an ad must generally break through in order to work most efficiently. In this era of TiVo and digital video recorders (DVRs), when so many ads are fast forwarded, this remains true. Fast forwarded commercials may have an effect *if the ad has broken through and been noted previously*.¹ However, many ads are mediocre at breaking through in the first place. Others are compelling and involve us. Still others can be so boring that even if we don't fast forward them, we skip over them mentally or tune them out and we can't recognize ever having seen them.

Reach is a media term that simply means the percentage of people who have had an 'opportunity to see' that ad. But even if people are in front of the screen, to what extent does the ad reach them mentally and touch their minds as well as their eyes? And if it is does, just what gets through? This chapter focuses on the difference between 'media reach' (how many have an 'opportunity to see') and 'mental reach'.

Let us look first at what people generally do when they see an ad. We will focus on print ads for the moment and come back to TV and the web later in the chapter. In an earlier chapter we saw that in order to understand an ad, people seem to go through a process similar to the following:

1. First, they recognize that it is an ad.
2. They then immediately try to identify what it is an ad for. They look for something familiar that corresponds to a memory address that they recognize—something that already exists in their minds. Usually this is a brand or a product category.
3. When they have located a memory address, their minds can then store any new information that is in the ad in that pigeonhole.

For example, consider the print ad at Figure 26.1. Leafing through a magazine and seeing this, people would recognize they were looking at an ad. They would then quickly recognize it as an ad for Colgate toothpaste, which is a known memory address for most people. Now, if toothpaste is not high on their agenda of interests or concerns many at this point may flick over the page. They have identified it as:

1. an ad;
 2. extolling the virtues of Colgate toothpaste;
- so any curiosity they had is quite satisfied by recognizing these two things.



Figure 26.1: A print ad for Colgate.

This is a very low level of mental processing and for many ads not much more than this low level of mental processing takes place. In this ad everything you need to know about the brand is included in the headline, so you might think that you don't have to work too hard to know what the ad is all about even if you just skimmed it. The message is pretty instantly communicated provided that you read it. As Franzen reports: *'When something in our minds decides we have enough information, we move our attention on to the next advertisement, or to another constellation of stimuli.'* That occurs after about seven eye fixations (about two seconds). *'The average reader never gets round to reading an entire sentence (longer-than-average headline, for instance).'*²

Recognition

However even with such minimal amounts of attention, an ad may nevertheless register enough to at least provide some brand reinforcement and help maintain the brand's salience in people's minds. The chances are reasonably high that they would recognize this ad if they saw it again. If after being exposed to an ad people can't even recognize having seen or heard it before, then chances are the ad is not doing much because

this generally indicates the ad is not distinctive enough to ‘cut through’ the clutter and mentally reach its audience to this very minimal level. It implies that if there are *any* effects, they will be entirely dependent on implicit rather than explicit communication. To avoid distraction (as we saw in the last chapter) people try to ignore many web ads and hence these must depend relatively more on implicit, feather effects than must TV or viral ads.

So, to test for mental reach advertisers often show people the ad and ask if they recognize having seen it before. Web ads are an exception (see the previous chapter) but with other media, if people have been exposed to it chances are high that they will recognize it even though they may not have been able to *recall* it or describe anything specific about the ad. Recognition and recall are two somewhat different measures and we will be discussing this in more depth in the next chapter. Suffice to say here that advertisers can use ad recognition as an operational measure to validate that the ad is achieving at least some mental reach.

With print advertising, people are shown ads to see if they recognize having previously seen them. With radio, TV (and web) ads, the ad spot may be played to them in a web interview. However, it may be impractical because of time constraints to play all competitive commercials in the category so an approximation is often used whereby people are shown a series of still shots taken from the ad. (The selection of exactly which shots are shown is critical, as we shall see later.)

Mental reach is defined as the percentage of the target audience that we can demonstrate had at least some level of *mental* contact with the ad. In other words the ad registers with them, enough for them to at least recognize having seen it. It quantifies how many of the scheduled ‘opportunities to see’ in the media schedule actually translate into mental contact, recognizing that losses are caused by bathroom visits, attentional distractions and the simple act of mentally tuning out.

Reach vs mental reach levels

So what is important is not just the level of *media* reach (‘opportunities to see’) but the level of *mental* reach. An ad schedule that targets 28 per cent cumulative *reach* in a week will almost inevitably have a mental reach that is somewhat lower. Twenty-eight per cent reach means that 28 per cent of the target audience have the ‘opportunity to see’ the commercial on at least one occasion. If this produces say 14 per cent *mental* reach, it

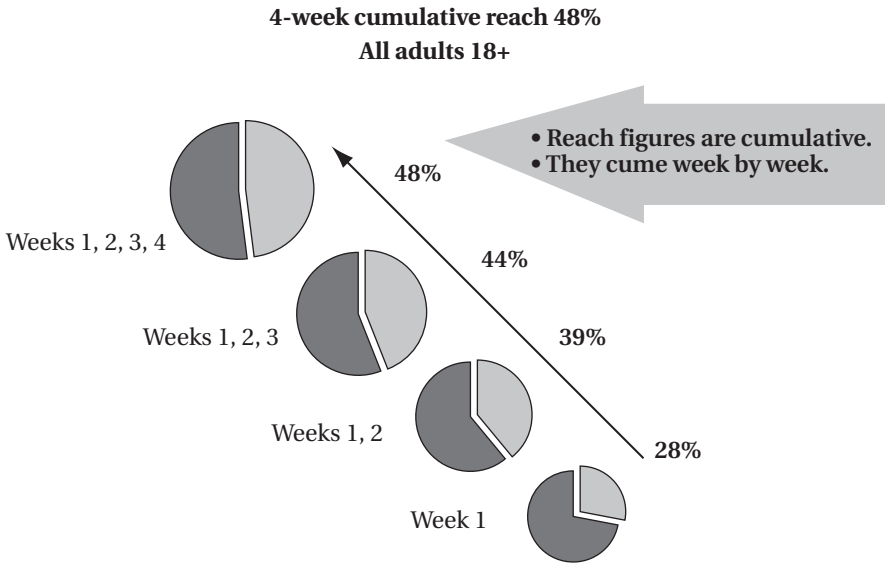


Figure 26.2: Cumulative reach over four weeks.

indicates that the ad has not only been exposed but also registered with half . . . enough for them to recognize having seen it.

So, an advertising media schedule quantifies the size of the audience that an ad is supposed to reach. A reach of 28 per cent means that is how many had an opportunity to see the ad—not that they actually saw it.

If the ad is shown several times over a period, the accumulated figure is known as *cumulative reach*. See Figure 26.2 for just one example of how an ad might cumulatively reach 48 per cent of the target audience over a four-week period.

Such measures as these (along with TRPs, GRPs, TVRs, TARPs and with web advertising ‘impressions’, etc) can be misleading unless it is clearly understood what they mean. It is most important to realize that such figures do not represent *actual* exposures. Much less do they represent mental reach. They are merely ‘opportunities to see’.

Because the concept of mental reach is important, let’s better understand the underlying psychology of it. What is not widely understood by advertisers or consumers is that in order for people to be able to recognize what they have seen or heard, they have to form a mental model of it. Comparison with this mental representation is what enables them to say if they have been exposed to it before—or if it is something new.

The representation may be just bits and pieces that are stored but these provide a basis for reconstructing the past event, ‘much as a paleontologist reconstructs a dinosaur from fragments of bone’.³

There are many print ads that people just flick over and ignore and would not be able to recognize again. Similarly with TV ads people’s minds have the capacity to mentally ‘flick over’ them as demonstrated by the work of researchers Thorsen and Zhao, who unobtrusively videotaped people while they were watching TV in a naturalistic setting when they were free to read, watch TV or chat.⁴

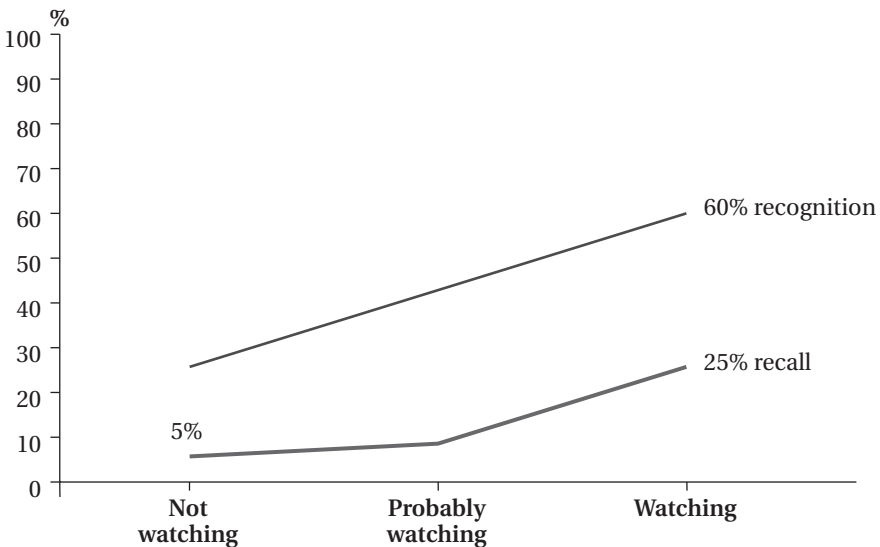


Figure 26.3: How ‘eyes on screen’ impacts on memory for TV ads. (Source: Adapted from Thorsen & Zhao 1994)

Immediately after the program the people were given a surprise test to see which ads they were aware of that had been shown during the 90 minute program. Figure 26.3 shows the relationship between people having their ‘eyes on screen’ while an ad was being aired (as evidenced by the videotaping) and subsequent recognition (and recall) of the ad, immediately following the 90 minute program.

Remember these were people who had their eyes on the screen when the ad was being shown. As the figure shows, only 60 per cent of these people were able to recognize having seen the ad. This is an average level across about 50 commercials. It *quantifies* what we knew intuitively, that

even if people have their eyes on the screen and have resisted the urge to go to the bathroom or make a cup of coffee, an ad may nevertheless still fail to register mentally. (As expected the percentage who were able to free recall the ad without being prompted was substantially lower at 25 per cent.) Clearly there are a lot of other things going on in people's heads when they are exposed to ads—things that can neuter the effect of an ad.

Problem diagnosis

If an audience, shortly after being exposed to an ad, can't even recognize having seen or heard it, they have either not noticed it or have been unable to take in enough to form a mental model of it. The main barriers and reasons for this are:

1. **Poor creative.** Boring ads that fail to get people's attention may not be distinctive enough. Or complex ads that may make mental processing too difficult.
2. **Insufficient processing time.** Many scene switches in TV commercials, or very brief commercials or fast forwarding all limit the amount of processing time for understanding. Time pressures and constrained reading time can do the same thing for print ads.
3. **Distractions.** Even when the person is in front of the screen, they are often subject to distractions. While watching TV, people are frequently doing other things (such as talking, reading, using the phone, doing handicrafts, ironing, playing with kids or pets, etc). Naturally, when people are doing something else at the same time they don't have their eyes constantly on a screen. The ad has to be compelling enough to 'break through' and engage people in the face of these distractions. Preoccupation with congested traffic and road conditions can have the same effect with radio commercials.
4. **Resistance to distraction.** Particularly with web and radio ads, people will at times deliberately need to resist distraction.
5. **Lights on but no one home.** Even when people have their eyes on a screen, they may be thinking of something else, perhaps reflecting on the events of the day or listening in to another conversation. Even with eyes on the screen people don't necessarily mentally process the ad. Again it is the ad's job to 'break through' against *internal* distractions as well as external.

Overcoming the barriers

It is the creative execution, the creative elements of the ad as well as movement and sound that are designed to ‘break through’ and capture attention. However as estimated from the Thorsen and Zhao study, with only one single ‘opportunity to see’ the TV ad about 40 per cent of the time this breakthrough doesn’t happen on that occasion. In the next scheduled ‘opportunity to see’ the ad, the minds of some of these people who missed it on the first occasion may not be as pre-occupied or as distracted. This is a common justification for repetition of the ad—though usually a weak one and less compelling in these days of DVRs and fast forwarding.

Repetition and better media placement may go some way to improving the situation but you wouldn’t like to bet the farm on it. Good creative ads compel your attention and there is a lot of evidence to suggest that repetition (in the form of more media exposures) will not make up for an ad if it is the commercial itself that fails to engage people’s interest and attention on the first occasion.⁵

Relying on repetition alone to try to fix this problem is not only expensive but it is also risky. There is no guarantee that the ad will ‘mentally reach’ them on the next occasion or the next. So these single exposure results are a strong argument for the power of creativity and the need to design distinctive ads that do not have to rely on repetition to break through.

Summary

In this chapter I have focused on the difference between ‘reach’ (how many have an ‘opportunity to see’ an ad) and ‘mental reach’ (how many can recognize having seen it). Measuring mental reach is best done through the ad recognition measure. But this is only one of a number of measures that are used in the diagnosis of where an ad is breaking down if it is not working. Ad recognition doesn’t tell us if the ad is working. But it does pinpoint if the ad is being seen—if it is getting at least the bare minimum of attention.

How then do we tell if the ad is working? In the next chapter (‘Measurement of advertising effects in memory’) I show how to assess this through brand focused measures (like brand purchasing and brand awareness, etc) rather than ad focused measures (such as ad recognition). Then, in Chapter 28, ‘The buy-ology of mind’, I revisit ad recognition but this time in the context of the other ad measures (such as ad recall and message take-out) and show how they are used to pinpoint other critical areas where the ad may be breaking down.

27 MEASUREMENT OF ADVERTISING EFFECTS IN MEMORY

Traditional measures of advertising effectiveness such as ad recognition, ad recall, ad liking, message take-away,¹ brand awareness, brand image, and purchase intention confuse many advertisers. The question often posed is: What do these all mean? Which one should I use? Do they really indicate how effective my advertising is? This chapter and the next focus on these mental measures. I look at what they mean, relate them to measures of purchase behavior and put them clearly into the modern perspective of how our memories work.

Diagnostic complementary measures

Mental measures are essentially diagnostic. They help with the problem of sorting out what is going on underneath the observed purchasing behavior. When there are changes in sales or market share they help us in sorting out what changes are due to what causes. How much is due to the advertising and how much to other things that happened at the same time (such as promotion, pricing, competitors' actions, etc)? Advertisers want to know more than just whether their ad worked or not. They need to know how and why it worked. If it didn't work they want to know why, in order to avoid the same mistakes next time.

Let me make it as clear as possible that I firmly believe some form of purchase behavior measurement is crucial whether this be sales, market share, scanner data or self-report. Mental measures won't substitute for these measures of purchase behavior. But measuring purchase behavior by itself cannot provide the necessary diagnostic ability to know what is happening with them unless they are combined with mental-response measures. Mental-response measures in providing this diagnostic ability don't substitute for behavior-change measures; they complement them. They help sort out what is causing what. They provide understanding of how and why the ad works or doesn't work.

Indeed using purchase behavior alone can prove to be misleading and result in perfectly good ad campaigns being mistakenly jettisoned simply because they haven't led to any increased sales or market share (yet). This is especially a problem for brands that already have large market shares. Increases in market share become harder to get the greater the existing brand share. Maintaining existing customer behavior is not necessarily a bad thing when you are a large, well-established brand. An important role for advertising is to continually defend the established sales and market share levels against the many would-be attackers. For established, larger brands, advertising's role must increasingly focus on defending or holding its established share. Judgment of advertising effectiveness *solely* in terms of increases in sales or market share is naïve because amongst other things, it fails to come to grips with the role of advertising as an 'occupational force'.

To fully understand the way these other, mental measures work, to understand what they mean and how to use them, we need to discard the traditional, old-fashioned view of memory. There is often a gap of ten to twenty years between new developments in psychology and their dissemination and use in marketing. The past half-century has seen significant developments in psychological research on memory, some of which have still not been built into the thinking of some marketing and advertising practitioners.

One reason for this is that some aspects of it are not all that easy to explain. It takes some effort to understand the full implications. The effort will be repaid however because an understanding of the modern view of memory is fundamental to understanding advertising's effects and to using mental measures diagnostically in the evaluation of an ad campaign.

Towards the modern view of memory

In 1959, a neurosurgeon by the name of Wilder Penfield inserted a microscopic electric probe into a patient's brain while the patient was conscious. This will make your eyes water, but Penfield used local anesthetic and the patient was able to converse with him while this was happening. The patient reported various 'memories' being activated, like watching *Gone with the Wind* years earlier—complete with the smell of cheap perfume in the cinema and the beehive hairstyle of the person in front.²

When Penfield touched the brain at one spot the patient reported 're-experiencing' a piece of music. Penfield then shifted the probe slightly

and into the patient's mind suddenly came the vivid 'memory' of an old childhood experience that the patient claimed had long been forgotten. Depending on the exact location in the brain that Penfield touched with the electric probe a different 'memory' might be reactivated. Whether these were true memories or not, they were often things the patient claimed not to have thought about in many years.³

Penfield's experiments eventually led psychologists towards what is called the 'spreading activation' theory of memory.⁴ Cast in the framework of neural networks and distributed representation,⁵ this has become the best-accepted theory of how memory works today (notwithstanding that the strength of the original interpretation of the Penfield results appear to have been somewhat overstated).⁶

Implicit memory

As we ended the last millennium, another memory concept had emerged—'implicit' memory.⁷ A brand or an ad can trigger a feeling without it necessarily retriggering full awareness of how, when, and where you have encountered that object before or where the feeling about it came from.

Conventional memory refers to retriggering some residue of a past experience. It means re-activation of that past experience as a conscious (explicit) memory which shows up as either recall or recognition. However, if one has been exposed to an ad but cannot recognize ever having ever seen it, can it still have an effect? Yes. Instead of a re-activation of the memory, the effect may be implicit which simply means we have processed it to some extent but without being able to recall or recognize ever having seen it. We saw in earlier chapters that feather effects can be produced in this way by:

- subliminal exposure (Chapter 3)
- oblique messages (Chapter 5)
- ignored web ads (Chapter 25).

In other words sometimes effects shows up indirectly. While we can't recognize that we have seen the ad, the effects might show up in brand image or in a marginally increased liking for the brand or increased liking for its advertising. Research indicates that the mental measures that implicit processing can influence are:

- salience (brand or ad)
- attitude/affect i.e. liking (for ad or brand)
- image shift.

A complication however is that these measures are not only impacted by implicit (unconscious) processes. They can be impacted by explicit (conscious) processes as well. So the only way to infer that the causal process was implicit and not explicit is to look at ad recognition. If the person doesn't recognize having ever seen the ad before, then the strong implication is that any effect must have resulted from implicit processes. What does this tell us? Not much except it underlines how important it is not to simply rely on ad recognition (or ad recall) as hard and fast criteria of advertising effect. Mental measures need to include more than recognition or recall. Indeed, you need an armory of mental measures including those above, as well as others that I will discuss shortly.

First though, let me put in a few words of caution about implicit effects. It does appear that implicit and explicit learning are parallel learning processes and this means some learning can take place through automatic, implicit processing, even in the relative absence of attention. The operative word here is 'can'. You need evidence from the tracking (or other research) that the ad is indeed influencing behavior, and if not behavior then attitudes. And if not behavior or attitude, then image or brand salience. You can't just *assume* an ad is working implicitly. Only after one or other of these effects is established (for the ad that people don't recognize seeing) can you conclude that it is working implicitly. In other words, in the face of definite behavioral, attitudinal, image or salience effects, you can rule out explicit communication explanations by showing that people don't recognize ever having seen the ad. Any conclusion that the ad must be working implicitly is arrived at by a process of elimination. Unless you have the evidence that the ad is clearly working, then claims that it must be working implicitly are nothing more than 'smoke and mirrors'.

Actually, my view is that learning is rarely either wholly implicit or wholly explicit. In many ads there are elements of the two processes at work. My guess is that the accumulating evidence will eventually reveal that while explicit and implicit processing systems can and do work independently, they also often work together interactively. For example, touch typists' knowledge of where the keys are on a typewriter is largely

implicit (often they can only tell you where the keys are by moving their finger) but that doesn't mean it was learnt unconsciously or without any attention. Nor indeed does it mean that it didn't require a huge amount of repetition.

Another caution is: beware of exaggerated claims for the power of implicit processing.⁸ There is no doubt that ad exposures can have effects through associative processes even though there is no retrievable memory trace of the actual exposures. But in my experience those associative effects are more often feather effects and even then they have to be evidenced and not assumed.

Another caution is that communicating purely by association usually requires substantial repetition. As discussed in Chapter 3 ('Subliminal advertising: the biggest myth of all') and in Chapter 5 ('The advertising message: oblique and indirect'), repetition is often important for measurable effects to show up. White says of implicit advertising: 'This kind of advertising seems to put a premium on repetition and ubiquity.'⁹ Indeed, relying totally on implicit learning (low levels of attention) usually means slower learning and hence significant repetition.

This conclusion, as to limitations of learning without attention, is also supported by the tracking experience of others. Mundell, Hallward and Walker for example, using the Ipsos-ASI system, agree that implicit (low attention) processing can influence brand preference, but when ads are processed with high attention 'it has a profoundly more significant impact'.¹⁰

We have to conclude that high attention advertising is still the rapid route to learning.¹¹ So, despite the fact that we can and do learn implicitly by association (especially with product placement, see Chapter 6), advertisers will nevertheless continue to try to capture consumers' attention. To the extent that implicit associations work best with low (rather than high) attention, then techniques like oblique and indirect messages (see Chapter 5) can enable the ad to do double mileage. That is, by deliberately engaging the consumer's *explicit* processes, it can simultaneously draw attention away from other elements of the ad in order to communicate associations more obliquely, outside the full glare of attention.

Association

When you hear 'MmmmmmmMmmmmmm', what do you think of? Chances are that it immediately brings to mind Campbell's soup. As already

mentioned, when someone says to you ‘Just do it’ the chances are you immediately think ‘Nike’. This is because our minds work by association.

Things remind us of other things. For example we are often reminded, in the course of listening to someone else in a conversation, of something that we want to say. This association process lets our minds ‘fill out’ more complete memories from fragments of information. We see the back of a head at a friend’s party and before the person turns around we remember their face and if we are lucky, also their name. While walking past the television we hear the words ‘priceless’ and ‘for everything else’ and we immediately think ‘oh another MasterCard commercial’ even though we did not actually see or hear the word ‘MasterCard’.

Our memory system can be cued with a fragment of a memory and to the extent the connections and associative strengths are there, then our minds tend to ‘fill out’ the rest through spreading activation that travels through the mental connections.¹² Brain neuro-imaging studies show us exactly what parts of the brain are active at any time (e.g. when we recall a person’s face versus a person’s name). This reveals the surprising fact that the various features or fragments of a memory are not stored together. The bits and pieces of a memory are distributed throughout different parts of the brain. They are bound together as cliques by their connections and the associative strength of those connections.¹³

If you want to really appreciate the pervasive and spontaneous nature of associative connections try this exercise:

- Read out to a few people these words: candy, sour, sugar, bitter, good, taste, tooth, nice, honey, soda, chocolate, heart, cake, eat, pie.
- Then ask them to write down as many of the words as they can remember.
- Finally, ask them if any of the words ‘taste’, ‘point’ or ‘sweet’ were on the list.

Chances are that they will say (incorrectly) that ‘sweet’ was on the list (up to 90 per cent of people do).¹⁴ Why? The association is so strong that people mistakenly think they were actually exposed to the attribute ‘sweet’ instead of generating it themselves. ‘Sweet’ is an attribute which is strongly associated with a number of the words on the list (candy, honey, sugar, etc) and it appears to activate the general category of ‘sweet’ in our mind.

Mental network

Recognizing something involves us in linking together the fragments we have seen—linking them by associative strengths into a ‘coherent’ representation in our mind. We ‘bind’ the distributed features of the memory together. This representation of the memory is in the form of a mental network which may include not only things that we actually saw or heard but also (as with the word ‘sweet’) things that are very closely associated. This applies not just to memories but also to the meanings of things.

For example, when I say the word ‘cars’, what do you think of? You may have thought immediately of ‘roads’ or you may have thought of a brand of car such as Toyota, Ford, or Volvo. What underlies these associations in our minds can be thought of as a gigantic neural network of interconnected associations.

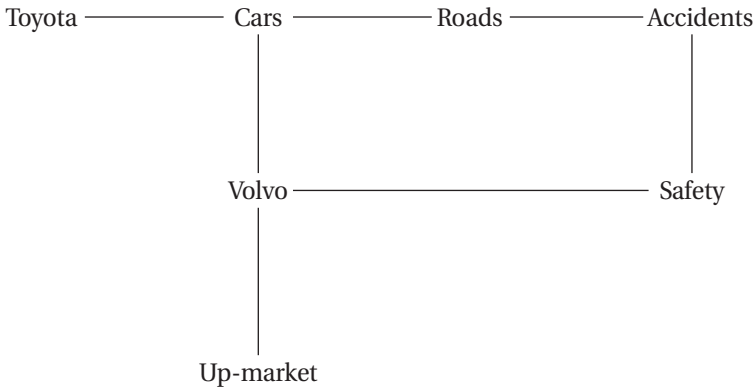


Figure 27.1: A memory network.

These billions of neurons are all connected, some directly and others circuitously, through other neurons. But the connections have different strengths. This is illustrated in Figure 27.1. It shows an over-simplified version of what part of this network might look like.

Just as the touch of Penfield’s electric probe might activate his patient’s networks and cause the apparent recall of some memory, so may a picture that we see, or a word that we hear, activate a part of our mental network. The activation spreads through the distributed representation of that thing and causes us to recall what it is and what is its meaning. For example, seeing a picture of a car or hearing the word ‘car’ activates their meanings. The activation is like an electric current spreading outwards and activating other close things that are associated with ‘car’.¹⁵ This is

why an expression such as ‘Just do it’ is likely to trigger not only its own meaning but also any things that are closely associated with it, like ‘Nike’.

When we are exposed to words and pictures, each one activates a clique of neurons that collectively represent that thing in the network.¹⁶ As I demonstrated with the word ‘sweet’ this does not have to be activated directly, however. It can be triggered by ‘spreading activation’ from some close associate.

This is one of the main reasons why ad campaigns like ‘Mmmmmmm Mmmmmmm’, ‘Priceless’ and ‘Just do it’ have been successful. They are frequently recurring expressions that crop up all the time in the normal course of our lives. So when we come across them in conversation it is the equivalent of inserting a probe into our minds and activating our mental memory network. The activation then triggers off any close associates, such as ‘Campbell’s’ or ‘MasterCard’ or ‘Nike’ that may have become connected to the active representation. It gives the brand ‘free registrations’ and helps the brand stay ‘top of mind’.

Meaning and brand image

The fact that our memories work through this process has far-reaching implications for advertising and marketing. It means much more than simply keeping something top of mind. In fact, it is the whole basis for the meanings things have for us, including the meanings of brands.

As Figure 27.1 implies, when ‘Volvo’ is activated it in turn activates any attributes that are closely associated with that brand, such as ‘safety’ and ‘up-market’. These things that ‘Volvo’ activates in our mind, the things that are closely associated with it, collectively represent the meaning of ‘Volvo’ for us. This meaning takes in the resonances of all the associations that are closely linked with ‘Volvo’ and activated by it. This is the underlying essence of meaning as well as the underlying essence of brand image. It is why Volvo is seen as safe and Coke is seen as fun. It explains the ability of a brand name to activate (at least partially) these attributes in our minds. They are close associates of the brand.

Closeness of connections

Activation spreads though the mental network like an electric current.¹⁷ When there is low resistance between two points (synapses), these two things have high associative strength and a high probability of the connection being made—the association being completed. On the other

hand, when two things have low associative strength there is high resistance in the flow. So things with low associative strength are less likely to be activated. The stronger the associative strength between an attribute like 'safety' and the brand Volvo, the more likely it is that activating 'Volvo' will spread activation to the attribute 'safety'. Conversely, the weaker the associative strength the less likely it is to be activated by that trigger.

Another way of thinking about this is in product positioning terms. Simply, it means Volvo 'owns' the safety position in people's minds. That is, Volvo is more closely connected to 'safety' than any other brand (in its class). This associative view of memory thus gives advertisers a much richer way of thinking about product positioning as well.

Reinforcing connections

Connections are like muscles. When they are exercised they get stronger. When they are not exercised they get weaker. We all have leg muscles, but if we want to use them for running long distances they need to be strengthened and exercised. Like leg muscles, connections that are not exercised may be too weak to perform.

When we encounter the American Express card today those of us who experienced the 'Don't leave home without it' campaign that featured Karl Malden rarely, if ever, think of it. That is not to say we are unaware that he once advertised American Express. Similarly we are only vaguely aware that Jerry Seinfeld appeared in a number of American Express ads also. We don't think about these ads any more. Yet the connections in a sense still exist except they have become so weakened by lack of use that they don't work of their own accord.

Contrast with the traditional view of memory

This all contrasts with the traditional view of memory that dominated much of marketing practice until recently. In that view, a memory trace is laid down. The memory is either there or it is not there. Either you remember it or you don't.

It is amazing that this model of memory survived at all, because it was always demonstrably wrong! How many times have you been unable to remember someone's name even though you know that you know it? Forgetting more often has to do with our 'inability to retrieve' the memory (or some fragment of it) and we are unable to activate it again. Sometimes we may have failed to store the memory in the first place but more likely

we just ‘forgot where we put it’ or that part of it. In other words, our mind has lost the connections.

Retrieval cues

Our memories get triggered by retrieval cues. These are things that prompt us to remember other things. When we are trying to think of somebody’s name, for example, and the name won’t come to mind, we use retrieval cues. We may deliberately bring to mind the situation in which we last saw the person. That may help us remember the name. Why? Because we are hoping that the activation which spreads from the memory of that situation will activate the name of the person and allow us to recall it.

If that doesn’t work, we may try other related cues to help us spread enough activation towards the person’s name to trigger recall of it. What we are doing is looking for a retrieval cue that will help us activate the name. Strong retrieval cues are things strongly connected with something and tend to remind us of it. They help pop that thing into our mind.

The relevance of this to advertising is that advertisers want their brand to be cued into people’s minds when they think of making a purchase from that product category. If you are an advertiser, you would no doubt like to tie your brand strongly to a retrieval cue that is often in people’s minds or in their environment—and ideally is also around at the time they buy the product category. This could be almost anything. It could be something visual (e.g. the pack or a dispenser label that we are likely to see at the point of sale). Or it could be something verbal (e.g. ‘MmmmmmmMmmmmmm’). Or it could even be a piece of music. So one test of the effect of an ad is to ask, is it strengthening the association between a relevant retrieval cue (such as the product category) and the advertised brand?

Association measurement

As marketers, the retrieval cues we are interested in are brands, products, messages, and image attributes. We have the ability to measure and track the changing strength of associations—to tell us how closely two or more things are connected in buyers’ minds and how that strength increases with repetition.

Given the word ‘fingers’, 46 per cent of people immediately think of ‘hand’ and very few (less than 1 per cent) think of ‘glove’. Fingers and hand have high associative strength. Fingers and glove have very low associative strength.¹⁸

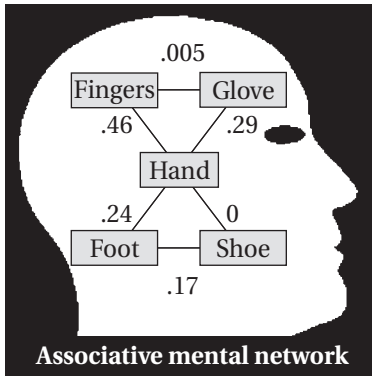


Figure 27.2: We are more likely to be reminded of 'hand' by the word 'fingers' than 'glove'. Given the word 'finger', 46% of people immediately think of 'hand' while very few (less than 1%) think of 'glove'. Fingers and hand have high associative strength. Fingers and glove have low associative strength.

(Adapted from: Postman L. & Keppel G, Norms of Word Association, Academic Press, 1970)

The essential method was pioneered years ago by psychologists exploring relationships between words and asking large samples of people 'What is the first thing that comes to mind when I say . . .'. The inserted word is the retrieval cue and this might be for example the word 'fingers' or the word 'glove'. From the responses the researchers can derive some picture of that part of our associative mental network and the strengths in the associative mental network can be mapped (see Figure 27.2).

When advertisers use products and brands and image attributes as the retrieval cues the principles remain the same. The connection strength is measured by the percentage of people giving each response. Direction is important e.g. the likelihood of the expression 'credit card' triggering 'Visa' is not the same as 'Visa' triggering 'credit card'.

But how do you relate associative mental networks and strength of connections to advertising effectiveness? Exactly what associations should be tracked and which ones indicate effectiveness?

An example

Let me illustrate using an old print ad for Minute Maid fruit juice that will serve as an example (Figure 27.3). A young girl with plaited hair is holding up her juice glass and asking 'Mom, can I have some more calcium?' The copy explains that Minute Maid is enriched with calcium—as much calcium as milk has and that 'it's one delicious glass your kids will actually drink'. This implies images of Minute Maid being:

- 'healthier' (fruit juice); and
- a more delicious way for kids to get their calcium than drinking milk.

When this ad is run, the ultimate test of it is this: are more buyers purchasing Minute Maid fruit juice? If not, are they at least more disposed to purchasing Minute Maid? The underlying logic of the process is this:

- if people, when they think of fruit juice, are more likely to think of Minute Maid (*brand awareness*);
- and when they think of it, they think of it as 'healthier/good for you' (*brand image*);
- then, if 'healthier/good for you' is important in fruit juice purchasing (*attribute importance*);
- we can expect a greater likelihood of people buying Minute Maid fruit juice will follow.



Figure 27.3: 'Mom, can I have some more calcium?' Ad for Minute Maid fruit juice enriched with calcium. (© 2000 The Coca-Cola Company. 'Minute Maid' is a registered trademark of The Coca-Cola Company.)

Additionally, the ad very cleverly attempts to tie the brand to milk as a retrieval cue and remind people of the fact that some kids don't enjoy the taste of milk and are reluctant to drink it. In other words, the hope is that when they think of milk, this will tend to trigger Minute Maid fruit juice as an association and as a possible substitute that parents might entertain as a way for their kids to get their calcium. This is a mechanism that could generate perhaps a bigger effect than the simple one of giving Minute Maid the image of a healthier fruit juice. So we should also ask: is it strengthening the association between milk as a retrieval cue and Minute Maid fruit juice as one of the other alternative ways their kids can get their calcium? Because this is another way the ad could be working and having its effect in addition to making the brand into a 'healthier' fruit juice brand. To keep things simple for the purposes of illustration here, we will ignore the 'milk substitute' mechanism in the explication

of the measures that follow and focus only on testing for evidence of the healthier fruit juice mechanism. It should be noted, however, that the same type of analysis procedure can be very easily extended to test the associations involved in building up the milk substitute mechanism—in other words, positioning Minute Maid juice as a more acceptable way for kids to get their calcium than milk.

Whether a greater likelihood of purchasing Minute Maid does result is a question to be answered by sales, market share or other forms of behavior data (such as self-report.). Table 27.1 summarizes the primary measures that need to be available. Note that in addition to behavior (1), we need to look at attitudes (2). People may feel more predisposed to buy Minute Maid but, if they get to the supermarket shelf and find their regular brand of fruit juice on cut-price special they may postpone their trial of Minute Maid until next time. That does not mean that the ad has failed.

Table 27.1: Primary measures of effectiveness

1. Are more buyers purchasing Minute Maid?
2. If not, are they more predisposed to purchasing it?
3. At point of sale, what is the likelihood they think of or notice the brand?
4. When they do notice or think of the brand, what is the likelihood that the image information (from the ad) is activated?

Behavior: Do sales, market share, scanner data, or survey self-report show more people buying Minute Maid juice?

Attitudes: Has disposition or intentions towards buying Minute Maid juice improved?

Awareness: Has *spontaneous* brand awareness for Minute Maid increased?

Image: Is Minute Maid juice now more associated with 'healthier' (because it has calcium) than it was before?

Measure 3 (brand awareness) and measure 4 (image) are not meant to substitute for the behavior and attitudes measures, but they are diagnostic—they help us analyze why the ad is or is not working and, if it is not they give us pointers as to what to do about it. Figure 27.4 depicts measures 3 and 4 as two diagnostic connections that need to be measured in the associative mental network.

Do people, when they think of fruit juice, think of Minute Maid? The connection strength of measure 3 represents the likelihood that people will think of (or notice) Minute Maid when they get to the point of sale. Pack displays, special promotional material, and all sorts of other things can influence this as well, but these things aside and other things being equal, the product category is one thing that is always present in the situation.

The other connection is the brand image connection: when people think of Minute Maid juice do they think of it as healthier? There is nothing too complicated in measuring the strength of this brand-attribute association. It is simply a matter of asking something like, ‘What brands of fruit juice do you most associate with “healthier”?’ or ‘What attributes do you associate with Minute Maid juice?’

Note that none of these four measures asks questions about the ad. They are all focused on the brand itself. If the tracking shows that both the brand connections get stronger when the ad is being run then, all else being equal, we expect more people to be buying Minute Maid. Of course ‘healthier because it contains calcium’ would need to have been pre-researched and established as a potentially important attribute in fruit juice choice. If that has been done and these two connections are strengthening, then purchase behavior in the form of sales or market share (or at least attitudes) should also be moving in consequent response.

Under such circumstances where these four *brand*-focused measures are moving as expected, analysis of *ad*-focused measures such as ad recognition, ad recall, and message take-out are rather irrelevant. The ad is working and even if such additional analysis showed the ad with poor recognition or poor message take-out (which is rather unlikely), nevertheless the *brand* connections that you want to influence are somehow strengthening and the key outcomes are happening. Something is working. Unless it can be accounted for by some other activity (such as brand-building promotion or PR), the ad must be working and, while this may be in a way that you don’t fully understand (i.e. implicitly), nevertheless it is working.

This is an important point because,



Figure 27.4: Brand associative mental network.

while we know how a majority of ads work, we don't understand everything about the way that all ads work. In my experience, it is the exception for them not to work through conscious ad recognition processes but, as discussed earlier in the section on implicit memory, it does happen. We should *never* throw out an effective ad that is working just because we don't understand exactly *how* it is working. Poor ad recognition or poor message recall should never be allowed to override the stronger evidence of movement in the strength of the *brand* connections (together with sales, market share and attitudes, of course).

But what if purchase behavior and attitudes to the brand have *not* changed? This is when the ad-focused measures like ad recall and message take-out, as well as ad liking, can become really important because they give further diagnostic aid in working out what is going wrong.

When an ad isn't working

It is when these key indicators (of sales, market share, brand attitudes, and the two primary brand associations) reveal that an ad isn't working that the ad-focused questions become valuable diagnostics. This is when we need to delve deeper into the underlying related associations in an attempt to diagnose why the breakdown might be occurring.

We need to answer questions like 'Are they seeing the ad?' and 'Is it communicating the right message?' We know that an ad can work despite its apparent failure on one or both of these questions, but that is the exception not the rule. If an ad is clearly not working (as indicated by the behavior and attitude evidence discussed above), then ad-memory questions may help to identify whether the problem is one with mental reach (getting attention) or branding or message registration.

With a high degree of confidence, this will point to a key reason why the ad is not working and hopefully allow us to do something about it. We take this up again in the next chapter.

Summary

Mental connections are like muscles. When they are exercised they grow stronger and when they are not used they get weaker. The primary role of mental measures as an indicator of connection strength is essentially a diagnostic one. Measuring the strength of connections can help with the problem of sorting out what is going on underneath the observed purchasing behavior.

These are all brand-focused measures. They measure performance and associations with the brand. Measures that are focused on the ad itself (ad recognition, ad recall, ad liking, message take-out, etc) are important when the ad is not working; they aid the diagnosis and supplement the brand-focused measures. As we see in the next chapter, they help to pinpoint exactly where an ad seems to be strong and where it seems to be weak and what actions we need to take to fix it. Understanding this can help advertisers do much more of what works and less of what doesn't.

28 THE BUY-ODOLOGY OF MIND

The suffix ‘-ology’ is used to mean either ‘the study of’ or ‘the science of’. This chapter is about the science of consumption (or buying). In particular we address the role of the mind, how it influences buying and brand choice, and how to go about measuring it.

The last chapter peeked inside our ‘necktop’ computer to see how memory works. Memory consists of the firing or activating of an interconnected network of neurons. If our brain is touched internally at any point with a probe, a picture or a word, some part of our mental network is activated and we may recall a particular memory, meaning or feeling about that word or picture.

Like an electric current, the activation spreads out in all directions from the original point of activation, gathering up the meaning of the stimulus as it goes. The meaning of a thing is represented by the total pattern of the activation that the word or picture initiates. Knowledge is retrieved (or recalled) by activating the appropriate network in memory.

What we haven’t discussed is the fact that there is more than just knowledge in these networks in our brain. Not all memory is knowledge. There is also memory for things that happen to us—of autobiographical events that are not knowledge per se. We remember episodes in our life—like driving to work this morning. Or perhaps we remember tasting a new brand of coffee yesterday. And we remember watching *The Simpsons* last night and seeing that great Missy Elliott ad for Pepsi again.

These are autobiographical events or episodes that are retained in our memory, at least for some time. They form memory networks that can be activated later to be re-triggered in our mind. Psychologists label memories for episodes like this ‘episodic’ memory, to be distinguished from remembering that is in the form of knowledge which is called ‘semantic’ memory.¹ The two are seen increasingly to be related.²

When we are exposed to an ad that gets our attention, such as the Minute Maid fruit juice ad discussed in the previous chapter, there are usually four distinguishable components or fragments that can potentially be stored in memory. Under normal ad-exposure circumstances it is all too rare that we remember all four of them. These fragments are:

1. the ad execution (girl with glass asking for more calcium);
2. the product category (fruit juice);
3. the brand (Minute Maid);
4. the message (healthy/good for you—kids ask for it).

The first component, the execution, is the creative vehicle that we hope will make the audience sit up and take notice; that will make the ad break through the clutter so that, having captured some attention, it can deliver its message. The ads shown in Figure 28.1 for Volkswagen (the ‘Save Face’ ad that we saw earlier) and for Dairy Soft spread are good examples. These executions almost compel us to stop and take a closer



Figure 28.1: The ad executions for VW and Dairy Soft spread grab attention and, having done so, can then deliver a message.

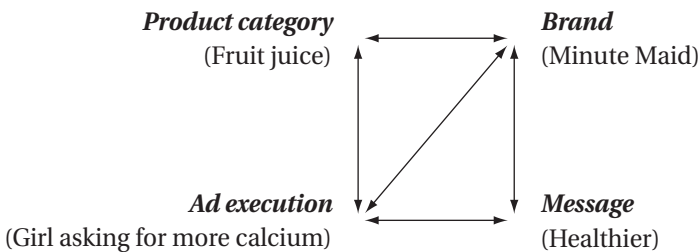


look at what they have to say. Once the execution has got our attention, it has a better chance of delivering its message and linking this to the brand.

If the ad execution does its job of successfully breaking through the clutter, that is an important but just a first step. Getting attention is the first stage but the other elements are also important. Having broken through the clutter, what message does the execution register in memory? Is it what the advertiser intended? And if it is, did the consumer connect all of this in memory with the correct brand and the correct product category? If not, the advertiser could be doing a great job of advertising for some other brand or product.

These four elements of any ad experience that need to be represented in memory as fragments bound together by connections can be depicted as shown in Figure 28.2. The ideal is to have all four of these elements highly integrated in the ad so that they mutually reinforce each other. However, this is all too rarely achieved and ‘different elements of the ad compete with each other for the attentional resources available’.³ Even some integration is better than none. The Volkswagen ad, for example, goes part way in that the visual execution reinforces the verbal message (‘Volkswagen puts safety first’).

Similarly, the visual execution of the Dairy Soft ad dramatically reinforces its verbal message—‘easier to spread’. Here, two of the elements (the execution and the message) are highly integrated and work very effectively to reinforce each other. To remember the execution is almost certainly to remember the message and vice versa. Compare this with the Minute Maid fruit juice ad, which has much less integration. Few ads



Note: Four elements need to be represented in memory and bound by connections.

Figure 28.2: An ad experience memory network.

manage to have all four elements highly integrated. The more integration there is the higher the chances of the ad's success.

The most common problem in advertising is, without doubt, registering the (correct) brand in memory. It is staggering how much advertising fails because it doesn't successfully connect up everything else with the (correct) brand in memory.⁴ Back in Chapter 22 I showed how to use 'constants' to help in this task of binding the brand into the memory network. It is a real advantage if you can use elements that are strongly and uniquely associated with that brand because they act as effective retrieval cues for the brand over and above the brand name itself. For example, when you see an ad with Fergie (the Duchess of York), chances are you think of Weight Watchers whereas an ad with Kirsty Alley may make you remember the line 'Have you called Jenny yet?' and trigger recall of Jenny Craig Weight Loss Centers. You don't have to see the brand but you get the brand all the same. And you only have to hear the words 'For everything else, there's . . .' and you think 'MasterCard'.

Looking at this another way: when your memory network is activated at two points simultaneously (i.e. the product category and an execution fragment like Kirsty Alley), the activation spreading from those two points and activating any other strong connections should trigger the brand. This is epitomized in some of the Nike commercials that are able to 'sign off' with the 'swoosh' and nowhere in the ad is there any explicit mention of the brand 'Nike'.

So, one point that can be strongly connected to the brand is the ad execution. Another is the message (e.g. 'I'm lovin' it' and McDonald's). If the brand has a unique message that has remained constant for some time, just the message itself should trigger the brand. For example, 'Where's the beef?' and 'Just do it'. These are unique retrieval cues that immediately communicate their respective brands (Wendy's and Nike) even without any explicit mention of the brand name.

Ad effect measures

In the past, some advertisers placed great store on people being able to recall their ad. Others did not believe in ad recall but thought it important that people be able to indicate they had seen the ad by at least recognizing it. Some advertisers have put the focus on communication of the message rather than people remembering the ad itself, while others have argued that consumers' ability to parrot back a message is not relevant

to the ad's sales effectiveness. There is a resolution to all this. To arrive at it we must first understand that *the effect of an ad is a process*, and that evaluating the effectiveness of an ad using continuous tracking data is also a process.

The process of evaluating an ad

Suppose that an ad like the Minute Maid ad, when first exposed, is not showing clear and obvious effects on changing behavior (as measured by sales, market share, or other behavior measures such as trial, repeat buying, etc). The first part of any doctor's diagnosis is to determine whether there is a *real* problem and, if there is, to locate the source of it.

As has been made clear in earlier chapters, advertising does not just make us 'run out and buy'. In order to capture its intermediate effects we need indicators of its impact on more than just behavior. For each strategic point in this attempted influencing process, we should aim to have an appropriate measure to indicate what is happening. When sales and market share movements as well as other behavior measures do not react immediately to advertising, the advertiser needs urgently to diagnose what is happening. It is at this point that the other measures assume center stage, because it is necessary to trace back through the intermediate effects to see where the ad is having an impact and where it is not, so as to make a judgment about what to do.

In the last chapter we touched briefly on the four important brand measures—brand behavior, brand attitude, brand awareness and brand image. Now it is time to extend this and look at the full range of measures, including ad-focused measures.

The main measures

The second set of measures (see Table 28.1) focuses on the ad itself—ad recognition, ad recall, message take-out, and liking and believability of the ad. These measures fit together with the brand-focused measures in the total picture of advertising evaluation because they are used in a process of elimination to try to assess, first, whether the ad is working and, if it is not, to isolate what is going wrong. The questions that are asked about the effectiveness of an ad (e.g. the Minute Maid ad) will call for information derived not only from the brand-focused measures but also from the ad-focused measures.

Table 28.1 Measures of advertising effectiveness

Brand-focused	Ad-focused
Brand-purchasing behavior	Ad recognition
Brand attitudes/purchase intentions	Ad recall
Brand awareness	Correct branding
Brand image	Message take-out
	Ad liking
	Ad believability

The crucial difference is that having all these measures enables the pursuit of a full diagnostic interpretation.

Use of the brand-focused measures

The brand-focused measures that we met in the last chapter are primary. The questions they answer are shown again in Table 28.2.

Table 28.2 Brand-focused measures

1. Are more buyers purchasing it?	Measure brand behavior
2. If not, are they more predisposed to purchase it (but perhaps being prevented by something like a competitor's cut-price promotion)?	Measure brand attitudes or intentions
3. What is the likelihood they think of or notice the brand? (If they don't think of it at the appropriate time this can prevent them buying it.)	Measure spontaneous brand awareness
4. When they do notice or think of the brand, what is the likelihood that the (image) information from the ad is activated?	Measure brand-image association

I need to elaborate a little more on these four brand-focused measures.

1. *Are more buyers purchasing it?* (Or are the same people buying more of it?) The earlier it is in the campaign, the less likely that *purchase-behavior* evidence will show clear, unequivocal evidence of movement, especially for products such as durables where the

purchase cycle may be months or years, and movements cannot be expected instantly.

2. *Is the ad showing any signs of affecting people's overall attitude to the brand or, in other words, their disposition towards purchasing it?* (Another way to think about this is in terms of their attitudinal commitment or loyalty to it.) The answer can be provided by brand-attitude (or purchase-intention) measurement. It can often be revealing to see how much brand attitudes are changing even though behavior itself may not (yet) have changed. Note, though, that the earlier it is in the campaign the more likely that the evidence from this too may be 'fuzzy' and inconclusive because the effect may (as yet) be only small.⁵

So, especially during the early period, the next level of diagnostic measure comes into play, requiring information from the next two brand-focused measures. When, initially, there is only fuzzy information on changes in the behavior and attitude measures, these next two, somewhat more sensitive, measures provide 'early-warning' indicators as to whether the ad has a *likely* problem.

3. *Is spontaneous (category-cued) brand awareness increasing?* The one thing that is almost always in our minds when we are about to buy something from a particular product category is the name of the product category itself. So the product category (e.g. fruit juice, cars, computers, margarine, beer) is almost always an important retrieval cue that should bring the brand to mind in the purchase situation. When market researchers measure spontaneous brand awareness, they ask people what brands in the product category they can name. Which ones can they easily bring to mind? This is a gauge of the degree to which the product category acts as a retrieval cue in bringing the brand to mind; it indicates how closely the brand is connected to the product category. An increase in spontaneous brand awareness therefore provides an indicator of a strengthening in the connection between the product category (as retrieval cue) and the brand (shown as connection *a* in Figure 28.3).⁶

If spontaneous brand awareness is increasing, the ad is achieving at least that part of its aim. But if it isn't, then it signals the need to explore why the ad seems to be failing to produce this part of its effect.

4. *Is brand image association strengthening?* The brand's association with the key image attribute featured in the advertising (e.g. 'healthy')

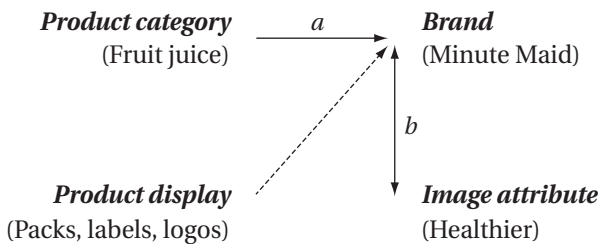
should also be showing signs of strengthening. If the image attribute association is strengthening (connection *b* in Figure 28.3) then the ad is doing this part of its job. But if it is not, it signals the need to explore why the ad does not seem to be achieving this part of its intended effect.

Pinpointing where an ad is breaking down

Establishing that either measure 3 (the category-brand association) or measure 4 (the brand-image association) is not strengthening will raise the question *why?* It is in order to explore the ‘where and why’ of something breaking down that we need the ad-focused measures. The ad-focused measures are diagnostic supplements. As we said, ad recognition, ad recall, message take-out, and ad liking do not substitute for brand-focused measures but complement them. They assist in pinpointing which components of the ad are not performing and which ones are. They also indicate something about the nature of the remedial action/s that might be taken to redress these problems.

For example, suppose we found that the connection (in Figure 28.3) between the retrieval cue—the category (fruit juice)—and the brand (Minute Maid) was not being strengthened. In other words, spontaneous (category-cued) brand awareness was not increasing. Naturally, the advertiser wants to know why. There are two possible reasons.

First, as we saw in Chapter 26, the ad may not be achieving ‘mental reach’. It may simply not be capturing attention. Alternatively, the ad may be capturing attention and being seen but it may be weak in communicating the link between the product category (fruit juice) and the brand (Minute Maid), perhaps because people remember the ad but don’t remember the



Note: The two key memory connections, and how product display may act as a supplementary retrieval cue.

Figure 28.3: Associative mental network connections.

brand. To take remedial action, the advertiser needs to know whether it is the attention-getting characteristics of the ad that need to be changed or the communication content itself. At this point, the ad-focused measures assume center stage and allow us to trace back through the cognitive effects to see exactly where the ad may be falling down.

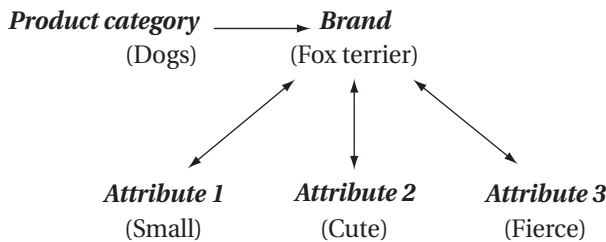
Episodic memory and knowledge memory

When we store experiences such as ads as events in episodic (autobiographical) memory, we can learn from the experience. A non-advertising example illustrates this nicely. If a fox terrier bites us we remember the episode but we also learn that this cute type of dog can be fierce and to be more cautious of it next time. In other words, the events in our episodic memory feed into our ‘knowledge’ memory, as represented in Figure 28.4.

The experience may be one of being bitten by a dog, which is a highly emotional knowledge memory. Or it may be an experience with a brand (such as enjoying a cold glass of Minute Maid fruit juice after school—a memory with some but not the same emotion). Or it may be an experience with an ad for that brand (such as seeing the Minute Maid ad in a magazine we read last night—again a memory with perhaps some but not the same emotion).

So there are:

- memory networks that represent *brand experiences*, and
- memory networks that represent *ad experiences*, both of which feed into
- ‘knowledge memory’ networks.



Note: The fox terrier part of the network affected by experience.

Figure 28.4: Dogs’ knowledge memory network.

Ad experiences and brand experiences also percolate through to affect the strength of the various connections in our ‘knowledge memory’ network. We don’t know *exactly* how these two types of networks interact and affect each other but we do know that activating two items simultaneously in one network affects the other. For example, strengthening the connection between the category (e.g. fruit juice) and the brand (e.g. Minute Maid) in our memory for the ad experience, as represented in Figure 28.3, also strengthens the corresponding connection between the same two items in our ‘knowledge memory’ (Figure 28.4). The ‘activation’ primes or strengthens that connection as well as any other closely associated connections.

Armed with our newly acquired perspective on the modern view of memory, we can now resume our examination of how the ad-focused measures perform as diagnostic aids. It is time to examine, one by one, the more common measures that focus on the ad itself and outline the role of each, how it is used, its strengths and weaknesses, and where it fits into the overall diagnostic armory.

Ad recognition

We visited ad recognition in Chapter 26. ‘Ad recognition’ is the conventional name for this measure but, in line with our modern view of memory, it should really be called ‘execution-cued ad awareness’ because it is recall that is prompted by the ad execution. Whatever we choose to call it, however, it is measured by showing people the ad execution (or describing the execution)⁷ and asking if they recognize having seen it before.

For example, people may be shown the ad for Volkswagen which shows the man’s horribly scarred face (Figure 28.1). When asked whether they have seen the ad, and they say ‘no’, this has a clear implication. Either they have not been exposed to it or, if they have, it has failed to command enough attention to get noticed. As a result it will very likely fail to show any observable effects on behavior. As discussed in Chapter 26, this is a good measure of ‘mental reach’ and indicates whether the ad is at least being noticed.⁸

It is not a very demanding test but is useful because it provides an indication of the proportion of the audience that has been ‘mentally reached’ by the ad. The Thorsen and Zhao laboratory research referred to in Chapter 26 indicates that when a TV ad is aired once, we can expect about 60 per cent of the people who have their eyes on the screen to

be able later to recognize having seen it before.⁹ When people are given multiple ‘opportunities to see’ an ad, as happens in campaigns of several weeks, tracking results indicate that 70 per cent is the absolute minimum figure this should reach and it should preferably be much more. Note that this is among those who have had an opportunity to see it—this, of course, must be quantified by the cumulative reach media figures for the ad that pertain up to that point (see Chapter 26).

It is in cases where recognition turns out to be low that this measure is especially helpful for diagnosis. If people don’t recognize the ad after a few weeks on air (and none of the other measures are moving), the advertiser can be certain there is something very wrong—because recognition is such an ‘easy’ test. The question is, is there something wrong with the ad or with the media schedule? We can eliminate the possibility of it being a media scheduling problem by checking on the media figures that show what the cumulative reach of the ad has been (the percentage of people who have actually had at least one opportunity to see it). If cumulative reach is okay, then the low recognition figure reveals that this ad is ‘wallpaper’—that is, it does not capture enough attention to get noticed.

In reality you will find that low recognition figures and ‘wallpaper’ ads like this are rare—for TV at least. Most often, 70 to 90 per cent of people who have been exposed to an ad a number of times in a TV campaign do recognize they have seen it—unless there is something very wrong with the ad or they have not actually been exposed to the full length ad because of fast forwarding through the commercials. A high recognition figure shows that the ad is capturing enough attention to get noticed and may give the advertiser warm feelings—but keep it in perspective. It is important to emphasize that this reveals nothing about the *strength* of any mental connections that have been established. This is because ad recognition is, in a sense, an ‘easy’ test, merely testing that a connection is there. It confirms that the ad execution does have some representation in consumers’ memory networks. It has been seen. Establishing this is one thing. Measuring the *strength* of the mental connections within the network is another.

This difference can be demonstrated with old ads—but it applies to new ones as well. As pointed out earlier, those of us who are old enough will recognize that we still have a mental connection between Karl Malden and American Express. We remember that Karl Malden was the presenter for many years of the original American Express ‘Don’t leave home

without it' commercials. That is, we can remember when prompted, so the connection is there in our minds, but ask yourself how many years it is since that memory saw the light of day. How long is it since it was last activated in your mind? In the same way, those of us who remember the famous commercial 'I'd like to buy the world a Coke' rarely, if ever, think of that song or that ad when we encounter Coke today. The connections still exist but they have become so weakened by lack of use they don't work of their own accord. The connections are dormant.

So the recognition measure can tell us that the connections exist but tells us nothing about their current strength or the likelihood that these connections will be activated by everyday events, especially at the point of purchase. The fact is that there are many, many connections in our minds that lie dormant and never influence us because they are never spontaneously reactivated. Even though we may recognize an ad, it reveals nothing about the likelihood that the right connections will be activated in the purchase situation. Ad recognition (execution-cued ad awareness) is therefore a diagnostic measure to check whether the ad has been seen—nothing more. In saying that, let me not take away from the fact that it is a very valuable measure for that purpose and consequently needs to be included.

But, in addition to it, we need to provide diagnostic indicators as to the strengthening of the connections that the ad is attempting to influence.

Spontaneous ad recall (category-cued ad recall)

Suppose, as a consumer, you are asked to describe any ads for 'cars' that you have seen recently. You describe an ad showing a man's horribly scarred face. This provides evidence of a mental connection between the product category and the ad execution in your mind—one that is strong enough to be triggered by the product category as a retrieval cue. This is conventionally known as 'spontaneous ad recall' but, in the modern view of memory, it is more accurate to call it '*category-cued* ad recall' as it is recall prompted by the product category. (Remember that the more appropriate label for recognition is 'execution-cued ad recall' because it is prompted by the ad execution.)

After you have described the ad, you are asked which brand was being advertised and you answer correctly 'Volkswagen'. This is 'ad execution-brand association'. It provides the evidence that the execution is connected to the correct brand in your memory.¹⁰

When you are asked to recall and describe ads for product categories like this, which ones do you describe? Those which are activated in your memory by the ‘spreading’ activation moving outwards from the two points in the network that have been activated (i.e. from the product category ‘cars’) and from a point representing the general notion of advertising.¹¹ The ads you describe are those that have the strongest memory connections to the product category at that point in time. These will be ads with already high activation (e.g. those exposed very recently) and ads that have established high strength (those that have been exposed more frequently).

When consumers are cued only by the product category and they spontaneously recall an ad along with the correct brand and the correct message, it tells advertisers more about the likely strength of the connections in consumers’ memories than if they are merely able to recognize the ad. It requires a stronger connection for us to be able to recall details like this rather than simply being able to recognize the ad.

If, in response to the product-category cue, a respondent can recall and describe the ad execution and also correctly recall the brand, an advertiser can deduce two things. First, the ad has undoubtedly been seen.¹² Second, it is strengthening the interconnections in memory between the product category, the brand, and the execution.

Advertising tracking has demonstrated that increases in category-cued *ad* awareness almost always lead to increases in spontaneous (category-cued) *brand* awareness (unless the memory of the ad is not being linked up with the correct brand).¹³ This is because activation spreads out in all directions from the initial point of activation and reinforces or strengthens any other close connections to it. Spontaneous (category-cued) ad recall is therefore a check to see that the ad is doing this part of its job—strengthening the connection between the brand’s ad and the product category (the purchase-situation retrieval cue). (We consider some other, supplementary retrieval cues at the end of this chapter.)

Ad-brand association

The strength of the connection between the ad execution and the brand is revealed in the answer to the second part of the questioning procedure outlined above—namely, what brand was being advertised? This measure of correct brand association with the ad is important because it is perfectly possible for us to recall and describe an ad in detail but have it mistakenly connected in our memory with the wrong brand.

When this happens, some other brand (e.g. Volvo) may be benefiting from a brand like Volkswagen's advertising.

This is not an uncommon cause of 'leakage' in the effectiveness of many ads. It means that everything is working except that the advertised brand (in this case Volkswagen) is not being successfully connected to the memory network. Consequently, its association with the product category ('cars') or the attribute ('safety') is therefore not being strengthened. Some other competitive brand (Volvo) may be connecting to the memory network instead and getting the benefit of the advertising.

Failure to connect up the (correct) brand in the memory network is an all too frequent problem. A check on ad-brand association is therefore a crucially important procedure in the total armory of diagnostic checks.

Message take-out

Let's look at the Minute Maid ad again (Figure 27.3) and assume the ad is:

- being seen (as revealed by execution-cued ad awareness); and that
- the connections between the product category and the ad and the brand are all strengthening (as revealed by category-cued ad awareness and correct ad-brand association).

Suppose Minute Maid discovered that its ad did not strengthen the association between the brand and the attribute 'healthier'. We would expect it to strengthen because this is an objective of the ad. What else could be going wrong? We know that the ad-brand association is okay so there is little if any brand 'leakage', so why isn't Minute Maid increasing its association with the attribute 'healthier'?

The problem may lie with the quality, or clarity, of the message and this is where 'message take-out' assumes center stage to determine whether this is the problem. Message take-out is usually measured by asking, 'What was the main message that the ad was trying to communicate to you?' Suppose consumers answer, 'It is healthier because it has calcium and kids ask for it/like it'. This tells us that the message take-out is in line with the objective of the ad, and would effectively eliminate this as the source of the problem. Note how these measures are used as part of a process of elimination to close in on 'causes'. If we had found that people were seeing the ad and associating it with the correct brand but that the message take-out did not conform to what we intended,

this would reveal the ad's weak link. But in this case we assume that the message take-out is okay.

If message take-out is okay and the communication is successful, what could possibly be causing the failure of Minute Maid to strengthen its association with the attribute 'healthier'?

Believability

Failure to strengthen the brand's image on the attribute can happen if people have cause to disbelieve the message. For example, what happens if people saw a *Reader's Digest*-type article about calcium that says its health benefits are overrated and that it can cause unwanted health problems in itself? (I am making this up merely to illustrate the point.) These people may still recall the message of the ad but it will be much less likely to translate into a strengthening of the connection between Minute Maid and the attribute 'healthier'.

A direct inconsistency between two ideas is a signal for our minds to stop and examine the ideas and decide which one is correct. The consistency of the message with what is already in our minds is crucially important (see Chapter 5, 'The advertising message: oblique and indirect'). If the ad or its message is inconsistent with what is already in our minds, if there is motivation for our minds not to accept what is being said, then simply remembering the message will not necessarily influence our underlying 'knowledge' network. This is where a measure of believability of the ad is a helpful aid to detect whether this is the problem.

Message recall can be neutralized by our minds actively rejecting the proposition. It is therefore imperative to keep the diagnostic nature of message take-out in clear perspective. Many people have argued over the years, and much evidence has been presented, that recall is unrelated to advertising effectiveness. The fact is that in many cases it *is* related—but recalling the message of an ad does not in itself mean the ad is effective. It is perfectly possible for us to parrot back the message that the ad is trying to communicate even though the strength of the connection between the brand (Minute Maid) and the attribute ('healthier') remains unaffected.

We can now see why so many people have been led to argue that no relationship exists between ad recall and ad effectiveness.¹⁴ To hear and remember something is not necessarily to accept it and build it into our

network of underlying ‘knowledge’. Message recall is only one component of the process. Cognitive consistency is another.

Message recall is nevertheless a valuable diagnostic tool to have in the advertiser’s armory because, when an ad is going wrong, it can help the advertiser to analyze why or how. Like other measures, it may be limited in what it reveals but it can, nevertheless, be particularly revealing at times of where and how the ad is falling down. Specifically, if an ad is not working, message recall can help answer these questions:

- Is it because the ad failed entirely to communicate the message that was intended?
- Or did it communicate the message but was just not accepted? (Ad believability helps to sort this out.) A third possibility also exists:
- Is the attribute (e.g. healthier) relevant?

The message may be successfully communicated and accepted, and strengthen the brand’s connection with the attribute. But if the attribute itself is not relevant to the consumer’s decision-making processes, then the ad still won’t affect behavior. So the degree to which the attribute is relevant is also important.

Attribute importance

Which attribute does the advertiser choose to emphasize? Clearly, different brands put their faith in different attributes. In the beer market, for example, one beer might rely on forging a connection with the attribute of ‘reward for a hard-earned thirst’ by showing people consuming the brand in a variety of thirst-raising, physical exertion situations. In contrast, another brand may rely on creating connections with ‘natural brewed’—a very different attribute. And still another brand may focus on communicating the fact that their beer is ‘less filling’.

Like the Minute Maid ad, these try to connect the brand with an attribute that the manufacturer thinks will be important or at least relevant to the consumer’s decision-making process. If it is relevant, then the advertising maximizes its chance of being successful. If it is not relevant, then even if the ad successfully breaks through the clutter and communicates the message and the message is accepted, the advertising may still be ineffective in influencing behavior.

If the message is not right, if the attribute is not relevant to the

consumer, then effectiveness may be limited or non-existent. To have any effect at all in that situation, the ad will be totally reliant on increasing the salience of the brand in people's minds (i.e. strengthening the connection of the brand with the product category). Just creating greater salience of the brand may not be a big enough feather in itself to tip the beam balance and lead to sales increases for the brand. Much depends on whether the opposition brands that are ranged up against it are seen as otherwise equal (see Chapter 1).

Attribute relevance, or attribute importance, is or at least should be researched up front as part of the 'message engineering' at the time an ad campaign is being developed. The aim is to convey a message that has some relevance to the consumer, or one that has some chance of influencing the choice decision. (The relative importance of attributes may also be tracked by asking people to rank, or rate, how important each attribute is to them in their purchasing of that particular product category.)

Ad liking

In a substantial number of product categories where transformational advertising is the norm, liking the ad is critical to making people feel good about the brand—especially where there is not much else to differentiate it from other brands.¹⁵

This is the last of the ad-focused measures and simply asks people to what degree they liked or disliked the ad. On the beam balance of choice, if everything else is equal, liking for the brand's advertising can tip the balance. As was made clear earlier, a brand's advertising is similar to its packaging in that it is part of the brand's personality wardrobe. A brand's advertising attire can make a brand more attractive and make the essential difference when everything else is equal. With certain types of products and certain types of advertising (especially web advertising—see Chapter 25), ad liking can be an important diagnostic aid.¹⁶

Supplements to the category retrieval cue

Before concluding, let me round out the picture by considering the notion of supplementary retrieval cues. The main retrieval cue we have looked at is the product category itself. This is why category-cued brand awareness provides an important diagnostic measure of advertising effect. However, smarter advertisers also build other retrieval cues into

their advertising which may need to be considered in the measurement of that advertising's effectiveness.

To illustrate, during the work day or some other extended activity many of us have said, 'Have a break' or 'Give me a break'. If we weren't aware that we were feeling 'snackish' before we said this, we probably would be afterwards. Drinks and snacks are closely connected in the mental network to the notion of taking a break. 'Have a break' or in some countries 'Time for a break' and/or 'Gimme a break' are retrieval cues that not only remind us we might be hungry but, as a result of advertising, also activate a particular brand that became closely connected to the expression. That brand is, of course, Kit Kat. 'Have a break. Have a . . . Kit Kat.' 'Time for a break. Have a . . . Kit Kat.' 'Gimme a break. Have a . . . Kit Kat.'

Another way of thinking about this is to be aware that a brand can tie itself to some connection, some retrieval cue, that helps it break through the mental or visual point-of-sale clutter and pop into mind, especially at the point of sale or point of consumption. The clutter that it has to fight against may be just mental clutter or it may also include the visual clutter that is presented by a product display crowded with brands and assorted variants. The brand wants to 'own' the occasion, or the moment or the feeling.

The advertiser wants the advertised brand to be more strongly connected with something that is likely to be in our mind or in the product display at the time of purchase—something that will remind us of the brand or help it to be noticed for long enough to gain our consideration.

The main retrieval cue is the product category (name) because, almost by definition, this is in our minds when we are about to make a purchase. However, there are other cues—especially those that are likely to be encountered near or at the point of purchase (or sometimes consumption). These supplementary cues can be visual or verbal. The important thing is that something is included in the advertising that is also likely to be encountered at the point of purchase. Signs that tie in with the advertising, or a distinctive logo, pack shape or designer label that are included in (or tie in with) the advertising can all function in this way.

As an example of a visual cue let me cite one very convincing experiment. A brand of breakfast cereal took a single-frame shot from its TV commercial and incorporated it prominently on the pack. This acted as an effective retrieval cue connecting the pack and the brand to what was

in people's minds about the ad. It gave it a boost that helped that cereal break through the shelf-display clutter.¹⁷

Advertisers who have built strong supplementary retrieval cues into their advertising rely correspondingly less on the connection between the product category and the brand to do all the work. The brand can be brought to mind by a trigger from the product category or the supplementary retrieval cue or both. This has implications for measuring the strength of not just one but all of these connections to the brand. In the evaluation of Kit Kat's traditional advertising, for example, monitoring the strength of the association between the expression (e.g. 'Have a break') and Kit Kat was important as well as the association of Kit Kat with the product category itself.

Summary

This and the previous chapter have covered the main measures of ad effectiveness. This coverage is not completely exhaustive. There are other, less used ad measures but the main measures have been covered.

As I said at the outset, advertisers can get understandably confused about measures of ad effect. In the end it is behavior that they want to influence and therefore measures of behavior such as sales and market share are what they want to see moving. However desirable, changes in sales and market share are rarely sensitive enough and rarely *sufficient* in themselves to measure ad effectiveness. To capture advertising's immediate effects, it is necessary to have indicators of cognitive and affective impact as well as behavioral impact. For each strategic point in this attempted influencing process an appropriate measure is needed that can indicate what is happening.

Behavioral measures can't diagnose why an ad works or why it doesn't. Without mental measures, advertisers can develop very little understanding of this buy-ology of mind and the real effects of advertising. These measures provide diagnostic tools that are all-important if advertisers are to translate the knowledge that something worked into a wider learning experience that generalizes to help formulate new effective advertising for the brand. Unless a brand is tracked on a wide range of mental measures it is difficult, if not impossible, to say how and why it worked and to use that knowledge to design better advertising in the future.

29 CONCLUSION

When we die we will have spent an estimated one and a half years just watching ads either on TV or the web. No matter which way you look at it, advertising today takes up a significant chunk of our lives. For that reason if for no other, advertising is an important phenomenon in our society.

As children we wonder about how car engines work, how aircraft fly, or how it is possible to transmit voices invisibly through the air. We also wonder about advertising as we are growing up—but for a quite different reason. Unlike cars and aircraft, ads seem deceptively simple—indeed so blatant and so transparent that it is difficult to understand how they could really persuade anybody. What really puzzles us, then, is why such advertising continues to survive. Is there some secret that advertisers are not telling us? It seems irrefutable that advertising must be doing something to somebody—but what, how and to whom?

This is the traditional view of advertising that has held sway in our society for as long as we can remember. It is a view that has been based on intuition and introspection and which gets fanned from time to time by books alluding to ‘the secret’ in terms of hidden persuaders or subliminal seductions. This book has tried to present a fuller understanding of the subtleties and complexities of advertising as revealed through the systematic, continuous tracking of advertising campaigns as well as by scientific developments in psychological research into memory and behavior.

This book has tried to demystify advertising by developing an understanding of some of the real psychological mechanisms underlying it. Not all of the mystery is solved because as we have seen, advertising, far from being simple, turns out to be more complex than the traditional view suggests.

To some extent this complexity reflects simplicity in disguise. If you bolt together enough simple things, you get something that appears complex. So the way to begin to understand such seemingly complex

things as radios or car engines or advertising is to start breaking them down into their simpler components and functions and looking at them at a micro level before moving up to the macro perspective. Understanding how advertising works on a macro level comes from understanding how all these micro-bits fit and function together.

I readily embraced the opportunity to track the effects of advertising over the years because it provided a window through which I could observe first-hand the effects of one of the childhood ‘mysteries’. Looking at advertising through this window has led me to several conclusions:

1. Advertising works on people just like you and me—not just on those ‘other more gullible people’ out there.
2. The typical world of advertising that we may have envisaged where advertisers always knew exactly what their advertising was doing turned out to be very far from the truth.
3. The reality is that there are still more ads that fail than there are ads that are outstandingly successful. The great majority of ads are at best mediocre in their effect.
4. The fourth realization was that much of the myth and mystique of advertising has come from the ‘tribal’ ad agencies—many of which know less than they would like us to think, about how or why advertising works. As with medicine men, their powers and methods have seemed all the greater because of the mystery that surrounds them. By imputing witch-doctor-like powers to advertising agencies, books like *The Hidden Persuaders* and *Subliminal Seduction* helped enshrine and perpetuate this mythology.
5. The fifth realization is that persuasion per se is a mechanism that is rarely involved in advertising. If it were, this book probably could have been called *The Not-So-Hidden Persuaders*.
6. Finally, the real mechanisms underlying advertising effects turn out to be more subtle than they are mystical.

This book, in revealing the much more benign nature of these so-called ‘unconscious’ effects of advertising, has I hope dispelled many of the myths and much of the over-claiming that have been associated with advertising. At the same time, it has tried not to downplay the subtlety of these influences, or the effect they can potentially have on the success or failure of one brand over another *especially when everything else is equal*.

We are still very much in the process of discovering how the new forms of advertising work i.e. advertising on the web, mobile devices, viral advertising, and paid product placement. What we do know is that advertising in the future is likely to look very different to its past.

In fact, the advertiser and the consumer have been closer bedfellows than they knew. Both have been frustrated by not knowing more about the effects of advertising. All too often advertisers have known little more than consumers about how, why or when their advertising was working. This is beginning to change with new tracking and research techniques but again, as our understanding of the mechanisms of advertising grows, so too does greater recognition of its limitations as well as its effects. This knowledge probably lessens rather than heightens the anxieties people may have about advertising having unbridled power.

One message that both consumers and advertisers can take from this book is that just because advertising doesn't seem to be working doesn't necessarily mean it is not working. It takes sensitive measurement to gauge the often small, subtle but cumulative effects. At the same time, any fears that we may have had of being exploited by wholesale subliminal manipulation are way off the mark.

The reality is that advertising has most impact on us in those areas:

- where we are otherwise disinterested in the choice between alternatives;
- where the effects are subtle and we don't feel any effects. (Subtlety is what we need to look out for rather than subliminality. In this regard, I have singled out paid product placement and behavioral targeting as the two new practices that we need to be especially aware of.)

Individual advertisers who have felt for a long time that they don't know enough about what their advertising is doing should be prompted by this book to stiffen their resolve to overcome this. In an era that is now coming to an end where ad agencies enjoyed and exploited their mystique as the wise medicine men, the state of knowledge remained primitive. But increasingly, the better agencies are coming to realize that like modern-day doctors, they must be accountable. Appeals to faith or mysticism only work on people who are in a primitive state of knowledge. Effectiveness today has to be proven and established by observation and careful measurement. Mysticism eventually gives way to scientific reality.

By continuously tracking their advertising over time advertisers are coming to understand much more about what works, what doesn't, and why. Accordingly, they are much better placed to brief their ad agencies. In being better equipped to articulate exactly what they want from their advertising, they are in a position to demand and confidently expect advertising that is successfully directed towards faithful implementation of their communication strategy.

The message of this book to both consumer and advertiser is that it is time to forget the mystique and focus on the real effects. Human beings have the ability to see the same thing in different ways, depending upon the frame of reference that we bring to it. This book represents a frame of reference that it is hoped will allow us to see advertising in a different perspective. For consumers, this perspective should be a more balanced and less fearful one. Understanding advertising and its real effects should make us less suspicious of it. Its power has been much exaggerated but at the same time we should note how advertising is changing and remember that 'the price of freedom is eternal vigilance'. Or as someone else put it: 'When you jump for joy, beware that no one moves the ground from beneath your feet.'¹

Advertisers, on the other hand, should take the attitude that we now know a lot more about what works, and what doesn't, and why. As a result they can more confidently reject attempts to obscure their inquiries or fob off their concerns about whether their advertising is working. Belief in the exclusive power and province of the tribal medicine man belongs to an era that has passed. Accordingly advertisers should be able to get much more effectiveness out of their advertising budget and out of working with their advertising agency. At the same time consumers should be able to accept, without necessarily feeling threatened, that advertising does influence which brands they choose especially when the choice of brand doesn't matter to them personally.

APPENDIX: HOW TO PROMPT AD AWARENESS

In this appendix I address the ways that ad awareness questions can be asked and clarify some of the confusion that abounds as to exactly what is being measured. It provides an understanding of how different ways of asking the question may result in different figures. It also explains why that occurs and which way/s of asking it are best for your purpose.

Since the second edition of this book, broadband penetration has enabled web interviewing to become mainstream. It is now feasible to play the complete ad on the web and measure recognition by asking respondents if they have seen it before. Yet, time and other interview constraints mean it is usually impractical to assess all the opposition commercials in the product category in the same way. For this reason, there is usually still value in asking respondents to say what commercials they can remember seeing within the product category. This means that there are still a number of alternative forms of asking about ad awareness that use different cues. It is important to understand the differences between these different cues.

What is the cue?

Every ad awareness question has a prompt or what is more technically called a cue. Sometimes people mistakenly use the term *unprompted* ad awareness. There is no such thing! There *always* has to be some kind of prompt in a question in order to tell people what it is you want them to try to remember. It would be absurd to simply ask people do they 'remember'? Remember what?

Three types of questions to choose from

As an example using Diners Club advertising, these are the three broad options available:

1. **Execution cued:** Have you seen an ad telling you about a brand of charge card where you receive 1.5 airline frequent flyer points for every dollar spent on the card? (In web interviews photo-still graphics or even the full execution may be shown.)
2. **Brand cued:** Have you seen any advertising for Diners Club on TV recently?
3. **Category cued:** Describe for me any advertising you have seen for *charge cards* on TV recently.

You have to tell them something about what it is you want them to remember. You have to prompt them with some kind of a retrieval *cue*. So the issue is not whether you use a cue but exactly which cue you use. Should you use:

- the ad execution
- the brand, or
- the category?

The box on this page shows full definitions and illustrative question wordings for each of these.

Questions like the ones shown in the box above are designed to trigger the memory in some way. Like giving an actor a cue from offstage, the cue in the question is designed to act as a starter that jogs the memory. Any ad awareness question has to have some kind of cue built in. The various forms that the question can take, therefore, mostly amount to variations in the type and richness of the cue that is used.

Practicality

For most product categories it is impractical to measure recognition for each ad by playing all the ads in the category, one at a time. Similarly it is usually impractical to describe the ad execution for *every* ad and *every* brand. There can be dozens of brands and an impossible multitude of ads. Consider the huge number of brands and ads in categories like

financial services, fast food or computers for example. If you tried to do this, it would fill up the whole questionnaire, overly tax the respondents and leave no room in the questionnaire for the many other important things you need to cover.

For the purpose of measuring awareness of *your own* ad/s as an indicator of their mental reach, execution-cued ad awareness is a highly valuable measure and is most appropriate for this purpose (see Chapter 26, 'Mental reach').

While it is important if you can do it, to be able to compare your ad's performance with competitors' ads, it is rarely practicable to do this for mental reach. 'Execution-cued ad awareness' (recognition) is rarely practical for competitive comparison for the reason outlined above—even though it definitely should be used to indicate the mental reach of your own ads.

The other two forms of cueing are by category or by brand. As discussed in Chapter 27 ('Measurement of advertising effects in memory'), these also give some idea of the strength of associative connection. However as we shall see, only one of these two lends itself to complete coverage of all ads and all brands in the market.

Brand vs category cueing

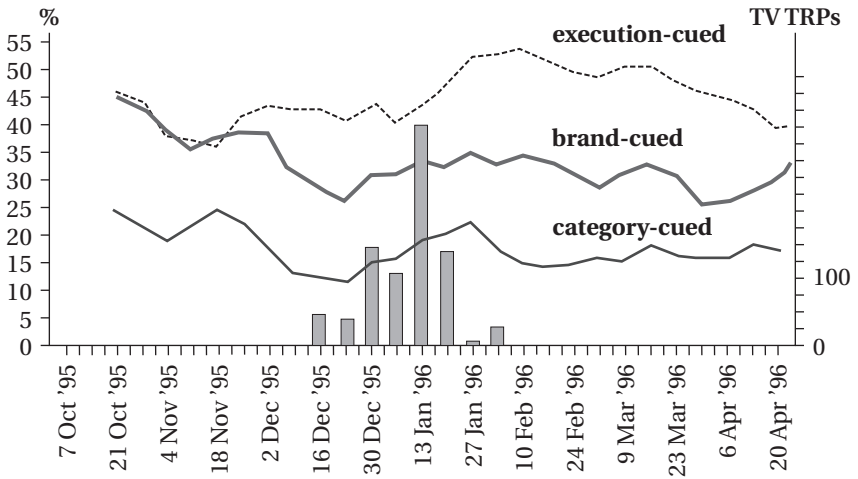
For comparative purposes then, which question is best to use—the one with the category cue or the one that uses the brand cue?

The controversial alternatives

- 1. Category cued:** Describe for me any advertising you have seen for *credit cards* on TV recently.
- 2. Brand cued:** Have you seen any advertising for *Diners Club* on TV recently?

One prominent company has always favored brand cueing and has long been critical of category cueing.¹ Others take strong issue with their unsupported assertions on this, pointing out that their claims are not based on empirical evidence.² Let us look a little more closely at the two.

When the two are compared, you will find that the brand-cued advertising awareness figure is usually *higher* than if the question is category-cued. In other words more people claim awareness when the question is cued by the brand. This is apparent in the case examples in Figure A.1 and Figure A.2. In case 1, the brand-cued ad awareness figure



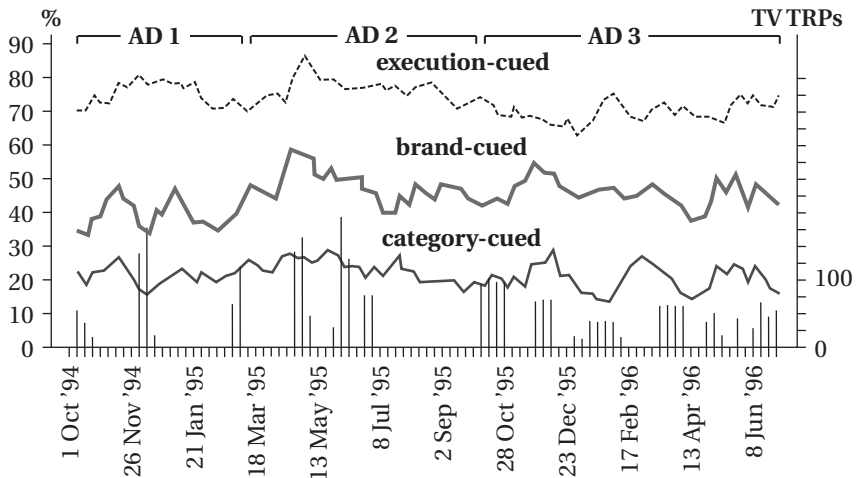
The average figure for this ad:

Execution-cued ad aware = 44%

Brand-cued advertising aware = 33%

Category-cued ad aware = 18%

Figure A.1: Case 1—category vs brand-cued advertising recall. (Source: MarketMind)



The average figure across a long period of time:

Execution-cued ad aware = 71%+

Brand-cued advertising aware = 46%

Category-cued ad aware = 22%

Figure A.2: Case 2—category vs brand-cued advertising recall. (Source: MarketMind)

averages 33 per cent compared to category-cued of 18 per cent. In case 2, brand-cued is 46 per cent and category-cued 22 per cent. Such differences are reasonably typical.

So, why is brand-cued generally higher? Is it just that brand cueing focuses the memory on a more specific question that people find it easier to wrap their minds around (i.e. 'Have you seen any advertising for Diners Club on TV recently?')? Or is there more to it than that?

The nature of the output

There is indeed more to it than that. Note that there is a difference in *expected output* from the two types of questions.

Category cueing ('Please describe any advertising you have seen for charge cards on TV recently') expects people to recall and describe what happened in the ad. Compare this with brand cueing where you provide the advertiser's name (or pack or logo) and ask 'Have you seen any advertising for Diners Club on TV recently?' As Staplehurst has noted, 'A simple yes/no is recorded for each brand, hence this measure is also known as claimed TV ad awareness, as the respondent does not have to prove or describe an execution.'³

Now, think about this for a moment. If the respondent 'does not have to prove or describe an execution', what does it mean, if for example 46 per cent of people say 'yes' to the question 'Have you seen any advertising for Diners Club on TV recently?' What does the figure tell you about the current Diners Club ad?

Ad awareness

Not until respondents are asked a follow-up question like '*Describe the ad* (you have seen recently for Diners Club)' can you begin to uncover how this claimed, (brand-cued) 'advertising awareness' is made up. When you do this do you find that it will invariably reveal those claimed advertising recalls are made up of not one thing but at least *four* things. As shown in the box on p.329 this includes false recalls, old ads and ads where they can only remember the brand. Typically if you have, say, 46 per cent level of (brand-cued) advertising awareness then maybe half or less are valid recalls of the current (Diners 'frequent flyer points') ad.

The four components outlined in the box should make it crystal clear that when you are using the brand cueing type question, then only if you also ask the follow-up question and ask people to 'describe

Asking people to describe the ad they claim to have seen for the brand will reveal that claimed advertising recalls are made up of at least four things:

1. *Current ad*: Valid recalls of the current ad (e.g. 'I remember the ad that said Diners earns you 1.5 frequent flyer points for every dollar spent').
2. *Past ads*: Recalls of past ads (for Diners Club) that are mistakenly remembered as being on air recently.
3. *False recalls*:
 - a) Brand 'slippage': These are recalls or descriptions of competitor's ads (like American Express, MasterCard or Citibank) mistakenly recalled as being ads for Diners Club (e.g. 'I remember the ad where Kate Winslet tells us that Diners Club is part of her life').
 - b) Category 'slippage': These are recalls of advertising from some other product category that are mistakenly recalled here e.g. an ad for an airline (like American Airlines Mileage Miles) might be mistakenly recalled.
4. *'Don't knows'*: 'I can't describe the ad but I know it was for Diners Club.' (But is this correct? And if it is, is it a past ad or the current ad? There is no way of knowing.)

the ad' can you quantify the level of ad awareness of the current ad. When you do this and use the information to subtract from the claimed awareness those that are not valid recalls of the current ad, it lowers the result. The result is likely to be much more like the figure that you would have obtained from category cueing the question instead of brand cueing it. That is because after these extraneous items are subtracted it then represents a measure of *ad* awareness. Before that it is a figure for claimed *advertising* awareness and this is naturally higher because it has all this other extraneous material in it.

Ad awareness vs advertising awareness

Too often people use the terms '*ad* awareness' and '*advertising* awareness' interchangeably.⁴ If 46 per cent of people claim to have the perception or belief that they have seen a Diners Club ad recently, this is *advertising*

awareness. It simply means that the brand has an image, among 46 per cent of people, of having been advertised recently. Advertising awareness is an image in the person's mind. It is not *ad* awareness. It is not a measure of awareness of any specific ad or campaign.

Ad awareness and advertising awareness are not the same. One is an image dimension of the brand. The other is the level of ad recall for a specific ad (or campaign). One quantifies the brand's perceived advertising presence. The other helps you diagnose how people are processing the *current ad* (inferred from the questions on content, message, branding, etc; see Chapter 27, 'Measurement of advertising effects in memory').

The bottom line

The bottom line is: if you want to use ad awareness as a measure—if you want to use it to help diagnose what's working and what's not in your current ad (or campaign)—then you have to ask people to describe the ad anyway, whether you ask them to do this using a question that is:

- category-cued: 'Describe for me any ads you have seen recently on TV for charge cards' or
- brand-cued: 'Have you seen any advertising for Diners Club on TV recently?' and making sure that it is followed by 'IF YES, describe the ad you saw'.

Debating which *way* you ask this (category-cued or brand-cued?) is something of a red herring. It is not as material as making sure that you *do* ask it and therefore making sure you get a measure of *ad* awareness, not just an image measure of *advertising* awareness.

So this is a key reason why brand-cued *advertising* awareness figures almost always *appear to be* higher than category-cued ad awareness. It has all this extraneous material in it.

Evaluating ads

Let me emphasize yet again that in evaluating ads, awareness is a *diagnostic* measure. Ads should not be judged on whether they can get high ad awareness but on their ability to change behavior and attitudes (see earlier chapters). It is therefore important to always keep in mind exactly what the diagnostic objective is of including ad awareness in the measures.

It is a perfectly valid objective to quantify the brand's perceived advertising presence (see Chapter 4, 'Conformity: the popular thing to do'). For this specific purpose, brand-cued advertising awareness does the job well, although it would be more helpful if it were called 'perceived advertising presence' instead. This is because it is roughly equivalent to asking in an image bank a question like this: As I read out each brand please tell me for each brand if you think it is:

- recently advertised on TV yes/no
- good value for money yes/no
- often on promotion yes/no
- etc.

But for the objective of evaluating the *ad* itself and diagnosing why it is or is not working, you cannot escape asking people to describe the ad and what message they took out of it, etc, whether you begin with category cueing or brand cueing.

Three measures move together?

At the risk of too broad a generalization, it is my experience that all three measures of ad awareness (category-cued, brand-cued and execution-cued) tend to *move* in a similar way, more often than not. Figures A.1 and A.2 on p. 327 illustrate this and show how they tend to move together.

But note that there is a major difference in their *absolute* values (as discussed earlier).

While more often than not they tend to move together, it would be unfortunate if any reader took out of this that they *always* do, or that they *necessarily* do. They *don't* and there are very good reasons.

Let's look closely at the three measures in turn.

Recognition

Why is the figure highest when this type of cuing is used? It is because it is a richer cue than the other two.

It is a well established principle in psychology that memory is most effectively triggered if the cues at time of retrieval are identical to those at the time of exposure.⁵ What this means is that in an ideal world we would show the video of the ad and ask if they recognize it and have seen it recently.

As we have pointed out, in the real world of survey research cueing memory by the ad itself in this way can only be done using web interviewing. If it is impractical to play the actual ad, the alternative is to trigger the memory with some surrogate, some substitute cue. The more this cue approximates the full ad itself, the more likely that it will effectively trigger the person's memory.

Showing photo-stills from the ad execution or describing the ad verbally is the next best thing to playing the ad. While rarely practical for use with *all* brands and *all* ads in a market, execution-cued ad awareness is valuable to use for your own ad/s. There are some important things to note about exactly how this is measured.

Execution-cued ad recall

For *web interviewing*, the best method is to show the full video of the ad and ask the respondent if they have seen it before. This is ad recognition.

If time or other constraints prevent this then the fallback position is to show photo-stills from the ad *which should always have some of the words from the audio track underneath*. Let me repeat: you *must* provide cues taken from the 'audio' track as well as cues taken from the video. It is amazing how often this is overlooked and yet it makes a huge difference to the level of recall.

When you show photo-stills or describe the ad, strictly speaking this should not be referred to as recognition. Even though the person is being asked if they recognize having seen the ad previously, it is not the full ad that they are being exposed to but a surrogate—some representation of it. So to avoid the possible confusion it is better to refer to this as execution-cued ad awareness (though admittedly it does not trip off the tongue so easily).⁶

For *telephone interviewing*, execution-cued ad awareness usually goes something like this: 'Have you seen an ad telling you about a brand of charge card where you receive 1.5 frequent flyer points for every dollar spend on the card?'

For most ads the ad execution may be described to the respondent in words. Clearly, however, there are some executions—some ads—that are so complex they defy verbal description. In which case, the best way around it is to use web interviewing.

Execution-cued is usually highest

Note in the graphs that executional-cued ad awareness produces the highest ad awareness figure of all three measures of ad awareness.⁷ This is not surprising since this usually provides the richest set of cues. If the objective is to find out what percentage of the target population has been mentally reached by the ad, then this is the best measure of the three to use. It gives the best estimate. (As discussed earlier it is mainly the practicalities that get in the road of using it for brands other than your own brand.)

What this measure, execution-cued ad awareness, does is to establish if there is *any evidence* that the person has been *mentally exposed* to the ad, irrespective of whether the person can spontaneously retrieve it or what details they remember and irrespective of whether they paid it scant or a lot of attention. It addresses the question: in what percentage of the target market does the ad appear to have any ‘mental reach’?

Problem with the media or the ad?

As discussed in Chapter 26, this percentage figure needs to be compared against the percentage of people who have had the ‘opportunity to see’ the ad according to the cumulative reach in the media schedule.

This cumulative reach figure from the media schedule for the client’s ad sets the ceiling that you can expect for recognition or execution-cued ad awareness. The degree to which ad recognition falls short of it quantifies something meaningful.

Large gaps between the level of ad recognition and the cumulative reach indicate either:

- *A media schedule problem.* People without an ‘opportunity to see’ the ad; or
- *An ad problem.* People who had an ‘opportunity to see’ it, but who failed to notice it—at least enough to recognize it again.⁸ Advertising that people have been exposed to but don’t recognize having seen is usually like advertising that they have never actually been exposed to.

As part of the diagnostic process of elimination you have to rule out the possibility that the media schedule is the problem *before* you can start concluding that the ad is a problem. The ad recognition measure is immensely valuable for this for your own ad/s.

When an ad doesn't track well on this measure (i.e. there is a large gap between it and the cumulative reach), my experience is that it most often identifies a problem with the media schedule i.e. that it is not delivering on its cumulative reach objective. It is much rarer that it turns out to be a problem with the ad itself—i.e. the ad being just 'wallpaper' and just not getting noticed—especially after multiple exposures.

Include the ad recognition measure before the ad goes to air

The ad recognition measure must go into research before the ad goes to air, for two reasons:

1. Sometimes when a new ad is very similar to other ads in the category, people can indicate they recognize having seen it even before it goes on air.⁹ This problem of 'generic content' is an important reason why *the recognition question should be put into the tracking before the ad goes to air* so that the degree of false claiming can be quantified. When false claiming like this does happen, it almost certainly indicates that the ad is *not* going to be successful (except in promoting the category itself).¹⁰
2. There is one other circumstance where false claiming can occur. That is when the ad is a sequel or it contains elements similar to the brand's previous advertising—such as using the same presenter, character, verbal expression, scenes, etc—as were included in some previous ad for that brand. This type of continuity can be a positive so some small degree of false claiming in this situation is tolerable and not necessarily negative. But it should not be large and again *it needs to be quantified by incorporating the question in the tracking before the ad goes to air.*

Brand cueing

This suffers from a similar limitation to execution-cued ad awareness. As we saw with execution-cued ad awareness it is mostly not possible to get complete coverage of all ads for all brands in the market. There are just too many and this makes it impractical. The same applies although to a slightly lesser extent with *brand cueing*.

This limitation of rarely being able to get full coverage is reasonably apparent when you think about it but it is rarely drawn to advertisers' attention. To use brand cueing, there is a need to specifically ask about

each brand. This means a separate question for every brand. *Have you seen any TV advertising for brand X recently?* This can mean a lot of questions.

The situation is even worse because it means in fact that two or three questions must be asked for each brand, not just one, because there is the need to follow up each one by asking people:

- Describe the ad;
- What message was it trying to communicate?

So unless yours is a market with a very limited number of brands it will be impossible to ask about every brand in the market if you use brand cueing. If you use brand cueing you will have no choice but to use a *subset* of brands, which means yet again the tracking compromises on getting coverage of the full competitive ad spectrum. (Category cueing does not suffer from this problem and therefore usually represents a more attractive alternative.)

Ads for new brands and new variants

It is also important to note that with brand cueing, if a new competitor enters the market you will miss out on its advertising because any new brand or new variant will not be specifically included in the list of brands that the interviewer has to ask about each week. You only become aware of this omission after the new advertising has been launched. And then you have to decide if the brand is going to be important enough to warrant putting it into the questionnaire. This is a difficult decision because if the new brand is going to have substantial impact then the answer is yes. If it is not, then the answer is no. But predicting this is exactly why you want to capture the ad awareness in the first place. You want it to act as an early warning system to indicate to you how much impact its advertising is likely to have.

With category cueing on the other hand, if the new brand's advertising is salient enough, it will be recalled and will be automatically picked up by the category-cued question—without any need to manually intervene and change the questionnaire. So category cueing as well as offering full brand coverage also has the advantage of this automatic capture of new brand advertising by the questionnaire.

Category cueing

It should be apparent that in most cases, using category cueing is about the *only* practical way to get coverage of the full competitive spectrum in the ad awareness question. Hence it is generally the recommended choice for that reason as well as the automatic capture of new brand advertising.

There are however some limitations of category cueing that you need to watch out for. One difficulty for category cueing is that the definition of the category may sometimes be contentious. There can be contention as to whether the category is best described one way or some other way. (For example in our earlier example for Diners Club, would it be better to describe the category as ‘charge cards’ or ‘credit cards’? This is a fairly trivial example but it helps to make the point.)

Some categories are easier to define than others. Ones like banks, shampoo, cookies are fairly clear cut. Others are not—sometimes because they are at a higher level of aggregation and sometimes because they are not well formed as categories in people’s minds. For example, consider the following:

- financial services
- hair treatment products
- snacks.

What exactly does each of these mean? ‘Categories’ like financial services, hair treatment products, snacks, etc are at a much higher level of aggregation than banks, shampoo, and cookies and are consequently less well formed as categories in people’s minds. It is not entirely clear exactly what falls into that category. For example, is an ice cream a snack? Is an insurance company a financial service? Is a hair dryer a hair treatment product?

When categories are specified like this at a higher level of aggregation, it is more difficult to define the category and on some occasions it may be impossible. Fortunately this tends to be more the exception than the rule. But there are times when category cueing will have its limitations. In particular it will have problems with ill formed categories and it possibly misses out on some low salience ads, but on balance the positives of category cueing more often outweigh the negatives.

The positives of category cueing can be summarised as follows:

- It allows complete coverage of the ads for all brands—not just a subset of brands.
- It does not miss out on ads for new brands or variants that inevitably come on the market.
- It is clearly the easiest to manage from a questionnaire point of view and avoids the problem of the questionnaire being made out of date by new product/variant entries.

Recommendations

1. Where the category is relatively well defined (e.g. banks, shampoo, cookies) there is therefore strong argument to use category cueing rather than brand cueing. This measures the strength of connection of the brand to the product category (see Chapters 27 and 28).
2. With categories that are less well defined (e.g. financial services, hair care and hair treatment products,) where you don't feel completely comfortable with category cueing and especially if there are only a small number of brands, then brand cueing may be preferable to use in that minority of cases. *But be sure to include the follow-up question asking people to describe the ads they claim to have seen so that you can come up with a measure of ad awareness and not just an image measure of advertising awareness.*
3. In addition, it is important to include a measure of execution-cued ad awareness for your own ad/s in order to be able to quantify the absolute level of 'mental reach'. It tells you nothing about the strength of any connections but will tell you if your ad is not capturing enough attention and how many people it has 'mentally reached' (see Chapter 26).

NOTES

About the author

- 1 NFO acquired MarketMind in 1998. The brand was later sold to Interpublic and eventually acquired by (and folded into) Taylor Nelson Sofres.

Part A Introduction

- 1 David Ogilvy, *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, Atheneum, NY, 1963 and 1984, p. 96.
- 2 Variously attributed to John Wanamaker in the USA and to Lord Lever-Hulme in the UK.
- 3 John Philip Jones, *When Ads Work: New Proof that Advertising Triggers Sales*, Lexington, NY, 1995, p. 28.
- 4 William Lutz, *Doublespeak*, Harper Perennial, NY, 1990, p. 74.
- 5 Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, Mackay, NY, 1957.
- 6 Alec Benn, *The 27 Most Common Mistakes in Advertising*, Amacom, NY, 1978, p. 5.
- 7 As Kover has pointed out: 'Copywriters have a "reputation" in the folklore of the advertising business. They are charged with defending their work and its integrity against any change, no matter how small. They do this against account management, against their own creative department managers, and often in opposition to research findings and the urging of clients.' Arthur Kover, 'Copyrighters' implicit theories of communication: an exploration', *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 21, March 1995, p. 604.
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Chapter 1 Influencing people

- 1 Referring to this effect as a 'feather' is not meant to deprecate its importance. On the contrary, it is meant to give consumers an intuitive *feel* for why we often find it difficult to introspect on how advertising affects us. We don't feel the effect because it is below the JND (just noticeable difference), but that doesn't mean that feathers aren't important or effective. They are! If an ad has real news to convey, it can become a very big feather, in which case we don't need an explanation of the effect. Mostly, however, they are much smaller feathers.
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- 5 Especially when the repetition comes from various sources such as different publications—even for low plausability claims—see A.L. Roggeveen & G.V. Johar, 'Perceived source variability versus familiarity: Testing competing explanations for the truth effect', *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, pp. 81–91.
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- 7 M. Von Gonten & J. Donius, 'Advertising exposure and advertising effects: New panel based findings', *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 37, No. 4, July/August 1997, p. 59.
- 8 In this section I am heavily indebted to Charles Fishman's excellent account that appeared in C. Fishman, 'Message in a bottle', *FastCompany.com.*, July–August 2007.
- 9 C. Fishman, 'Message in a bottle', *FastCompany.com.*, July–August 2007.
- 10 *ibid.*
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Chapter 2 Image and reality

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Chapter 3 Subliminal advertising

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Part B Introduction

- 1 Note that this is merely the average frequency figure. The fact is that some people will have seen it only once, others will have seen it twice and still others will have seen it three or more times. The overall average for the number of times seen is, however, a single figure and this figure is known as average frequency. The more astute advertisers today are demanding that their media plans and media schedules be looked at in more than this simplistic way. They are demanding information on the full frequency distribution of these figures rather than the simple overall average, so that they can see exactly how many people were exposed once, twice, three times, etc., rather than having just a single overall average figure.
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Chapter 13 Continuous tracking

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Chapter 15 Planning campaign strategy

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Chapter 16 What happens when you stop advertising?

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Chapter 17 The effectiveness of funny ads

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- 3 See Tony Chapman & Hugh Foot (eds), *Humor and Laughter: Theory, research and applications*, Wiley, London, 1976.
- 4 Eric Smith, *An Accidental History of Words*, Bay Books, Sydney, 1998, p. 83.
- 5 Chapman & Foot, op. cit., p. 1.
- 6 A study of highly successful comedy scriptwriters in the USA found that humorists were not able to provide much in the way of conscious insights about their technique. Most 'showed a charming and convincing naiveté about humor theory per se'. Chapman & Foot, op. cit., p. 251.
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Chapter 18 Learning to use shorter-length TV commercials

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L. Jacoby & C. Kelley, 'Unconscious influences of memory for a prior event', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 13, pp. 314–36.

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Chapter 20 Underweight advertising

- 1 Two writers independently have suggested 50 TRPs per week as the minimum threshold. See John Philip Jones, *op. cit.* and M. Von Gonten & J. Donius, *loc. cit.* (50 TRPs means that at best only half the target has an opportunity to see the ad during that week.)
- 2 150 TRPs could mean 100 per cent of people exposed on average 1.5 times. In this case it was more like 93 per cent of people exposed on average about 1.6 times in the week.
- 3 Note that laboratory research using *forced attention* is quite different to natural viewing, low-involvement conditions (see E. McQuarrie, 'Have laboratory experiments become detached from advertiser goals? A meta analysis'). Not infrequently laboratory forced attention studies produce findings that might *appear* to support the use of multiple executions. We believe these are applicable only to high-involvement conditions. See for example H. Rao Unnava & Robert Burnkrant, 'Effects of repeating varied ad executions on brand name memory', *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. XXVIII, November 1991, pp. 40–417. Also S. Hawkins, S. Hoch & J. Meyers-Levy, 'Low-involvement learning: Repetition and coherence in familiarity and belief', *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2001, pp. 1–12.
- 4 S. Hawkins, S. Hoch & J. Meyers-Levy, *loc. cit.*
- 5 It is important to note that brand buyers are relatively more involved with that brand than non-buyers of it. By implication brands with low market shares have a communication 'handicap' compared to brand leaders—especially if the brand leader is talking to its own buyers. For empirical evidence of this see B. Rice & R. Bennett, 'The relationship between brand usage and advertising tracking measurements: International findings', *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 38, No. 3, May/June 1998, pp. 58–66.

Chapter 21 Why radio ads aren't recalled

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Chapter 22 Maximizing ad effectiveness

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Chapter 24 Corporate tracking of image and issues

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Chapter 25 The web

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- 13 R. White, loc. cit.
- 14 G. Philipson, 'Devices put to a screen test', *The Age*, 18 September 2007, p. 7.
- 15 P. Edgar, loc. cit.
- 16 G. Philipson, loc. cit.
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 P. Edgar, loc. cit.

Chapter 26 'Mental reach'

- 1 E. DuPlessis, 'DVRs and advertising attention: The case for inadvertent attention', loc. cit.
- 2 Giep & Franzen, *op. cit.* p. 20.
- 3 Ulric Neisser as quoted by D. Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, Basic Books, NY, 1996, p. 22.
- 4 Esther Thorsen & Xinshu Zhao, 'Television viewing behavior as an index of commercial effectiveness', Association for Consumer Research, Advertising & Psychology conference, 1994.
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Chapter 27 Measurement of advertising effects in memory

- 1 This is referred to in the USA as 'message take-away' but in other parts of the world it is more commonly known as 'message take-out'.
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- 4 For an excellent account of 'spreading activation' theory see John R Anderson, *Cognitive Psychology And Its Implications* (3rd ed.), Freeman, NY, 1990, pp. 150–209.
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- 6 Daniel L. Schacter, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
- 7 Daniel L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory*, Houghton Mifflin, NY, 2002. Larry Percy, 'Advertising and the seven sins of memory', *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 23, 2004, pp. 413–27.
- 8 Robert Heath, *The Hidden Power of Advertising*. Admap Publications, Henley-on-Thames, 2001, pp. 57–8.

- 9 R. White, 'Engagement, involvement and attention', *Admap*, Vol. 487, October 2007, p. 24.
- 10 J. Mundell, J. Hallward, et al., 'High attention processing: The real power of advertsing', *Admap*, Vol. 474, July/August, 2006.
- 11 S.M.J. van Osselaer & C. Janiszewski, 'Two ways of learning brand associations', *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 28, 2001, pp. 202–23.
- 12 Technically this is known as 'content addressability'.
- 13 J.Z. TSein, loc. cit.
- 14 Daniel L. Schacter, op. cit., p. 103.
- 15 Brain imaging technology reveals that things that have high connection strength do not necessarily have to be physically close but are often widely distributed throughout the brain. See for example Schacter et al., 1998, *ibid*.
- 16 J.Z. TSein, loc. cit.
- 17 Although the primary method of transmission is chemical rather than electrical.
- 18 L. Postman & G. Keppel, *Norms of Word Association*, Academic Press, NY, 1970, pp. 1–38.

Chapter 28 The buy-ology of mind

- 1 For an excellent account of episodic memory, see Mark H. Ashcroft, *Human Memory and Cognition*, Scott Foresman, NY, 1989.
- 2 One view is that the residue of repeated information from similar episodes forms semantic (knowledge) memory. See Francis Bellezza, 'Mnemonic methods for storage and retrieval', in E.L. Bjork & R.A. Bjork (eds), *Memory*, Academic Press, San Diego, 1996, pp. 356–7.
- 3 Scott McKenzie, 'The role of attention in mediating the effect of advertising on attribute importance', *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 13, No. 2, September 1986, p. 178.
- 4 This is based on my MarketMind experience over more than 15 years of tracking numerous campaigns and also strongly supported by the publication of the work of Eric Marder, *The Laws of Choice*, Free Press, NY, 1997.
- 5 Extensive studies by Marder (*ibid.*) indicate that the effect attributable to a *single* placement of a print ad is small and below the order of magnitude that can be detected in many research sample designs (p. 287). However, with TV the average effect, while still small, is many magnitudes (8 or 9 times) greater (p. 319).
- 6 R. Fazio, P. Herr & M. Powell, 'On the development and strength of category-brand associations in memory: The case of mystery ads', *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. I (1), 1992, pp. 1–3.
- 7 For example, people may be questioned about the Volkswagen ad by asking whether they have seen an ad for cars that showed a close-up of a man's face that is badly scarred.

- 8 Ad recognition (execution-cued ad awareness) can be a good measure of 'mental reach' only if precautions are first taken to set benchmarks and control for the tendency towards 'yeah'-saying. A new ad can look or feel familiar even when people have not actually seen it before—particularly if the new ad is generically similar to other ads. We have observed as many as 43 per cent of people in benchmark periods claiming to have seen an ad, before it even went to air. It is amazing how many market research companies ignore this and fail to benchmark these types of measures.
- 9 Esther Thorsen & Xinshu Zhao, loc. cit.
- 10 It is possible to do this an alternative way by asking people if they have seen any advertising for the brand and, if they have, to describe the ad. This is known as brand-cued ad recall. This is discussed in more detail in the Appendix.
- 11 In fact, people are more likely to recall TV ads than print ads like this but we have used the print example for clarity of illustration.
- 12 Note that this is not a good estimate of the percentage of people who have seen and noticed the ad, which will be significantly greater and more appropriately indicated by the execution cued (recognition measure). Movements in the two measures are usually correlated (see Appendix). Here, what is being indicated is the percentage of people for whom the connection has not only been established but is strong enough to be triggered into mind spontaneously by the product category.
- 13 There is also some tendency for the reverse to be true. Increasing brand recall can also lead to an increase to some extent in advertising recall for that brand. If more people become involved with that brand they may be more likely to notice its advertising. But this relationship is much weaker and not a necessary one at all.
- 14 Jack B. Haskins, 'Factual recall as a measure of advertising effectiveness', *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 4, March 1964, pp. 2–28.
- 15 Advertising that is not designed to solve a problem or remove a dissatisfaction but depicts consumption of the brand as a source of reward in its own right. For a fuller understanding of transformational advertising, see John Rossiter & Larry Percy, op. cit., p. 121.
- 16 It is important to recognize that brand users are usually more favorable to that brand's advertising than non-users of it. This needs to be borne in mind, especially when comparing one brand's ads with another smaller brand's ads. See B. Rice & R. Bennett, op. cit.
- 17 Kevin Keller, 'Memory factors in advertising: The effect of ad retrieval cues on brand evaluations', *Journal of Consumer Research*, December 1987.

Chapter 29 Conclusion

- 1 Lec J. Stanislaw, Polish writer (1909–66).

Appendix

- 1 Graham Staplehurst, 'Effective research for effective campaign results', paper presented to Australian Market Research Society Annual Conference, 1996.
- 2 See for example Frank Simper, 'A response to effective research for effective campaign results', Paper presented to Australian Market Research Society Annual Conference, 1997.
- 3 G. Staplehurst, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- 4 M. Sutherland & L. Friedman, 'Do you model ad awareness or advertising awareness?', *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 40, September/October 2000, pp. 32–6.
- 5 This is known as the encoding specificity principle: see E. Tulving, E. Thomson & D. Thomson, 'Encoding specificity and retrieval processes in episodic memory', *Psychological Review*, Vol. 80, 1973, pp. 352–73.
- 6 Frequently the brand will be masked out of the photo-stills and the description—in which case it is called 'masked, execution-cued ad awareness'.
- 7 A study by Stapel provides evidence that all recall comes from the much larger group of people who recognize the advertising. J. Stapel, 'Recall & recognition: A very close relationship', *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 38, No. 4, July/August 1998, pp. 41–5.
- 8 When consumers look at your advertising communications, what do they think about? Some are daydreaming—staring while their minds are 'off elsewhere'. An hour later 40 per cent or more won't even recognize having seen it. See E. Thorsen & X. Zhao, *loc. cit.*
- 9 One complication is that when an ad is very similar to other ads in the category it is possible for people to say they recognize having seen it before it goes to air. This usually signals that it is a problem ad because it is not distinctive enough—its content or style is too 'generic'. It is crucial to quantify this level of 'false claiming' by including the question in the tracking *before the ad goes to air*. This then becomes a diagnostic in its own right.
- 10 See Chapter 22, 'Maximizing ad effectiveness: develop a unique and consistent style'.

INDEX

- 15-second commercials 209–11
 - 27 *Most Common Mistakes in Advertising* 4–5
- 30-second commercials 135
- 60-second commercials 135

- Aaker, David 250
- Absolut vodka 239–40, 241, 256
- accelerated trials 222
- accountability 322
- activation theory 287, 291–3, 301
- actors playing characters in ads 132–3
- 'ad hoc' surveys 168
- adjectives, use of 114
- adolescents 52, 57, 85
- adverbs, use of 114
- advergaming 99
- advertisements, *see also* creativity; executions
 - association with brands 313–14
 - elements of 116–39
 - length of 135, 196, 209–20, 276–7
 - measurement focused on 298
 - parts focused on 111–12
- advertising, *see also* brands; effectiveness of advertising; executions; image advertising; television advertising
 - awareness of 329–30
 - cessation of 190–7
 - delivery methods 72
 - fine tuning 180–2
 - for brands vs products 150–1
 - limits of 146–61
 - mystique of 4, 321
 - new products 3–4, 63, 101–4
 - time spent watching 320
- adwords 140–1, 272–3
- Aflac insurance 249, 254
- African Queen* 75
- agenda of concerns 263–4
- agenda-setting effects 17–18, 54, 77
- alcohol marketing 154, *see also* brands
 - of alcoholic drinks
 - as 'social' products 57
 - by product placement 75
 - light beer 154
 - patent medicines 35
 - restrictions on 151
- Alley, Kirstie 126
- Allstate Insurance 243
- alternatives, weighing up 15–16
- Altoids 239
- ambiguity 28–9, 50, 106–7
- American Express
 - Jerry Seinfeld ads for 93, 277, 293
 - Karl Malden ads for 126, 293, 311–12
- analgesics 237
- Anderson, John 184
- animation 133–5, 141, 268
- Annheiser Busch (Budweiser) beer
 - 121, 125, 204
- 'anti' motivation 85
- anticipatory laughter 207
- Anticol 243
- anxiety about subliminal advertising 37
- Apple Computers
 - mini-dramas 92–3
 - reaction to symbols 85
 - target audience 127
 - use of sequels 254
- Aristotle 199
- artistic people, *see* creativity
- Asch, Solomon 49
- Asics 106
- assertions 111
- association 298
 - communicating by 67–9
 - conveying 63
 - learning by 66–7
 - measuring 294–9
 - memory and 65
 - requires repetition 289
 - via product placement 75–6
- Atkinson, Rowan 125
- attention
 - devices to obtain 117–20
 - inconsistency and 64–5
 - inertia in 97–8
 - limits of 42–5
 - minimum levels of 44
 - time required for 216–17
 - to humorous advertising 203
 - to television vs radio 233–4
- attitude change 46, 153, 306–7
- attribute cueing 34
- attribute importance 316–17

- audience motivation 219
Avis car rental 33
awareness 40–5, 324–37
- back-to-back shorter ads 218
badges of identity 81–90
Baker, Herbie 201
bandwagon effect 50–1, 56
banner ads 267
Barclays Bank 125, 254
barriers to entry 284
Bart Simpson 134
beam balance analogy 7
‘beat-ups’, maintaining 103
Beckham, David 126
behavioral targeting 140–5, 270–2
believability 315–16
belt-tightening, *see* budgeting
Benn, Alec 4–5
beverages, *see* drinks
Billy Graham Crusades 51
Blair, Tony 172
Body Shop 45
Bolle sunglasses 119
bottled water 12–13
brain studies 290
brand evaluation, *see* effectiveness of advertising
brand image 317
 association with 307–8
 entertainment value and 104–5
 meaning and 292–4
brand loyals 192
brand placement, *see* paid product placement
brands, *see also* advertising; brand image
 alternatives, evaluating 28–35
 association with 313–14
 attribute agenda 31–2
 cueing by 20–1, 326–8, 331, 334–5
 effect of ceasing advertising on 190–7
 in radio advertising 235
 inferior 156
 influence of 34–5
 integrating with execution 204–6
 involvement in advertising 105
 making into symbols 88–9
 measurement focused on 298, 306–7
 memory for 302–4
 reminders of 109
 style and 241–2, 249–50
 vs products 150–1
British Airways 121
broadband 324
Bryant, Kobe 130–1
budgeting 147–8
 cessation of advertising and 191–5
 cost-effective 196
 for radio advertising 234–5
Budweiser beer 121, 125, 204
Burger King 109
Bush, George 172
Bush, Jay 244
Bush’s Baked Beans 125, 244
Butterfinger 134
buy-ology of mind 301–19
bystander role 97, 127–8, 158
- cable TV 145
cake mix products 152
Calvin Klein jeans 119
Camel cigarettes 36, 37, 126
Campbell Soups 235
car advertisements 188, 232, *see also* *names of manufacturers, e.g. ‘Hyundai’*
Caro 128
carry-over effects 192
categories, *see* product categories
category-cued ad recall
 spontaneous ad recall
category-cued salience 23
celebrity endorsements 81–2, *see also* *names of celebrities*
 actors playing characters 132–3
 association via 75–6
 for bottled water 13
 ‘ownership’ by brands 22
 presenters 125–6, 244–5
 testimonials 120
cessation of advertising 190–7
chameleon commercials 237
Chanel No. 5: 239
channels of communication 96
character (letter) recognition 87–8
characters, *see* on-screen characters
checks and balances 146
Chesterfield, Lord 199
Chiffon margarine 127
Chrysler Charger 244
chunking 256
Churchill, Winston 277
cigarette marketing 154

- Clayton's 61–2
- cleverness 106
- click through rates 141, 268–72
- Clinton, Bill 172
- Clix fragrance 204
- Close-Up toothpaste 32
- closeness of connections 292–3
- clutter 186–7, 213–14, 233–4, 272
- Coca-Cola
 - budgeting limitations 148
 - jingles 122
 - point-of-sale advertising 23–4
 - 'subliminal advertising' for 37–8
- cognitive consistency 153–4, 255–6
- Colgate toothpaste 32, 106–8, 279
- commercials, *see* advertisements
- communicating, *see also* messages
 - by association 67–9
 - channels for 96
 - in fast-forward 72–3
 - time required for 215
- comparative advertising 137
- competitors, *see also* defensive advertising
 - advertising by 146–7
 - effect of on retention 185–6
 - negative features of 32–3
 - opportunities given by 194–5
- computer games 99
- conditioned attitudes 46
- confirmation of brand attributes 158–9
- confirmatory evidence 8
- conformity 48–59, 83–4
- consciousness, *see* explicit processing
- consistency 153–4, 255–6
- constants, *see* style
- consumers, influencing 6–27
- contextual advertising 273
- Continental soup 239
- continuity in sequels 255–6
- continuous advertising schedule 166
- continuous tracking 168–74, 177, 263–4
- 'control groups' 173
- 'controversial' advertising 119
- conventional memory 287
- convergence, *see* technological change
- conversion vs reinforcement 157
- cookies 178–9
- Coors 75
- corporate image 258–65
- corporate raiders 260
- counter-arguing 202–3
- creating needs 148–9
- creativity
 - ad length and 216–17
 - awards for 159–60
 - cognitive consistency and 155
 - failure of 284
 - 'handcuffs' on 255
 - in humorous advertising 201
 - success in 101
- cueing
 - by brands 334–5
 - by product category 22–3
 - enhances salience 19–21
 - for retrieval 294
 - of memory effects 324–8
- cumulative reach 281
- 'cuteness' 106
- Dairy Soft 302, 303
- daylight saving 226
- De Vries, Peter 57
- decision-making 15–18, *see also* high-involvement decision-making; low-involvement decision-making
- Decoré shampoo 171
- defensive advertising 32–3, 55, 259–60
- descriptions of ads 329
- DHL couriers 205
- diagnostic complementary measures 285–6
- Dial deodorant soap 158
- dialling bird commercial 200, 205
- digital television 274–5, 278
- discrimination learning 86–8
- dishwashing detergent 152
- distractions, *see* interference effects
- divided attention 42–3
- DIY celebrity 244
- Dodge Neon 244
- dogs, fear of 85
- Double Tree Hotels 121
- Dr Pepper 129
- 'dramatic' advertisements, *see* mini-dramas
- drinks, *see also* alcohol marketing; *names of drink brands*
 - attribute agenda 31–2
 - bottled water 12
 - Clayton's 61–2
 - iced tea 223
 - instant coffee 152
 - milk marketing 191, 243
 - mini-dramas 92–3, 95
 - seasonal advertising 225–6

- 'drip' media strategy 196
- drug advertising 150–1
- durable products 176–7
- Duracell 137
- dynamic measurement 172

- early seasonal advertising 225
- effectiveness of advertising 159–60
 - alternative brands 28–35, 45–6
 - critical threshold 228
 - effect of competition on 185–6
 - evaluation of 6–8, 305, 330–1
 - feather effects 6
 - humor and 198–208
 - maximising 237–50
 - measurement of 159–60, 285–300, 304–9, 325–6
 - recall and 315–16
- Effies 160
- Ehrenberg, Andrew 36, 157
- elaboration 230
- elements of advertising 116–39
- embedding, *see* paid product placement
- emotions
 - features associated with 29–31
 - influences on 44–5
 - mini-dramas and 96–7, 131
 - sharing of 83–4
 - style defined by 247
- empathy, immersion and 94–5
- employees, attracting 258–9
- Energizer bunny 243, 243
- entertainment value 104–5
- environmental issues 259, 262–4
- episodic memory 301–2, 309–10
- erosion of brand image 190, 192–4
- evaluation of effects, *see* effectiveness of advertising
- Everage, Edna 239
- Evian bottled water 12–13
- exclusivity 57–8
- executions 165
 - analysing 123–7
 - brand integration with 204–6, 312
 - failure due to 196, 227–32
 - memory for 302
 - multiple 231
 - on-style 250
 - optimal number of 228
 - recall cued by 332–3
- expected output from questions 328
- explicit processing 288
- expression 82–5
- extending a season 223–5
- extensions of product placement 79
- external reaction to symbols 86
- eyes on screen 282–3
- eyewitness testimony 113–14

- face to face advertising 124–5, 235
- failure of advertising
 - diagnosis of 283, 308–9
 - due to inconsistency 154–5, 315–16
 - due to scheduling 332–3
 - executorial anorexia 196, 227–8
 - mental processes and 299
 - mistaken identity 238–41
 - predominance of 321
- false fame effect 53
- false recalls 328
- familiarity
 - accelerates processing 211–13
 - aids recognition 25
 - as 'side effect' 54–5
 - product placement and 77
 - repetition enhances 9
- fast-followers 218
- fast-forwarding 72–3, 217, 278
- feather effects 6
- Federal Express 268
- Feldman, Marty 201
- Festinger, Leon 153
- fifteen-second commercials 209–11
- First Person Shooters 99
- fish paste marketing 155–6
- Fishman, Charles 13
- focus of processing 114
- follow-up responses 270–2
- food sales 190–1
- for and against positions 85
- forgetting, models of 184–5
- format of advertisements 245
- Fosters beer 136
- frames of reference 28, 258
- Franzen, Giep 117
- Freud, Sigmund 202

- Gates, Bill 34
- Geico commercials 95
- general level of clutter 187
- generic content 334
- gesture 243–4
- gifts 57
- Gillette 129
- 'given' information 112

- GlaxoWellcome 271
 Gordon's gin 75
 granfalloon 84–5
 'green' image 259, 262–4
 Greenland 35
- habitual buyers 192–4
 hair spray advertising 10
 Hallmark cards 57
 hated ads 102–3
 headphones 99
 Heath, Robert 184
 Heilig, Morton 91
 Heinz 239
 heralding 109–10
Hidden Persuaders 4
 high-attention advertising 289
 high-involvement decision-making
 advertising and 14–15
 commercials aimed at 188
 evaluation of effects 7–8
 media weight and 229–31
 via the Internet 274
 Hirschfeld, Al 39
 Hogan, Paul 22, 22, 126
 Hopkins, Anthony 125
 humorous advertising 119–20
 deflects irritation 109
 effectiveness of 198–208
 negative roles in 136
 'hypnotic' effects 98
 Hyundai 261
- Iacocca, Lee 48
 identification
 'badges' denoting 81–90
 conformity and 83–4
 with characters 94
 image advertising 10–11
 change via 260–3
 corporate image 258–65
 effects of 66–7
 immersion and 95–6
 mental processing of 61–3
 immediacy of radio 235
 immersion 94–9
 implicit image association 75–6
 implicit processing 63–4
 deliberate 44
 durability of 183–4
 effectiveness of 321
 memory and 287–9
 'subliminal' 41
- in-home placement 179
 incidental learning, *see* implicit
 processing
 incompatibility, *see* inconsistency
 incongruity, *see* inconsistency
 inconsistency 64–5
 creative 106–7
 failure due to 154–5, 315–16
 in humorous advertising 200
 indirect advertising, *see* oblique
 advertising
 individual differences 69–70
 inference 67
 influencing people 6–27
 initial trials 180
 innovations, *see* new products
 insecurity 51–2
 instant coffee 152
 integral constant 249
 Intel 246
 interaction of words and visuals
 116–17
 interference effects 183–5, 217, 229,
 284, *see also* clutter
 internal reaction to symbols 86
 Internet, *see also* technological change;
 web advertising
 behavioral targeting 140–5
 broadband 324
 panels recruited via 173
 viral advertising 138
 iPod 238
Iron Chef 36
- Jaipur perfume 119
 James Bond movies 75
 Jewelry.com 60
 Jim Beam 11
 jingles 121–2, 248
 JND 8
 Joe Camel 126
 Jolie, Angelina 126
 just noticeable difference 8
- keywords in 'search' advertising 140–1,
 272–3
 kissing 86–7
 Kit Kat 223, 318–19
 Kit 'N Caboodle 134
 klitchniks 120
 knock-on effects 269–70
 knowledge memory 301–2, 309–10
 Koestler, Arthur 201

- Land Rover 92, 204
- laughter 199
- layout of advertisements 245
- learning 66–7, 211
- lecture-style ads 124
- 'legitimacy' to continued purchase 55
- length of commercials 135, 196, 209–20, 276–7
- Lever body wash 118
- Levis 121
- light beer 154
- liking of advertisements
 - advantages of 104
 - humorous advertising 202–6
 - transformational advertising 317
 - web advertising 269–70
- limens 41–2
- line length study 48–50
- Lion King* 36
- lip-sync 124
- Lipton 223
- Loftus, Elizabeth 113
- London Daily Mirror 39
- 'look-alike' advertising 238
- Lotto 268
- low-involvement decision-making
 - clutter and 213–14
 - commercials aimed at 188
 - evaluation of effects 6–7
 - media weight and 229–31
 - radio advertising and 234
 - supermarket purchases 24
- low-key advertising 110–11
- Luv diapers 121
- lyrics of jingles 123

- M&M 31–2, 134
- Madonna 13
- Malden, Karl 126, 311–12
- malleability of memory 113–14
- market research 141, 160
- marketing, *see* advertising; media scheduling; new products
- Marlboro cigarettes 22, 75, 85
- mass markets, accelerating 149–50
- Mastercard 129
- Mayer, Oscar 155
- McDonald's
 - basketball ad 130–1
 - jingles 122
 - reaction to symbols 85
 - target audience 132
- 'me-too' advertising 10, 12–13

- Meadow Lea 158
- meaning 66, 86, 292–4
- measurement of effectiveness, *see* effectiveness of advertising
- media reach 280
- media scheduling 234, 311, 332–3
- memory 276, *see also* familiarity; mental processes; recall; recognition; retrieval
 - association and 65
 - malleability of 113–14
 - measuring impact on 285–300
 - strategy based on 183–9
 - types of 301–2
- mental processes
 - accelerating 213
 - barriers to entry 252
 - buy-ology of mind 301–19
 - focus of 114
 - implicit 41
 - in decision-making 15–18
 - learning 66–7, 211
 - modelling 281–2
 - neural networks 291–2
 - 'reach' of 278–84
 - reviewing alternatives 15–16
 - saliency 8, 17–23, 103
 - selective processing 43–4
 - sequels and 256
 - stored information 62–3
 - strategy based on 183–9
- Mercedes Benz 36, 37, 242
- messages 101–15, *see also* communicating
 - content of 62
 - engineering 317
 - memory for 302
 - re-presenting 105–7
 - take-out 62, 314–15
 - time required for 215
 - ways of receiving 184
- MetLife 239, 240, 256–7
- Microsoft 33, 262–3
- Mikimoto pearls 30, 30
- milk marketing 191, 243
- mimicry 244
- mini-dramas 92–5, 130–1, 135
- minor effects of advertising 6
- Minute Maid fruit juice 295–8, 296, 303, 314–15
- mistaken identity 238–41
- mixed-involvement audiences 231–2
- mixture-ingredients 218

- models of memory 184–5
- money, *see* budgeting
- mood, influences on 44–5, *see also* emotions
- Moran, William 194
- most preferred alternatives 16
- Motorola 126
- movies 74–5, 253–4
- multiple executions 231
- music in advertising 121–3
 - as a brand cue 22
 - style defined by 245–6
 - voiceover with 248
- mystique of advertising 4, 320

- Nabisco 245–6
- nationalism 84
- NatraTaste 137
- 'natural' forces 255
- needs, creating 148–9
- negative features 29–33, 136–7
- negative roles 135–7
- Nestea 242–3
- Nestlé coffee ('Nescafé') 92–3, 254
- networks, neural 291–2
- neuro-imaging studies 290
- Nevin, Bruce 12
- 'new' information 112
- 'new media', *see* technological change
- new products
 - advertising 335
 - failure rates 148
 - heralding 109–10
 - promotions for 157
 - time required by 175–82
- news advertising 3–4, 63, 101–4
- newspapers, decline in 275
- Nike 85, 242, 304
- Nivea 52
- 'noise' of competing claims 147, *see also* clutter
- noiseless food mixer 152
- non-assertions 111
- non-heralding advertising 110–11
- nostalgia 150

- oblique advertising 60–71
 - non-assertions in 111
 - product placement 72–80
 - ways of receiving 184
- off-season pause 223–5
- Ogilvy, David 3
- Omega watches 81

- on-screen characters 131–5, 245
 - actors playing 132–3
 - as receivers 129–30
 - identifying with 94
 - negative roles 135–7
 - thoughts of 130, 248
 - voiceovers and 128–9
- OpenOffice software 33
- opportunities for competitors 194–5
- 'opportunities to see' measure 280–1
- opposition, *see* competitors
- optical illusions 28
- Oral B 128, 254–5
- Osgood, Charles 66
- out-of-body experiences 93
- overpopularity 56–7
- ownership of a style 238–41, 256–7

- packaged goods, *see* supermarket purchases
- Packard, Vance 4
- paid product placement 72–80
 - in games 99
 - influencing taste via 151
 - vehicles for 95–6
- paid search advertising 272–3
- parity choice situations 77
- participant vs bystander roles 97, 127–8
- passive observers 130
- pearls 30
- peer group pressure 52, *see also* conformity
- Penfield, Wilder 286–7
- people, as social beings 117–18
- Pepsi-Cola 117
 - comparative advertising 137
 - jingles 122
 - mini-dramas 130–3
- perceived popularity 52–3, 55–8
 - communicating 58
 - product placement and 77–8
 - seasonal products 221–2
- perceptual fluency 269
- periodic surveys 172
- peripheral processing, *see* implicit processing
- Perrier bottled water 12
- persuasion
 - as role of advertising 14
 - by proxy 121
 - rarity of 321
 - reinforcement vs 157

- pet food advertising 271
- PETA 30
- pharmaceuticals 150–1
- pictures, thinking in 69–70
- Pirsig, Robert 91
- Pizza, Pizza 122
- places 247
- Plato 199
- plays on words 106
- point-of-sale advertising 23–4, 34, 318
- political campaigns 37, 144–5, 172
- popularity, *see* perceived popularity
- positioning 155, 262
- positive features 29–31
- practical jokes in advertisements 39
- practicality in measurement 325–6
- 'pre/post' surveys 168–9, 172
- presenters 125–6, 244–5
- prestige, overpopularity and 57–8
- price, overpopularity and 57–8
- primary food products 150
- priming 211–13
- Pringles 108, 109
- print media 275, 279
- private equity companies 260
- product categories
 - clutter in 187
 - conformity in 237–8
 - cueing by 22–3, 326–8, 335–7
 - memory for 302
 - 'social' products 57
- product placement, *see* paid product placement
- products, vs brands 150–1
- program integration, *see* paid product placement
- purchase information monitoring 168, 285–6, 306–7

- radio advertising 233–6
- Ray-Ban 75
- 'reach' of mental processes 278–84
- Reagan, Ronald 172
- reality TV, product placement in 75
- recall
 - effectiveness and 315–16
 - false 328
 - measuring 332
 - mental reach and 280
 - of humorous advertising 203
 - of radio advertising 234
 - residual, as barrier 252–3
- recognition
 - measures of 310–12, 326, 331–4
 - mental reach and 279–80
- recommendations 337
- 'recovered memories' 114
- Redembacher, Orville 255
- Reece's Pieces 75
- registration on websites 143
- regulation of Internet advertising 143
- reinforcement 211–13
 - by advertising 195
 - of connections 293
 - vs persuasion 157
- reminders 112–13, 217–18, 270
- repeat purchases 194
- repetition
 - association via 289
 - effects of 8–9, 284
 - enhances salience 18–19
 - in low-involvement decision-making 230
 - staleness due to 107–8
- residual effects 192, 252–3, 269–70
- resistance to change 151–5
- retail, *see* supermarket purchases
- retrieval
 - cues for 294, 317–19
 - failure of 185
 - style and 241–7
- Roddick, Anita 45
- role-play 93–4

- salience 8, 17–23, 103
- 'salting' tip jars 51
- satisfied customers 120
- saturation radio marketing 233
- 'save water' campaign 223–4
- Schumacher, Michael 81
- search advertising 140–3, 267, 272–3
- seasonal advertising 180–1, 221–6
- Seinfeld, Jerry 93
- selective processing 43–4
- self-competition 188
- self-help tapes 38
- self-presentation 82–5
- semantic memory 301–2, 309–10
- Sensodyne toothpaste 32
- sequels 251–7
 - commercial length and 135
 - continuity in 133
 - shorter ads as 214, 218
- Sesame Street* 64, 133–4
- sex in advertising 118

- 'shadowing' studies 43
- shallow processing, *see* implicit processing
- share-of-mind 186
- shared experiences 83–4
- 'side effects' of advertising 53–5
- sign-off lines 120
- silent signals 114
- situational image changes, *see* image advertising
- sixty-second commercials 135
- slogans 31, 82, 242
- Snapple 254
- social networking sites 138, 143
- social product categories 57
- soft drinks, *see brands of drink e.g.* 'Coca-Cola'; drinks
- 'solo' fifteens 217–18
- sonic branding 245–6
- sounds, style defined by 245–6
- special occasions 57
- spontaneous ad recall 312–14
- spontaneous brand awareness 306–7
- sporting heroes 81, 83, 126
- 'spreading activation' theory 287, 291–3, 301
- Sprint 243
- Sprite campaign 33
- St John 126
- stock prices, image and 259
- stopping advertising 190–7
- stored information 62–3
- strategic cueing times 21
- style 237–50
- subliminal advertising 36–47, 321
- subtlety in advertising 37, 78
- summer products 221, 226
- Superman II* 75
- supermarket purchases
 - agenda-setting effects 17–18
 - conformist advertising 240–1
 - low-involvement decision-making and 230
 - mental agendas 24–6
 - point-of-sale advertising 23–4, 34, 318
 - repeat buying 177–80
- supplementary retrieval cues 317–19
- Sure deodorant 243–4
- surveys of customers 168–74
- Sutherland, Max xii
- symbols 81–90, 242, *see also* brands
- syntax of print material 114
- Target 241
- target audiences 127, 140–5, 219
- target rating points (TARPs/TRPs) 166–7
 - delivered vs planned 227–8
 - per execution 228
 - when advertising ceases 192–3
- taste testing 190
- Taster's Choice coffee 92–3, 93, 254
- Tease body spray 79
- technological change
 - advergaming 99
 - broadband 324
 - digital video 217
 - fast-forwarding 72, 278
 - in market research 160
 - Internet and 138
 - new products from 149
 - web advertising 266–77
- teen brands 57, *see also* adolescents
- telecommunications advertising 147
- telephone interviews 332
- telethons 51
- television advertising
 - cable TV 145
 - 'hypnotic' effects 98
 - mini-dramas 92–3
 - technological changes 266, 274–5
 - time spent watching 3
 - tracking results of 173
 - using shorter commercials 209–20
 - vs radio 233–4
- testimonials 120
- The 27 Most Common Mistakes in Advertising* 4–5
- The African Queen* 75
- The Hidden Persuaders* 4
- 'the secret' 4, 320
- thirty-second commercials 135
- thresholds of awareness 41–2, 228
- timing of advertising, *see* media scheduling
- Tinactin 243
- 'top-of-mind' category members 23
- Toshiba 136
- Toyota 92, 157, 243
- traditional view of memory 293–4
- traditional voiceover 248
- Transamerica 247
- TRPs, *see* target rating points
- 'truth effect' of repetition 9
- turn-offs 56–7
- TVRs, *see* target rating points

- 'unconscious' effects of advertising 5,
 - see also* implicit processing
- undershirts 75
- understanding of advertisements 108–9
- underweight advertising 227–32
- United Airlines 121
- unprompted ad awareness 324
- user image 11–12

- vantage point of viewer 97
- vehicle advertising 188, 232, *see also*
 - names of manufacturers, e.g.*
 - 'Hyundai'
- vicarious experience 91–100
- Vicary, James 37–8
- Victoria's Secret 119
- video games 99
- viral advertising 72, 137–8, 276
- virtual billboards 268
- virtual reality 91–100
- visual salience 26
- visuals 116–17, 235, 242–3
- vocal stresses 114
- voiceovers
 - face to face vs 124–5
 - inhibit mini-dramas 97
 - pros and cons 126–8
 - style defined by 248
- Volkswagen 31–2, 60, 102, 204, 302, 303
- Volvo 10–11, 292–3
- Vonnegut, Kurt 84

- wash-over effect of music 122–3
- wear-in 251–2
- wear-out 206–7, 251
- Weatherproof clothing 199
- web advertising 141–3, 235, 266–77
- 'webisodes' 277
- website use tracking 141–3, 173
- Weinblatt, Lee 210
- Welles, Orson 12
- Wells Fargo 238
- Wendy's 125
- Wheaties 122
- Winfield cigarettes 22, 126
- winter products 221
- word of mouth advertising 137–8
- words 69–70, 116–17, 123, *see also*
 - print media
- YouTube 276