

colliculus. The lateral geniculate nucleus (considered part of the thalamus) plays a critical role assessing the importance and urgency of a visual stimulus, while the superior colliculus gives us the capacity to see without consciously knowing we see. Meanwhile, right above the superior colliculus is a tiny brain structure considered part of the limbic system called the amygdala. The amygdala has the power to control our entire body and move us away from danger in about 13 milliseconds [101]. Joseph Ledoux, a prominent neuroscientist and researcher on emotions and responses to threats at NYU showed that it takes about 500 milliseconds for the neocortex to recognize the legitimacy of a threat. Therefore, the primal brain is nearly 40 times faster than the neocortex to respond to a visual stimulus [102].

After the information has been processed by the lateral geniculate nucleus and the superior colliculus, visual data typically follows a ventral stream and a dorsal stream, each serving different processing functions. The ventral stream is called the *what* pathway because it processes the urgency of recognizing objects or situations we encounter. Upon the stimulation of the ventral stream, we may receive enough information to act. This is what Ledoux calls the “low road.” Low-road processing demonstrates the importance of relying on visual data to survive. When we see something that looks like a snake, we do not think about it; we move away from it by shortcutting any engagement with the rational brain. Meanwhile, a dorsal stream, engaging primarily the parietal lobe to prepare and guide our behavior, also interprets visual data. Therefore, if we see something that looks like a snake, we use the dorsal stream to decide if we should change our walking course. The dorsal stream is called the *how* network because, without a healthy parietal lobe, we cannot figure out what to do with an object, or how to respond to a situation. In fact, the dorsal stream is also responsible for re-assessing the self-relevance of a situation confirming the critical importance of making a visual stimulus personal. However, let's be clear: visual dominance is not just a function of how much we fear death. It is truly our default decision-making system.

Even Voting Is a Visual Decision

Some surprising research has demonstrated that we tend to cast our political vote for people who have the most visual impact on us. In a study conducted by Princeton University in 2006 [103], subjects were asked to “use their guts” to confirm which of two gubernatorial or senatorial candidates they would pick. With no prior knowledge of who these candidates were, they could only rely on the candidate's facial appearances. Yet, researchers were able to predict their

picks over 70% of the time. The conclusion of the study is obvious: we are guided by the visual dominance of our primal brain, and we later rationalize choices made below our level of consciousness. Although none of the stereotypes attributed to how beauty or attractiveness is portrayed in media today, there is clear and undisputable evidence pointing to the importance of how we perceive the character of a person based on the way they look. For instance, we are better at judging personality traits of people we consider attractive after we meet them briefly than doing the same for people who are perceived as less attractive [[104](#)].

The Four Types of Visual Stimulation

There are four types of visual stimulation that are important to consider when you are on a mission to persuade an audience.

3D Moving Object. The most potent visual stimulus for the primal brain is a three-dimensional object moving in space. The onset of motion captures the most attention of all [[105](#)]. Think about the impact of a lion starting to run toward you! Consider that, when you present in front of people, you are a live being moving in space, which is why you can trigger more attention than a video or an email ever will. Also, faces and their expressions capture more attention than any other object [[106](#)]. That is why using your body language is a critical visual stimulus. Face familiarity detection in the brain only takes 200 milliseconds according to a recent study using EEG [[107](#)]. Researchers have also shown that a lot of the visual processing of objects is “pre-attentive.” This means that it happens mostly below our level of consciousness [[108](#)].

3D Static Object. The second-best visual stimulus is a static three-dimensional object. It could be an object you place on a table in front of you during a presentation, like a prop, a mock-up, or a 3D model. Alternatively, the object can be you facing an audience while remaining still. In all these cases, even though the object is static, it may be of great interest for the primal brain, if the object is relevant to your audience and to the story of the value of your product, company, brand, or message.

2D Moving Image. The third most effective visual stimulus is a two-dimensional image moving frame by frame. Of course, we are talking about a video. We enjoy them simply because visual frame changes are entertaining for our primal brain. This is true as long as the changes are not happening too fast. In the era of digital editing, video producers can display many frames in a very short period. However, studies we have conducted on the effect of videos on the

brain show that our primal brain stops processing the meaning of a narrative when the speed of change is above three frame changes per second or below 35 milliseconds per frame. Above that speed, the information may still be processed below the threshold of consciousness, in which case the effect is called *subliminal*. Although the subject of the effect of subliminal stimuli has garnered much attention over several decades, the effects are minimal [\[109\]](#). However, we now know that text and visual stimuli produce distinct subliminal effects – namely, because reading text requires complicated computational operations that involve not only the eyes but also the auditory cortex. Although subliminal perception is possible from either type of stimuli, visual primes receive more subconscious attention than words do. This, of course, is due to the dominance of the primal brain. Many scholars also explain this phenomenon by considering that language has evolved over a very short period compared to our biological ability to decode a visual stimulus, which predates the development of the cortex by millions of years [\[110\]](#). Also, as we mentioned earlier, our ability to acquire visual information without conscious effort is enabled by old subcortical areas (like the lateral geniculate nucleus, the superior colliculus, and the amygdala), which process visual signals before they reach higher, more evolved cortical areas [\[111\]](#). Finally, negative emotional videos produce more brain response than those featuring positive emotions, regarding both intensity and speed. To be persuasive, we recommend that a video should use a persuasive narrative with a pain-centric drama. Also, you learned earlier that we need about 200 milliseconds to recognize a familiar face. So to recognize or connect with the characters of the story, remember that your audience needs at least 200 milliseconds of footage to do so [\[112\]](#).

2D Static Image. The fourth most effective visual stimulus is a picture – a two-dimensional set of pixels. Notice I did not mention text or charts. Photos (objective form) are better at grabbing attention than illustrations (subjective form) because they require less time and energy to be recognized by the primal brain. Illustrations are not as effective because they are less concrete and potentially less familiar than real scenes captured by a camera. Using custom photography of situations that are unusual is effective if the objects, the context, and the nature in each photo are familiar to your audience.

The Power of Colors

Primates started to see in color –trichromatism – about 35 million years ago as the result of a mutation of the seventh and X chromosome [\[113\]](#). As a result, they developed an evolutionary advantage to pick up fruits, detect predators, and

become better at reading facial expressions. Colors have a specific effect based on their wavelength:

- For example, visible colors of longer wavelength (reds) have an innate effect of stimulant because they are associated with dangerous stimuli like fire, blood, lava, and sunsets [[114](#)].

Although the physiology of vision cannot explain all responses to colors, there are still many similarities among diverse cultures on how colors are perceived. For instance, in a study performed on 243 people from eight different countries researchers confirmed that blue, green, and white are always associated with calm, serenity, and kindness [[115](#)]. Another study performed in the United States showed that different colors and different shapes – circles, squares, angles, and waves – of lines communicated the following affective values [[116](#)]:

- Red is happy and exciting.
- Blue is serene, sad, and dignified.
- Curves are serene, graceful, and tender.
- Angles are robust and vigorous.

Once consumers have started to make a strong association between a product and a color, the evaluation of a new product that contrasts with the original color may fail [[117](#)]. For example:

- Pepsi introduced Crystal Pepsi a transparent drink whose color was too far from the regular brown and was quickly abandoned.
- Palmolive tried a new color for its dishwashing soap. The consumers considered it less “degreasing” than the yellow one and less “fresh” than the green.

Researchers have also demonstrated that colors play a role on memorization: red strongly increases memory for negative words, and green strongly increases memory for positive words [[118](#)]. Beyond a simple color association for a physical product, researchers have also established that certain colors impact the cognitive performances – for example, green stimulates creativity, whereas red inhibits intellect [[119](#), [120](#)].

In conclusion, the choice of packaging color, color of the product itself, color of the background where the product is presented, or color of the fonts in text will all affect the brain of your audience. As an effective persuader, make sure to use colors effectively.

Applying Visual to Persuasive Messages

Maximizing the visual appeal of your message is a priority. There are many ways to apply this core stimulus when you craft an ad, a corporate video, a commercial, a web page, and, of course, a face-to-face presentation.

First, always remind yourself that your audience will not process the entire visual stimuli. Only a fraction of what you show will be seen. Less is more. Eye-tracking studies confirm that only a fraction of a web page or a packaging label will be processed by most people, regardless of age, gender, or education. There are 100 million receptors in the eye, but only a few million fibers in the optic nerve. Fifty percent of our visual brain is directed to process less than 5% of the visual world. It is as if our eye movements curiously help us see more of small areas, not more of big areas.

Second, focus on improving the saliency of your images. Visual saliency is the inherent quality your visual stimuli must have to capture and captivate your audience. We typically process details in the center of the visual field, but the contrast between an object and its surroundings makes it more salient. For example, when we designed the home page of the SalesBrain website (see [Figure 4.8](#)), we made sure that the key message elements would be salient. The pictures featuring the brain are complex, but the dark background helps the viewers focus their attention on the critical elements (water splash and funnel). The icons are simple, with clear white lines around three illustrations introducing our claims. The visual opacity map ([Figure 4.9](#)), which shows only the areas that are predicted to receive visual attention, confirm that the overall design is well balanced because the most important message elements have good saliency.



Figure 4.8 SalesBrain home page.

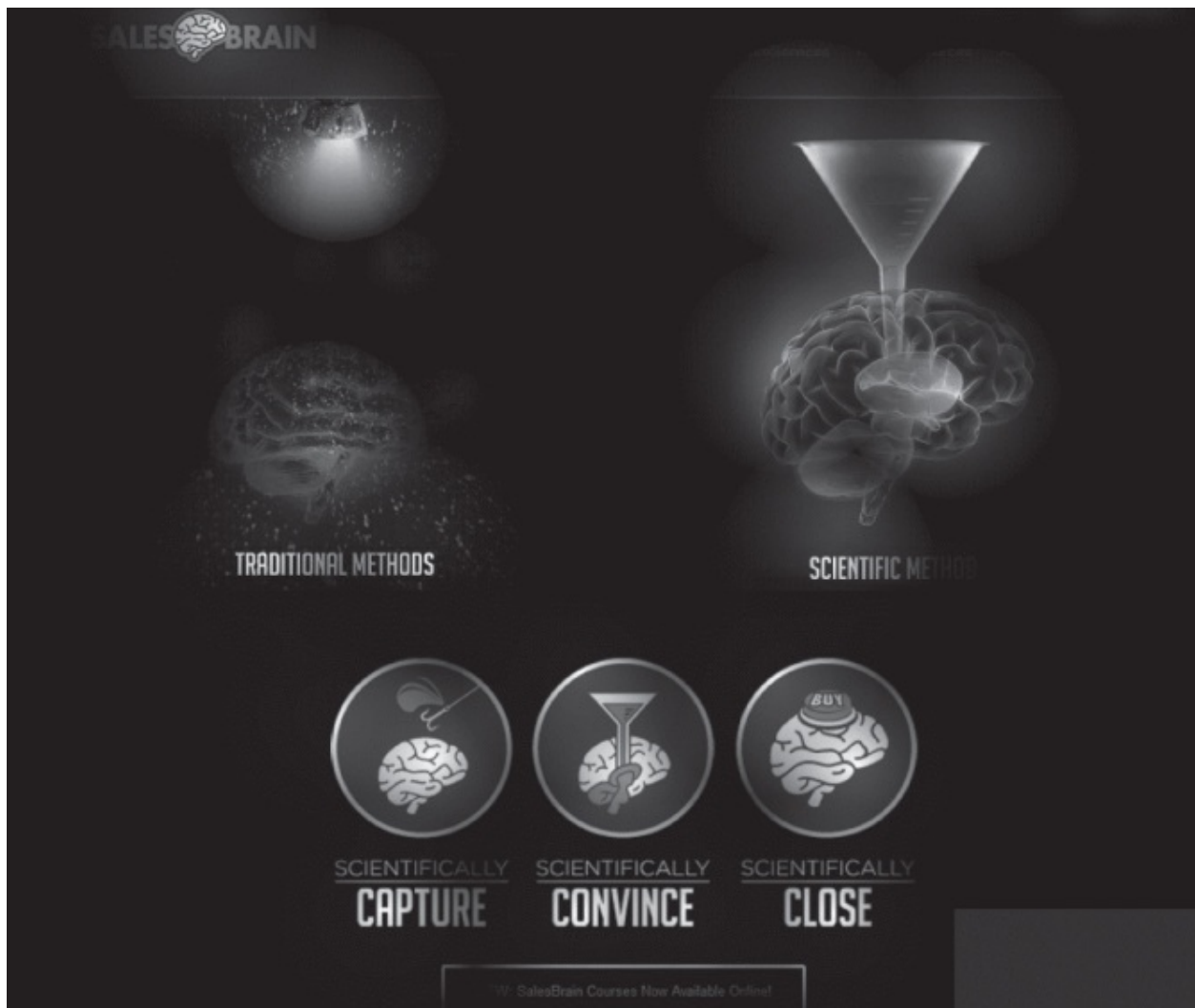


Figure 4.9 Opacity map of SalesBrain site.

On a web page, identifying a pop-out object can take less than 100 milliseconds. However, that time will increase if you design objects that have more than three levels of differences from each other – namely, their sizes, their colors, and the speed of their motion.

Third, visual processing is done in stages. You must appeal to early processing stages where neurons are busy sorting the easiest elements to recognize first. Avoid using too many colors, for example, because this makes separating salient elements difficult to achieve. As the SalesBrain example demonstrates, using lines around objects helps the brain perform a pattern detection with less cognitive energy. The more visual your messages, the more persuasive they will be.

Sometimes, your messages might even save lives. Such as in the field of public

health. There's been some interesting research showing the superiority of visual warnings over text ([Figure 4.10](#)). They are called *picture warnings*. More than 40 countries around the world are using such visuals, and they produce better results than text warnings, especially on young brains and brains of light smokers [121]. The younger the brains, the more important employing visuals and emotional content to influence behavior. This is important because lives are at stake, and you want to make sure that your message is communicating urgency.



[Figure 4.10](#) Poster for World No Tobacco Day, May 31, 2009, Tobacco-Free Initiative, World Health Organization.

To conclude, most people do not understand what making a stimulus visual really means, especially when you consider how visual data is processed in the primal brain. For instance, if you use bullets with text on your presentation slides, none of that data is visual! The primal brain sees letters as if they were

hieroglyphs, which mean they will trigger no meaning or urgency!

The Neuroscience of Visual

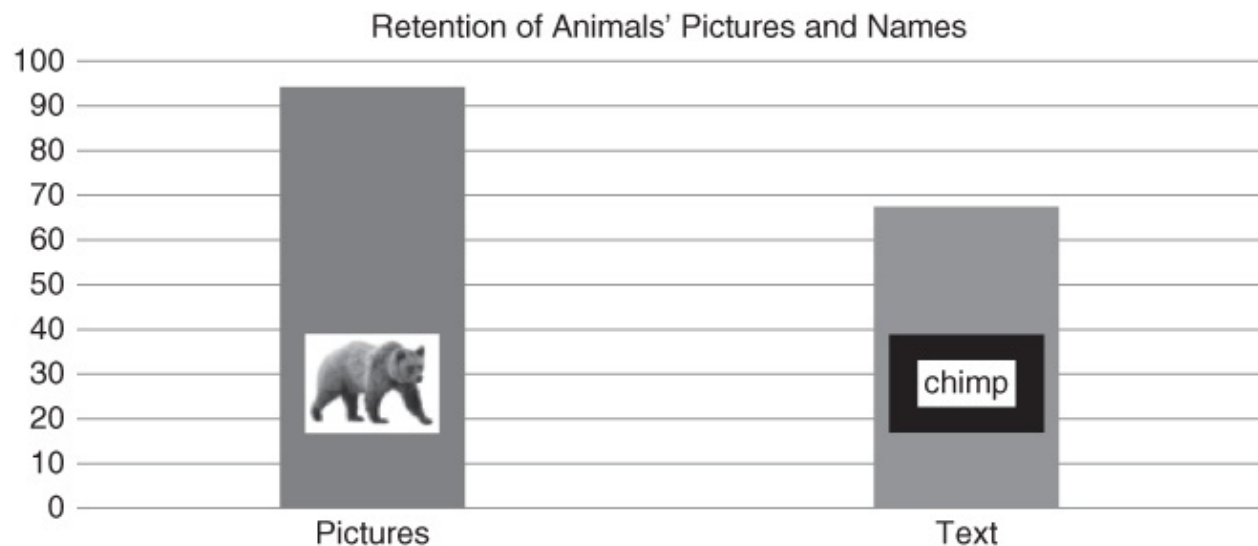
For visual, we tested the following research question: *Can you make a message easier to process and more memorable by making it more visual?*

We used the following advertising stimuli to test our hypothesis:

- Insurance print ad:
 - One ad explaining the value of life insurance using text.
 - One ad showing someone about to be eaten by a shark.
- Pictures and words of animals flashed for 10 seconds.

The results supported our hypothesis:

- The insurance ad using a visual grabber instead of text triggered more attention (27%), more arousal (+697%) and much more emotional valence (100x) while reducing cognitive distraction by 25%.
- The retention of animal pictures was over 90% of the list and 40% higher than the retention of the animal words ([Figure 4.11](#)).



[Figure 4.11](#) Visual retention.

Visual Neuroinsights: By making your messages more visual, you will create more impact on the primal brain and make your message more memorable.

What to Remember About Visual

- The visual sense dominates all other senses.
- It takes only 13 milliseconds to process an image, but about 10 times more to process a word and nearly 500 milliseconds to process a decision that engages the rational brain.
- Making a message visual delivers the fastest and most important persuasive stimulus of all.
- Objects in movement attract the most attention.
- Saliency of objects is key.

EMOTIONAL



“We are not thinking machines that feel, we are feeling machines that think once in a while.”

– Antonio Damasio, neuroscientist

Emotions play a critical role in making your message persuasive because emotions are the basic fuel that trigger decisions. The role of emotions in decision making is well-researched, but the topic has often been highly controversial. What are emotions? Do they derail us from making good decisions? Can we control them so that they do not affect our choices? These are just a few of the questions that have been debated for hundreds of years.

Let me introduce the seventeenth-century French scientist, philosopher, and mathematician largely responsible for this discord among today's scholars and researchers, René Descartes. Descartes, one of the greatest scientists, gave us modern mathematics with the Cartesian representation of data (Cartesian comes from the name Descartes). For instance, when you plot x and y on two axes, you use Descartes's model. Descartes believed that reason drives the best of our decisions and it is only through logic and deduction that humans can pursue a path to a greater truth. He promoted a philosophical model called “dualism” in which he argued the mind and the body be two separate entities. For Descartes,

the mind thinks like a god and is imbued with the capacity to use logic and reason, while the body cannot think and responds like a machine to basic instructions. In a famous book titled *Le Discours De La Méthode* [122], he suggested a step-by-step process to make the best rational decisions and developed the notion that only humans have rational souls: “I think, therefore I am.” So, Descartes inspired a long-held view that humans are always driven by rationality. Hence, scholars have supported for decades the notion that emotions have little influence on the way we decide. In fact, many argue that we systematically use reasoning to compute the *utility of a decision*. Introduced earlier, the pursuit of more utility assumes that we seek to maximize the value of our choices by increasing the number of options. Doing that increases our probability of finding what we want. Supporters of the utility theory further believe that bad choices are caused by limited choices, not by inherent flaws in our decision-making process [123].

However, behavioral economists, neuromarketers, and decision neuroscientists have revolutionized our understanding of how choices are made in the human brain. Their findings disprove the rationale of the utility theory because neurotransmitters affect our behavior in ways that revolutionize our understanding of decisions. One such transmitter is dopamine, which plays a critical role in emotional states related to predictions and rewards. For instance, in one study, participants who received synthesized dopamine were better at optimizing their choices than others. Other studies have shown that choices under uncertainty are difficult to make for patients with prefrontal and amygdala damage, confirming that emotions play a crucial role in making complex decisions [124]. Neuroscientist and prominent expert on the neurobiology of emotions, Antonio Damasio, is a fervent opponent of Descartes' dualism as well as any decision-making model theory based on the dominance of rationality. In the book *Descartes' Error* [125], Damasio showed the fallacy of Descartes' argument by revealing the neurobiological processes underlying our decision-making processes. For Damasio, emotions are the basic fuel that our brains need to make decisions.

According to Damasio, there is no such thing as a rational decision, because older evolutionary systems influence and often dominate our choices by recruiting the guidance of our emotional system. He claims that “Nature appears to have built the apparatus of rationality not just on top of the apparatus of biological regulation, but also from it and with it.” For Damasio, emotions play the role of a biological bridge between subcortical layers and higher-level cognitive functions such as thinking or goal setting. In fact, there are more

neurons extending from the limbic system (subcortical) to the neocortex than the other way around. Clearly, emotions influence our wants below our level of awareness. This explains why we cannot easily report our emotional states. All we can report is our interpretation of how rapid changes of key neurotransmitters make us feel.

To summarize, we make emotional decisions first and rationalize them later. Richard Thaler, recipient of the 2017 Nobel Prize in Economics, a prominent behavioral economist, behavioral economics, also claims that humans systematically avoid rationality and recruit emotions to make decisions. He coined this phenomenon *misbehaving* [126]. Our research also supports the notion that we decide emotionally and that the primal brain largely controls this process. Like Damasio, we argue that we cannot make decisions without the guidance of physiological clues provided by older regions of the brain. In fact, studies on patients with lesions in their orbitofrontal frontal cortex (OFC) show that they are not able to make good decisions because they fail to interpret the biochemical changes they experience after being emotionally aroused [127]. As a result, they perform poorly without the guidance of the emotional clues [18]. Meanwhile, neuroscientist and prolific author David Eagleman also argues that “emotions are also the secret behind how we navigate what to do next at every moment” [128]. Eagleman supports his statement by describing the case of patients such as “Tammy” who damaged her orbitofrontal frontal cortex, and as a result cannot receive emotional feedback from her body. She, too, was unable to make any decisions. To conclude, Eagleman insists, “physiological signals—are crucial to steering the decisions we have to make.”

Which Emotions Influence Most of Our Decisions?

Although the evidence coming from studies done with healthy or unhealthy subjects largely support the critical role of emotions in decision making, we need to recognize that we experience thousands of emotions in any single day. Most theoretical models on emotions are complicated and, to date, there are many different models of emotions attempting to measure, evaluate, and rationalize emotions. One of our favorite models of emotions was proposed by Robert Plutchik [129], a psychologist who developed a psychoevolutionary theory of basic emotions. The major tenets of Plutchik's model are as follows:

1. Emotions affect animals as much as they affect humans.
2. Emotions help us survive.
3. Emotions have common patterns and can be categorized.

4. There is a small number of basic or primal emotions.
5. Many emotions tend to be derivative states from the primal states.
6. Each emotion has its own continuum of intensity.

Plutchik created an organized view of emotions illustrated in [Figure 4.12](#) as the wheel of basic emotions. Even though the model was introduced nearly 40 years ago, it is regarded as one of the most elegant ways to organize emotions from eight core critical states: anger, disgust, sadness, surprise, fear, trust, joy, and anticipation.

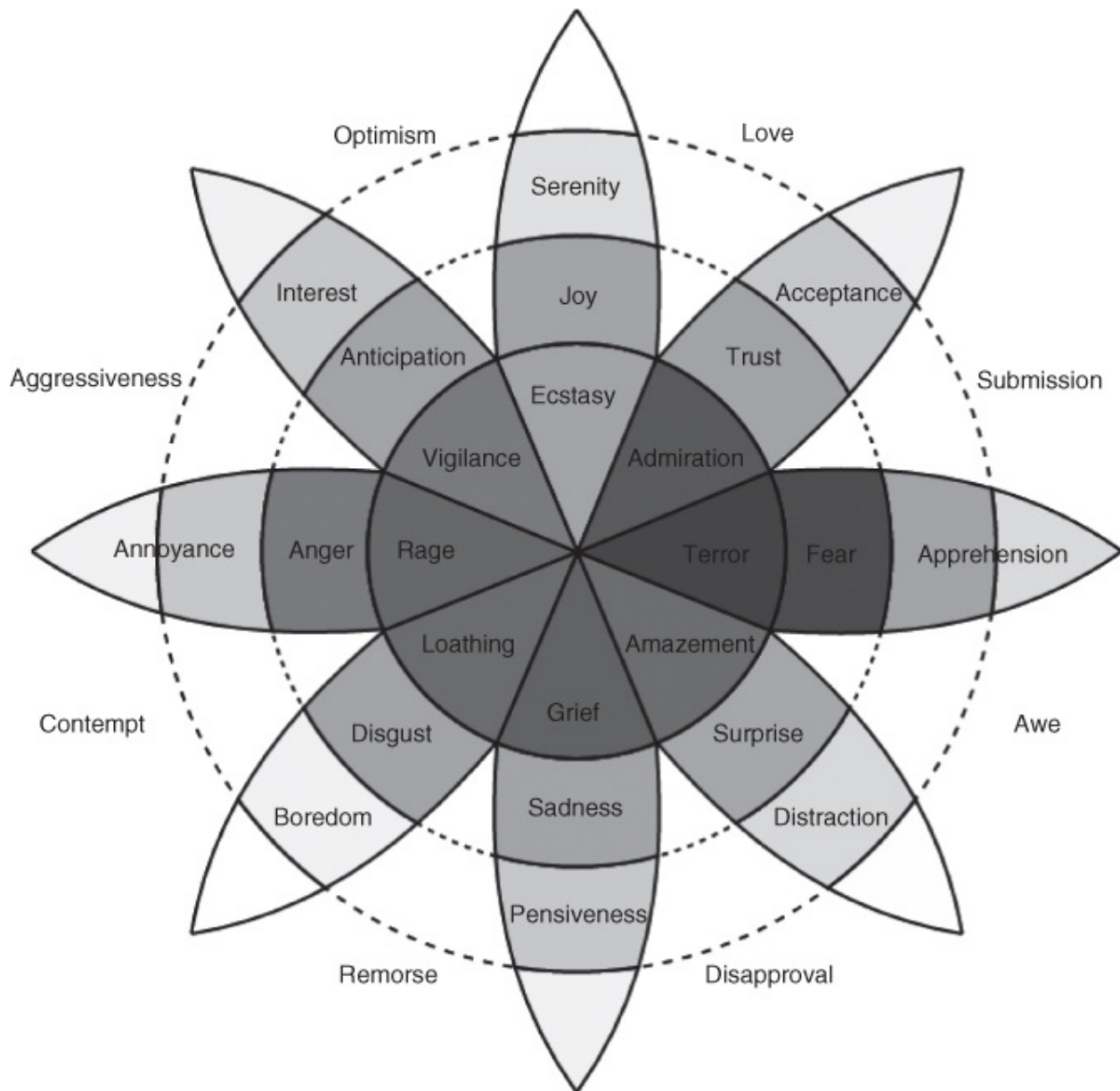


Figure 4.12 Plutchik wheel of emotions – first published in *American*

Scientist.

The wheel of emotions helps you realize that creating a strong emotional cocktail is a function of activating a limited set of primal emotions that have opposite and negative effects (valence) on our responses. At the time Plutchnik developed his model, neuromarketing research did not exist, so researchers could not easily measure and predict the impact of a persuasive message on emotional valence.

Table 4.2 Primal Emotions.

Source: Adapted from Plutchik.

| Avoidance Emotions | Approach Emotions |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fear | Anticipation |
| Sadness | Joy |
| Disgust | Trust |
| Anger | Surprise |

Based on this model, the most effective emotional lift you can create should first include an avoidance emotion – such as reminding the prospect of their pain – followed by an approach emotion – such as letting them experience the gain. Producing a good emotional lift is challenging for most of our clients. For instance, many tend to resist starting a message with a negative emotion. Yet, it is the best path to a successful persuasive message, because the primal brain attends to negative events before positive events. Failure to act in front of a negative event has more dramatic consequences for our survival than ignoring a positive event. That is why the fear of regret is the most powerful negative emotion to amplify the effect of any persuasive message.

The Fear of Regret. Briefly discussed earlier in the book, the fear of regret arises when we expect outcomes to fall short of our predictions. We experience regret when we choose an option that turns out badly, or when we pass on an option that turned out to be better than the status quo. In both instances, there is a sense that we have lost something that we can no longer experience, and more importantly, that we have prolonged the risk of the threat of making the wrong decision. In their paper on the impact of regret on decision making, researchers from both France and the United Kingdom [[130](#)] demonstrated that there is an intricate neural network involved in decision-making situations where regret is a key factor. They collected fMRI data while subjects participated in a gambling

task. The data showed that the fear of regret generated higher brain activity in the *medial prefrontal cortex*, the *dorsal anterior cingulate cortex*, the anterior hippocampus, and the amygdala. The anterior cingulate cortex is considered a general center of emotional processing with projections to the amygdala and the *anterior insula*, a brain structure that lights up when people experience disgust. In all studies focusing on the impact of regret, the same neural circuitry appears to mediate both the experience of regret and the anticipation of regret. Meanwhile, the stress produced by the fear of regret induces the release of noradrenaline from the *adrenal medulla* and the *locus coeruleus* in the brainstem. Noradrenaline is responsible for the fight or flight response managed by our autonomic nervous system [131]. Additionally, a slower system, the *hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis* releases both cortisol and adrenocorticotrophic hormone to calm our body when we experience stress from regret. However, cortisol starts working only 30 minutes or so after the onset of a stressful event. Therefore, studies show that the immediate effect of a negative event is better recalled right after it occurred rather than later, presumably because cortisol lowers cognitive processing and retention. This only reinforces the importance of producing messages that include “regret stressors” right at the beginning to heighten your audience's attention and retention but finish with a positive emotion at the end. Indeed, the best way to lift your message after re-enacting the fear of regret is to generate more *anticipation* in the brains of your audience.

The Power of Anticipation. Anticipation is a prediction that we will receive excitement, joy, pleasure, or happiness if we engage in a specific experience. Such prediction is rewarded by a powerful neurotransmitter called dopamine. Although a healthy dose of dopamine can create the fuel of our day-to-day motivation, it can also lock us into addictive habits [132]. Psychologist and popular author Adam Alter argues that addiction is a pattern of behaviors we reproduce because they stimulate our dopaminergic system. For instance, when we look at our cell phone over 300 times a day, drink too much alcohol, or consume mind-altering substances, the chemical effect of dopamine is gradually less potent, hence it pushes us to continue a potentially destructive habit. Practically, persuasive messages can directly stimulate a healthy dose of anticipation. By magnifying the power of an excellent product or an innovative solution, you can stimulate a safe level of dopamine in your audience's brain.

To conclude, both the fear of regret and the power of anticipation can help you create the simplest, yet most powerful emotional lift.

Emotions and Memory

Triggering an emotional lift is crucial to hijack attention and to jump-start the decision-making process of the primal brain. However, there is another critical benefit from making your message more emotional – retention and recall are improved. Curiously, emotions not only affect both our decisions and behaviors, but also the encoding of all messages and events that mark our lives. According to neurobiologists, emotions have a direct effect on what and why we remember anything at all. Research performed by Jim McGaugh has confirmed that emotional arousal enhances the storage of our memories [[133](#)]. That is why we call emotions the glue of your message. Without them, what you say, present, or show will not stick. By the way, this explains why we recommend that you first activate a negative emotion. Stress hormones participate in this process. The ability to retain information is essential to our survival, and negative events tend to be remembered more than positive events [[134](#)]. It is as if we have a “record” button in our brain that is automatically activated during noteworthy events. It does make sense that we would be wired to remember events that produce a strong impression on us, and especially those that could cost us our lives.

By creating emotional cocktails, you simply ensure that your messages are optimized to activate these automatic mechanisms. Meanwhile, emotions also produce physical movements on people's faces that are crucial to helping you monitor the effect of a presentation in front of a live person or audience. The visual cues you may receive from their micro-expressions can confirm that you are successful at capturing their attention, that your message is triggering an emotional response. With the help of Dr. Wallace Friesen, Paul Ekman developed a comprehensive inventory of such movements over a 13-year period (1965–1978). They called it the Facial Action Coding System (FACS). The FACS is a catalogue of 43 facial movements called action units (AUs). Each AU is anatomically unique and has its visual signature. According to Ekman, a limited set of emotions produce the same facial expression anywhere on this planet (see [Figure 4.13](#)).



Figure 4.13 Universal facial expressions.

Applying Emotional to Persuasive Messages

To ensure that you properly guide your audience to the behaviors you want, your message should first activate negative emotions that prompt us to avoid a situation. For instance, a negative surprise is one the most commonly used avoidance emotion to sell products or solutions that reduce risk or uncertainty, like insurance. If this negative emotion is relevant to your audience, then it will grab their attention and prime people to ask for a solution. In fact, at best, their *mirror neurons* will kick in to sample the stress that this situation may represent for them. Neuroscientists consider the existence of mirror neurons a crucial step

toward understanding the basis of empathy and learning functions in humans [135]. It is now widely accepted that mirror neurons help us learn and sample people's emotions by simply observing their behavior. Later you will learn that one of the most effective ways to stimulate mirror neurons is to act out the pain of your prospects so they can personally relive it for just a few seconds. Once you have done that, simply activate an approach emotion by presenting your solution to their pain. This, of course, will liberate your audience from the tension you created by re-enacting their fears. The emotional lift will produce more trust, more sense of safety, more joy, more love, or more excitement for the value you can bring. Never forget that a good emotional lift directly impacts the chemical balance of the brain. Stress or fear may indeed raise levels of noradrenaline, adrenocorticotrophic hormone, and cortisol in the brain and throughout the body. Love and trust may produce elevated levels of oxytocin; laughter will raise levels of endorphins; happiness may raise serotonin levels; and anticipation will boost dopamine. Making your message emotional means using the power of brain chemicals to make your message more persuasive (see [Figure 4.14](#)).

The Neuroscience of Emotional

For emotional, we tested the following research question: *Can you make the message more persuasive by increasing arousal using negative or positive valence?*

We used the following advertising stimuli to test our hypothesis:

- Don't-drink-and-drive print ad.

One ad showed a text warning.

One ad showed the face of a victim of a drink-and-drive accident.

- Video of protective products.

One version of the ad featured the value of wearing a respirator.

Another version showed a man at home using a barbecue recklessly and the same character at work wearing a respirator in complete control of the situation (safe versus unsafe).

The results supported our hypothesis:

- The ad featuring a victim of a drunk driver generated a huge spike of valence (+2600x) and a remarkable boost of cognitive engagement (+70%) compared

to the text warning ad.

- The video featuring the emotional contrast between a character unable to use a barbecue safely but using a respirator at work also produced a huge spike of valence (+3800x) and reduced workload (−5%).

Emotional Neuroinsights: By making your messages more emotional, you will create more impact on the primal brain and make your message more memorable.



Figure 4.14 Emotional response to a message.

What to Remember About Emotional

- Emotions are chemicals that affect all our decisions.
- We need emotions to make buying decisions.
- The most powerful emotions are the fear of regret and the pleasure of anticipation.
- Emotional lifts are needed to pay attention, retain, and decide!

INTEGRATING THE SIX STIMULI

Individually, each stimulus has limited effects on the primal brain. However, triggering all stimuli with NeuroMap will catapult the effect of your persuasive attempts ([Figure 4.15](#)). That is why we use the language metaphor here. The combined effect of all six stimuli works like a powerful sentence. First, let's briefly review what each stimulus does to ignite activity in the primal brain. Repetition is good for your memorization!

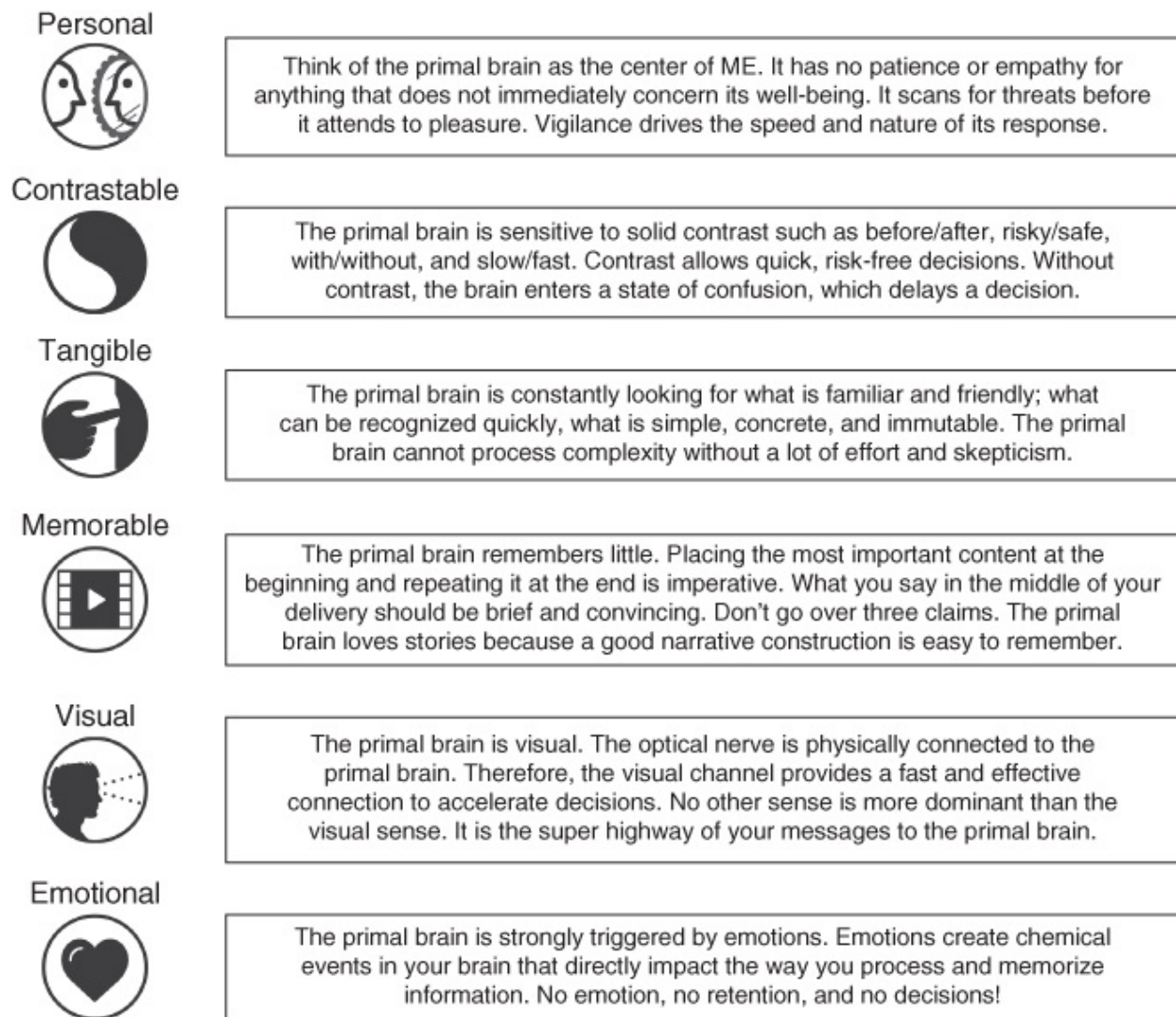


Figure 4.15 Summary role of the six stimuli.

The dynamic nature of the persuasion process creates activity in the primal brain first, then stimulates the rational brain second. We suggest that this effect is like a path, a way through which persuasion radiates upward in the brain.

The Path of Persuasion

The illustration in [Figure 4.16](#) can quickly help you understand the path of persuasion and the step-by-step effect of each stimulus. Your message is like a rocket that you are launching in a vast and crowded persuasion space. You need to rely on six different fuel tanks to put it into the “orbit of persuasion.” To do that, you need to make sure that each stimulus is moving your audience to the right coordinates of the persuasion space, from neutral to engaged. The six stimuli represent your Persuasion Code!

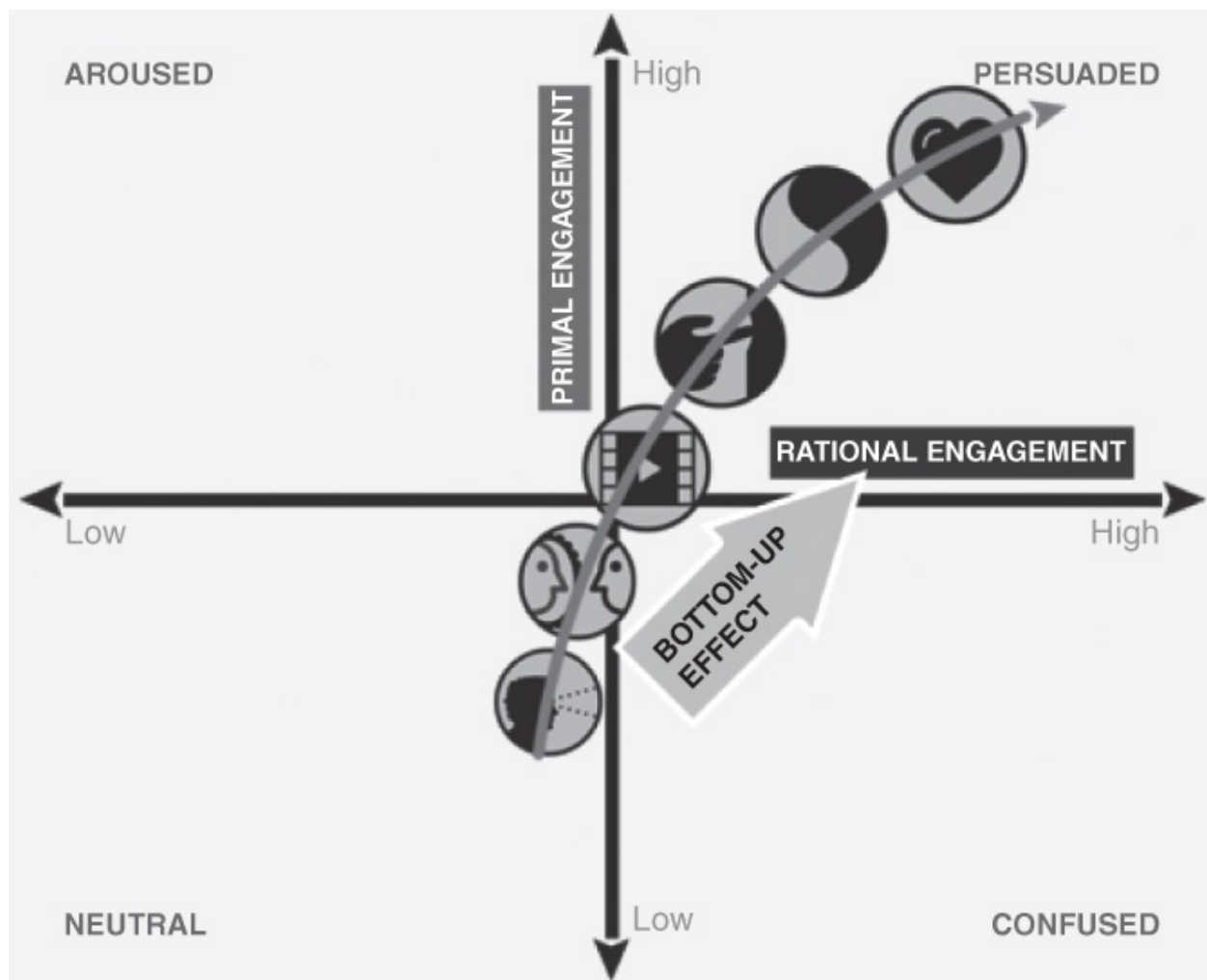


Figure 4.16 The persuasion map.

Source: © Copyright 2002–2018, SalesBrain.

This process will happen in sequence if you apply the power of each stimulus to your message. People are busy attending to competing priorities and are typically not excited when they receive sales messages. Therefore, you should first activate an emotional lift by triggering engagement in the primal brain, moving the persuasive emotional state of your audience from *neutral* to *aroused*.

However, the persuasive process cannot be just about creating an emotional lift such as making a situation surprising, painful, or even shocking. The message must help your audience move from the emotional engagement to the rational engagement. For that to happen, brain energy must radiate to the upper right section of the persuasion map to activate higher cognitive functions. By doing so, the message can then be confirmed as not just relevant but important so that it becomes elaborated by the frontal lobes of the rational brain. At that point, you can consider that your message has successfully created cognitive engagement and can persuade. This entire process is what we call the *bottom-up effect* of persuasion. We discussed how the dominance of the primal brain controls the path of persuasion earlier. However, now that you have learned the role of the six stimuli, we can explain how each one can progressively help you persuade.

The Gradual Effect of Each Stimulus. Visual and personal are central to how a message can quickly CAPTURE attention. Next, your message must be able to share memorable elements that provide a structure to the narrative of your value proposition. However, your story must be tangible to be easily understood and believed, which is why you need to present evidence. Making your message memorable and tangible help you CONVINCe. By then, your message should reach higher cognitive areas. It means that the effectiveness of your message now depends on the dynamic relationship between the primal brain and the rational brain: the bottom-up effect. So, by using contrastable and closing with a strong emotional cocktail, you are providing the catalyst and the glue to CLOSE the persuasive cycle. Meanwhile, NeuroMap can also help you assess how your messages perform without having to conduct extensive neuromarketing research. You can use our *NeuroScoring* tools and see how well you are currently using the six stimuli on a home page, a print ad, or a commercial. See [Appendix A](#).

NeuroQuadrant Analysis. Additionally, performing a NeuroQuadrant analysis helps you confirm the degree to which your message stimulates both the primal brain and the rational brain ([Figure 4.17](#)). Once you get your *NeuroScores* from [Appendix A](#), you can find out where your message is on the persuasion map. Each quadrant reveals the existence of four persuasive states that have different potency of emotional and cognitive effect.

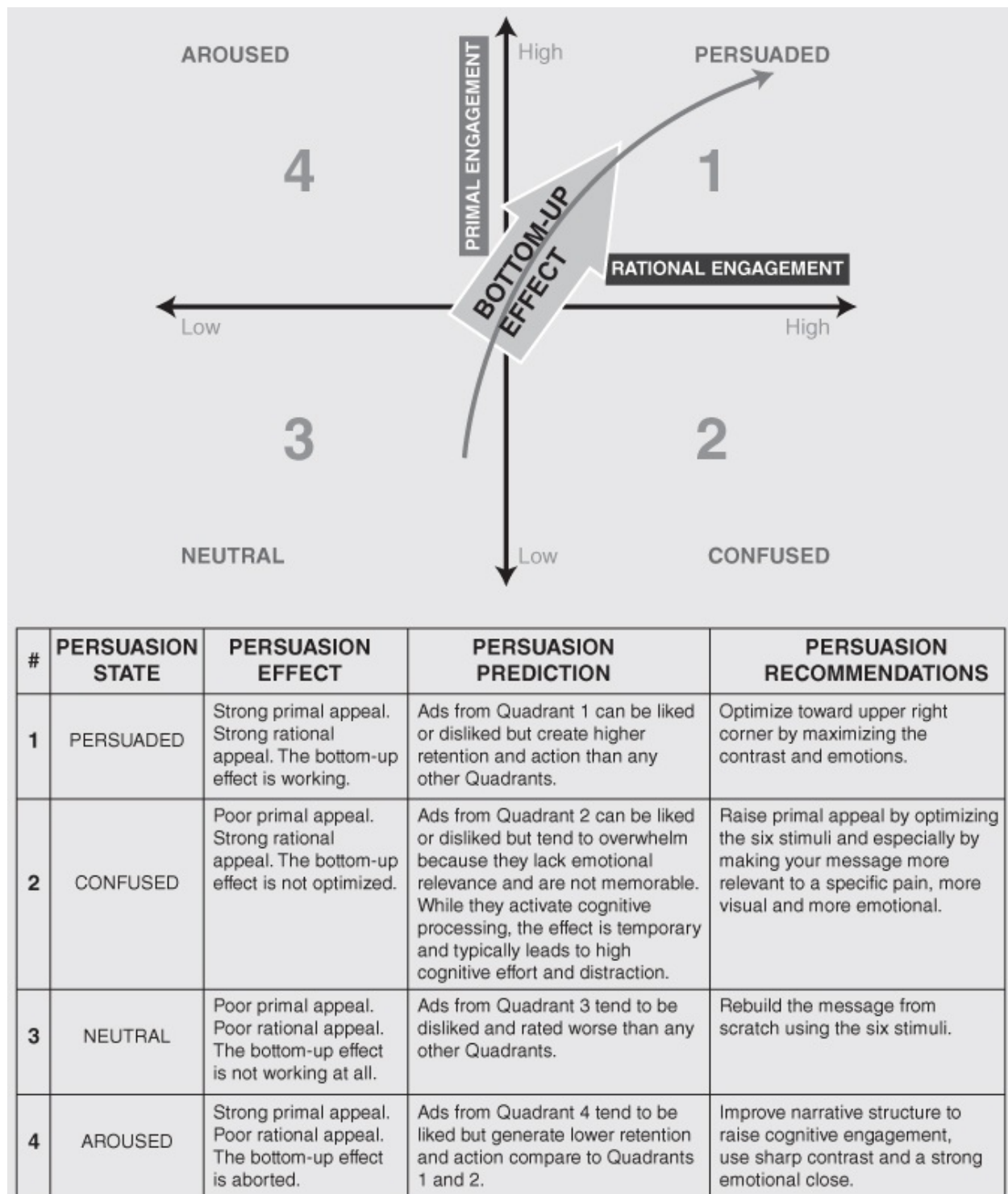


Figure 4.17 NeuroQuadrants.

Source: © Copyright 2002–2018, SalesBrain.

Conclusion from the Neuroscience of the Six Stimuli. The neuro study we conducted did confirm that each stimulus can produce measurable change on the

neurophysiology of an audience. [Table 4.3](#) summarizes the direct impact of each stimulus on the primal and rational brains. The + sign shows the degree to which a stimulus is likely to activate specific functions in the brain. For example, personal creates a lot of arousal in the primal brain, whereas memorable strengthens retention in the rational brain.

[Table 4.3](#) How stimuli influence both brains.

| | PRIMAL | | | RATIONAL | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------|---------|----------|------------|-----------|
| | Attention | Arousal | Valence | Workload | Engagement | Retention |
| Personal | +++ | +++ | | | | |
| Contrastable | ++ | | + | ++ | +++ | |
| Tangible | | | ++ | | | |
| Memorable | | | | | | +++ |
| Visual | | ++ | +++ | + | | +++ |
| Emotional | | + | ++ | ++ | | |

The NeuroMap scores we computed for each stimulus suggest that they have different individual contribution to the overall persuasion effect. Understanding that this neuro study has methodological limitations that do not allow us to be statistically conclusive, we still believe that the data supports the predictions of NeuroMap. For instance, it confirms the importance of using all six stimuli to achieve the highest possible persuasive impact. [Table 4.4](#) shows that visual is the highest, most potent stimulus of all six according to our data, while personal is the lowest. Together, however, they all contribute to three critical stages in the persuasion path which we introduced earlier ([Figure 4.16](#)): the first stage is to *capture* the brain's attention (visual and personal), the second stage is to *convince* (tangible and memorable), and the final stage is to *close* the persuasive process (contrastable and emotional). The persuasion path explains the logic of using six stimuli and the role each one plays to move an audience from the neutral state to the persuaded state.

[Table 4.4](#) Rank effect of each stimulus.

| | NeuroMap Rank Effect | Recommended Sequence | Persuasion Stages |
|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Personal | 6 | 2 | Capture |
| Contrastable | 4 | 5 | Close |

| | | | |
|-----------|---|---|----------|
| Tangible | 3 | 4 | Convince |
| Memorable | 5 | 3 | Convince |
| Visual | 1 | 1 | Capture |
| Emotional | 2 | 6 | Close |

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- To improve your ability to persuade, you need to use six stimuli that speak to the primal brain first and can ultimately engage the rational brain as well.
 1. The message must be personal and able to relate quickly to a relevant frustration or pain.
 2. The message needs to be contrastable, so that a decision can be accelerated by comparing two situations that make the best choice obvious.
 3. The message must be tangible to achieve cognitive fluency and allow the primal brain to accept the truth of the argument.
 4. The message must be memorable so that retention is done effortlessly and designed to encode the part of the message that will trigger a decision.
 5. The message should be visual because the primal brain is visually dominant in the way information is first considered and integrated into our decision-making process.
 6. The message must produce a positive emotional uplift, to reach the higher cognitive areas and trigger a decision.
 7. Together, the six stimuli can propel your message to success, achieving the optimum path of persuasion, as explained by NeuroMap.
 8. NeuroScoring your message on the six stimuli will help you correct and improve the course of your message on the path of persuasion.
 9. NeuroQuadrants also provide a simple tool to optimize the effect of any message.

Yet again, we are making a very important transition, which is the critical importance of maximizing the use of six stimuli by following a four-step PERSUASION PROCESS. You cannot achieve the benefits of NeuroMap by

skipping anyone of the steps. The four steps are the fundamental pillars of your persuasive strategy. They ensure a proper articulation of your message by:

1. Diagnosing the top pains of your customers
2. Differentiating from your competition by identifying unique claims
3. Demonstrating the gain of each claim
4. Delivering to their primal brain by following the blueprint of a killer presentation, a sticky website, a stunning ad, or a compelling video.

PART III

DECODING YOUR PERSUASIVE NARRATIVE

CHAPTER 5

Diagnose the Pain



“Most people want to avoid pain, and discipline is usually painful”.

– John C. Maxwell Clergyman

WHY PAINS DRIVE BUYING BEHAVIOR

First, your message must target the elimination of fears, threats, or risks that the primal brain prioritizes to eliminate. As humans, we aspire to reduce or remove anxiety to survive and to feel safe. As we learned in the section on personal, our brain has evolved over millions of years. Even today, we need to pay attention to events that matter most to our survival so that we can thrive as a species.

According to Stanislas Dehaene, a foremost expert on the neuroscience of consciousness, our ability to navigate a complex array of decisions is driven by the level of vigilance we apply to critical states of consciousness. As vigilance rises (as threats increase), the brain recruits more brain areas in a bottom-up process that results in recruiting more cerebral blood flow [[136](#)].

Since vigilance is so critical to how brain energy radiates from emotional to cognitive layers (from subconscious to more conscious), it is why we are anxious beings, not only when we wake up every day, but also when we make buying decisions. It is part of our default processing mode. Our brain is like a car

that is always in an idle “anxiety” state. Vigilance is the basic program that helps us cope with this idle state. Starting the engine is not an option when you need to drive away quickly! Our state of vigilance is central to our capacity to face the challenges life throws at us. Sigmund Freud famously suggested that human anxiety was responsible for most mental disorders. For Freud, anxiety came from worrying about the future, without having a very precise idea of what could cause harm. The top expert on fear and anxiety in the neuroscientific community, Joseph LeDoux, supports this view [137]. LeDoux insists that there is a critical difference between anxiety and fear, in that anxiety is mostly produced by subcortical brain areas of the primal brain and typically does not involve or require the conscious, more rational, and more recent layers of our cognitive machinery. He reminds us that the root of the word *anxiety* is the Latin word *anxietas* that itself comes from the Greek word *angh*, which was used to describe unpleasant physical sensations like tightness or discomfort.

In fact, today anxiety disorders affect more than 20% of the US population. Many of the people who suffer from anxiety-related diseases cannot naturally cope with the psychological and sometimes physical impact of the ongoing rumination of their worries. I am not suggesting that buying a product may produce as much anxiety as experiencing the dread of not being able to afford a house, find a job, or break a cycle of bad relationships. I am, however, claiming that anxiety is generated largely by the dominance of our primal brain. As a result, we tend to use the same neural networks to assess the relevance and value of a purchase as those we use to cope with a life-threatening situation.

The iceberg in [Figure 5.1](#) helps you recognize the hierarchy of decision drivers that influence how and why we buy. For instance, the motivation that directly influences a buyer's brain often arises from fearing devastating consequences, such as the fear of regret or the fear of disappointment. Fear causes frustrations or pains, which ultimately affect what we say we need, want, or even like. Note that many of our worries and fears may be completely unconscious, while we can typically articulate what frustrates us (pains), what we need, want, and like.

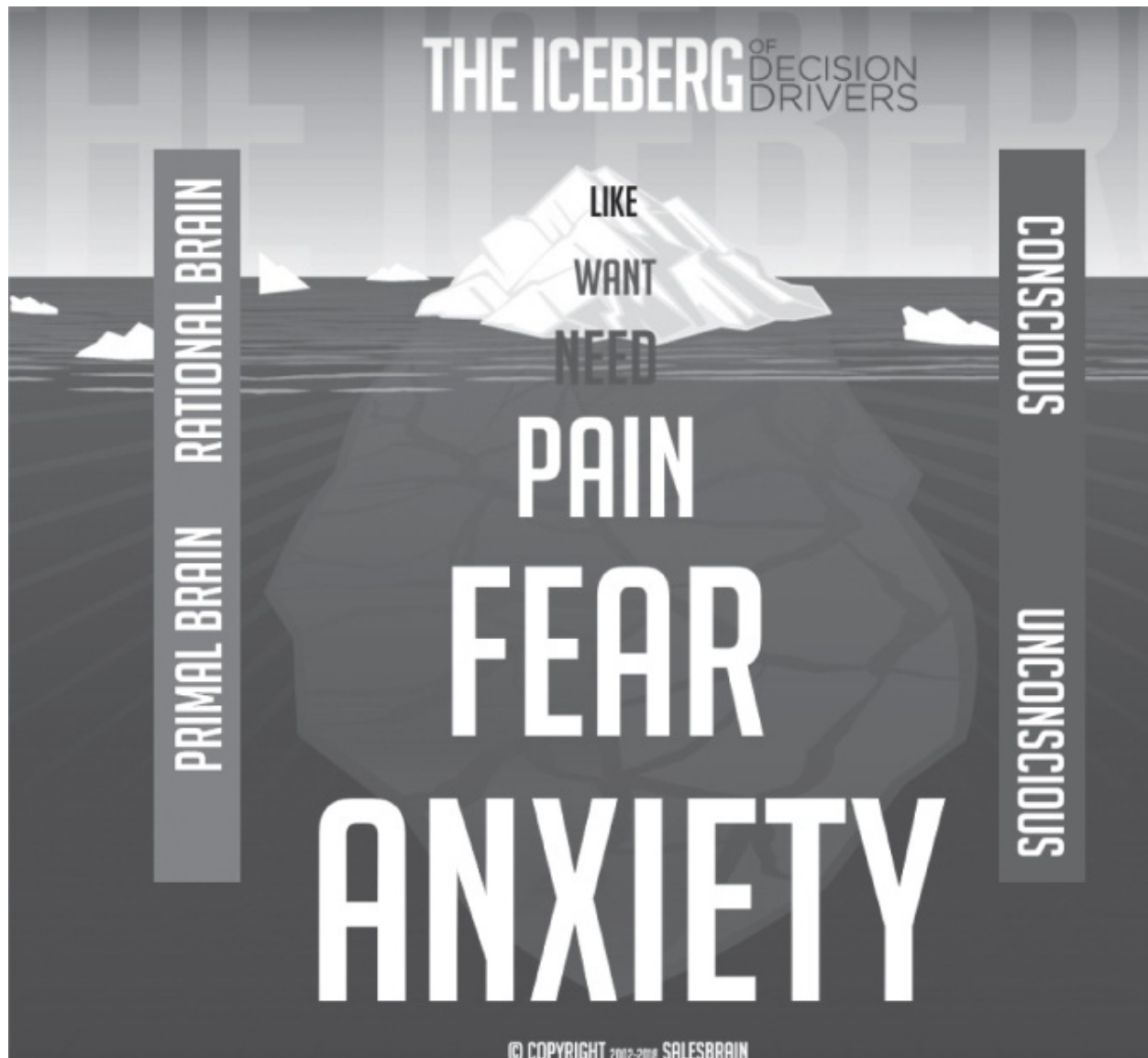


Figure 5.1 Iceberg of decision drivers.

The iceberg of decision drivers is a powerful metaphor to explain how critical psychological and neurophysiological states affect our response to persuasive stimuli. Traditionally, marketing research has focused on what people say they like or think they want. However, neuromarketing studies have now proven that customers cannot be trusted to articulate or even confirm what they like or want. That is why both likes and wants are poor predictors of buying behavior. Likes and wants are vague conscious interpretations of what we think we need to be happy and safe. They tend to shift over short periods based on lifestyle changes, trends, and even moods. On the other hand, our core fears and pains are more permanent. As such, they become the best predictors of how people make decisions.

Since we formed SalesBrain nearly 20 years ago, we have designed numerous surveys, conducted hundreds of focus groups, and facilitated thousands of in-depth interviews. We have collected self-reported feedback from thousands of people from over 10 countries. Collecting data on what people *want* systematically yields confusing if not misleading insights. What we have learned over nearly two decades of neuromarketing research is that nothing is more powerful than asking people what they fear. What they fear comes from our human nature of being anxious and vigilant to survive.

The Nature of Fear

According to Ledoux, fear is associated with emotional events for which we can identify a specific threat. The semantic difference between both terms may appear pointless until you realize that anxiety is more diffuse and more permanent than fear, while fear is more precise and typically more imminent than anxiety. Ledoux argues: “To experience fear is to know that YOU are in a dangerous situation, and to experience anxiety is to worry about whether future threats may harm YOU” [[137](#)].

The Nature of Pains

We understand that in most cases, it is very difficult if not awkward, to discuss anxiety and fears with your customers directly. When we conduct a neuromarketing experiment, we can assess the level of arousal and fear that people may experience watching an ad without requiring conscious feedback. However, for many of SalesBrain's clients, identifying the neurophysiological basis of fears associated with the purchase of a product or a solution is both costly and challenging to execute. On the other hand, engaging in PAIN dialogues that can specifically focus on what people consider their biggest frustrations associated with the purchase of a solution is relatively easy to do.

Diagnosing the top pains is a critical step because it will later help you select a few benefits of your value proposition that can directly eliminate the top sources of frustrations. It is like putting the dozens of reasons why customers should buy from you through a strainer. Only those that offer a direct, unique, and credible solution to the top pains should stay in the strainer!

Often, pains are simply correlated to complaints, pet peeves, or grievances that customers have once they have purchased or used a product or a solution. When you sell something new, pains can predict future complaints. Here is some

valuable data to help you further understand the power of diagnosing the top pains to increase customer satisfaction [[138](#)].

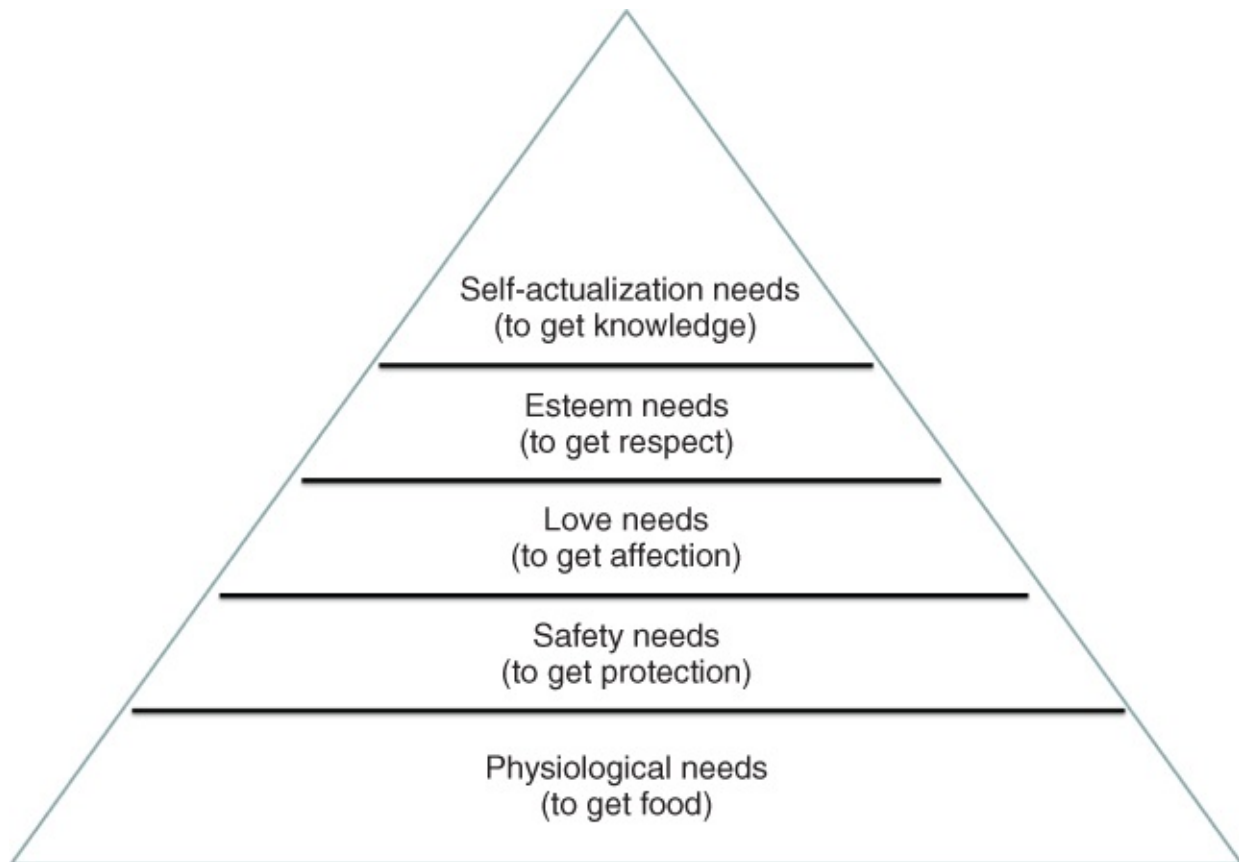
- Sixty-six percent of customers switch to another brand because of receiving poor service.
- Fifty-eight percent will never use a company again after they experience a negative experience.
- Forty-eight percent of customers with negative experiences will tell ten people or more, whereas good experiences are shared with five or fewer.

These data points stress something obvious: we are more affected by negative customer experiences events than we are by positive ones. This is why we tend to spend more time sharing our customer nightmares than we do sharing our pleasant experiences.

The Nature of Needs

Psychologists investigating how personality traits explain and predict our behavior popularized the term *needs*. Needs typically describe what we seek to acquire or do to protect and enhance our lives. The field of personality studies has debated for decades the psychological (and most recently, the neurophysiological) basis of our needs or, more simply, what drives us on a day-to-day basis. For our discussion, though, let's review one of the most important models explaining the importance and usefulness of having needs: the Maslow Theory [[139](#)].

The Maslow Theory. Abraham Maslow [[140](#)] had a rather optimistic view of human nature. He believed that Freud had identified “the sick half of psychology” (p. 5) and suggested that his own model would provide “the healthy half” (p. 5). His view of motivation was dualistic. He believed we have two types of motives: *deficiency motives* and *growth motives*. Deficiency motives are common to all people and address physiological and emotional needs such as hunger, safety, love, and esteem from others. Growth motives are specific to some individuals and explain the unselfish pursuit of knowledge or love we can provide to others. He proposed that humans must, in fact, satisfy some basic needs before they satisfy higher needs like self-actualization. His famous ladder of human needs ([Figure 5.2](#)), known as “Maslow's hierarchy of needs,” shows physiological needs at the bottom, followed by safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization.



[Figure 5.2](#) The Maslow hierarchy of needs.

Moreover, Maslow believed that human needs vary with age and map our personal development stages as illustrated by the graph in [Figure 5.3](#).

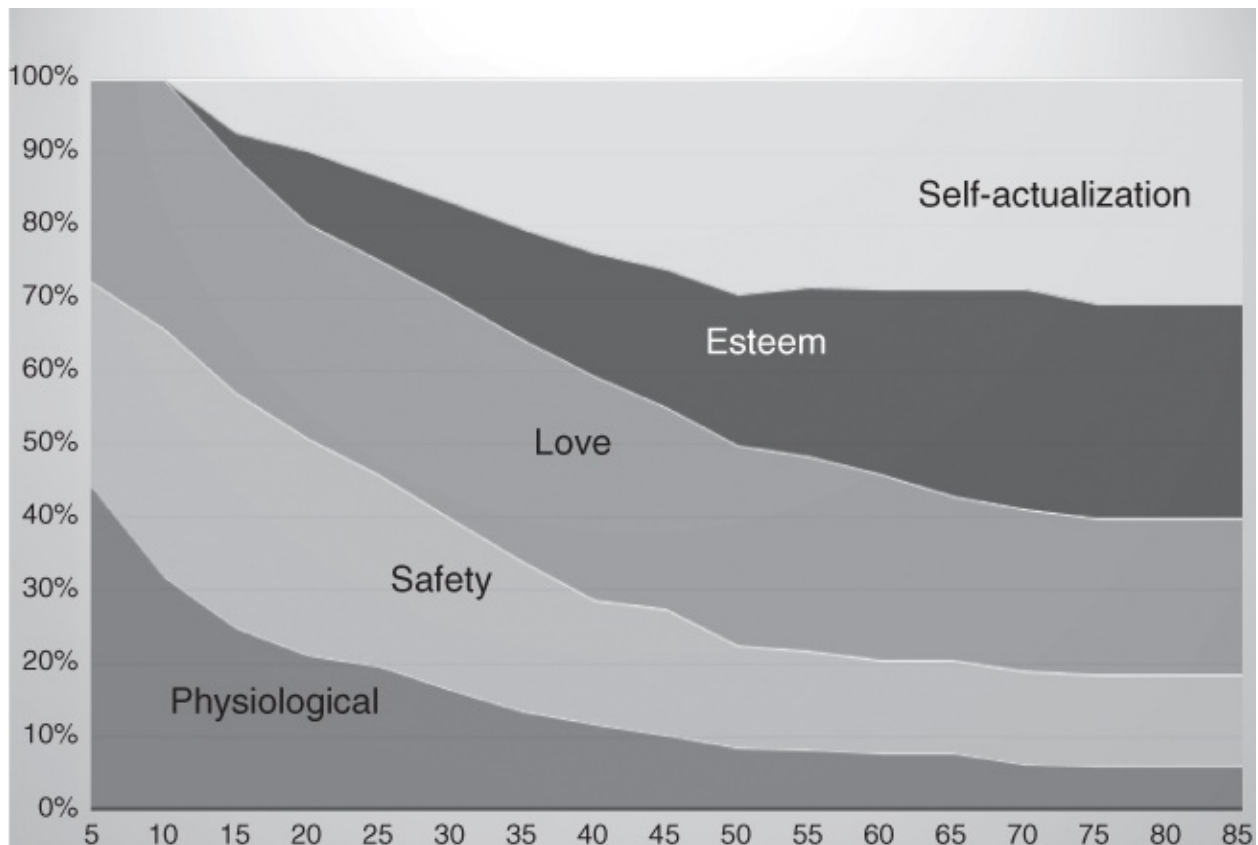


Figure 5.3 Timeline of Maslow's needs.

Clearly, the primal brain is implicated in the pursuit of the first three needs of the pyramid, whereas the last two require more influence from the rational brain. At a deeper level, though, the theory of needs proposed by Maslow is a theory of human motivation. To that extent, because buying a product or solution requires motivation, Maslow's model is both relevant and important to understand.

However, the model does not integrate the complex routine of neural processes that trigger the expression of all basic needs. Additionally, the model posits that human development follows a well-planned progression of sequential and logical psychological stages, as if they were like rungs on a ladder. Obviously, this is simplistic and is no longer supported by today's understanding of developmental psychology. To conclude, asking consumers what they need is not enough to predict their behavior. This is why marketers have relied on measuring another decision driver to understand consumer behavior: the nature of our wants.

The Nature of Wants

The nature of our wants points directly to the consumerism movement and the

well-accepted idea that our wants are insatiable. There is, again, a subtle difference between needs and wants. Wants articulate desires that can go beyond what we would consider basic needs. Most researchers on the subject argue that wants are outcomes that make us more influential or more powerful, like money, power, or public attention [[141](#)]. Frankly, the theoretical discussion on the subject has been blurry for decades because it has relied for too long on what people are willing to say they want. Fortunately, recent studies coming from the field of neuromarketing and neuroeconomics have provided a more credible theoretical framework to understand our wants.

In his book *Introduction to Consumer Neuroscience*, Thomas Ramsoy presents his theory for the neurophysiological basis of our wants. He claims that “wanting” is mediated by a brain structure called the nucleus accumbens (NAcc), a brain structure we have discussed several times already in this book when we discussed the emotional stimulus. It is tucked deep in the primal brain. Ramsoy suggests that “wanting is the unconscious approach and avoidance evaluation related to items, organisms, and events.” He uses a well-known study from Knutson and colleagues to support his theory [[41](#)]. We already cited this source, but to remind you, Knutson claimed that he could predict what people “want” before they decide by looking at the surge of blood flow to their nucleus accumbens. Unfortunately, although we have a better understanding of which areas of the brain predict the want signal, there is still no reliable scale to collect people's self-reported evaluation of what they want. In other words, unless you put people in a fMRI, your ability to measure what people want is very difficult and mostly unreliable. This is why we suggest that collecting pain data is easier and more predictive of purchasing behavior.

The Nature of Likes

The concept of liking may be less ambiguous than the concept of want. After all, we can usually report whether we like something or not. Liking is typically captured by asking people to rate something, which is a way of providing a grade or a numerical assessment of how much you enjoyed a product or an experience. As such, you would think that measures that come from liking or rating are more reliable than measures of what we want. Think again! A famous study conducted by Gregory Berns on the popularity of songs revealed that the liking data was not predictive of the neural response [[142](#)]. For instance, the data collected from the nucleus accumbens activity, which also correlates with what people choose (or buy), did not correlate with the liking data. Even Facebook considered the importance of going beyond collecting like data by adding

emoticons a few years ago. This provides the social media company more emotional granularity that their data scientists can use to analyze the sentiment expressed by millions of users.

AN INTEGRATED VIEW OF DECISION DRIVERS

The process of how consumers assess, respond, and eventually decide after they are exposed to persuasive messages is complex and the source of extensive debate among scholars and researchers. Our proposal for an integrated view of decision drivers considers neurophysiological research and traditional research performed on a wide range of products and industries, as well as over 20 countries. We believe that decisions are influenced by the dominance of the primal brain and especially the pains we strive to eliminate.

Buyers typically start their journey in a basic state of ignorance or anxiety about a product or solution, a situation in which risk is potentially high (the fear of regret), and the cognitive involvement is typically low. However, to the extent that a product or solution is made relevant, urgent, and useful by re-awakening pains, specific fears become activated. For instance, if a message is making you realize that you could die abruptly and leave your loved ones with massive debt by not having life insurance, you face multiple fears you feel you need to address quickly. By considering the value of having life insurance, you now move from a neutral state to a state of interest. Two possibilities happen next. If you are not willing to engage cognitively with the topic, you will choose to forego a decision, which means do nothing or else evaluate another option. However, if the message or the value proposition is successful at activating cognitive engagement, you will move to a “want” state and feel the motivation to buy (anticipation), rewarded by a nice dose of dopamine in your brain. So, as you can see, diagnosing pain is a central construct persuasion step that increases the likelihood you can create effective messages. Know the pains you need to eliminate, and you have the script of your best selling arguments!

Identifying the Top Pains

We have conducted thousands of surveys and interviews of which the sole purpose was to unveil customers' top pains. Although the products and services for which we did these interviews vary greatly, from fMRI equipment to cosmetic products, we have consistently been able to categorize pain insights in three categories.

The Three Sources of Pain. Pain always falls into three main categories: financial, strategic, or personal.

1. *Financial pain* pertains to economic factors such as the loss of revenue, low profitability, or bad ROI. Financial pain is typically highly visible and easy to measure.
2. *Strategic pain* includes issues that affect key business risks that can compromise the development, manufacturing, marketing, or delivery of products and services. Typical types of strategic pains are poor product quality, production inefficiencies, high customer complaints, and poor brand recognition. Strategic pain is not always as visible as financial pain and cannot always be easily measured.
3. *Personal pain* is made up of the negative feelings and emotions affecting those who are involved in the buying decisions. Examples include elevated levels of stress, job insecurity, or working longer hours.

[Table 5.1](#) should help you quickly understand how to recognize and label the pains you can diagnose.

[Table 5.1](#) Pain types.

| Source of the Pain | Areas of Pain and Frustration | Methods of Pain Measurement | Fear/Pain Affecting the Primal Brain |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Financial | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funds • Low return on investment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data • Stories | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of not having enough • Fear of losing what we have |
| Strategic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality issues • Long delivery delays • Long product development cycles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market benchmarks • Mappings • Surveys • Competitive analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of not knowing enough • Fear of not having control |
| Personal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor attitudes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee surveys | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of |

| | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High stress • Lack of motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership assessments • Neurophysiological studies | <p>powerlessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of worthlessness • Fear of extinction |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Conducting Pain Dialogues

There is an effective way to identify the most critical pains. Just create an intimate dialogue with your top customers. Customers, not prospects, are the best source for this crucial information. Customers have had the benefit of an intimate relationship with your value proposition already, so they can share a unique perspective on what transformation it brought to their lives by your solution. Simply ask them the following questions and be prepared to practice deep listening!

1. What were some of the top challenges, hurdles, or risks you were facing before you found our solution?
2. How much money would you lose by not using our product?
3. How did our product help you eliminate risk or uncertainty? Describe a typical situation where you felt you did not have enough control because you did not have our solution.
4. How did our solution make you feel better about yourself, your job, or your family?

You can adapt these questions to match your situation, but as you can imagine, only a few discussion points can reveal critical areas of pains and frustrations that are at the core of *why* people will choose your solution. Note that if you are selling a product through resellers, you need to do this process twice, once for the end-users and once for the resellers. To the extent that their areas of concerns vary, you will find that you need to change your message to stimulate the primal brains of each target group.

PAIN CASE STUDIES

It is quite remarkable how getting clarity on the top pains that your business or solution can eliminate may be the single most critical issue to solve to find the persuasion code of your messages. Let's consider these examples.

Domino's Pizza

The pizza delivery business seems straightforward and highly commoditized. You would think that to be successful in this activity; you need to focus on making a good pizza. However, very early on, Domino's didn't focus its main claim on the pizza. They focused on solving a critical pain: *the anxiety of not knowing when the pizza will arrive* ([Figure 5.4](#)).

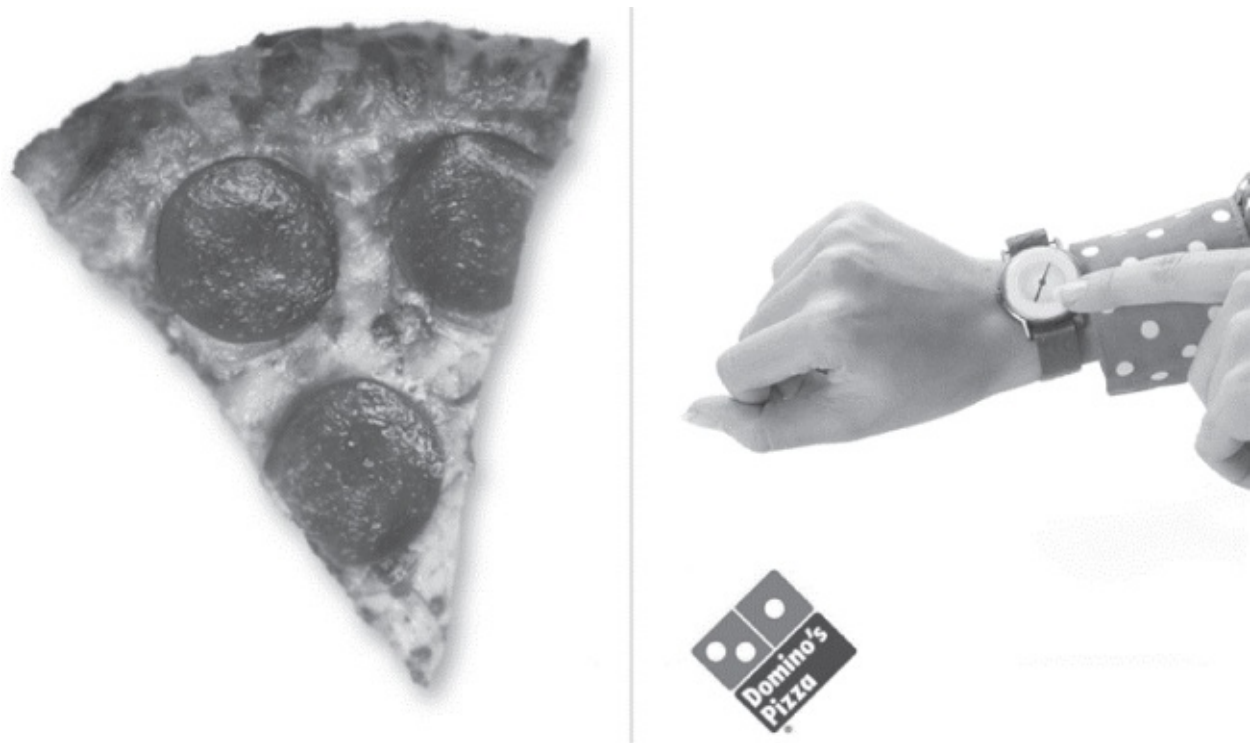


Figure 5.4 Pizza pain.

This strategic decision is at the center of Domino's success, not just in the United States but outside as well. Today, Domino's Pizza is the first largest pizza restaurant chain in the world (Pizza Hut is the second!), with more than 14,400 locations in over 85 markets. They are like the Federal Express of the pizza industry: the pizza delivery experts! The pizza itself is important but it's not the key differentiator for Domino's Pizza.

For many years their slogan was: “30 minutes or less, or it's free.” Notice how it provides a perfect cure to the pain!

Starbucks

Meanwhile, you may think of Starbucks as the company that gives you the drinks you want. However, the success of their mission is because they realized

that people spend most of their time at home and in the office. Yet people experience the pain of missing a transitional environment that helps them switch mentally from their home mode to their office model. The founder and former CEO of Starbucks, Mr. Schultz positioned the business as an ideal *third place*.

The “third place” is like a decompression chamber, the home away from home, the workplace away from the workplace ([Figure 5.5](#)). That positioning has made Starbucks unique and very successful in over 70 countries and over 24,000 locations because it solves a major pain for millions of people every day.



[Figure 5.5](#) Starbucks pain.

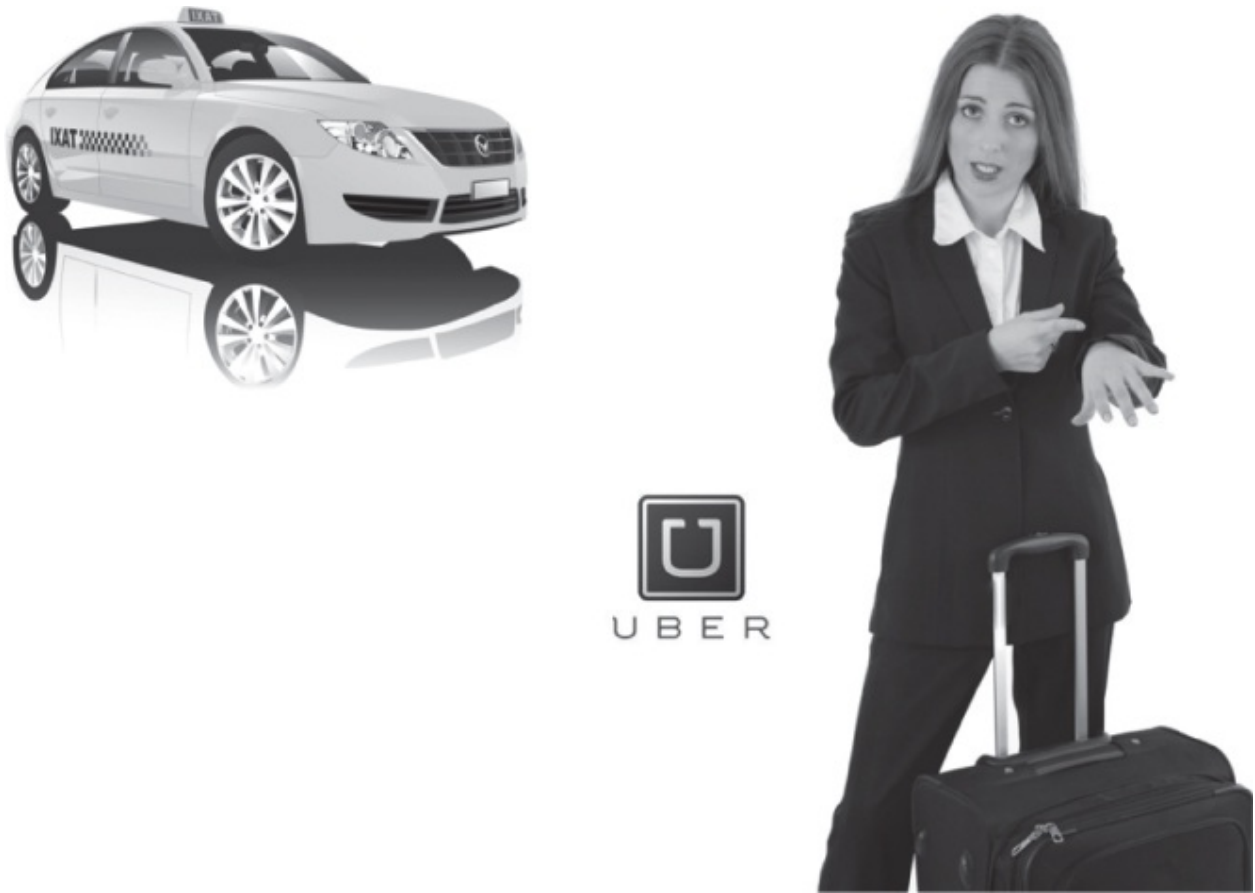


Figure 5.6 Uber pain.

Uber

Meanwhile, another company that did not even exist 10 years ago built an empire by targeting pains many of us share: going from one point to another quickly and cost-effectively without owning a vehicle. How many of us have been frustrated waiting for a cab not knowing exactly when it would arrive? and have you not wondered when you would get to your destination and if you would have enough cash to pay for the ride ([Figure 5.6](#))? Today, Uber operates in 84 countries, has over 160,000 drivers and holds a market value of \$70 billion, while not owning one car.

For the preceding examples, winning market share was not just a function of offering products or solutions, but performing a good diagnosis of the underlying pains. [Table 5.2](#) helps you appreciate the power of making a crucial distinction between marketing what customers *want* and marketing to their *pains*.

Table 5.2 Marketing to pains.

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|

| Wants | Pizza | Coffee | Taxi |
|-------|-------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Pains | Not knowing | Not having an option between home and office | Lack of control |

Pain Cluster Studies

The process of diagnosing pains typically involves two steps:

1. Qualitative exploration, achieved by conducting pain dialogues
2. Quantitative measurements, done through telephone or online surveys

The best way to organize pain data is to perform a *pain cluster analysis*. The concept is challenging to understand from a mathematical standpoint, but the purpose of the technique is to classify survey respondents (sometimes called segments or clusters) that share common patterns of responses on pain questions that are most predictive of future purchasing behavior. At SalesBrain, we have performed hundreds of such studies and what we have found will not surprise you: pain questions are always the most powerful questions to create segments of customers that have common patterns of consumer behavior.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- Diagnosing pains helps you unveil the most critical decision drivers out of the many psychological factors that may influence your customer's behavior.
- Humans aspire to eliminate worries to survive and thrive. Our nature is to orient our attention to messages that awaken our fears, which is why a product or solution that can clearly articulate which pains it can eliminate first will receive more consideration and create higher urgency.
- There are three types of pains that can explain how and why people become attracted to a specific value proposition: financial pains, strategic pains, and personal pains. They all point to either material, emotional, and psychological needs we want to satisfy.
- Once you have successfully diagnosed the top pains by conducting pain dialogues, quantify the importance of the pains as well as consider creating segments or clusters of your top customers who share common pains.

The following sections are written by Patrick Renvoisé, the cofounder of SalesBrain, the “other hemisphere” of the SalesBrain team. Before starting SalesBrain with me, Patrick traveled over three million miles around the world

to sell sophisticated products and solutions for Silicon Graphics (SGI) and for Linuxcare. As a computer engineer, he is truly passionate about making the complex simple to understand and helping people communicate and deliver memorable messages.

In prior chapters, I helped you understand the why of neuromarketing: Why does it work? Why can we not trust what people say? Why do we need to use new methods to collect invaluable information to decode people's intentions? Why do we no longer have the option to ignore persuasion sciences? I also introduced the first step to prepare your persuasive message based on NeuroMap: Diagnose the pain.

Patrick will now cover the remaining three steps starting with Step 2:

- Differentiate your claims: How to identify the top two or three unique reasons why people should choose your solution – or adopt your ideas – versus buying from your competitors or doing nothing.

CHAPTER 6

Differentiate Your Claims



DIFFERENTIATE YOUR CLAIMS™

In order to be irreplaceable, one must always be different.

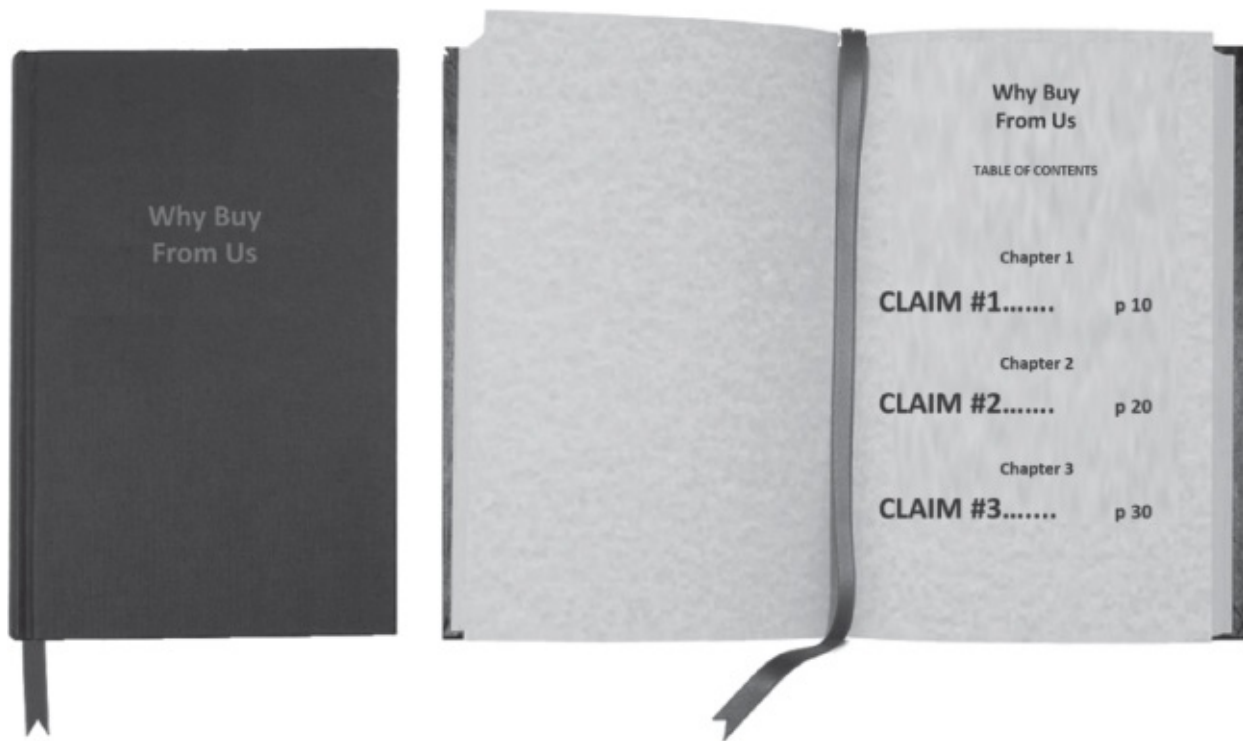
– Coco Chanel, fashion designer

Do you remember the second stimulus: contrastable? If you want your prospects to see the difference between your solution and your competitors' solution, then you need to clearly differentiate by highlighting your claims. The primal brain of your audience seeks a variance in its environment as a prompt for action. If you are not selling something unique, you are selling as much for your competitors as you are selling for yourself.

Most likely, you have many competitors who all offer products or services very similar to yours. Look at your home page; are you saying, “We are a leading provider of...”? Now look at your competitors' homepages; are they using the same “we are the leading provider of...”? If so, how much contrast does this provide? How will that help the primal brain of your audience see, understand, and remember why they should choose your apple in a stack of identical apples unless of course you offer the biggest apple!

To differentiate your claims, you need to use the *Von Restorff effect* to your advantage. First discovered in 1933, and later confirmed by many researchers, this cognitive bias states that an item that sticks out is more likely to be remembered. To make your solution stand out, you need to say: “We are the first/only/best provider of claim 1, claim 2, claim 3.” Researcher Erin

MacDonald at Stanford wrote: “Generally, product differences prove to attract more attention than commonalities” [143]. Also note that most messages focus on *what* the vendor does rather than *why* the customers should buy. To stand out and construct a message that is friendly to the primal brain you need a clear set of claims, emphasizing *why* they should choose your product. Simply imagine that you are writing a book entitled *Why Buy from Us?* We recommend that the book should have no more than three chapters (see [Figure 6.1](#)).



[Figure 6.1](#) Claims book.

Your claims are the titles of the three chapters in your book (three is the maximum). As discussed in the section on memorable in [Chapter 4](#), researchers have found that working memory can only hold and manipulate between three and five items, hence our recommendation to select no more than three claims [144]. Later, we will also insist that you maximize both the *understanding* and the *memorization* of your message by repeating the claims consistently throughout your communication [145].

Claims represent a critical concept at the center of NeuroMap. When companies talk about *who* they are and *what* they do, it creates little or no interest because of the self-centered nature of the primal brain. Therefore, you should translate the *who* you are and *what* you do into a clear, concise, and convincing story about *why* your prospects should choose you. The following are a few examples

of well-known companies who have used a strong and consistent claim.

WELL-KNOWN CLAIMS

Consider Volvo. Why would people want to buy a Volvo? Most people will say “safety” in just a few seconds. If we had to write a book titled “*Why Buy a Volvo?*” there would be only one chapter in that book – although we might then see three subchapters under the main chapter on safety.

Think now about Apple. The company started in April 1976, and they have historically used few claims. Why would people choose to buy a Macintosh in the 1980s and 1990s? Back then, you could either buy a PC, notorious for its complexity, or you could buy an Apple. Apple's claim for the first 30 years of its existence was “*easy to use.*” More recently, as Apple expanded into the cellular phone business and most computers and phones became easier to use, their main claim became: “*cool to use.*” Apple is not sparing any efforts to make their phones aesthetically and technologically pleasing; from the rounded edges, the slimness of the body, to face detection features, and even the shipping boxes, everything is meant to communicate coolness. That includes the price of the Apple X which broke the \$1,000 threshold once believed to be the price beyond which a smartphone would never sell,...except to people who really want to be cool! In the long list of possible smartphones to choose from, including Samsung, Microsoft, Acer, Alcatel, and many more, notice how Apple stands out as the coolest one to use!

More examples of known brands with strong claims include the following:

- *We're number 1* by Hertz car rental. Nobody else can be number 1, so indeed this is unique, and the suggested value is that since they rent the same cars at the same airport counters for the same price, you will most likely get a better service.
- *We try harder* by Avis car rental: That means they confess to being number 2 – which is unique – but which also implies that you will get better service, even better than if you were renting from the number 1 (Hertz) because, fueled by Avis's ambition to become number one, they will try harder.
- *You got 30 minutes?* by Domino's Pizza. In December 2007 Domino's changed their claim from “30 minutes or less or it's free” to “You got 30 minutes?” Note that the “or it's free” offered a great proof, but Dominos dropped it to avoid the public perception of reckless driving.

- *The ultimate driving machine* by BMW.

HOW TO SELECT YOUR CLAIMS

Defining your claims is a rather simple theoretical process, but it can be challenging. Here are three critical steps:

1. Make sure each claim is a TOP claim; TOP is an acronym for:
 - **Therapeutic:** Your claims should provide a cure for a pain experienced by your prospects.
 - **Original:** Your claims should provide enough differentiation between you and any of your competitors. To ensure your claims display enough contrast, you need to know intimately the *reason* your prospects would want to buy from your competitors.
 - **Provable:** You need to support your claims with strong proofs.
2. You should wordsmith your claim(s), so they become mnemonic, that is, they become easily memorable; one of the six stimuli!
3. When they are put together in one sentence, your claims should support your mission statement: “We are the first/best/only company to offer claim 1, claim 2, and claim 3.” At SalesBrain, we coach many companies to make sure their mission statement includes their three claims and nothing else!

CLAIMS EXAMPLES FROM SALESBRAIN CUSTOMERS

By using clear claims, you will eliminate the confusion your customers may experience when they need to decide if they should choose you! As shown in the earlier examples, in most business-to-consumers (B2C) businesses, it is often considered more effective to use only one claim. Before going deeper into the science of claims, let's examine a few examples from SalesBrain's B2B customers.

Carothers DiSante & Freudenberger LLP is a labor law firm with multiple offices in California. Traditionally, law firms have focused their message on *who they are* (their list of partners) and *what they do* (the type of law they practice) without a clear indication of *why* you should choose them. By contrast, notice how CDF makes three clear, concise and consistent claims:

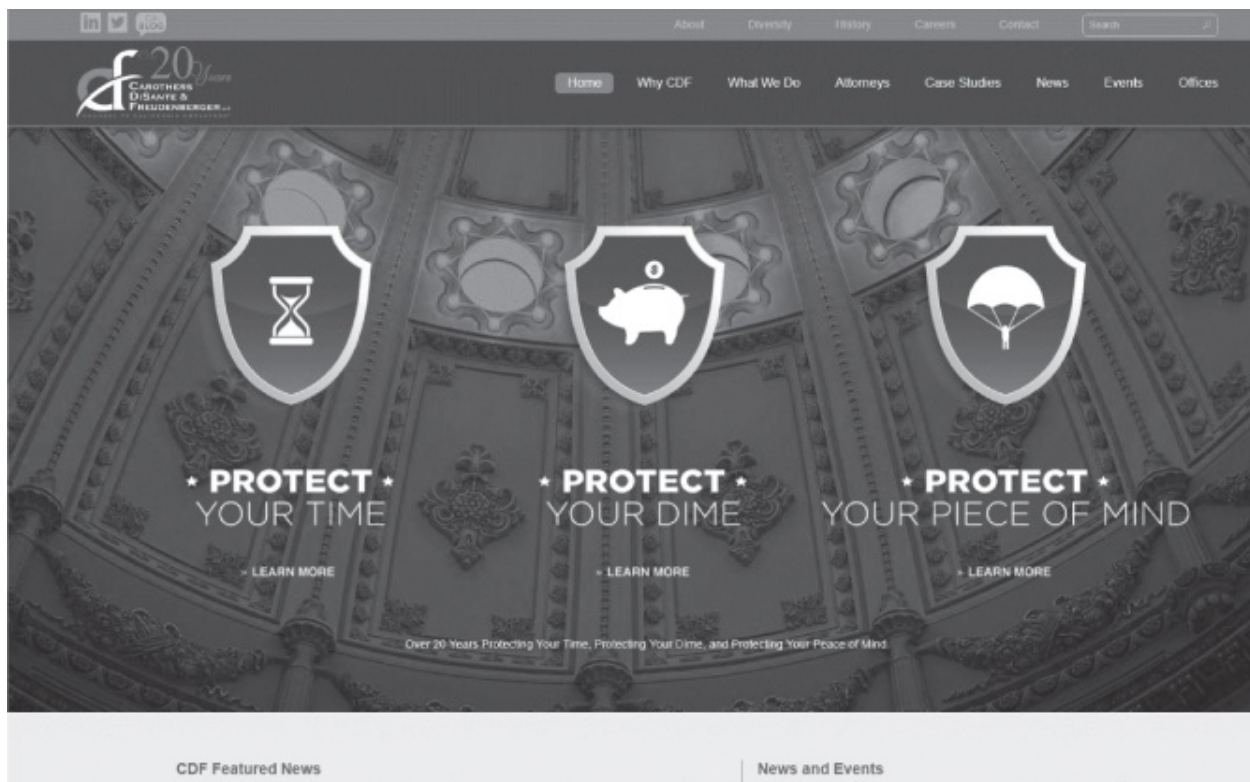


Figure 6.2 CDF claims.

Notice how these three claims are

1. Therapeutic to the pain of being exposed to risk.
2. Original to CDF: no other law firm is making the same claims.
3. Provable, and they sound good.

Commenting about her claims (see [Figure 6.2](#)), Marie D. DiSante, managing partner said, “Developing and drawing upon this clear set of claims helped us explain why potential clients would want to work with us. We’ve noticed how these claims centered on protecting our clients are more effective in demonstrating why we are skilled at what we do. We now have a platform to signify to clients that we protect their best interests. This makes it much easier for our attorneys to talk about why companies should choose us!”

CodeBlue is an industry leader in restoration claims management, working alongside a national contractor network to return *insurance* policyholders to pre-loss condition in the fastest, most efficient, and least disruptive manner possible (see [Figure 6.3](#)).



EXTRAORDINARY SPEED

Our Elite network of experts commits to the fastest response time in the industry ... anywhere in the United States.



EXTRAORDINARY SCIENCE

Our trained experts use our proprietary methodology to return policyholders to preloss condition in the most efficient manner possible.



EXTRAORDINARY SERVICE

Our active management techniques, and use of technologies like iPads, make a better policyholder experience, which results in improved customer satisfaction scores.

Figure 6.3 CodeBlue claims.

Paul Gross, CodeBlue CEO, stated: Nine months after starting to communicate our extraordinary claims to the market, we experienced a 34.87% increase in revenues compared to the nine months prior.”

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN BRAND AND CLAIMS

Many marketing experts have attempted to precisely define what a brand is, but the concept remains fuzzy. We suggest the following definition: “A brand is a memory in the brain that connects the name of the product or service with a set of desirable benefits.”

For example, when you heard the name Volvo and retrieved from your memory what you thought about Volvo, most likely the concept of *safety* came to mind.

This association between two concepts, Volvo and Safety, is the result of a strategic decision that was made at Volvo headquarters 60 years ago. It is then the consistent repetition of the association of Volvo with safety in most – if not all – Volvo messages that created such a strong memory in your brain. Most likely it took you less than half a second to make that association. It should be noted that this association is driven more by affect than by cognition suggesting a strong connection with the primal brain [[146](#)].

Therefore, claims are the explicit expression of a limited set of key brand attributes, carefully worded to facilitate memorization and retrieval.

Meanwhile, there is a significant difference between B2C and B2B brands. For most B2C brands, the claims (or reasons to buy) tend to be implicit. Volvo is indeed an exception. But for a B2B brand, we believe it is critical for the top executives to create clarity, consensus, and commitment on the top three explicit reasons that customers should buy their solution: the claims should be determined once and for all, and they should be the focal point of all communication.

WHY LIMIT YOURSELF TO THREE SHORT CLAIMS?

Please memorize the sentence: “I love the weather in California.” Repeat it a few times.

Now without looking at the written words on the page, try to say it backward word by word. Not easy? Why?

Because your brain's working memory can only handle a limited number of concepts at a time – typically three to five. With six words, the memorized sentence will jam your working memory. Try now to memorize the sentence: “I love California” and try to say it backward. It is easier because the message can easily be manipulated by your working memory. As you recall, the primal brain needs your message to be memorable, and organizing it under three claims will ease the processing and recall of critical information needed to make a decision.

Retrieval fluency is the ease with which information can be accessed from memory. To communicate a concept, an idea, or a complete sales/marketing message, our working memory will naturally select three to four chunks of data from a large amount of information, as well as retrieve knowledge about the topic we want to communicate, before it stores relevant information for long-

term use [[147](#), [148](#)]. A chunk or package of information can be defined as a thought, feeling, idea, or concept, which, on average, can be held in working memory for about 20 seconds. As soon as working memory requires a new chunk of information, it will need to dump one of the current chunks to make room for the incoming one [[149](#)]. According to Smith and Jonides [[149](#)], when we hear a message, our brain automatically classifies the complete set of information by breaking it down to three or four chunks. Then it is stored in our working memory where we continue to assign each of the chunks to one simple label or word, even if it involves a very complex concept or experience. So, when you try to communicate your value proposition by giving a detailed description of all the benefits of your solution, the message will be poorly processed and poorly remembered. On the other hand, if you organize your arguments under a maximum of three chapters, whose titles are the claims, you will achieve better understanding and better recall.

Other researchers have shown that the relationship between persuasion and objective information is an asymptotic function. Passed a certain point, providing more information, even if that information is objective, will not increase persuasion [[150](#)]. The neural basis of the *verbatim effect*, the phenomenon that the gist of what someone has said is better remembered than the verbatim wording, has been demonstrated and is linked with activity in the hippocampus – part of the primal brain [[151](#)].

In conclusion, selecting a maximum of three chunks of information (three claims) upfront and simplifying their expression will make your message more effective with the primal brain: it will be more easily processed, understood, and encoded by your audience!

WHY WORDSMITH YOUR CLAIMS?

Processing fluency describes the ease with which information is handled by the brain, and it has been applied to marketing, to business names, and even to finance for many years. For example, researchers discovered that, during the week following an IPO, stocks that are easier to pronounce tend to perform better than others. For example, their ticker symbols are easy to pronounce such as KAG versus KHG [[152](#)]. Moreover, studies have found significant differences in likability, quality, originality, and memorability between rhyming and equivalent but nonrhyming slogans [[153](#)]. “Rhyming as a reason” is yet another cognitive bias, a manifestation of how our perception is dominated by our primal brain: it's not so much what you say rather it is the music of what you say that

makes an impact!

Processing fluency can also be improved by other means. For instance, by improving font readability. Information provided in an easy-to-read font is typically rated as more familiar and more trustworthy than information provided in a hard-to-read font [154]. Processing fluency can also be raised by using more visible colors compared to colors that are more difficult to read against their background [155]. Even information that is focused versus blurry impacts processing fluency [156].

WHAT TO REMEMBER

You should remember that the primal brain will favor information that

- Claims give your prospects the solution to their top pains
- Uses short and simple words that are easy to pronounce [157].
- Do not use more than 3 claims to not overload the working memory of your prospects
- Reads easily with fonts that are processed with maximum processing fluency and in color, which offer a pleasing contrast with their background. Verdana, Tahoma, Times are always good choices for fonts [158].
- Is pleasing to the ear, so wordsmith your claims using:

A repetition of the same word as in “*protect, protect, protect.*” This creates a META-claim, a claim above all claims.

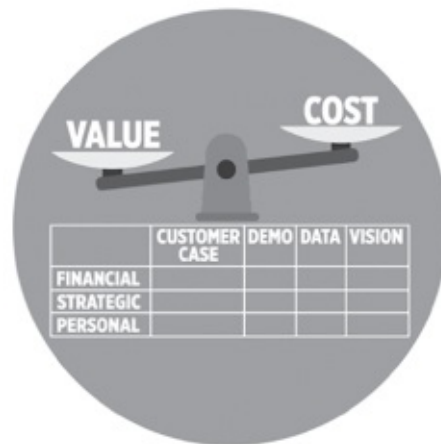
An alliteration (the repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent words) as in “Diagnose, differentiate, demonstrate, and deliver.”

A rhyme as in “Protect your time, protect your dime, protect your peace of mind” (or pain, claim, gain). In the book titled *Pre-Suasion*, Professor Robert Cialdini reports, “The statement *Caution and measure will bring you riches* is seen as truer when changed to *Caution and measure win you treasure.*” There is a lesson here for persuasive success: “To make it climb, make it rhyme” [159].

Any other technique that creates a pleasing sound in the expression of your claims.

CHAPTER 7

Demonstrate the Gain



DEMONSTRATE THE GAIN™

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.

—Carl Sagan, astronomer, author, and science communicator

After you *diagnose the pain* of your customers and *differentiate your claims*, you will now need to *demonstrate the gain* to help trigger a decision. Remember that it is not so much the value that you present that matters, rather it is the value that people believe in. Therefore, you will need to make an effective and convincing demonstration of the value. Your audience should hear or see highly *tangible* proofs, proofs that are simple to process cognitively and easy to believe. You need to lift the curtain of skepticism, and to do so, you need a strong demonstration of the *gain*, defined as the difference between *value* and *cost*.

Researchers at Oxford wrote, “When advertising persuades, the audience can be said, almost definitionally, to have tested and accepted the truth of a claim of value” [[160](#)].

THE SCIENCE OF GAIN COMPUTATION IN THE BRAIN

This topic has been the subject of prolific research in neuroeconomics, and we briefly introduced it earlier in the book. It is called *the utility of decision*. *Utility*

of decision influences the consumers' willingness to pay different prices for different goods. Utility seeks to explain rationally: why people are willing to buy an expensive four-wheel-drive SUV in Los Angeles when it never snows there!

Brian Knutson, professor of psychology and neuroscience at Stanford University, and George Loewenstein, professor of economics and psychology in social and decision sciences at Carnegie Mellon University investigated what happens in the brain of consumers when they decide to purchase food and entertainment items [41]. The test subjects were given a comfortable sum of shopping money and the items they had to pick or reject ranged from chocolates to a digital voice recorder, to the latest Harry Potter book and more. When the subjects decided to pick an item, its price was deducted from their shopping money. Using an fMRI, the researchers visualized the activity of specific brain areas. They discovered that when the subject was first shown the image of an item, the nucleus accumbens (NAcc) was activated. As discussed earlier, this part of the brain plays a key role in the dopamine reward pathway. They noticed that the intensity of the activation of the NAcc correlated with the desire a subject had for an item. If the subject didn't experience an ardent desire for an item (for example, he could already own a copy of the last Harry Potter), his NAcc did not show much activity.

When the subjects were exposed to the cost of the item the fMRI data showed that excessive prices activated the insula: an area of the primal brain known to play a role in the processing of pain and negative experiences. Additionally, spending money deactivated the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) a brain region involved in complex cognitive functions and in moderation of social behavior. The researchers showed that by independently measuring the activity of these regions they could predict purchase decisions more reliably than the subject's self-reported intentions of purchase. This research confirmed the neural processes involved in weighing the trade-off between the pleasure of receiving the value and the pain of paying for it, that is, the cost, effectively assessing the neural response to the gain.

MEMORY AND GAIN EVALUATION

The encoding of value (or price) in memory is also the subject of intense research because of the complexity of the brain processes involved with numerical data. Numerical data can be represented in different formats:

- Seven: in plain English.

- 7: in Arabic numerals.
- VII: in Roman numerals.
- *****: in symbolic representation.

However, that is not the way people typically memorize the value of a number. Instead, they encode an approximation of the number [\[161\]](#):

- 7 is “young” when referred to the age of a child.
- 7 is “cold” when referred to the temperature of a day.
- 7 is “cheap” when referred to the price of a bottle of wine.

Furthermore, a number of perceptual biases impact people's ability to process and compare numbers. For example, a bias called the *distance effect* shows that it takes longer to decide that 7 is greater than 2, than that 7 is greater than 6. Another one called the *magnitude effect* makes numbers with equal distance easier to discriminate when they are small, like 2 versus 3 rather than when they are large like 7 versus 8 [\[162\]](#). From this research, we can conclude that an effective persuader must help the buyer make a simple and direct comparison of the *value* versus the *cost*.

One should note that, in most business-to-consumer (B2C) situations, vendors show or discuss the price only after presenting the value. In most large transactions (B2B), the buyer is informed of the cost only toward the end of the sales cycle. Even for low-cost transactions, such as the ones you may do on Amazon or eBay, notice how the picture of the product is on the left and the price is further to the right, making sure that we see the product first (positive stimulus) and the price second (negative stimulus). In fact, researchers at Stanford studied the impact of price primacy. They looked at the differences in brain response when the consumer is first informed of the price before being informed about the product [\[163\]](#). They demonstrated that showing the price first promoted evaluations linked to the product's financial worth while showing the product first promoted evaluations related to the products' attractiveness or desirability. The conclusion is that if you are not selling the cheapest solution you should indeed present the product first followed by the price.

YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

Value (often called value proposition) is a favorite topic in the world of marketing. Of the roughly 200,000 books written on marketing about 1,000

focus specifically on the subject of the value proposition. By comparison, less than about 60 books have been written on neuromarketing so far, and over 1,000,000 books have been written on sales!

Fundamentally, when you are trying to sell or market a product or a service (or even an idea) your objective at any given price point should always be to maximize the value your prospects will perceive they receive. In other words, regardless of your price, you should attempt to maximize the value you present, and by doing so, you will maximize the GAIN defined as: value minus cost. Imagine you are selling a car for \$50,000. If you can create the perception in the brain of your prospects that the value of your car is comparable to that of a Bentley, a Ferrari or a Tesla, it will become easier to sell than if the perceived value is comparable to a Fiat or a Hyundai. The perception of value is key!

By reviewing the most popular models on value, we identified three sources of value: financial, strategic, and personal. You may remember that we use the same categories to discuss the pain diagnosis. We further believe that the value can be proven with four types of proofs: social (customer testimonial), observable (demonstration), analytical (data) and aspirational (vision). Therefore, value can be presented as a matrix, shown in [Table 7.1](#).

[Table 7.1](#) The value matrix.

| Proof | VALUE | <i>Social Customer Case</i> | <i>Observable Demo</i> | <i>Analytical Data</i> | <i>Aspirational Vision</i> |
|------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Financial | | | | | |
| Strategic | | | | | |
| Personal | | | | | |

THE THREE TYPES OF VALUE

Financial Value

The *financial value* refers to the creation of measurable wealth, either by increasing savings or bringing additional revenues. Keep in mind that because of the loss aversion bias, helping your customers save \$1 has a greater psychological value – in average about 2.3 times more – than helping them make an additional \$1 [[164](#), [165](#)].

In a B2B context, the financial value is often labeled ROI (return on investment) or TCO (total cost of ownership) and it should be carefully quantified. For example, rather than saying “My solution will save you money,” you should say, “You will save 12% of your manufacturing cost with my solution.” Or even better, “You will save \$58,000 annually with my solution.” Note how a precise quantification of the value makes it more tangible than a vague and less convincing statement like “we will save you money” [166]. Also quantifying the value with an actual dollar amount as opposed to a percentage will reduce your prospect's cognitive effort. It makes it simpler to compare the value with your cost. If your solution has a price tag of \$50,000, then your prospects will instantly understand that they can recoup their investment in less than one year. The gain calculation becomes obvious, even for their primal brains!

Strategic Value

The strategic value refers to a business value your prospect would experience with the understanding that this value cannot be translated into a credible financial quantification but offers nonetheless tangible benefits. For example, imagine you are selling a new type of seat belt to Volvo that offers a higher safety rating than the ones Volvo currently uses. Because safety is central to the value proposition of Volvo (it is, in fact, their main claim!) the increase of safety provided by your solution represents a strategic value. Note that translating this into a financial value would be challenging. Although an overall increase in safety of the Volvo cars is valuable, claiming it would help Volvo sell more cars would be a stretch because it would be difficult if not impossible to make a direct link between higher safety and additional sales.

Similar to the financial value, the strategic value should be quantified with an exact number. In the Volvo example instead of saying, “Our new seat belts will make your cars safer,” say, “Your car safety index will increase from 88 to 91 thanks to our new seat belts.” Note that in this case quantifying the value makes it more tangible and therefore more appealing to the primal brain.

Other examples of strategic value include less business risk, opportunity to diversify, increased quality, better differentiation, and so forth. All these examples point to a reduction of risk and uncertainty, which are crucial factors for the primal brain.

Personal Value

The personal value refers to the psychological or physical benefits your

customers would experience because of your solution. Personal value includes less stress, pride of ownership, reduced work burden, being promoted, becoming a hero, feeling more secure or more empowered in the job, getting a bonus, receiving company or external recognition, *etc.* Unlike the financial and strategic type of value, personal value is difficult to quantify other than by using psychological constructs. Nevertheless, if your solution allows your customers to work less, you should try to quantify how much less: is it just five minutes per week or one hour per day? Notice that if the benefit of working less implies that your customers could, in turn, decrease the cost of their solution, it would then be wise to quantify that financial component of the value. Instead of saying “Our solution will save you time,” say, “You will save five minutes on the assembly time of each of your machines, which means you will no longer have to do extra hours on Fridays (personal value) and it will result in production cost savings of \$27 per machine (financial value).” Even in large B2B transactions, the personal value should not be underestimated. For example, for years when IBM was selling large computers, their motto was “Nobody ever got fired from choosing IBM.”

The objective of an effective persuader should always be to maximize the amount of value presented and not to leave it open to the imagination of the audience.

THE FOUR TYPES OF PROOF

Please note that the value matrix presents the proofs in decreasing order of strength: the first type of proof, a customer testimonial, represents the strongest possible proof, whereas an aspirational proof, a vision, is the weakest type because it requires an act of faith from your audience: people have to believe your word.

Social Proof: Customer Testimonial

In his book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Robert Cialdini identifies six laws of influence [[167](#)]:

- Social proof: The more people behave one way, the more it will incent others to match that behavior.
- Consistency and commitment: Once people make a statement in one direction in the future they will be psychologically motivated to remain consistent with the original statement.

- Reciprocity: When you do something nice to people, they will want to reciprocate.
- Liking: The more you have a positive rapport with people the more chances you have to influence them.
- Authority: People perceived as expert or in charge are more influential.
- Scarcity: The rarer an item, the more valuable it becomes.

A simple example of the impact of the law of social proof – which we want to use here to strongly demonstrate your value – is “canned laughter,” which has proven to cause the audience to laugh longer and more often and to rate the comedy as funnier [168]. Cialdini states that we define as correct behavior what we see other people do. Other manifestations of this phenomenon can be seen when bartenders prime their tip jar with a few dollars, when car manufacturers claim “the number 1 selling truck in America” or when companies are eager to communicate the long list of customers who use their solution. Remember, our primal brain will make us behave like sheep. The more we believe people behave one way, the more we will want to conform. In a business setting, how can you use this law to your advantage? The answer is by using one or more customer testimonials.

Customer testimonials or customer stories represent the best type of proof because not only do they come from a third party, as opposed to coming from the vendor, but they give an example of what the social norm could be. Furthermore, when carefully scripted and properly delivered, customer testimonials can transport viewers into a different world, a phenomenon described in detail in the section on persuasion catalysts: stories in [Chapter 8](#). Imagine you are trying to sell seatbelts to BMW, and you have already sold your products to Volvo. You could use the following testimonial:

By using the seatbelts from our new vendor, we saved \$7 per car resulting in an annual saving of \$3.5 M (financial value), while increasing the safety index of our cars by three points (strategic value). As a result, our entire purchasing department received the Best Department Contribution award directly from our CEO (personal value). – Johann Swenson, Purchasing Director, Volvo

Notice how difficult it would be for the prospects at BMW to argue with such a proof. Knowing the similarities between their business case and Volvo, most likely the buyers at BMW will start to imagine that they too would experience the same benefits!

Cialdini insisted that the law of social proofs works even better when we are observing the behavior of people with a high degree of similarity to us [169]. In the story, the obvious similarity between BMW and Volvo would make the social proof work stronger than if the prospect was a tractor manufacturer like John Deere or an airplane manufacturer like Boeing. Here again, note the link with the primal brain and the importance of similarity!

Finally, a customer testimonial represents the past. There is nothing speculative about it. It is factual, which is why it has such impact on the primal brain!

Example of the use of a customer testimonial to support the value of a claim. Tovar is the largest snow removal company in the United States, and their clients include large institutions like banks, hospitals, and big shopping malls. The pain of their customers is all about speed: How long will it take after a major snowstorm for their parking lots to become accessible again? For a hospital, lives are at stake when the ambulances cannot reach their facilities, and for shopping malls revenue loss is immediate when shoppers cannot enter the parking lot. Guided by SalesBrain, Tovar endorsed a set of claims centered on the swiftness of their intervention: Instant Communication, Instant Action, and Instant Relaxation. They also asked SalesBrain to develop a set of slides to help sell their services. To prove the value of instant relaxation we recommended that they use customer testimonials such as the one presented in [Figure 7.1](#). In this example, notice that the customer uses the word “relaxed” to support the wording of one of their claims.

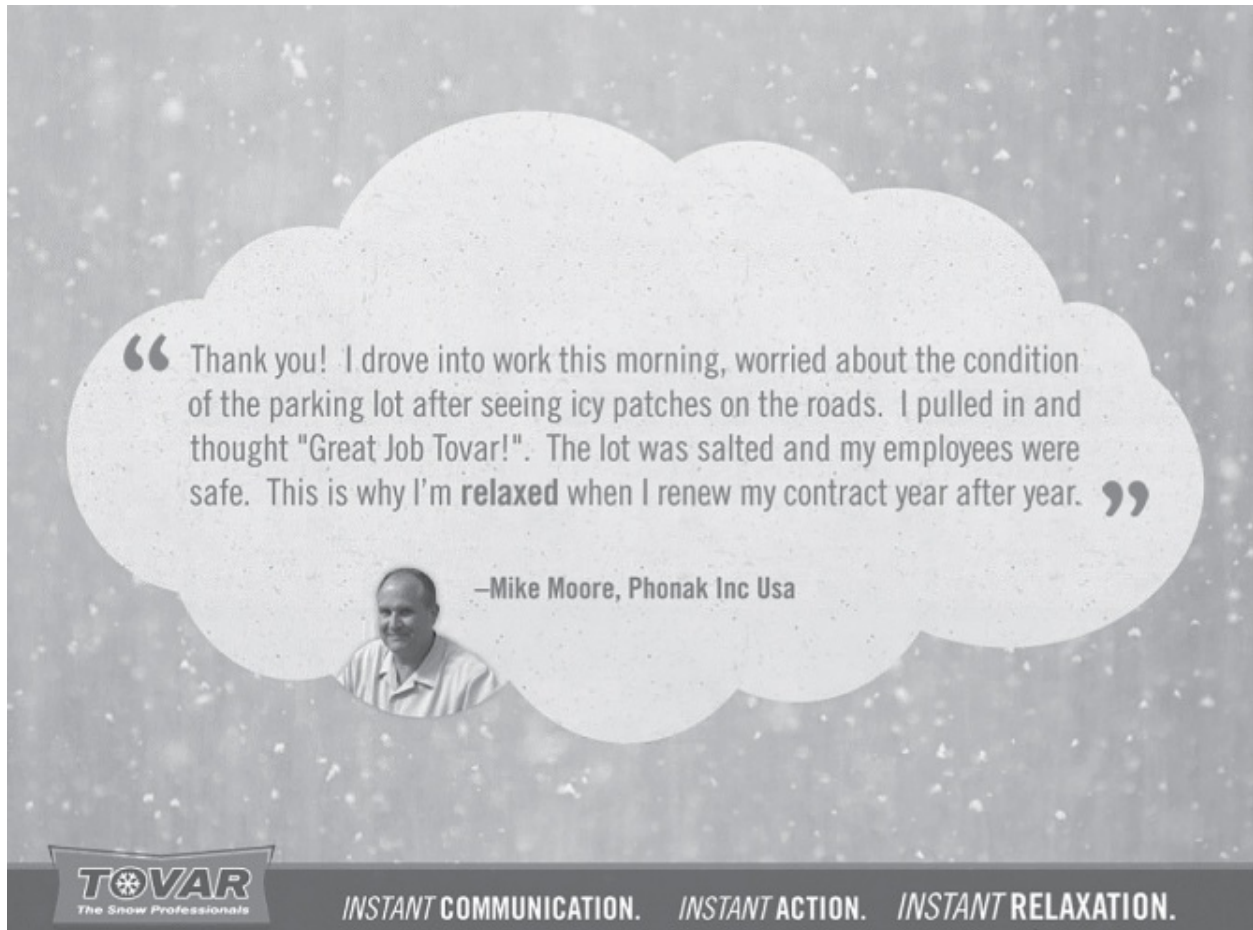


Figure 7.1 Tovar testimonial.

In conclusion, the best way to prove your value is to use the right customer stories. Testimonials are social proofs that have a strong persuading effect on the primal brain of your audience. Make them into videos to augment their visual and emotional impact.

Observable Proof: Demo

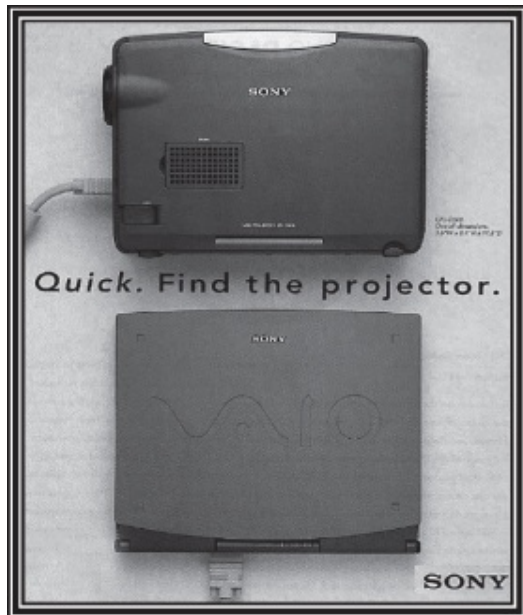
A demonstration (or demo) uses a prop, a visual, or a sequence of logical steps to prove a value statement in the present. Think about Domino's Pizza slogan: “30 minutes or less or it's free.” The “or it's free” is a strong demonstration that the pizza will arrive on time.

Table 7.2 Domino value matrix.

| Proof | VALUE | Social Customer Case | Observable Demo | Analytical Data | Aspirational Vision |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Financial | | | | | |

| | | | | |
|------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Strategic | | | | |
| Personal | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |

In [Figure 7.2](#), notice how Sony highlighted the personal value of a small projector: it is difficult to tell which one is the laptop, and which one is the projector! At the time this ad was used, nearly 20 years ago, most projectors were bulky and heavy.



| VALUE Matrix of Sony Projector | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| VALUE \ Proof | Social Customer Case | Observable Demo | Analytical Data | Aspirational Vision |
| Financial | | | | |
| Strategic | | | | |
| Personal | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |

[Figure 7.2](#) Sony value matrix.

[Figure 7.3](#) shows another example of a great demo, which uses the natural curiosity of the readers to deliver their value proposition!

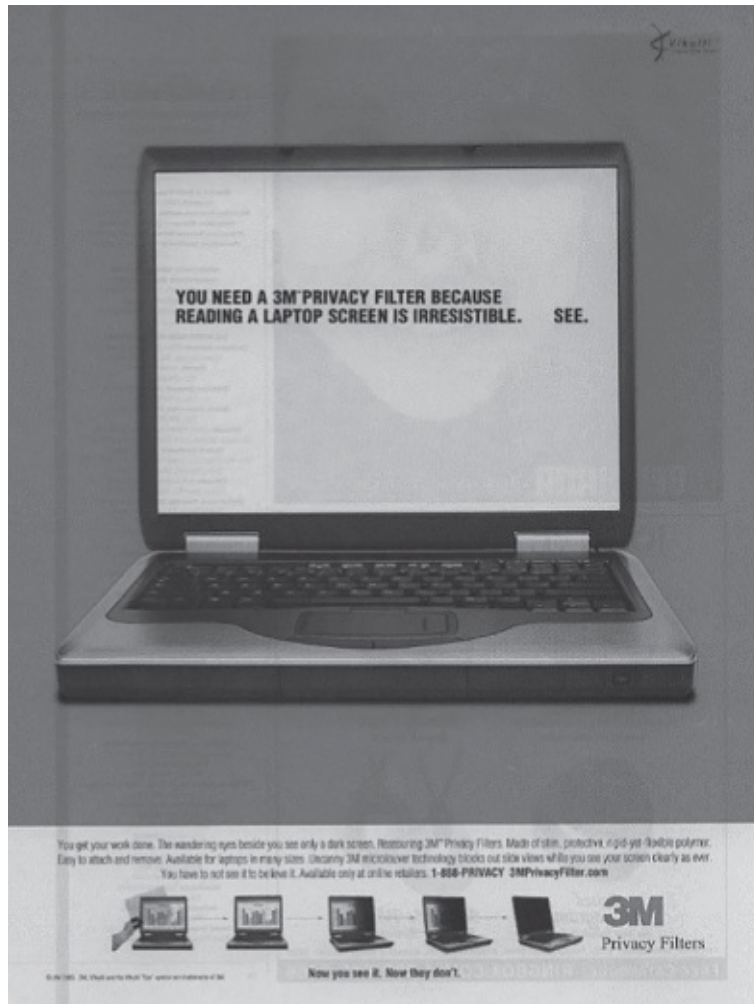


Figure 7.3 3M ad.

Although the value is not clearly stated or quantified, note that the value of privacy is communicated on three types of value (see [Table 7.3](#)):

- Financial: You could lose a significant amount of money if your confidential information was seen by the wrong eyes.
- Strategic: Losing confidential information could be detrimental to your business.
- Personal: Having to deal with identity theft or the loss of your credit card and other sensitive financial or health information could bring stress for years.

Table 7.3 3M value matrix.

| Proof | VALUE | Social Customer Case | Observable Demo | Analytical Data | Aspirational Vision |
|-----------|-------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Financial | | | | | |

| | | | | |
|------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Financial | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Strategic | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Personal | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |

Although each of those examples speak to radically different value points, note the space the demonstration of the value occupies: for instance, in the case of 3M, the visual highlighting the value proposition (the *why* you should buy) is 8 to 10 times bigger than the series of five images at the bottom that explains the *what* the product does. Now contrast this with what most advertisers do. They give a long explanation of the *what* with few or no reason for the *why*!

An observable proof such as a demo or a demonstration is second to a customer testimonial in providing an irrefutable type of proof.

Analytical Proof: Data

“In god we trust...all other please bring data!” is the motto of the skeptics. Despite that skeptic opinion, data are abstract and provide weaker proof than a customer testimonial or a demo. However, you can still prove your *value* using data.

When using data as a proof, research shows that the credibility of the source of the data impacts the persuasion effect [170]. Furthermore, studies have shown that quantification of the data always brings some persuasion benefit. The exception to this rule states that quantification might put more reliance on the fact that the source of information needs to be perceived as an expert for the persuasion effect to occur [171]. Note that the diagnostic phase of NeuroMap serves to unveil the pain of your customers and provides an opportunity to establish your expertise in the domain.

Imagine you are selling manufacturing equipment. To prove your value, you could say, “Our new machines would save you \$240,000 per year on your manufacturing cost.” Note that such a statement is not using data to prove the value, it's just a quantification of the value but the proof is aspirational, it's your hope that you would save them that amount.

Now imagine if you were saying, “Our machines will shorten your manufacturing time by 10%. Your plant is running 2,400 hours a year, so as a result you will save 240 hours per year. Since you mentioned that your production cost is \$1,000 per hour, you will save \$240,000.”

Notice that although the savings presented in the two examples above are identical, the first one requires a total act of faith in what the vendor says (the

identical, the first one requires a total act of faith in what the vendor says (the \$240,000), whereas the second requires two assumptions:

1. Your prospect believes you will shorten the manufacturing time by 10%. The rest of the numbers will be easily accepted because they came from them.
2. Your prospect understands the logic of your argument. For that, he needs to comprehend how you came up with the \$240,000 savings.

The current example is obvious but in most B2B situations these calculations can be very complex, and they will inevitably lead to a major cognitive load on the brain of your audience, a task that is energetically taxing and is often conducive to confusion, not persuasion.

Therefore, your objective is to arrive at quantification of the value – financial, strategic, or personal – by using the simplest possible formula compatible with your audience's level of comprehension of mathematical or abstract concepts. For example, if you sell a complex solution that will be reviewed by a CFO, it would be relevant to use a sophisticated ROI model. But if you are in a B2C situation, the use of data to build your proof should be simple to understand. Remember, even the simplest data are not appealing to the primal brain!

[Figure 7.4](#) and [Table 7.4](#) are great examples of data to prove the value.

JUSTICE
MAY BE BLIND.
BUT SHE STILL
SEES IT OUR WAY
92.3%
OF THE TIME.

quinn emanuel trial lawyers LOS ANGELES • NEW YORK • SAN FRANCISCO • SILICON VALLEY • SAN DIEGO • PALM SPRINGS

Our partners have won 92.3% of the cases they have tried in their careers, as of April, 2004.

Figure 7.4 Quinn law firm data example.

Table 7.4 Quinn value matrix.

| Proof | VALUE | Social Customer Case | Observable Demo | Analytical Data | Aspirational Vision |
|-----------|-------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Financial | | | | ☑ | |
| Strategic | | | | | |
| Personal | | | | | |

Notice how the ad in [Figure 7.4](#) uses data: the percentage of times the judges have agreed with them. However, they provided the proof but didn't translate it – most likely a difficult task – into either a financial value, how much money you would save on average by winning your lawsuit, and/or a personal value, not spending many sleepless nights under the stress of a lawsuit.

Monarch Medical Technologies has developed innovative software to better manage glucose for diabetic patients. In the first slide, shown in [Figure 7.5](#), note how they used data to emphasize the pain of the nurse who is caring for her patients.

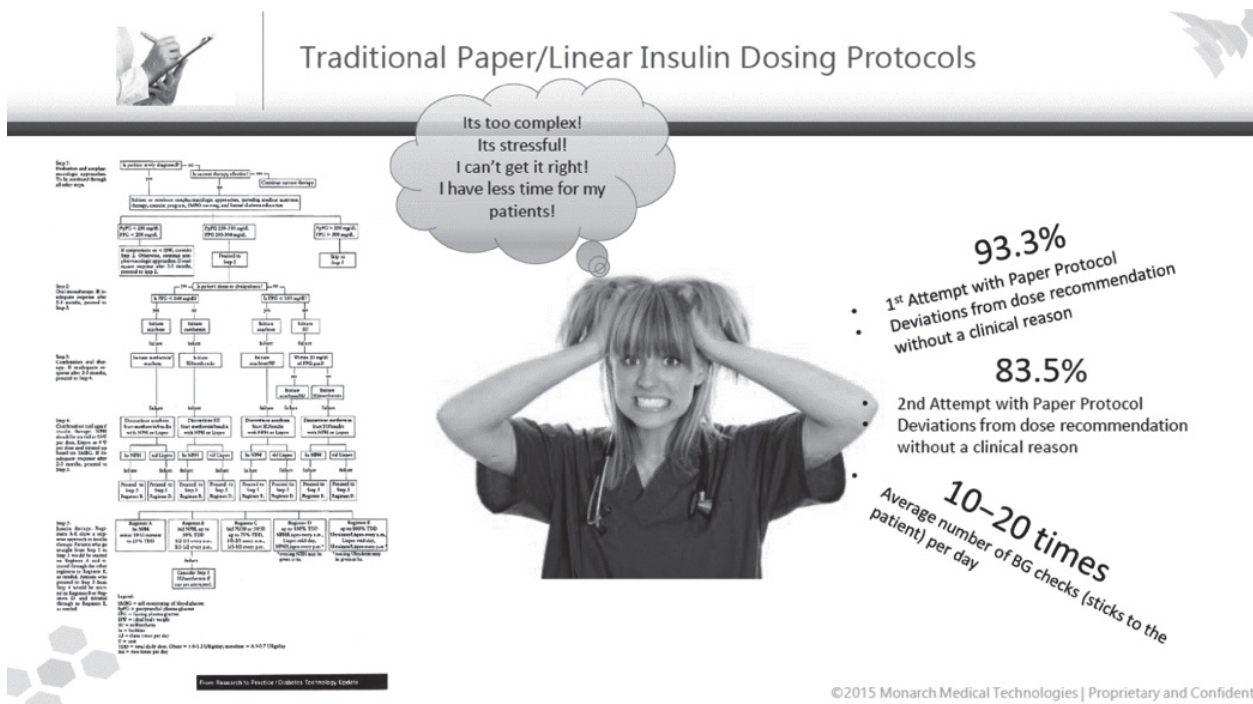


Figure 7.5 Monarch pain visual.



Monarch EndoTool Algorithm

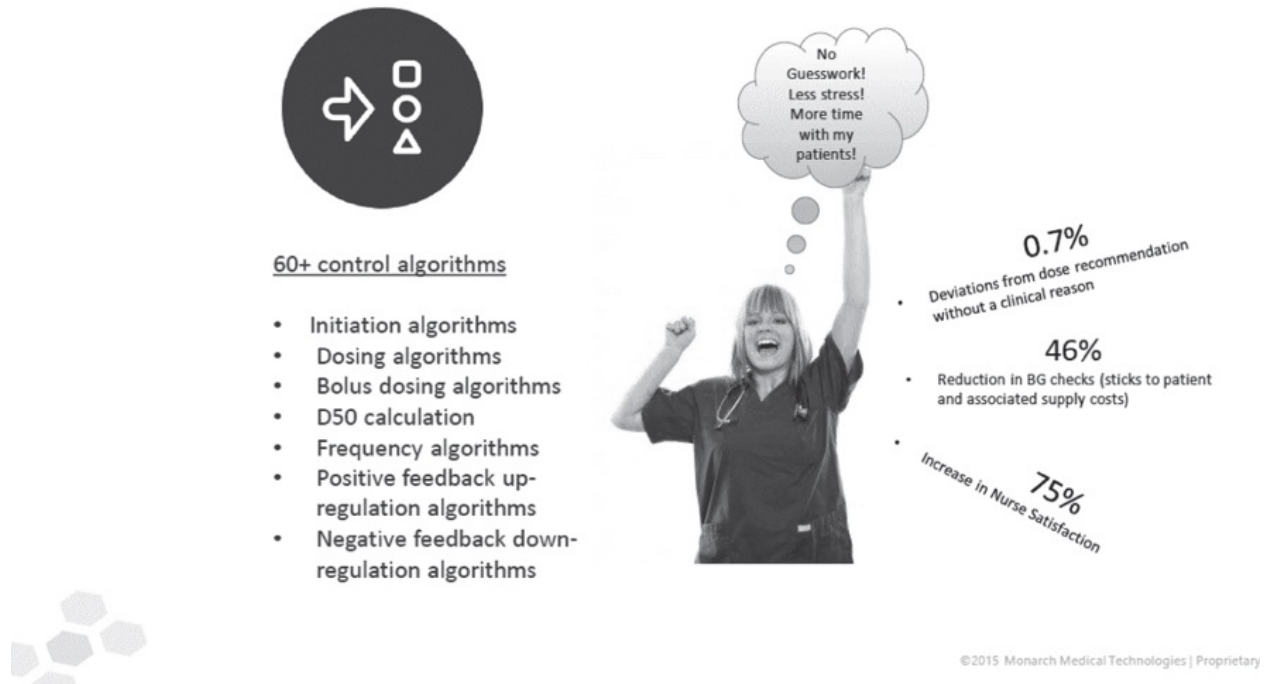


Figure 7.6 Monarch gain visual.

Then in the following slide ([Figure 7.6](#)) see how they used data to prove the value of their solution and how these numbers contrast with the numbers associated with the pain.

To further strengthen the proof, note that they could present the original data they used to come up with the numbers:

- 0.7% of deviation versus 93.3%
- 46% of reduction of checks
- 75% increase in nurse satisfaction

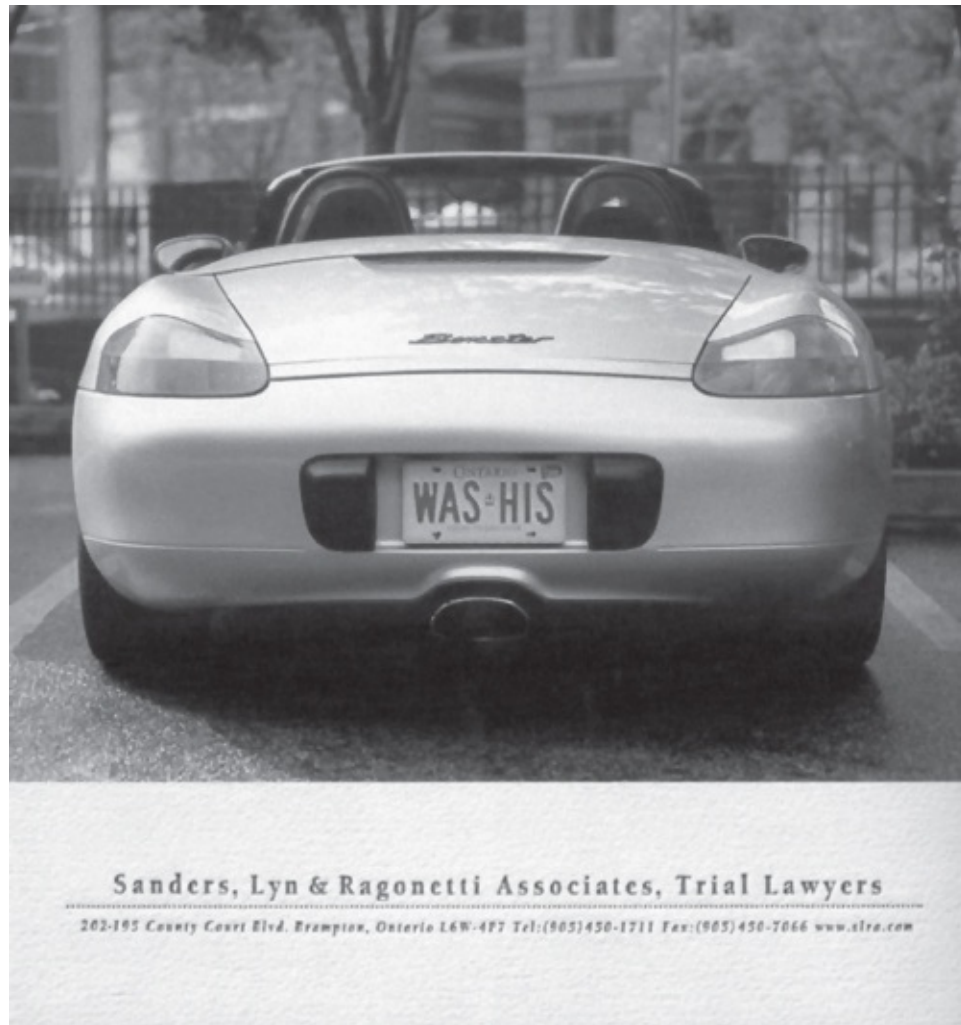
In conclusion, data could be used when stronger types of proof (social or observable) are not available. An effective persuader should make the data easy to process and believe.

Aspirational Proof: Vision

When no other proofs are available, there is still a way to persuade: by using the power of your vision or belief. You surely have heard this kind of proof when a

seller says: “Trust me, we’ll save you \$1,000!” Because of the absence of actual proof, the seller needs to make the vision bold and impressive. Such an aspirational proof typically requires telling a story, an analogy or using a metaphor to get your prospects to trust the value they will receive.

The ad shown in [Figure 7.7](#) received multiple advertising awards.



[Figure 7.7](#) Sanders ad.

Note that it is not a customer case because most readers are not naïve enough to believe that this license plate really exists as opposed to having been created by the ad agency. It would have been a customer case if a famous divorced woman like Ivana Trump (divorced Donald Trump in 1991) or Angelina Jolie (divorced Billy Bob Thornton in 2003) was standing by the car. It is also not a demo because the ad doesn't prove that indeed the woman would be able to get the car out of a settlement. Therefore, this is using a vision: “Trust us, we’ll be able to

get you the car.” The value has a financial component: the worth of that vehicle, say \$50,000, and it also has a personal component: revenge! The value matrix for this ad is shown in [Table 7.5](#).

Table 7.5 Sanders value matrix.

| Proof | VALUE | Social Customer Case | Observable Demo | Analytical Data | Aspirational Vision |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Financial | | | | | \$50,000 |
| Strategic | | | | | |
| Personal | | | | | Revenge |

One should note that although the type of proof used is quite weak, the ad still has a great impact because the message is delivered emotionally to your primal brain!

Another splendid example of the use of a vision to close a deal, and revolutionize the world in the process, is the story of how Jim Clark started Netscape – Jim, the only entrepreneur who ever started three companies that were worth more than \$1 billion, first founded SGI (Silicon Graphics Inc). I met Jim when I opened the first Branch of Silicon Graphics in Toulouse France and later when SGI offered me a job at their headquarters in Mountain View, California. Jim left SGI in 1993 and invested \$3 million of his own money to start Netscape, the company that invented the first browser and spearheaded the revolution that became known as the Internet era. In 1994, and before its world-record-breaking IPO (initial public offering) in August 1995, Jim was desperately trying to raise money, so he pitched his ideas to the top venture capital (VC) firms in Silicon Valley. The value of a browser, which made accessing the web easy through its graphical interface, could not be proven by using any other proofs of value than the vision of Jim Clark and he couldn't use:

- A customer case by saying that Bill Gates made a fortune with Microsoft Internet Explorer. It took several years after Netscape for Microsoft to develop its first browser.
- A demo. In fact, much of the money Jim needed was to develop a first running demonstration of Navigator, the first Netscape browser.
- Data, because there was no reliable data that could predict how many people would use a browser to access the Internet. There was no consensus on what people would do with the Internet besides what the research community had

done –that is, exchange scientific data over the Internet!

Between 1993 and 1995 Jim was trying to keep Netscape alive because the company was losing a lot of money. Yet, on the IPO day of August 15, 1995, many people started to buy Jim's vision; the IPO raised over \$300 million on a valuation of \$2 billion with revenues of only \$16 million for the six months preceding the IPO, with no prospect of making a profit for at least two years. That's the value of a good vision!

However, before this incredible success, Jim had a tough time selling his vision. In fact, New Enterprise Associates, one of the tier 1 VCs in Silicon Valley, turned down Jim's offer to join as an early investor. It was not obvious then that a browser would be worth anything. And betting investment money on the vision of an entrepreneur is a risky proposition.

The moral of this story is that even if you are Jim Clark and even if you're holding a piece of software that will change the world, you should try to present a better proof of value than your vision to influence the primal brain of your audience. Yes, it's possible to persuade using a vision, but it represents the weakest type of proof!

Note that the border between the four kinds of proofs we are suggesting are not definitive. For example, if you were selling toothbrushes you could use the following statement: “Our new toothbrush is recommended by 80% of dentists.” Note that this proof is a combination of data and a social validation, so its strength should be considered greater than a proof that uses only data as in the earlier manufacturing example.

THE COST

Just as for the value, the cost can be categorized into three components, discussed next.

Financial Cost

Financial cost is always the most well-defined element of cost. In B2C, the price is usually on the tag attached to the item. And in B2B, the cost typically appears prominently on the first or last page of the proposal.

Strategic Cost

Strategic cost is most relevant when selling a B2B solution. This includes the

business cost of acquiring your solution such as increased risk, less flexibility, diverting critical resources to the deployment of your solution, and so forth.

Personal Cost

It covers how your solution could impact negatively the personal lives of buyers. This may include the risk of a switching to a new vendor, the pain of learning a new system such as what would happen if you went from a Google phone to an iPhone or vice versa, having to work overtime, dealing with a new and stressful process, and so forth. The cost can also be represented in the form of the following matrix.

Table 7.6 Cost matrix.

| Cost Matrix | Cost |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Financial | |
| Strategic | |
| Personal | |

THE GAIN EQUATION

The gain equation can be represented by:

$$\boxed{\text{Gain}} = \boxed{\text{Value claim 1}} + \boxed{\text{Value claim 2}} + \boxed{\text{value claim 3}} - \boxed{\text{Cost}}$$

We recommend that you calculate the total value by adding only the value brought by the unique benefits presented by your solution – those offered under your claims, as opposed to simply adding the value presented by the difference between the existing solution versus the new solution. This is to emphasize that to compare and contrast the primal brain needs first and foremost to understand the unique value offered by your solution. In that case, the gain calculated doesn't represent the difference the client would experience between their existing solution and your solution, but the difference between what they would get between you and any of your competitors' solutions. To account for the loss aversion bias, a more psychologically accurate representation of the gain equation is:

$$\boxed{\text{Gain}} = \boxed{\text{Value claim 1}} + \boxed{\text{Value claim 2}} + \boxed{\text{Value claim 3}} - 2.3 * \boxed{\text{Cost}}$$

Furthermore, it should be noted that the customers' brain will experience the pain

Furthermore, it should be noted that the customer's brain will experience the pain of the cost immediately after the purchasing decision. And, it is expected to be counterbalanced by the hope of receiving the value at an uncertain point in the future. Thus the equation becomes:

$$\boxed{\text{Gain}} = -2.3 * \boxed{\text{Cost}}$$

[experienced immediately at time of purchase with 100% probability]

$$+ \boxed{\text{Value claim 1}} + \boxed{\text{Value claim 2}} + \boxed{\text{Value claim 3}}$$

[experienced at an unknown future time, with a probability linked to the strength of the proof]

As you now understand, presenting this complex equation to the no less complex intricacies of the brain remains a challenge. At SalesBrain, we believe the vendor is responsible for making that demonstration primal brain friendly. This means, achieving cognitive fluency with a gain demonstration that is well laid out, so it can be easily understood and easily remembered.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- Gain is the difference between value and cost.
- Gain proofing is critical to make sure your value proposition is not only clear but credible.
- It is your burden to prove that the gain is believable.
- Break down your gain in terms of financial value, strategic value, and personal value.
- There are four ways to prove the gain. The most effective way is to use customer testimonials, then a demo, then data, and finally a vision.

Now you have

- Diagnosed the pain
- Differentiated your claims
- Demonstrated the gain

Now that the content of your message is defined, it is time to work on the delivery of your message, and you need to

- Deliver to the primal brain.

CHAPTER 8

Deliver to the Primal Brain



DELIVER TO THE PRIMAL BRAIN™

The answers to the first three steps of pain, claims, and gain will define the content of your message i.e *what* you should communicate to maximize the probability that your targets' brains, both their rational brains and more importantly their primal brains, will support a *yes* decision. Now you need to work on *how* to communicate those concepts of pain, claims, and gain, so their brains truly understand, believe, and remember what you are saying. You need to make the delivery of your message brain-friendly! NeuroMap gives you the blueprint of the best delivery to achieve the maximum persuasive effect. There are two critical concepts we will discuss next: persuasion elements and persuasion catalysts. We recommend that you look up the poster illustrating NeuroMap printed on the back of the book cover, or go to www.salesbrain.com to download it for free!

SIX PERSUASION ELEMENTS

The persuasion elements are the building blocks or fundamental ingredients of the content you need to communicate to your customers ([Figure 8.1](#)).



Figure 8.1 Six persuasion elements.

To use a chemistry analogy, if the persuasion elements are the various components of your messages, the persuasion catalysts ([Figure 8.2](#)) represent the Bunsen burners, that will turn up the heat on your elements and accelerate and amplify their persuasive effect.



Figure 8.2 Seven persuasion catalysts.

Let's now review the appetizer of your message, the first persuasion element that will whet their appetite to learn more about you and your value proposition.

GRABBERS

“If you grab attention in the first frame with a visual surprise you stand a better chance of holding the viewer.”

– David Ogilvy, advertising expert

Most people cannot easily capture attention. Let's face it, your prospects are not typically eager to receive another sales message embedded in a piece of advertising on email, on a website, on a presentation, on a phone call, or on a business card.

advertising, an email, voicemail, a presentation, a website, or a brochure. Undoubtedly, they are focused on something else, and your objective is to divert their attention so they can start to orient their mental energy to process your message.

As our discussion on the neuroscience of attention established, attention is a complicated neurological process that cognitive neuroscientists have studied for many years. The human body sends about 11 million bits of information per second to the brain yet, the conscious mind can only process about 50 bits per second [172]. So how do we decide to focus our attention, or how does our brain decide to select 50 bits per second out of 11 million?

Consider the experiment conducted by Darren Brown, a British mentalist and illusionist. How much attention do you think a wallet with \$300 in cash would receive when left unattended on a busy sidewalk in London? How long would it take for people to notice it and pick it up? Check the video at <https://tinyurl.com/kku4raj>.

Surprisingly, if a yellow circle is drawn around it, the wallet goes unnoticed for hours and many passersby simply miss it. Of course, without the circle, the wallet is picked up in seconds. This experiment suggests that the circle signals to our primal brain something abnormal, and therefore the presence of the wallet is denied to our conscious awareness. The experiment was later repeated in other cities around the world and generated identical results: it's not just about how British minds work!

Likewise, Chabris (Harvard University) and Simons (Illinois University), psychologists and cognitive scientists, revealed the surprising effect of change blindness and inattention blindness [173]. In a famous experiment, which won them the Ig Nobel Prize – a prize similar to the Nobel Prize to reward ten unusual achievements in scientific research – Chabris and Simons demonstrated that humans often fail to recognize an unexpected stimulus in plain sight. See it for yourself at <https://tinyurl.com/8fuake8>.

Consider what this means for a stimulus like your website, your marketing campaigns, your brochures, your trade show booth or your PowerPoint presentations. How can you capture your audience's attention every single time you have a message to deliver? Maybe you think you are offering your customers a wallet full of cash. But how do you make sure that your message is noticeable? How do you ensure that its complexity or lack of self-relevance does not trigger attentional blindness? Its length, the use of too much text or simply the lack of an emotional cocktail are all conditions that would make it ignored.

Too often, messages do not capture the attention of your audience simply because they are not primal brain friendly!

Also, consider what Wolf Singer, neurobiologist and director of the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research, said: “Preliminary attention ensures a fast treatment of the information and a good transmission of the computational results, it means an effective programming in the entire cortical network” [[174](#), [175](#)]. That's what a grabber does: it creates the preliminary attention that will make the rest of your message easier to understand.

Even if you were able to initially divert the attention of your prospects, are you holding it long enough? Researchers actually discovered specific neurons in the nucleus accumbens – a brain section associated with motivation, pleasure and positive reinforcement – that trigger sleep when the subject is bored [[176](#)].

Additionally, researchers Richard Anderson and James Pichert demonstrated that what is remembered depends upon early information received. In a classic experiment, subjects were asked to read a story about a residential home either from the perspective of a burglar or that of a homebuyer. Their memories about the story were not an accurate recording. Instead, it was a filtered version impacted by instructions they had received [[177](#), [178](#)].

Before your targets decide to open your email, read your brochure, or pay attention to your PowerPoint presentation, you need to motivate them to change the object of their attention. You also need to prepare their minds for remembering what is important for them in your message. Think of a grabber as a short, highly condensed, yet exciting way of telling your audience why they should stop doing what they are doing, stop thinking what they are thinking about, and why, instead, they should focus their mental energy on your message right away.

Imagine if you were selling a gold mine. Your best grabber could be to lay your largest nuggets on a table just in front of their eyes. The effect of your grabber would be to create an instant understanding of your value proposition, capturing attention in the immediate experience or the forever present in which the primal brain lives.

Often, print ads are just grabbers. The advertiser tries to get you to stop flipping the pages, so you invest a few seconds of your precious attention to notice it. It's the visual as opposed to the text that will make you stop. To explore the concept of a grabber, consider the familiar exercise of giving a presentation using PowerPoint, Keynote, or similar tools. Keep in mind however that the concept of grabber applies to any form of communication.

Think about the last time you gave a sales presentation using slides? Did you start with

1. Your corporate overview?
2. Your agenda?
3. Your personal background?
4. A description of your product or services?

Do you think this information was compelling enough to stop the current train of thoughts of your audience's brain so that they give you their undivided attention? Do you realize now that you were drawing a circle around a wallet full of cash? Instead, learn to throw a nugget right in front of them!

How do you create a powerful first impression? How do you immediately capture attention and give your audience an instant understanding of what your solution, product or idea could do for them? Remember the stimulus of memorable, which discussed how important it is to hijack attention at the beginning: the primacy effect? The first minutes of your presentation, the first line of your email – its subject line – your website landing page, or the first words of your voicemails all require special attention. That is why you need a grabber! With a grabber, you recruit their attention and get your audience to focus their limited – 50 bits per second – of conscious perception on *your message*.

We will discuss five different types of grabbers. Note that by combining them and using your creativity, you can certainly come up with more ideas. You will notice that all grabbers can be used in face-to-face presentations, and some of them can also be used in videos, web pages, emails, voicemails, printed ads, and even direct mail.

1. Prop: using an actual object representing a metaphorical symbol of your value proposition.
2. Minidrama: making your prospects' brains re-experience pains or frustrations when they don't use your product, solution, or idea. Then, contrasting this negative experience with how painless their life would be if only they could use your product or solution.
3. Word plays: finding the right words to express your value proposition compellingly and surprisingly.

4. Rhetorical questions: asking questions that will force the brain of the audience to imagine what benefits you can provide with your product or solution.
5. Stories: making your value proposition alive by turning one or several of your benefits into a narrative your audience's brain will believe.

Props

Meet Health and Safety Institute (HSI) a company based in Eugene, Oregon. HSI delivers high-quality training materials, courses and programs in CPR, first aid, and advanced emergency care to health professionals, first responders, and employees ([Figure 8.3](#)). In 2011, Bill Clendenen, HSI CEO and president, asked SalesBrain to solidify its claims. During a two-day NeuroMap workshop, the executive team was able to quickly identify the best claims that would appeal to the thousands of instructors who buy their products. The real benefits were that they made their life easier. Bill and his top 12 managers agreed on the following wording for their claims: Easy for your people, easy for your business, easy for you.



Figure 8.3 HSI claims.

Then in 2015, during their two-day annual user conference called Summit Connect, Bill gave his opening keynote to a crowd of over 300 instructors, all eager to learn more about HSI. A terrific presenter, Bill first thanked the audience for taking time out of their busy schedules, then he dived in the topic. Bill said: *“In the next two days you will see how much easier your lives will be by using our courses. Our objective will be to demonstrate how: easy for your people, easy for your business, and easy for you it will be to work with HSI. As you now understand our goal is really to make it easier for you. You should get prepared to hear the word **easy** a million times in the coming 48 hours.”* Then Bill continued: *“In fact, I’d like you to reach under your seats.”* Puzzled

attendees leaned down and discovered that a curious object had been taped under their seats. While people were opening their package, the large conference hall became filled with a metallic voice that said: “That was easy!” Everybody had received the famous “easy button” from Staples ([Figure 8.4](#)), and 300 people were frantically pushing it!



[Figure 8.4](#) Easy button.

As you can imagine, the easy button became the hit of the conference, and all the attendees heard the easy message a thousand times!

Later Bill reported: *“Aligning our executive team on a set of consistent EASY claims, was a turning moment in our company's history. It brought us vision and clarity of purpose. After endorsing these claims and making them more tangible with the help of the easy button, we have grown consistently at over 21% per year for the last four years. In an otherwise flat industry, gaining market share brings a big smile on my face!”*

Clearly, Bill's results are not only attributable to the use of that prop, but it certainly contributed to the growth of HSI and to the success of that conference.

Other examples of the powerful use of a prop include when Bill Gates released a flock of mosquitoes in the auditorium where he was delivering a TED talk on eradicating malaria [[179](#)].

Or when Steve Jobs introduced the MacBook Air. His objective was to demonstrate the claim that the new computer was super thin and Jobs used an

envelope as a prop in which he unveiled the MacBook Air (<https://tinyurl.com/y9dw2q5w> at 1:20).

How can props produce such an effect? Why do they have such a positive, strong, and memorable impact on the primal brain of your audience? NeuroMap predicts they do because they trigger the visual and tangible stimuli. However, there is more evidence proving the remarkable power of props.

The Science of Props. Todd Rogers, a behavioral scientist at Harvard School of Development, ran a series of experiments to test what makes people remember more easily. Rogers showed that a physical object is a more effective way to spark your memory than written or electronic reminders. For example, tying a knot on your handkerchief will be more effective than writing a note on your smartphone [180]. Marie Stadler from the University of Wisconsin also demonstrated the effects of props on how well kids remember a story [181]. Her findings suggest that the manipulation of physical props assisted the children in better remembering the story leading to the inclusion of more descriptors in their narrative retells.

Dr. Todd C. Handy, a neuroscientist at Dartmouth University, said, “Screwdrivers, steering wheels and coffee mugs could soon join food, flashing lights and sexy bodies as neurological *attention-getters*. They are so important they can automatically draw our attention to them” [182]. Handy's team hooked up groups of college students to electroencephalograms (EEGs) to measure brain activity in neurological areas responsible for attention. They asked students to quickly look at pictures featuring both a graspable object (such as a screwdriver or mug) and a less-graspable object (the sun, a sailboat), arranged side by side. After a split-second, flashing lights would appear over one of the two objects presented. From the EEG readings, Handy's team found that brain activity was always higher when the flashes occurred over the tool versus the nontool, suggesting that the viewer had automatically been focusing on the tool, even before the flashing began. In other words, the screwdriver or the mug was already in the “spotlight of attention,” he said. Handy proposed that the findings tell us “that grabbable objects can, in fact, grab our attention” in ways that mimic our brain's response to sexual triggers, danger signals, food and other important stimuli.”

Examples of the Use of Props. With over 20,000 CEO members, Vistage is the world's largest membership organization of CEOs worldwide. Since 2003, Christophe and I have delivered well over 1,000 talks on the topic of neuromarketing to Vistage members around the world. Because of the

enthusiasm for our topic and the value CEOs receive from NeuroMap, we both received the 2008 “Above and Beyond” speaker award. Vistage CEOs meet monthly in groups of about 15 members, and they are coached by a chair (typically a former CEO or senior executive). The role of Vistage chairs is to help CEOs become *Better Leaders* who make *Better Decisions* and achieve *Better Results* – claims that SalesBrain helped develop. Did you also notice the acronym of LDR for *Leaders, Decisions, Results*? Vistage is indeed an organization of leaders helping other leaders. Prospective CEO members do not always understand the value of joining Vistage so we recommended that Vistage chairs use a prop to describe the value proposition. The prop includes several critical instruments: A whistle symbolizes the nature of their unique role as executive coaches and strategic facilitators. It also includes a small thermometer, a compass, and a magnifier. It became easy for the chairs to explain that once a CEO has established his heading (compass), his group of peers can help him find which tactics he should be focusing on (magnifier) and what could prevent him from reaching his goals (mirror). The thermometer represented the metrics the CEO would share with the group each month to track his business, and the whistle was used by the chair to remind the CEO they would be held accountable for the commitments they would make to them and the group members.

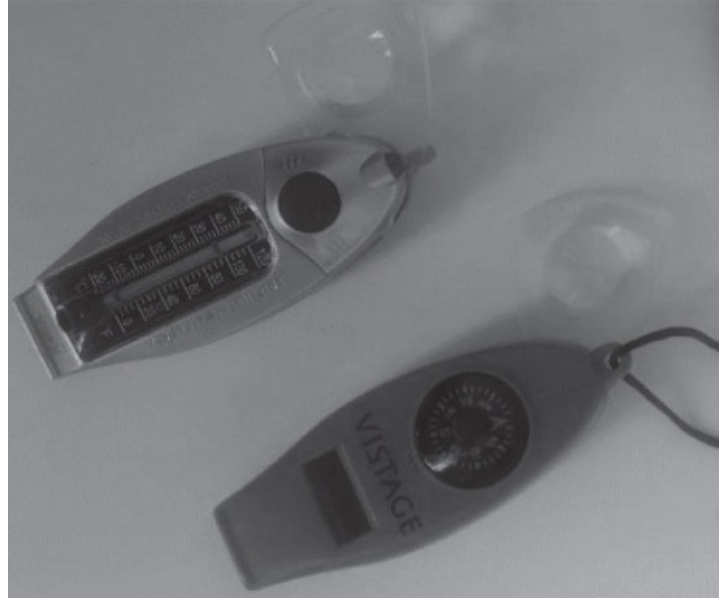


Figure 8.5 Vistage prop.

Dan Barnett, Vistage COO at the time, said: “*Using a common, clear, and consistent set of claims really helped our large community of chairs, speakers, and members understand the unique value proposition of Vistage. Then, when*

we started to use props, the concepts of better leaders, better decisions, better results came to life. Aspiring chairs and prospective members quickly understood why they should invest some time, money, and energy with our organization and we saw a significant growth.”

If your value proposition is linked to money, for instance, if you can demonstrate a financial gain, using real cash (or shredded money) can be very effective. After attending one of our Vistage workshops and learning about the impact of using a prop, Mary C. (a Vistage Member and CEO of a collection agency) sent this email to her fellow group members:

From: Mary C.

Sent: Wednesday, November 02, 2005

Subject: Y'all are going to think I'm crazy – but it worked!

FYI – I had a meeting with a client this morning that I lost to a competitor about 2 years ago when the CFO changed. This was a very profitable client that we did a great job for and only lost because we did not have a relationship with the new CFO. We finally got an appointment after calling for over 18 months. We had one shot at this because the guy was tired of hearing from us so I decided to step out on Patrick Renvoisé's ledge and I brought \$111,476 in cash with me – this was the dollar amount that we collected for them in 2004. (I was not 100% sure that I was going to take the money out cause I personally thought the cash all over the place approach was a little in your face – possibly even obnoxious.) The beginning of the meeting went well but I was not going to be walking out the door with anything more than a thank you so when it came time to tell him how important his account was to us. I opened the briefcase...his eyes were huge (I felt like a drug dealer). The contract was signed 15 minutes later and we will get accounts from him in 2 weeks. “No one has ever done something like that to get my attention.” He believes that he is very important to us because we made the effort to bring the cash to him to literally “show him the money.” I was not mugged and the money is back at the bank.

Unbelievable!

I had to share that with you guys 'cause I never thought it would have worked!

– Mary

Do you remember CodeBlue presented in the claim section in [Chapter 6](#)? They use the claims of

- Extraordinary speed
- Extraordinary science
- Extraordinary service

Working with SalesBrain, Paul Gross, CEO, became convinced that using a prop would create an effective grabber. Later Paul said *“One of the most effective campaigns that we ever deployed used a prop: a box of crap! It was sent to the top insurance executive in America, showing water-damaged construction materials like wallboard, carpet, and wood. It got the attention of many of the senior claims officers, and our business has prospered as a result”* (see [Figure 8.6](#)).



[Figure 8.6](#) CodeBlue prop.

What to Remember About the Use of Props

- Your audience might not remember much of what you tell them, but they will remember your prop. Using a bottle of wine at a conference on addiction might bring you boos or a standing ovation. It all depends on the pain of the people in your audience and the relevance and originality of your prop. Test it before you use it!
- You should plan on learning how to manipulate the prop. Don't just hold it without a purpose. Learn to tell a story where the main character is the prop. Notice how Steve Jobs carefully held the envelope and slowly retrieved the notebook out of it!
- The best props are the ones that become a metaphor for your value proposition. For Steve Jobs, the envelope symbolized super thin.

Minidrama

“When you sell fire extinguishers, open with the fire!”

– David Ogilvy, advertising expert

In 2003, when Stratex (now part of Aviat Networks), a telecommunication company in Silicon Valley, contacted SalesBrain, they had been a global supplier to one of the largest Telecom Operators in the world. But that year, their client decided to create a single purchasing center and launched a worldwide process to decrease their number of hardware suppliers from 12 to 3, with the ultimate goal to get better prices for 25 of their subsidiaries. Back then, Aviat was a relatively small player in this industry, and this opportunity was both exciting because they could gain more sales, but also risky because they could lose the revenue they were already making with a handful of international subsidiaries. Also, Stratex would need to invest a large amount of time, money, energy, and resources to respond to a complex request for proposal, and, given their size compared to other bidders, they believed they had a very low probability of winning one of the three vendor seats. The competition was made of large telecom generalists companies like Ericsson, Alcatel, NEC, Siemens, Lucent, Marconi, and more.

Patrick Martini, director of European business, tells the story of how SalesBrain helped Stratex use minidramas to impact the primal brain of their audience and win a spot in the limelight.

The first thing we did was to gather a huge amount of information on the pains of all the decision influencers. After submitting our response to a preliminary evaluation, we learned that we ranked 8 out of 12 suppliers; still very far from being in the top 3 to be awarded one of the coveted global procurement contracts! At that point, we evaluated our probability to win at about 5%. Since a critical event in the selection process was to deliver a formal presentation in front of the buying committee – 30 members strong from 24 different nationalities – we decided that our best chance to grab the attention of the buying committee and sway the odds in our favor was to deliver a minidrama. The buying committee had reserved 2 full days at their headquarters when each of the eight pre-selected vendors would give 2 hours to present their proposal. Our presentation was set just after lunch on the second day when the committee had already heard the six previous vendors. Needless to say, they were tired and bored of hearing some very technical and not-so-exciting presentations. We really

needed to recapture their attention and a series of short minidramas aligned with their top pains provided the best option to do that. Here is what we did: for the first 2 minutes, we started to deliver what promised to be a long, boring, and very technical presentation. Several of the committee members were so disconnected that they yawned uncontrollably. Then our VP of marketing abruptly and loudly interrupted the presentation. It created an uneasy moment which helped us regain their attention and prepare them to receive our well-crafted message. This is when we recapped their top pains which were based on the diagnostic we had conducted in prior months and we asked them to confirm that:

- 1. They couldn't choose a partner that is not focused on providing top notch customer service in the wireless space.*
- 2. They couldn't take any risk with a supplier that is not 100% focused on serving the wireless technology market.*
- 3. They needed to reduce cost without compromising technology and customer service.*

Our punch line was to ask them if they wanted to hear how Aviat was better positioned than any of the other vendors to help them: Delight (as in customer satisfaction), Derisk, and Decost the network operator. These were our carefully crafted claims for which we even had created icons [see [Figure 8.7](#)].

Our presentation on these three chapters lasted only 1 hour and 15 minutes and one of our minidramas served to illustrate that we offered the best option to mitigate all their risks: financial strength, constant innovation, multiple sites of production, excellent installation services, even in the most dangerous countries. To further grab their attention and demonstrate that we were their only risk-free partner, we decided to use the skills of Heinz Stumpe, our VP of sales. Heinz was a former karate champion and he had competed with the German team in the World Championship! Heinz told the following story to the buying panel:

“A couple of years back, I was asked by a very famous karate school in the US to award black belts. After the ceremony, one of the freshly awarded new black belts said: We have a black belt, like you...so we have the same level!” Feeling a little teased I asked them to break a brick as it is a standard practice when you reach the black belt level in karate...but I added a twist: I asked him to do it with a “2-inch punch” where he had to

place his hand only 2 inches above the brick. “The young black belt attempted to break the brick that way but hurt his fist trying. In the end, he protested that it was impossible,” added Heinz.

This is when Heinz took a real brick out of his briefcase, placed it on the table in front of the committee of buyers and with a loud BANG he broke the brick with that 2-inch punch. His punch made such a big noise that all the meeting participants jumped out of their seat. Heinz had their attention and he delivered his punch line: “It is not because you have a black belt that you will perform the same way a champion black belt would. It takes complete focus to not hurt yourself in this exercise: similarly, our 100% focus on microwave radio is the best insurance for your business. We are your best option to: Delight, Derisk, Decost.”

When we finished, the committee concluded that we understood their pain even better than they did and that out of all the presentations they had seen so far, this one was the only one they wished had lasted longer! Bottom line: after a few more months of arduous negotiations the operator announced that we had won one of the three agreements which generated \$150 MM in revenue for our company over the next five years. They still remember our presentation today and these minidramas did help us close the deal!”

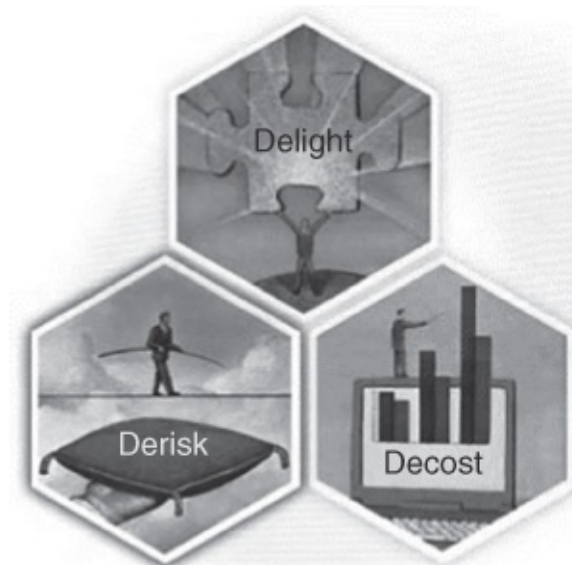


Figure 8.7 Stratex claims.

Most people think that a B2B sales message *must* be delivered in a rational, traditional, PowerPoint format. So, the basic element of a presentation is a slide.

Yet, most PowerPoint slides fail to capture the attention of an audience. Why? Because they are rarely addressing pains that are the most relevant to the audience. They do not state clear claims and typically they do not prove enough gain. By contrast, researchers have shown: “When an argument is successful the audience weighs the evidence and then yields to it. When a drama is successful, the audience becomes lost in the story and experiences the concerns and feelings of the character,” [160].

Other Examples of Minidramas. On June 29, 2007, when Steve Jobs introduced the first iPhone he used a minidrama to demonstrate how the device could perform actions which, before, would be complex and would require multiple steps and lots of clicks. Jobs showed how easily the new iPhone could perform these complicated tasks, including doing a three-way conference call with just a simple click.

To see the video, go to <https://tinyurl.com/lhtbg66>. At 26:47 notice how Steve Jobs pretended to be surprised by a second caller when of course it was all scripted! Notice also the reaction of the audience: they loved it!

Let me tell you story of minidramas delivered in 2001 when I got invited to give a keynote at the Linux users conference in Seoul Korea.

With over 3,000 IT executive attendees the objective of the event was to show the benefits of Linux and its open source approach to developing software. In a world driven by Microsoft, Linux promised to offer relief from the shackles of dependencies from a single provider. In an unusual and concert like fashion, the conference started in complete darkness with loud music playing the song “The Wall” from Pink Floyd. When the lights came up, the audience discovered that a huge wall was occupying most of the stage. The wall was made of wooden bricks, and the middle of the wall had been painted with four large squares in the colors of orange, green, yellow and blue. Although the name Microsoft was not printed or even mentioned the reference to the Microsoft logo was obvious to all the attendees.

This is when the first minidrama took place!

U-Jin Kim, the CEO of Linux One, walked on stage with 20 or so of his employees. All of them were wearing a uniform and walked in a military parade fashion in unison with the music, strangely reminding us of the video that accompanied the music “The Wall.” They were carrying a big hammer on their shoulders when suddenly U-Jin started to hit the wall.

Instantly he was joined by the rest of his crew happily destroying the wall. The punch line of this intro act came when the 20 people on stage removed their jacket to reveal a t-shirt that read: "Linux: Break the wall"...of the dependency on Microsoft.

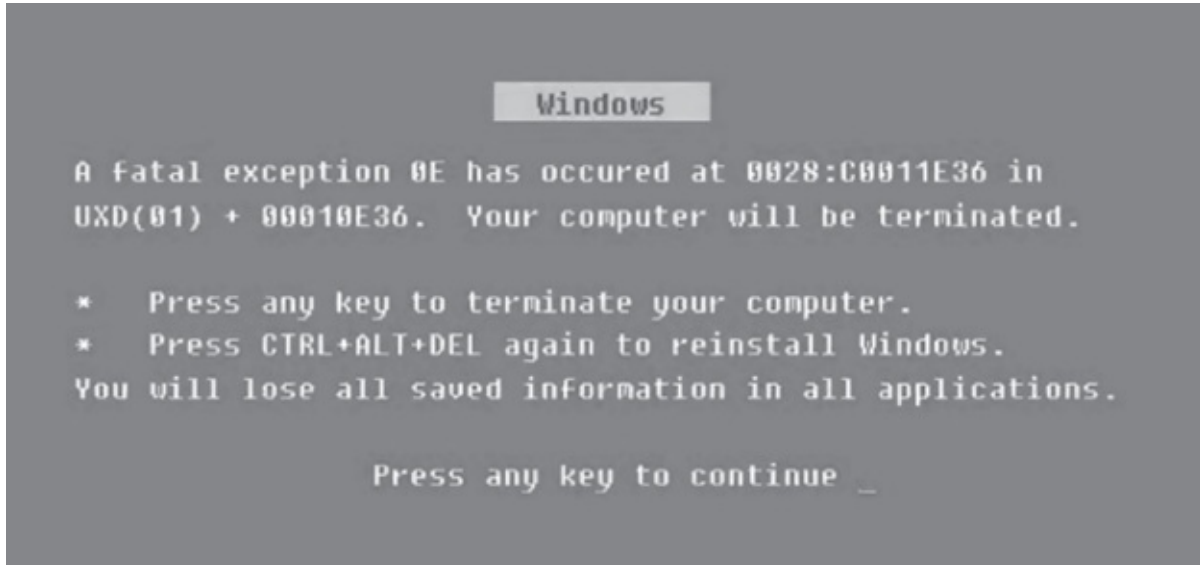
About 15 minutes later after the welcome introduction by U-Jin, I was invited to come on stage to deliver a speech on behalf of LinuxCare. Using a deck of slides, I started to present in a traditional way, which wasn't going to win me the attention of the thousands of prospects in the room. Suddenly, when I clicked for the next slide, the blue screen of death appeared: my laptop had crashed displaying the message "Fatal Error Detected." It was doubly embarrassing because not only was my presentation going to be interrupted by this computer issue, but it revealed that I was using PowerPoint, running on a Windows operating system: a mortal sin at a Linux conference!

Looking embarrassed and panicked I spent a few seconds talking to an assistant who was trying to fix my laptop. These seconds felt like an eternity and finally I asked: "Next slide." But how could my computer display the next slide when it had just crashed. Everybody knew that it would require several minutes to reboot? To the total surprise of the audience, the laptop instantly displayed the next slide which read: "It didn't crash: I run Linux on my computer." I had created a fake slide that flashed the famous Microsoft crash error message of the time: "Fatal Error Detected." So, when I asked for the next slide, the display jumped to it with no delay! This was highlighting a major benefit of the Linux Operating system: its stability versus Windows. Instantly, the audience understood the point and a sigh of relief could be felt in the entire hall. As a result, over 300 people were waiting in line to grab my business card: a sure indication that my message had hit home.

What to Remember About Minidramas

- Of the different types of grabbers, minidramas are certainly the most effective, yet the most difficult to deliver.
- Minidramas help the audience experience an emotion; they have a direct impact on the primal brain, far stronger than any PowerPoint slide!
- Creating a minidrama requires attention to details and rehearsal because it can easily fail. Imagine if, when Jobs tried to merge his two conversations into a three-way call, it had failed to work properly. The history of new

product launches is filled with minidramas or demos that failed. Did you ever see the announcement of Windows 98 when Bill Gates witnessed his own application crash ([Figure 8.8](#))? [Notice the blue screen of death at 0:10! a screen similar to the one I used in South Korea]



[Figure 8.8](#) Gates blue screen of death.

To see the video, go to <https://tinyurl.com/zkuwugy>.

- You should rehearse your minidramas until you have 100% confidence it will work properly. This means your minidrama should be scripted just like a play or a movie. When you deliver your minidrama, think that you are delivering an acting performance: it is no longer a business presentation, it is a theater play! Your objective is to get your audience to experience an emotion, and this can only be achieved if you put your soul into it. You cannot afford to fake it. Your words, your tone of voice, your facial expressions, all need to help your audience re-experience the painful state they live in (negative emotion) when they don't enjoy your solution, and then later you will help their brain feel the positive emotion your solution would provide.
- Minidramas can have only one act. In that case, the one act is typically centered around the pain of the customers. Or they can include a second act that would demonstrate the relief of the pain. Contrasted minidramas are often seen on QVC infomercials: think of the presenter who is trying to sell you a knife sharpener. First, they show you how a dull knife won't easily cut a ripe tomato without squishing it [Act 1: the pain], then they sharpen the

knife and it now makes a perfect cut on the same tomato [Act 2: the relief of the pain].

- The best minidramas will be acted live in front of your audience. They can involve only one presenter who would deliver a monologue, or they can include several people as in the case of Steve Jobs and the iPhone. If you are not comfortable acting in a minidrama live, you could film it and play it as a short video clip.
- Sometimes, even just a picture can represent a minidrama, such as the ad for a campaign to deter people from drinking and driving (shown in [Figure 8.9](#)).



[Figure 8.9](#) Drink-and-drive ad.

Stories

“...in the end, it's the story that matters. Be unpredictable, be real, be interesting. Tell a good story.”

– James Dashner, American author

At an empirical level, stories are described in every sales manual as an effective technique to create a stronger rapport and to help persuade people. On a more

scientific level, stories constitute a prolific topic of discussion among psychologists, philosophers, educators, historians and more recently neuroscientists. Their effect is described in the research literature as “narrative transportation,” a phenomenon in which the listener is mentally *transported* in the world of the story.

Antonio Damasio, director of the neuroscience department at University of Southern California, said it best when he wrote: “The problem of how to make all this wisdom understandable, transmissible, persuasive, enforceable – in a word, of how to make it stick – was faced and a solution found. Storytelling was the solution; storytelling is something brains do, naturally, and implicitly. It should be no surprise that it pervades the entire fabric of human societies and cultures” [[183](#)].

Drawing on neuroscience, psychology, and evolutionary biology, author Jonathan Gottschall in *The Storytelling Animal* explains how stories serve the biological function to encourage prosocial behavior, a critical component of survival [[184](#)]. The stories we hear growing up teach us the working principles of the world and they simulate possible outcomes in the service of decision making; our brains can play out several scenarios without the risk and expense of attempting them physically.

Think back to who told you stories: your parents, grandparents, educators, and friends. What do all these people have in common? They all cared for you. We rarely if ever tell stories to people we don't like. So fundamentally when you say: “Let me tell you a story...” the subliminal message you are communicating is “I care for you.”

Stories are very effective because they transport the listener's primal brain into a pseudoworld where he or she is made to believe that the story is happening. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to frighten little kids with a scary story? Why do stories have such an impact on kids? Because when the story is properly told it makes their primal brain believe it is real. Their rational brain has not yet learned to fact-check a story. The immediate reaction of their primal brain drives their experience and makes them live the story as if it was truly unfolding.

Try this:

Tell one of your friends or relatives the following story: Have them picture in their mind a bright, yellow, juicy lemon just in front of them. Then ask them to close their eyes and to imagine taking a sharp knife to cut that lemon in half. With their eyes closed, ask them to cut a ¼-inch slice of that lemon. Dropping the knife, they now should bring the slice under their noses to enjoy the zesty

the knife, they now should bring the slice under their noses to enjoy the zesty fragrance of that sweet lemon. Ask them next to hold that slice between their lips and to take a firm bite into the lemon meat. The sweet-and-sour lemon juice is reaching the tip of their tongues and the back of their front teeth, creating a pleasant sensory impression that inundates their whole palate and nose. At that point, stop and ask them what is happening in their mouths. Inevitably, if they properly focused on your lemon story their mouths started to water. Why? Because their primal brain believed they had some lemon in their mouths and needed to mix the lemon juice with predigestive saliva! It didn't matter if their rational brain knew it was imaginary, the narrative transportation made it all too real to deny the actual presence of lemon juice. In fact because of your own mirror neurons, reading that story might be enough to trigger your own salivation!

The Science of Stories. There is a huge body of academic research on the effect of stories on the brain. So much so that some researchers have found it valuable to perform meta studies: research on the existing research. The conclusion on stories is clear: stories can help you persuade. In the paper entitled “The Extended Transportation-Imagery Model (ETIM): A Meta-Analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation,” the authors analyzed 76 published articles on narrative transportation [[185](#)]. They coined the term “narrative persuasion” to describe how story listeners experience a mental transformation whose effect can be strong and long-lasting to the point of changing their opinions or beliefs. They concluded:

- “Storytellers' narrative transportation leads to emotional contagion on story receiver.”
- “The more stories are noncommercial, the more narrative transportation increases.”
- “Young children (under the age of 8) are more affected by narrative transportation because they haven't yet developed deception detection abilities.”

A straightforward way to summarize the complexity of this research is to remember that stories have the power to reshape the beliefs and behaviors of the listeners because they fool the story receiver's primal brain in believing the story is real. Stories typically put the listener in the middle of the action.

Winston Churchill was trying to influence the British Parliament to increase the budget for the development of new weapons during WWII. At that time, the economic situation in the UK was critical and Churchill was facing great

opposition to his request for a military budget increase. After using all logical arguments to make the members of Parliament realize the importance of his proposition, Churchill decided to use a story.

I would like to tell you the story of the battle of Omdurman. This battle took place on the bank of the Sudan River on September 2, 1898. This war against the Mahdist – also called the Dervishes, a fearless tribe of Muslim fighters – had started in 1881. It opposed 8,000 of our troops supported by 17,000 Sudanese to 52,000 warriors on the Dervishes' side. The Dervishes had been fighting with great determination and courage, and the outcome of the most recent battles was a casualty ratio of about 1 to 1: for every Dervish who perished, one British soldier had to lose his life. Now, imagine if you had been one of our soldiers. You were far outnumbered, and you knew it. You had been on the campaign for a long time and had not enjoyed a good cup of tea for many months, sometimes years. Inevitably on this day of September 1898, the temperature would climb again in the 100's, not a comfortable place for a Brit. The air was so dry that your mouth felt you had swallowed sand and the clean desert air you breathed was soon to be replaced with the burning smell of powder and blood. Then, suddenly, over the dunes as the sun barely reached the sandy ridge, you see the first wave of Dervishes charging. They are coming down on horses, on camels, and by foot, yelling their frightening war cry. And so was the situation of our soldiers until that day of September 1898. However, everything changed that day! We introduced a new weapon called the Maxim gun, a much-improved version of the Gatlin gun that delivered 600 rounds per minutes. The outcome of the battle was devastating for the Dervishes. 12,000 were killed, 13,000 were wounded and 5,000 were captured for only 50 killed and 400 wounded on our side. The Dervishes capitulated shortly after the battle was raging.

Churchill concluded his story by saying, “*And that was the difference between keeping up with technology and thinking it would always be the same.*” A few days later the parliament accepted his proposal to increase the budget for developing new weapons.

Now, if you had been a British soldier during the battle of Omdurman, would you be supportive of new weapon technology? Of course, you would because it most certainly saved your life! If the story was properly told, your primal brain wouldn't make the difference between having been at Omdurman and hearing the story of Omdurman.

Stories work because they transport the mind of the audience and create a

Stories work because they transport the mind of the audience and create a pseudo-real experience. A story is like telling your audience they have a slice of lemon in their mouth: their primal brain will believe it!

What is the secret of good storytelling? The storyteller needs to create visual, auditory, kinesthetic (movement), and possibly taste and smell clues that will make the primal brain of her audience believe that the story is actually happening to them.

The Dos of Stories

- It's all about the punch line: a story without one will have no persuasive power; worse, it will make you appear as a poor presenter with bad charisma. Start with the end in mind: clearly, define what your communication objective is and what will be your punch line. Then look for a story that best leads to that climax.
- Learn how to tell stories effectively. You need to paint a picture with enough details to make it believable. These details become most transporting when they are communicated using different senses:
 - “As the sun barely reached the sandy ridge you see”: the word *see* and the concept *sun* implies using the visual sense.
 - “Yelling their frightening war cry” is using the auditory sense.
 - “The temperature would climb again in the 100's”: the word *temperature* is triggering the sense of touch.
 - “Your mouth felt you had swallowed sand” suggests the sense of taste.
 - “With the burning smell of power and blood” is about the olfactory sense.
- Make sure you hold 100% of the attention of your audience. Remember it is about creating narrative transportation, so make sure the environment is conducive to deep listening: no disturbing noise or interruption, nothing should draw the story receiver's attention away. Notice how in movie theaters they filter the noise and light from the outside and remind the audience to turn their phones off: nothing can inhibit narrative transportation as effectively as a ringing phone.
- Project bold confidence and passion with your words, with your tone of voice and with your body language. Don't hesitate to use a prop to make the story even more visual. In the earlier Churchill story, note also the use and

repetition of the word *you*, to help transport the listener in the story.

Remember that effective stories are communicating emotions, not just facts: make your audience cry or make them laugh but make sure they experience a strong emotion. Just don't only tell a story: act your story!

- If you don't have acting talent, stick to a true story you have lived personally. It will increase the effectiveness of your storyteller antecedents because your subconscious (primal brain) will not have to perform any translation, distortion, or lie.
- Customer stories constitute the best proof of value and should be used when the objective is to demonstrate the gain. However, using a story not related to your business to convince will be even more effective when true narrative transportation is needed. Notice for example how you could use the Churchill story to persuade a prospect who doesn't believe in investing in new technology even though he might believe in the proofs of value you already presented. Again, note that persuasion works better when the persuadee is not aware of the persuader's intentions or as the previous researchers stated: “The more stories are noncommercial, the more narrative transportation increases” [\[185\]](#).
- Practice telling your story. It will confirm if your punch line is effective and if the details you are painting make the story believable. Get a few people to confirm that your story is appropriate for your audience: a story about cigarettes at a cancer conference might get you a standing ovation or boos; it all depends! The more you practice the story, the more you can include valuable details that draw a vivid and believable picture. Note the use of visual clues in these words...to remind you that the primal brain is highly visual!
- Look for good stories in books that present a collection of stories specifically for business. There is even a book entitled: *Business Storytelling For Dummies!*
- Use a story for your own introduction. Instead of presenting a conventional – and often boring – script about who you are, tell your audience a good story about you. It will incite people to pay attention because you'll be bringing something unique. Even better, have somebody else tell that story for you; it will further increase your credibility.

The Don'ts of Stories

- Don't make the story too long, or worse, without a punch line!
- Don't use stories that oppose too abruptly the general social opinions of your group of story receivers: it impacts the narrative transportation.

What to Remember About Stories. Stories represent such an effective persuasion tool that we consider that they are not optional. The effective persuader will always tell one or more stories in her presentation. Stories can be used as a grabber at the beginning of your presentation or anywhere later when you need to recapture the attention of your audience. Good stories require research to find the proper narrative and practice to sharpen the delivery so that when the punch line is delivered, it is with the expected persuasive effect. Later, in the section on persuasion catalysts, we will describe how your *charisma* – the science of what makes somebody believable – makes you a good storyteller.

Word Plays

“The writer has to take the most used, most familiar objects—nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs—ball them together and make them bounce.”

– Maya Angelou, American poet, writer, and educator

Researchers like Albert Mehrabian [[186](#)] have long established that *what* we say is potentially less impactful than *how* we say it. The primal brain is by nature not sensitive to the ephemeral, intangible nature of words. Yet, we would like to suggest a few techniques centered specifically around words. After all, as Russell Baker, an American journalist said, “When you write you make a sound in the reader's head. It can be a dull mumble – that's why so much government prose makes you sleepy – or it can be a joyful noise, a sly whisper, a throb of passion.”

Alexander Huth, a Berkeley neuroscientist, established a semantic atlas of the human brain. He and his colleagues mapped which brain areas respond to 985 common English words according to the semantic (meaning) of the words [[187](#)]. They found that these maps are highly similar across humans. For example, on the left-hand side of the brain, above the ear, is a tiny region that represents the word *victim*. The same region responds to *killed*, *convicted*, *murdered* and *confessed*. On the brain's right-hand side, near the top of the head, is one of the brain spots activated by family terms: *wife*, *husband*, *children*, *parents*. This suggests that some words have a different but rather consistent impact on people.

The first technique we recommend grabbing attention using words is to list four

to five words or expressions and link them together. For example, imagine you sell a security software and imagine that your targets are CIO (chief information officer). Here is how you could grab the attention of your audience with a word play.

Start by listing the following five concepts on paperboard or bring them up on a PowerPoint slide. Then ask: “What do the following have in common?”

- A neurosurgeon
- The central bank
- An airline pilot
- A nuclear scientist
- A CIO

After letting your audience search for possible answers for 20 to 30 seconds, deliver your punch line: “They all rely on safe and secure solutions to deliver their services.”

Notice that after you deliver the punch line, your audience will experience a brief eureka moment and make the connection between why security is important and why it's important for CIOs like them!

Researchers have established that such eureka moments, also called aha moments, insights, or epiphanies, require four defining attributes:

- They need to appear suddenly.
- The solution to the problem should be processed fluently.
- It triggers a positive affect.
- The subject is convinced that the solution is true.

Stellan Ohlsson, professor of psychology, believes that the initial difficulty of a question drives unconscious processes (the realm of the primal brain) which changes the mental representation of the problem, thus causes a novel solution to appear [188]. Such a cascade of events produces a pleasurable moment. Auble and Franks, from Vanderbilt University, studied the effect of “effort toward comprehension” and established that the experience of “aha” resulted in an increased recall [189].

The second technique in using words to grab an audience's attention is to create a combination of words that produce unusual or multiple meanings. Here are some good examples:

good examples.

- “More bank for your buck” by Wells Fargo
- “Why Weight?” by Weight Watchers
- “If we break the news: blame us!” by ABC News

Notice that when you read these slogans, your brain becomes engaged, maybe even intrigued for a few seconds. The dual meaning (also called *double entendre*) of the sentences produces a brief “aha” moment.

The third way to deliver a word play is to ask one or more rhetorical questions that start with, “What if you...?”

After consulting with Bill.com, the number-one software to simplify online payments, the company adopted the following claims to convince CPAs to use their solution: real growth, real control, real advantage. To grab their attention, SalesBrain recommended they use a series of “What if you...” questions. When they present to CPA prospects immediately after the cover slide they ask:

- “What if you could increase your billings by three to four X?” (four-second pause)
- “What if you could eliminate the conditions for fraud?” (four-second pause)
- “What if you could make payments for a global customer base from an airplane?” (four-second pause)

First, notice how each of the questions points to its claims in the same order they present them. If you use the rhetorical questions in an oral format (as opposed to displaying them on a screen), the four-second pause is critical to the effectiveness of grabbing people's attention. The pause provides the listener with some time to process the question. A good persuader will recognize that it is not the question that is important but what the listener's brain does while answering it. Without that lengthy pause, the listener will not have enough time to think about the question and imagine the benefits suggested by the technique.

The Dos of Word Plays

- Give enough time to your audience to understand the word play or if you ask a question, don't be afraid to let the audience experience the difficulty of the question: people need to actively look for the answer. Even if they don't find the answer, they will still experience an “aha” moment.
- Make sure that the question can be processed promptly, that is, that the “aha”

happens without hesitation. The audience shouldn't need a calculator to get it!

The Don'ts of Word Plays

- Don't use your word plays without testing them first. Often, people think that they have an effective use of words to grab attention, but the expression does not generate any response.

What to Remember About Grabbers

Regardless of the nature of your message, you will need to distract the current attention of your audience so that people start to spend cognitive energy on your product or service. To do this, you need more than just pure rational information: you need a short but strong stimulus with emotional content, self-relevance, and appeal. In short, you need a good grabber. Most likely at the exact moment, your message reaches the brain of your prospects, their focus is on something else:

- They are driving on the highway thinking about the bad day they had in the office, and you would like them to read your billboard.
- They have 127 emails in their inbox, and you want an answer to your question.
- They are sorting their snail mail, and you want them to open your envelope even though it's 8 p.m. and they haven't yet fed their kids.

In all these situations consider that:

- You need to interrupt their current trains of thought.
- Immediately after you have created that interruption, they should hear why they should pay attention to your message: they need to understand what's in it for them. You need to find an effective way to prove what they will gain in a matter of seconds.

And that's what a good grabber can do for you!

Consider that every communication needs a grabber:

- With emails, recipients often only use the title or the first few words to decide if they want to read it. When you are limited to a short subject line with only text, no color and the same font and font size, think about how you can grab their attention to avoid being ignored.