

Creating strong brand memory maps



By [John Laurence](#)

22 Nov 2012

The brain is found to be far more "plastic" than previously thought, able to rewire itself after damage from a stroke or to strengthen neural connections or "maps" when learning, like memorising the dialogue of a play or learning to play the guitar.

Harvard Medical School Professor of Neurology, Pascual-Leone investigated this when he used a new technique to measure the size of a neural brain map as blind people learned to read brail. They were given the task of learning for three hours a day, Monday to Friday. After subsequently measuring the size of these brain maps using this new technique, he found that as their skill improved, the size of these brain maps increased.

The maps measured on the Friday had shown remarkable expansion from their size on the Monday, but when his subjects had a break over the weekend and he re-measured the maps on the following Monday, they had reduced back to their baseline size. It was only after about six months of training that the "Monday map" started to show real growth. After 10 months of training, the subjects were given two months off. When they returned, they found that the maps had remained unchanged from the last "Monday map" from two months before. Unlike the short-term changes, which were quick to disappear, the long-term changes had become permanently hardwired into the brain.

Consistency and repetition

Brands map themselves in memory structures in a similar manner at various quality and quantity levels. Quality refers to the strength of the brand map that has been formed and its salience, or ease at which it can be recalled in the right situation. Quantity refers to the number of connections or associations that the brand makes to other elements that are important to the individual. For instance, thinking about Mercedes-Benz easily conjures elements of prestige, elegant style and traditionalism for most people.

Accordingly, strong brands are built on two key aspects - consistency and repetition. If you run a campaign for two months and then stop, you are effectively creating a short-term brain map which will disappear after a couple of months - as the Friday brain maps did with Pascual-Leone's subjects.

Decades of effort

Likewise, if you run one campaign for six months and a completely different one for another six months, then you are effectively creating two separate brain maps, which will collectively be weaker than a single strongly focused one.

No new brand can possibly assail Coca-Cola's dominant position in the South African market, purely because of the decades of effort that they have invested in creating strong, durable and consistent brain maps in people's minds. Anybody that ill-advisedly attempts to take on Coca-Cola would have to be willing to spend an enormous amount of money and have immense patience to wait for a return on that investment.

When it comes to advertising, do you know which aspects of your ad are creating memory encoding? You may be spending a lot of money creating a weak and inconsistent brand map that could actually reduce the hard work that has been put into the existing map in people's minds.

ABOUT JOHN LAURENCE

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