

Consumers' brain is the key

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"Panels in the US and elsewhere find that advertising is not very effective," says Caxton joint MD Noel Coburn. "They are finding through direct measurements of sales offtakes that 80% of advertising doesn't have an impact on sales. And for my money, that's what really matters."

This doesn't mean that advertising is incapable of working, merely that most of the time it is not well practised.

But the way it's done now, says Coburn, advertising is Russian roulette. "This is why money is going below the line. Advertising is seen as ineffective." In the US, the trend has been overwhelming.

In 1960, 73% of advertising money was spent "above the line," or on mainstream media advertising, and 27% was spent below the line, a catch-all phrase for nonmedia advertising, including sponsorships, public relations, direct mail, telemarketing, promotions and event marketing. By 1993, the balance had almost completely swung the other way: 25% above the line and 75% below the line. Coburn has no doubt that this indicates a growing level of disenchantment with traditional media advertising.

How can we change that? By getting it right the first time, says Coburn, who has presented his thesis at a number of distinguished international forums. This requires an understanding of how the brain processes information. "The holy grail of advertising is the search for a method to eliminate ineffective advertising before it is run.

"Most methods of pre-testing ads to establish their likelihood of success rely on two methodologies: likeability and recall. If people like or can recall an ad (preferably both), the theory goes, they are more likely to respond appropriately to its message, which usually is, Buy Me."

But American social scientist John Phillip Jones, author of *Getting it Right the First Time*, has shown that liking and brand recall have only a 41% success rate in predicting a marketing outcome. Advertising recall, surprisingly, has a higher level, at 54%, but "brain processed" advertising has a 91% success rate. This employs a technique which measures whether the brain has processed an advertisement and come to a decision.

"The battlefield is in the brain of the consumer," says Coburn.

The emotional dimensions are critical. One of the key things you have to do is convey favourable associations and differential information on your brand. Implicit recognition of this was evident in the reaction to the Joe Camel character, who was used with great effect to promote Camel cigarettes. The problem was its appeal to children: Joe Camel has higher recognition among children aged 6-9 in the US than Mickey Mouse.

"The brain is not a computer," says Coburn. "Because it works so well we think it is like a computer. But it won't do whatever we want it to do when we want it to do it. You can't make it make a memory. It has to have good reasons to do this. Memories get lost in the brain too easily. So you have to make sure that your advertising is easy to remember and retrieve. People don't realise how difficult it is for the brain to input information. Two competing streams of information can confuse the brain and unless you file it properly the brain can lose it.

"The brain is switched off a lot of the time. Whenever it can it goes on to automatic pilot. It scans but it doesn't memorise.

The brain isn't sitting there actively waiting for information. It ticks over to conserve energy. But if it senses something significant it becomes fully activated. The secret of successful communication is to activate the 'on' button. Get the brain to pay attention."

Three things can achieve this: relevance, involvement and intrigue. "The only way to get the brain to pay attention to the advertising is if it is relevant, involving and intriguing. If you have a good ad, you get sales immediately. If you don't get sales immediately you haven't got a commercial."

The amount spent has nothing to do with the results, Coburn maintains. "There is no correlation between advertising weight and sales effectiveness. If you get a good ad you don't need weight. And if you have a bad ad it doesn't matter how much weight you put behind it. There is a new media philosophy which is to get away from frequency for frequency's sake. Relevance implies defining who your readers are and thinking yourself into their needs."

The second component of effective advertising, says Coburn, is that the ad must create a measurable conviction that the advertised brand is worth buying next time the consumer is in the market.

"Lip service doesn't count. You have got to get conviction. The idea of conviction is a new one. We have started to discover that it is only if a consumer commits that it works. It is the difference between 'I love you' and 'Will you marry me?'(thin)" What turns love into conviction?

Recent research into the human brain has shown that it is divided into two rather distinct areas, one of which controls rational thought, and the other of which controls the emotions.

The rational brain processes the information and makes a decision, but it is only when this is approved by the emotional brain that the decision is truly made. "You test all your decisions against the emotional brain. This has been established by measuring the brain electronically," says Coburn.

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