



CONSUMERS BUY THE FEELING NOT THE FACTS Emotion Drives Purchase, Not Logic

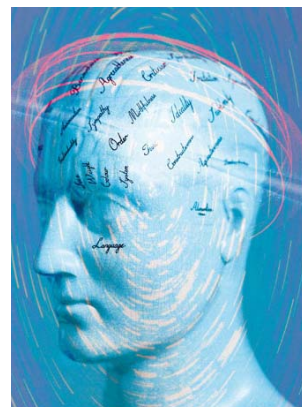
Most of what goes on day to day in business flows from decidedly left-brain focused activity. Product development, packaging, distribution, sales and price planning, manufacturing and even marketing will take on an analytical glow steeped in the traditions of fact-based decision-making. Everyday managers participate in the application and execution of systems and procedures designed to help direct business progress and outcomes. For the most part this effort is logical, sequential, rational and objective.

When it comes to products that compete for consumer attention, the formulations and technologies employed are often fine-tuned through preference testing that works to determine whether this recipe or that will theoretically outsell the competition — because tests confirm that the majority of targeted consumers like the taste of product “A” more than “B.” Better functionality, benefit and performance are now table-stakes by the way, and won’t offer much advantage.

The Elephant in the Marketing Room

These behaviors, actions, and steps serve to reinforce something remarkable that may inadvertently undermine the very goal every business holds dearly in achieving growth: to get and keep a customer. Our charts and processes suggest we ultimately believe consumers must be logical and decisive individuals who make sensible and considered purchase decisions based on the facts arrayed in front of them.

God forbid the energy and analysis invested in our logical, analytical approaches and reasoned steps to success could be upended by a consumer who doesn’t base their purchase decision on the facts but rather on that murky



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How did we get here?

Perhaps more so than at any other time in the history of modern consumerism, the overarching role emotion plays in response to brands and purchase behavior is an outgrowth of market complexity. Increased pressure on time, commoditization of many product categories (lack of any real, note-able differentiation) and unending clutter has forced the hand of emotion-based decision making. It is a coping mechanism – a path to mental shorthand that allows us to deal with the overwhelming number of products and services competing for attention. According to USA Today, “Neuroscience research has embraced the idea that irrational psychology rather than cool calculation plays a role in buying decisions.”

Ok emotions rule, so why does this matter?

The stakes are enormous. Miscalculating the role of emotion and feeling in purchase decisions can impact the future of brands and businesses. “Rationality and being ‘on message’ are fine but it’s more important to be ‘on emotion’ in product communications. Trust, believe-ability and relevance (are) the motivators behind our purchases,” reports Dan Hill, President of Sensory Logic, a firm devoted to facial coding research. “Today’s marketers may be increasingly aware of the power of emotion, but far too many companies still insist on trying to win consumers with rational explanations of product benefits.”

Emotion strategy at work

Put a baby inside the auto tire? Michelin’s move to the number one global tire brand position was driven partly by recognizing it’s not the novel tread design and time-worn staged demonstrations of traction in bad weather that drives preference. People are buying the Michelin brand based on a palpable feeling of trust, safety and security. Research is too often focused on rational method and points about superiority or preference that

completely misses the boat on the emotional needs and wants of the consumer. Too many products and brands already reside in an environment of thin distinctions and near parity in technical prowess. Marketing messages, to be effective, must connect with emotions first and transcend rational arguments.



Chicken or egg?

“Brands only exist in people’s heads, so it is their idea of what a brand is that matters, not the marketer,” extols Howard Roberts, research guru for Saatchi & Saatchi. People don’t choose rationally to listen to the marketing message and then experience a feeling about it. They choose to listen to the message BECAUSE they have a feeling about it.

Our left-brain dominated business lives may imperceptibly cause us to miss this forest for the trees. If emotion is not currently the tip of the spear in your marketing communications strategy, then today you may be compromised with a blunt instrument incapable of breaking through the elaborate barriers consumers have erected to purposefully ignore brand communications. Passion, emotion and relevance to people’s lifestyles matter first, not last, in gaining the elusive ear of those we want to buy our products.