



Book Cashvertising

How to Use More Than 100 Secrets of Ad-Agency Psychology to Make Big Money Selling Anything to Anyone

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Recommendation

Selling is a basic human interaction. Yet, most professionals in advertising and related fields understand very little about what actually drives people to buy. In this short, punchy book, Drew Eric Whitman lifts the shroud of mystery surrounding consumer behavior by explaining some fundamental psychological principles. His well-researched pointers will help you create ads that appeal to customers’ deepest desires and impulses. Although Whitman’s advice is applicable to all modes of advertising, he focuses on print advertising; thus, some readers might wish for more insights on Web copy or broadcasting. Still, *BooksInShort* strongly recommends Whitman’s compelling delivery of crucial advertising advice.

Take-Aways

- Many advertising professionals aim to be clever or creative, rather than focusing on their true purpose: to sell.
- Good advertising appeals to people’s basic desires.
- If people don’t believe what you say about your product, they won’t buy it. Testimonials and endorsements help build credibility.
- Your ad’s message should stress how customers will benefit from your product or service. It must answer their implicit question, “What’s in it for me?”
- Consumers will buy something if it promises them great returns in the future.
- They will purchase products linked to spokespeople or groups with whom they want to identify.
- Ads that appeal to people’s rationality have a longer-lasting effect on their purchasing patterns than those that influence them with pleasant images and associations.
- Long advertising copy sells better than short copy.
- Free samples or coupons are excellent ways to create demand for your product.
- People are most attracted to the color blue. After that, their color preference follows this order: red, green, violet, orange and yellow.

Summary

What Consumers Want

Effective advertising motivates people to spend money on a product or service. Yet, most advertising professionals lose sight of that objective, aiming instead to be clever or cute, or to win creative awards. Awards may gratify your ego but they don’t boost sales. Why, then, does the ad industry continue to follow this mistaken path? Because advertisers simply don’t know any better.

“Advertising’s purpose is not to entertain, but to persuade consumers to part with billions of dollars every day in exchange for products and services.”

By using specific techniques, you can influence consumers’ actions. Selling involves persuasion, which requires the strategic use of psychology. This science is crucial to advertising because it explains “what people want, how they feel about what they want and why they act as they do.” It enables advertisers to make better decisions that improve customer satisfaction and increase sales.

“Vicarious pleasure is where persuasion begins, because the first use of any brand is inside the consumers’ minds.”

Daniel Starch, an early researcher of consumer psychology, found that self-interest is people’s primary motivation to buy. Their attraction to a product corresponds to what it can do for them and how it can improve their lives. All people have eight basic desires. Ads that appeal to these fundamental desires strike a primordial nerve and generate a predictable reaction in people:

1. To survive and to have a pleasant life.
2. To enjoy food and beverages.
3. To be free from “fear, pain and danger.”
4. To have “sexual companionship.”
5. To live in a comfortable environment.
6. To win and to keep pace with their neighbors.
7. To care for and protect their loved ones.
8. To gain social approval for their actions.

“The aim of all advertising is to create marginal differences in consumer attitudes and perceptions.”

Humans are complex and they have additional desires, called “secondary or learned wants.” For example, they desire to be informed and to have their curiosity satisfied. They like to be clean, efficient and dependable. They wish to enjoy conveniences and to cultivate their style and beauty. And, they want to realize profits and find bargains. These learned desires are not as powerful as the eight biologically rooted ones. Biological desires are so intense that once a person recognizes the desire, he or she must act to satisfy it.

Driving People to Buy

To advertise effectively, you must first understand how consumers think and feel. Then you can strategically use that knowledge to your advantage. Heed these “Foundational Principles of Consumer Psychology”:

- **“Mental movies”** – People derive pleasure from satisfying their desires, but they also enjoy reading about or watching other people achieve that same satisfaction. By mentally projecting themselves into someone else’s life, people can vicariously experience being happy or rich, for example. This process of imagining heightens their impulse to act on their desires. Strategically use detailed, visual language in your ads, so consumers can envision themselves benefitting from your product or service before buying it.
- **“The fear factor”** – Fear is another powerful motivator. When you alert people to a possible danger – whether it’s the dust mites crawling in their pillows or the bacteria thriving on their seemingly clean floors – they feel stress. To eliminate that stress, they will seek a solution. As long as your product or service provides one, you can ethically use fear as a sale incentive. For instance, you can advertise new brake pads to alleviate the fear of bad brakes causing an accident. Insurance reduces the fear of financial harm due to unpredictable events. Similarly, using terms such as “limited time offer” and “while supplies last” compels consumers to act on their fear of missing an opportunity.
- **“Ego morphing”** – Influence consumers’ behavior by urging them to view your product as a facet of their identity. This technique is called ego morphing. Advertise your product using images and spokespeople with whom people will want to identify. Victoria’s Secret ads, well-known for their alluring models, use this strategy well. A woman who buys the company’s lingerie is acting on her ego-based reaction that she fits, or wants to fit, that product image. This psychological response explains why ads for luxury items are so sparse on copy. The images do all the selling.
- **“Transfer”** – Credibility is crucial in advertising. If people don’t believe what you say about your product, they won’t buy it. By using transfer, a method that draws on the authority of the trusted people and institutions that promote your product, you can bolster consumer confidence in it. For example, celebrity testimonials can win customers and accelerate the sales process; they provide “credibility by osmosis.”
- **“The bandwagon effect”** – People crave a sense of belonging. They are drawn to groups that share their values and ideas, or that offer them a certain status. Marketers can sell their products or services by linking them to groups consumers associate with or want to join. For example, Jif peanut butter promoted the highly successful ad, “Choosy moms choose Jif.” People who bought Jif in response to this ad were not doing so because of the product’s own merits, but because they sought membership in the group of careful, selective parents.
- **“The means-end chain”** – People will buy something if it promises them future returns. For example, real-estate agents will buy expensive cars to send a message to potential clients that they are highly successful. More clients will list their houses with the agents, who will thus earn more money – the ultimate benefit at the end of the chain. This strategy is particularly relevant for advertising luxury goods and services.
- **“Persuasion step by step”** – Selling to someone who has never heard about your product or service is a major challenge. Consumers learn about a product in stages. They move from ignorance to familiarity to willingness to buy. In the final phase, they become loyal customers. Those who understand this process create ads that cater to consumers at every stage of familiarity with the product. Or, they develop a sequence of ads that helps people progress through the various stages of familiarity.
- **“Belief re-ranking”** – Changing people’s beliefs is difficult. The alternative is to reshuffle the importance of their various beliefs, either by strengthening ideas that make them want to buy your product, or by weakening those that undermine that impulse. Reinforce beliefs by providing factual data or successful case studies. If your aim is to discredit a belief, don’t overtly attack it, but offer additional evidence that subtly suggests an alternative view. Be careful not to cause negative consumer reactions.
- **“The Elaboration Likelihood Model”** – According to this model, there are two ways to influence buyers’ attitudes. Ads that target people’s “central route processing” appeal directly to their reason and logic, whereas those that aim at their “peripheral route processing” persuade them to buy using pleasant images and other “cues.” Generally, people use central route processing when considering big purchases, such as a home, and peripheral route processing for small

- purchases, such as a grocery item. Over time, beliefs that consumers form through rational analysis are much more likely to stick.
- **“Weapons of influence”** – Robert Cialdini, a social psychologist, spent three years researching for his book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. In it, he identifies several powerful ways to persuade people. You can trigger their reflex to conform to peer groups, or their impulse to reciprocate favors and gifts (such as free samples). Or, you can sway them with your likability/attractiveness, authority or dependability. You can also drive them to act by making something, or someone, seem scarce.
- **“Evidence”** – Buyers want to know they will get value out of your product. When considering a purchase, they implicitly ask, “What’s in it for me?” Providing evidence – facts, research, testimonials and so on – is the best way to convince them of your product’s worth. Use evidence to strengthen people’s positive opinions of your product, or to enhance its credibility. Often, when an ad includes many figures, testimonials and charts, consumers conclude it is valid.

How You Say It Matters

Once you have chosen your strategy, you’re ready to develop your message. In print ads, aim for simplicity. Keep sentences brief and paragraphs short. Ideally, 70% to 80% of your advertising copy should consist of one-syllable words. Advertising maven David Ogilvy recommends a lead paragraph no longer than 11 words. Your message should stress how your product benefits consumers. Express the biggest benefit in a succinct, powerful headline of no more than five or six words, because people cannot recall more than this number at a glance. Use figures and statistics strategically: Effective ad copy contains no more than five to nine numbers.

“Contrary to popular belief, men are most attracted to pictures of other men, and women to pictures of women.”

Advertising experts know that long copy has more impact than short copy, provided that you write it well. Consider this: If you spent an hour with a good salesperson, you would probably buy more than if you spent 10 minutes with a bad one. The more time that a prospect invests in reading your ad, the higher the odds are that he or she will buy something. An effective ad informs, motivates and persuades consumers, driving them to make a purchase. It satisfies people who just want the basic facts about a product, as well as those who need convincing. Adopt a newspaper-style tone and look. Readers regard this style more seriously than that of a traditional advertisement.

“Your goal is not to create new fears, but to tap into existing fears, either those on the forefront of consumers’ minds, or those that require a little digging to uncover.”

Writing good copy is like scripting a movie. Appeal to the five senses to evoke “a concentrated internal experience” that makes people want to buy your product. Tell its unique story using detailed imagery. For example, someone advertising a pizza might specify that the crust comes from the best Italian wheat flour, the cheese is fresh buffalo mozzarella and the virgin olive oil is imported. Use language and a writing style that makes your ad distinct.

“The features are the attributes. The benefits are what you get from those attributes.”

Memorable ads use photographs and illustrations. Advertisements that equally balance graphics and text have a longer-lasting impact on consumers than text-only ads. Ads that are mostly visual have an even greater effect. Photos – particularly of children, mothers and babies, groups of adults, animals or sports scenes – are the best graphics to use. Other good snapshots show people enjoying your product, and convey action, drama and human interaction.

“Loading your advertising with benefits is the key to all successful advertising.”

Color is another key element of ad design. Dozens of experiments have found that the most popular colors are blue, red, green, violet, orange and yellow (in this order). Men and women share these preferences, with one exception: Women like yellow over orange. Age also affects color preference. Babies are drawn to red. However, as people age, they become partial to blue. One explanation is that their eyes’ lenses become hazed, allowing in more blue light and less brighter color.

“The more ways you justify the purchase of your product, the more likely you’ll influence people to buy.”

People love to save money, so they respond well to coupons. One of the first to recognize the power of coupons was Asa Candler, a Philadelphia pharmacist who made Coca-Cola into one of the world’s largest brands. In 1894, Candler offered coupons for free samples of Coke, a tactic that helped the company achieve nationwide distribution by 1895. Today, 86% of Americans use coupons, primarily those who earn up to \$100,000 annually.

“Don’t reinvent the lightbulb...just switch it on.”

“Grabbers,” little gimmicks that capture people’s attention, also help you advertise in a memorable way. For example, a real-estate agent who sells beachfront property might distribute a flyer with a small bag of sand attached. Or, a sweets shop might mail out candy wrappers that people can redeem for a free sample.

Going Online

The Web presents new twists to effective advertising. If you are e-mailing your advertisements, remember that many people prefer to receive mailings no more than once a week. Most marketing e-mails (about 68%) contain graphics, and animated advertisements attract more attention than static ones. However, ensure that the motion graphics are not obnoxious or irrelevant. Be aware that clever headlines may increase the click-through rate, but do not necessarily translate into higher sales. For best results, include the recipients’ names in the subject line and make sure what you’re offering is relevant to them.

About the Author

Drew Eric Whitman has taught the psychology behind the consumer response for more than 23 years. He has worked as a consultant for the American Legion, Amoco, Texaco and many other organizations.