

Dealing with Undesired Consumer Attitudes

Gimme! The Human Nature of Successful Marketing



For too long, many marketers have ignored the basics of how human beings are wired and how they work emotionally. And as a result, the effectiveness of their marketing and advertising suffers.

Marketers who understand the emotional triggers and genetic characteristics of their consumers are better able to persuade and convince them with their marketing programs. *Gimme!* explores these evolutionary traits in ways marketers can easily understand, so they can better leverage these primary human drivers of behavior for greater marketing success.

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Gimme! is a must-read for the marketing professional... John Hallward brings together robust data, a deep understanding of consumer values, a knowledge of advertising and great insights, that make Gimme! an indispensable resource for marketing executives everywhere.

— Tracy Hampton, SVP Research Services, Visa U.S.A. Inc.

In this issue of *Lessons Learned*, John Hallward shares the genetic building blocks that form and change attitudes

Attitudes are defined as the beliefs and feelings towards some event or object. However, we often have many beliefs towards any one single object (some good and some bad). As we make decisions we weigh the emotional pay-offs (the pros and cons) of each possible decision choice.

The problem with attitudes and beliefs is that they are well burned into the neurons, and they have emotional attachments or associations. In many cases, they have been there for a long time and have been constantly re-enforced. Owing to our inclination to be energy efficient, we dislike engaging our lazy brains to constantly rethink things. Thus, changing an established attitude, particularly a negative one, is difficult to do. We are genetically disinclined to change our established attitudes. Fundamentally, our species genetically dislikes change.

In marketing and sales, trying to change a consumer attitude is difficult. The holder often doubts the intentions and credibility of the communicator. Thus, instead of trying to change a stubbornly set attitude, it is often easier for marketers to either (1) alter or leverage **other attitudes**, or (2) change **the importance** of the attitude in the holder.

Many successful ad campaigns have had success by recognizing their brand's shortcomings and admitting or agreeing with the negative attitudes of the consumer. We have seen this idea work successfully in Canada for "Buckley's Mixture" cough syrup. Their selling message has been: "It tastes awful, and it works." This strategy builds greater credibility.

Another strategy for persuasion in the face of poor attitudes is to add new beliefs. Consumers are less likely to reject or ignore new beliefs that do not challenge existing ones. Beliefs



are about attitudes that already exist in the person's mind, so if a new idea is presented, it is unlikely to be met with a pre-established negative judgment. As an example, I saw the other day that smoking can lead to impotence in men. We all know about lung cancer, but impotence is a completely new reason to quit smoking. It is hard to have a prejudgment about smoking and impotence if this was previously unknown.

Although advertisers do not like to recognize (or promote) the names of their competitors, sometimes it is worthwhile to do so. If a competitor is obviously superior, much larger, and established, then it is not likely so damaging to recognize what consumers already know.

Perhaps one of the most famous campaigns to recognize the competitor in its own advertising was Pepsi and its Pepsi Challenge. The big idea was that many more people drank Coca-Cola than Pepsi, but in a blind taste test these consumers preferred Pepsi. In the "Pepsi Challenge," Pepsi challenged Coke drinkers about their beliefs towards Coca-Cola, and started consumers thinking of Pepsi in a better way.

When a brand is strongly outsold by a market leader, it is likely safe to recognize the leader, and then work to alter, add, or reweigh the importance of beliefs. What I find interesting is that as brands have named their competitors and successfully closed the gap on their dominant competitor, they have then stopped directly recognizing the opposition and have adopted an independent, confident leadership tone. Once the gap narrows, and many consumers may no longer hold the (ex) leader in such high regard, there should be caution about including the competition in the campaign.

Altering or biasing attitudes can also be achieved in subtle and almost indirect subconscious ways. Just small details to context can make a difference in whether attitudes are triggered or recalled. For example, if an upset-stomach remedy is perceived as a medicine, and many people do not like taking medication, then perhaps one can alter these brand perceptions by casting the upset stomach remedy in a beach bag, gym bag, or backpack. By altering the context of the brand (away from the bathroom medicine cabinet towards a more fun and enjoyable context), one can alter the beliefs in a subtle emotional way. Any hints of medicine are removed. These are subtle peripheral cues, but our senses register them (even if subconsciously) altering our beliefs.

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About the Author



Advertising research expert John Hallward started his career with Procter & Gamble, and Johnson & Johnson. He then co-founded the Canadian firm of Tandemar Research Inc., a leader in advertising research for top advertisers. After Tandemar was acquired by Ipsos, he went on to become Director of Global Product Development for Ipsos ASI, where he is also a member of the board. *Gimme! The Human Nature of Successful Marketing* is his first book.

Ipsos ASI



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