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The Secrets of Emotionally Effective Advertising

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Recommendation

The advertising industry is making a transition from creating ads that are “on-message” to producing messages that are “on-emotion.” An emotional connection generates sales, in part because the consumer’s overall brand experience carries more weight than a company’s slick marketing message. Author Dan Hill – an expert in “facial coding” – has gleaned 10 essential rules for producing advertising that resonates with consumers. Hill brings new insights, providing marketers with a better understanding of what they must do to evoke emotional responses. *BooksInShort* recommends this text to marketers and salespeople and to those intrigued by the facial analysis used in the TV series *Lie to Me*.

Take-Aways

- An advertising message is “on-emotion” when it makes an emotional connection with the target audience.
- The “three P’s” of emotionally effective advertising are “Passion, Purpose and Personality.”
- An on-emotion ad stops people “in their tracks” and causes them to pay attention.
- If consumers must struggle to figure out your ad’s message, they’ll give up and move on.
- Advertising that occurs within a familiar context resonates with its audience.
- The human face provides a wealth of opportunity to engage, persuade and compel the viewer.
- All ads must answer the question in every consumer’s mind; “What’s in it for me?”
- Selling hope is a great motivator and an effective advertising tool.
- Price-based advertising creates problems for brands for many reasons.
- Consumers expect brands to relate in newer and more different ways than traditional “interruption advertising.”

Summary

Make an Emotional Connection

A television commercial begins with several beautiful women in colorful dresses swaying to an upbeat rhythm. At first glance, you might think that this commercial for a diet drink is right on point. Research proved it was not. When middle-aged women watched the spot, they didn’t feel uplifted; they felt depressed. The tagline, “Pump it up,” made them feel inferior to the lithe women in the ad, whom they assumed spend hours at the gym working on their perfect figures. The commercial’s target group felt excluded and sad.

“Creating a strong sensory-emotive connection is at the heart of making money.”

Although the TV spot was “on-message,” it failed to be “on-emotion.” It never made an emotional connection with its target viewer. Research shows that emotionally engaged consumers are more likely to buy a product than those who merely know about it. This failure to connect emotionally might explain why so much advertising fails. A quote attributed to both William Hesketh Lever and John Wahhamaker says that half of all advertising is wasted, but marketers don’t know which half.

“From engagement to brand loyalty, everything is feelings based.”

Researchers have learned to identify consumers’ emotional reaction to advertising through “facial coding,” a noninvasive technique that experts use to read people’s feelings via the muscle movement on their faces. If you use this information to tailor your ad campaigns and to trigger emotional responses, you’ll increase sales, reduce price sensitivity and raise brand awareness. For emotionally effective advertising, leverage the “three P’s”:

1. **“Passion** – The instantaneous response to an ad based on people’s sensory perceptions.”
2. **“Purpose** – Linking functionality to the target consumer’s values and beliefs.”
3. **“Personality** – A brand’s personality comes across as emotionally engaging, unique and authentic, giving it character.”

The 10 Guidelines for Emotionally Effective Advertising

To create advertising that has an emotional impact, follow these 10 precepts:

1. “Get Physical”

Advertising that equals the competition’s is not enough. Effective ads stop people “in their tracks” and grab their attention by using surprise and engaging their five senses. Consider the success of the late, “as-seen-on-TV” advertising spokesman, Billy Mays. His loud, up-tempo, hard-hitting approach cut through the clutter.

“Think too much, and you don’t feel enough.”

Any ad has about two milliseconds to make a visual connection. Humans process visual data with amazing speed. The old maxim is true: An image is worth a thousand words. The human eye tracks images in certain ways, including “centrality, dominance, showing faces and showing or implying motion.” Therefore, the placement, size and use of faces affect consumers’ perceptions of a print ad. Continuous action and sudden movement are effective attention-getters in video spots. Engaging the senses of touch, smell and taste are more effective than using only sight and sound. Innovative methods of leveraging the other senses include scratch-and-sniff inserts, food samples or textured ads.

2. “Keep It Simple”

If your ad bores or frustrates consumers, you’ve lost them. If your ad is too complex to grasp quickly, you won’t engage your audience’s emotions. “Keep it Simple, Stupid” or “KISS,” is the only way to go. Think of a billboard. If a viewer can’t process the message in half a second, the billboard is wasted. Good design invites easy interpretation through a “hierarchy of visuals.” Your eye travels to the most important visual first, the second most important visual next, and so on. A brand image or logo placed in the lower right-hand edge of an image disappears into the “corner of death,” which viewers typically see last.

“In marketing, what’s unfamiliar tends to get screened out by us.”

Websites often lose frustrated viewers. To be effective, websites must be easy to use. The Home Depot website provides a positive example. Web developer Jason Beard suggests the following website design guidelines. Consider content before design. It doesn’t matter how beautiful your web page looks if it’s not easy to understand. Make navigating through your website intuitive. The user shouldn’t have to struggle to understand it. Your visual theme must be “cohesive and coherent.” Use the most important components as a magnet for the user’s attention.

“The longer or more frequently that a company relies on price-leading advertising, the more we expect low prices.”

People won’t work to figure out your message. They’ll give up and go away. Don’t use big words when simple ones will do. Use the words a Yale University study identified as the most persuasive: “You, money, save, new, results, easy, health, safety, love, discovery, proven and guarantee.”

3. “Keep It Close to Home”

Familiar images in your advertising will resonate quickly with recipients. Familiarity works because it’s instantly relatable and doesn’t require mental calisthenics. People will dismiss or “filter out” messages that seem foreign or unfamiliar.

“To neglect or otherwise under-utilize the power of faces, such as by being off-emotion, is as much a handicap as a guy who can’t see that his romantic date for the evening is feeling unhappy.”

People like a storytelling format with a beginning, middle and resolution. The brain makes a subconscious decision that what is familiar is also true. That’s why repetition matters. Because Allstate insurance has told you throughout your lifetime that “You’re in Good Hands,” you believe it. People gravitate to those who are like them, so your casting choices should duplicate the characteristics of your target market. Certain music will evoke particular reactions. Consider the music played in horror films to induce fear in the viewer.

4. “Focus on Faces”

Faces are vitally important in advertising. For example, a national electronics retailer packed its TV ad with dozens of brand elements, yet testing showed that viewers

had poor brand recall. Why? Because the ad was also jammed full of people. Viewers' eyes went to the faces of the people and missed the brand signifiers.

“There are two basic pathways to persuasion. There’s argument and there’s emotion.”

The brain takes in information by reading facial expressions. The brain’s “fusiform face area” (FFA) is dedicated to this task. As social commentator Roger Scruton explains, “Human beings are alone among the animals in revealing their individuality in their faces.” How does this relate to advertising? Choosing the right face and personality for your ad is crucial, yet most advertisers fall short, partially because those who cast the actors don’t understand facial coding. Facial coding research shows that close-ups are 20% more effective than long shots. A moving actor garners more attention than one who stays still, and looking at the camera is more effective than a profile or turned face. Men rate 9% higher in appeal than women, and celebrity faces register only a slightly higher impact than unknowns. Also, authenticity rules. Emotions that aren’t heartfelt read as disingenuous.

5. “Make It Memorable”

The goal of all advertising is to generate memories, and that’s an “emotional-driven process.” People retain in their active memories only a small percentage of the data they see. Recall takes place on a subconscious level based on emotion, not intellectualization. For information to register, it must have “relevancy, novelty, intensity, familiarity” or it must show or involve “change.” Memory recall is based on “pacing, peaks and patience.” The pacing must be engaging enough to hold the viewers’ attention, but not so frenetic that viewers tune out and go away. The optimal number of scene changes in a TV spot is three to four. Spots also should include three emotional peaks. The most effective peaks for earning emotional buy-in are positive, and utilize humor and surprise. Patience refers to timing the “emotional punch,” which is most effective toward the conclusion of the spot.

6. “Relevancy Drives Connection”

Advertisers love to describe their product or service’s superior features and attributes. They err when they make their product the hero of their ads. However, the offer isn’t the hero, either. Advertising must vividly describe a situation that offers a solution to an emotional need. So the hero is how the offer can solve someone’s problem. Messages must respond to the question in every consumer’s mind: “What’s in it for me?” or “WIIFM?”

“But in the end, it’s the emotional verdict of message believability that matters most.

What emotional need does your product or service fulfill? For example, hair coloring is not about changing a woman’s hair color; it’s about making her feel better about herself. Harley-Davidson isn’t merely a motorcycle; it’s a ticket to freedom. When a message makes an emotional connection, people want to buy. Being “on-motivation” goes hand in hand with being on-emotion. Advertising usually addresses key motivational categories, either alone or in combination. These categories are “physical, empowerment, attachment, self-esteem and enjoyment.” Of these, self-esteem and attachment rank highest for engagement.

7. “Always Sell Hope”

What’s the difference between happiness and hope? Happiness is a current feeling. Hope is the promise of happiness in the future. All great marketing delivers hope. Selling hope, a powerful motivator, works better than manipulating people with fear. But selling false hope, or not fulfilling your advertising promise, creates consumer distrust. If customers feel that they aren’t getting what they paid for, the advertiser has broken the rule of “emotional reciprocity.” Moreover, today’s disappointed customers quickly spread the word of their shattered hopes via Twitter, Facebook, blogs and other social media.

8. “Don’t Lead with Price”

Focusing on “value,” a code word for “price,” is not the right approach. If pricing becomes a frequent or continuous element of a brand’s marketing mix, then the brand loses the element of surprise needed to grab consumer attention. The judicious use of special sales won’t hurt your brand, but constant discounts undermine brand reputation. If your consumer expects low prices, the word “sale” loses meaning. Cutting prices leads to earning less from your existing customers, compromising their brand loyalty as they begin to view your product as less valuable. When you sell based on price, you sacrifice selling based on quality. Instead of price competition, enhance the “sensory” appeal of your product, emphasize your brand’s unique characteristics, or invite customers to participate in the innovation process by soliciting ideas from them.

9. “Mirror the Target Market’s Values”

People interpret messages through the prism of their value system. If your message is at odds with your target market’s beliefs, it won’t connect emotionally. Consumers seek dialogue, so they expect brands to relate to them in new ways beyond traditional “interruption advertising.” Blogs and other social media allow them to participate in such relationships. Brands cannot simply send their messages out through mass-media channels as they have in the past. Be authentic, and tell stories to ensure an emotional connection. Consumers want companies to hear and respond to their voices; they want to be part of the process. Today’s sophisticated, cynical consumer reacts suspiciously to slick language. Spin is dead, and transparency is the new necessity.

10. “Believability Sticks”

With every offer, consumers consider whether their expenditure equals or exceeds the promise of what they will gain. All advertisers try to persuade consumers that their product or service fulfills that promise. Ads come in three types, “argument, endorsement and narrative,” and some work better than others. The argument ad provides information. Testimonials or endorsements endow an offer with credibility. Narrative ads cultivate affinity by using humor or drama. Argument ads, particularly those that use analogies, are the most effective. However, the arguments must not promote the company’s self-interest. They must state the consumer’s case instead.

About the Author

Dan Hill is author of the bestseller *Emotionomics* about facial coding analysis. He founded the research consultancy Sensory Logic, and he is an expert on facial coding and the role of emotions in marketing.
