



# Book Emotionomics

## Leveraging Emotions for Business Success

Dan Hill  
Kogan Page, 2009  
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## Recommendation

Facial coding, which is based on psychologist Paul Ekman’s Facial Action Coding System (FACS), has a sleek and shiny high-tech feel. Indeed, the approach that Dan Hill and his research consultancy firm developed involves eye tracking, video recording, tabulation of “emotional data sets,” elaborate scoring systems and comprehensive analyses. Yet, 19th-century scientists Charles Darwin and Guillaume Duchenne studied facial coding and applied their findings in their work. Since prehistoric times, humans have intuitively understood how to read each other’s faces. Hill and his colleagues have updated this ancient art to enable companies to determine accurately what consumers and employees truly feel about them and their products – which is different from what they tell researchers. *BooksInShort* recommends Hill’s groundbreaking book to executives and managers in all fields, but especially to human resources and marketing professionals.

## Take-Aways

- Most mental activity has almost nothing to do with rational thinking.
- Emotions, not intellect, drive decisions.
- Emotions determine which products or services people choose to buy.
- Improve your sales and operations by focusing on customers’ and employees’ emotions rather than on their rational thoughts.
- What people say about something often does not match how they feel.
- Facial coding is the best way to bridge the “say-feel gap.”
- People’s involuntary and highly uniform facial expressions reveal their emotions.
- Thus, astute observers can see how others truly feel.
- Use facial coding to discover and quantify such basic emotions as happiness, contempt, sadness, surprise, anger, disgust and fear.
- Draw on these insights about people’s deepest feelings to develop messages that connect with customers and employees.

## Summary

### Getting Around the “Say-Feel Gap”

People make most decisions with their hearts, not their heads. To put it another way, “emotions drive reason more than reason drives emotion.” Indeed, feelings always precede rational thought. So, although people claim to prize rationality, modern-day humans are much closer to their Stone Age ancestors than they like to admit. “Visual imagery and other nonverbal forms of communication” greatly outweigh formal reasoning in most people’s thought processes. Fully conscious, rational thought accounts for “less than .0005% of mental activity.”

“Achieving a competitive advantage depends on both rational and emotional endorsement from the target market.”

Learn to read your customers’ and staff members’ emotions to increase sales, profits, and customer and employee satisfaction. Your primary business goal should be to deliver “a unique emotional value proposition.” To create this kind of “emotional buy-in,” you must first overcome the say-feel gap. This is the chasm between what people claim and what they truly feel, which determines what they do: buy your product, shop at your store, work diligently at your firm and so on. Test subjects often provide responses they “think others will give.” Such responses, including those concerning product choice, are of dubious authenticity and, therefore, value.

“Companies ignore the role of emotions in business at their own peril.”

The say-feel gap develops from people’s “self-justifying rationalizations (intellectual alibis).” People cover up, although often not very well, their true emotions. Many businesspeople are oblivious to the say-feel gap. Company sales, productivity, and customer and employee satisfaction suffer.

“Breakthroughs in brain science show us that emotions drive outcomes.”

The best way to get around the say-feel gap is by using facial coding, the “analysis of facial muscle activity.” Use it to determine consumer preferences for “TV spots, print ads, direct mail” and so on. When you can evaluate and measure people’s feelings using facial coding, you can manage those emotions so they serve your commercial purposes. Stake your commercial claims in the area of emotion, not rationality. If this idea makes you uncomfortable, note that a study of 23,000 U.S. consumers indicated that “emotions are twice as important as facts” in their purchasing decisions.

“Facial coding is robust because of the face’s unique properties.”

Since emotions are so important, you must not only be “on message” with your advertising, promotion and employee policies but also “on emotion.” Persuading people to change their attitudes and beliefs is difficult. Instead, appeal directly to the emotions; then “provide rational support” through advertising or employee communication.

## The “Seven Core Emotions”

As far back as the 19th century, British naturalist Charles Darwin and the French anatomist Guillaume Duchenne studied the meanings of human facial expressions. In the 1960s, Paul Ekman developed the Facial Action Coding System (FACS). Ekman discovered that people’s facial expressions are “stable, ubiquitous and uniform.” Thus, facial coding is extremely reliable. People’s facial expressions reveal seven core emotions:

1. **“Surprise”** – Even newborns show shock. When someone is surprised, the eyes get big, the eyebrows rise and the mouth opens. The face “expands upward and downward.”
2. **“Fear”** – This emotion counts more than any other; it is the “mainstay of business.” Fear opens the face and makes it blanch. Eyes and chin go wide, lips pull back in a horizontal direction, eyebrows go “up and in,” and the “jaw drops open.”
3. **“Anger”** – Customer-service people dread this one. The “face contracts” and its overall appearance is intense. In extreme cases, people’s faces redden; the “eyebrows lower and knit together, eyes narrow into ‘snake-eyes’ [and the] lips tighten or form a funnel.”
4. **“Sadness”** – In stores, this emotion often registers as “buyer’s regret.” In offices, it disengages employees from their work. The face and lips sag, “giving a person a ‘long-face’ frown.” In the midforehead, wrinkles create a “puddle” look. The eyebrows droop, “but inner corners rise slightly...the corners of eyes crease in a wince.” “The ‘trench’ running between the corners of nostrils and upper mouth corners will deepen.”
5. **“Disgust”** – People who feel this emotion wish to distance themselves from the offensive item. The nose turns up, the lips curl and the face takes on a “lifting up and away” look, “like a gag reflex.” The “nose turns up and wrinkles, upper lip rises, sometimes as part of an ‘upside-down smile,’ [and the] lower lip pulls down and away.”
6. **“Contempt”** – This emotion is deadly in a business situation. The lips go tight “and lift on one side of the face, forming a little pocket or cavity in the cheek like the eye of a hurricane.” Contempt is a “unilateral expression,” in which the face’s left side is “more expressive than the right side.” The “upper corner of the mouth [curls] into a sneer, the upper lip rises [and the] eyes may partly close and turn away.”
7. **“Happiness”** – This is the only “positive emotion” in the group. The “true smile” (also known as the “Duchenne smile”) makes the eyes “twinkle or gleam” through surrounding muscle contraction. Crow’s-feet form near the eyes. “The upper eyelid slightly droops and [the] skin under the eye may gather upward.” Cheeks move up and “corners of the mouth move up and out.”

“Until now, emotions have been hard to quantify and, therefore, even harder to plan for. Facial coding changes all that.”

Emotional analysis reveals, in addition to these seven primary emotions, about 30 secondary emotions – for example, “delight, relief, pride, vengeance, morbidity, yearning [and] nostalgia.”

## When You’re Smiling

Watch out for smiles that don’t indicate happiness, for example, the “social smile.” People can easily “manipulate the muscles around the mouth” to form a simulated smile: “The face becomes rounder as the corners of the mouth move up and out and the cheeks lift upward.” However, the muscles around the eyes are much more difficult to manipulate. Social smilers’ eyes do not twinkle or gleam, hence the famous adage “the eyes never lie.”

“It is believed that 70% of what we look at in stores is packaging.”

Be wary of “lying smiles,” which don’t “involve the whole face.” The cheeks “lie flat and still and the eyes don’t narrow.” Lying smiles register more on one side of the face. True smiles last for about four seconds, while lying smiles last for five to 10 seconds and involve timing that makes no sense. They “start or end too abruptly or arrive too early or late.” You can spot a lying smile “if what the person is saying and the expression are out of sync.”

## The Mechanics of Facial Coding

In video interviews, researchers capture all facial expressions. Trained analysts review and code the video “at intervals as precise as 1/30 of a second,” providing businesses with a reliable quantification of test subjects’ specific emotional responses.

“We tend to do business with people whom we like, people like us who share our beliefs. In effect, we tend to hire ourselves.”

The most important metric is “emotional reaction.” Did the subject care about or even notice the content of the test? Was the subject engaged? Coders measure the subjects’ specific emotions, their intensity or “emotional temperature,” and whether their responses were “positive, neutral [or] negative.” Emotions always exist on a spectrum.

“The key to a successful presentation isn’t the offer; it’s the relationship-building that’s involved.”

To make sense of facial coding data, you must know exactly which sensory input the subject was responding to, moment-by-moment. Eye tracking – the “recording of where people look and what they focus on” – provides this essential information. Using this data, analysts can determine subjects’ responses to each aspect of what they see. Such analyses help companies ensure that their promotional messages engage people.

## Emotions Motivate

Once you understand how people respond to your commercial messages, you can adjust them to motivate individuals in positive ways. Since emotions are “action-oriented,” changing people’s emotions triggers behaviors, for example, the purchase of your product.

“The emotional climate within a company may account for as much as 30% of its performance.”

For businesses, the purpose of facial-coding analysis is to understand emotional responses to commercial messages better to ensure they motivate positive behavior. Such analysis reveals the link between various feelings and five “recurring business-oriented behaviors”:

1. **“Outcome orientation”** – People’s emotions indicate whether they are concentrating on the “carrot or the stick,” or, perhaps, both.
2. **“Level of attention”** – “Only happiness or surprise ensures a high attention level.”
3. **“Action bias”** – Emotions “drive people to action,” but “the type of action varies.”
4. **“Risk tolerance”** – Happy, angry and sad people are more likely to take risks.
5. **“Decision making”** – Feeling surprise, fear or sadness can leave people “paralyzed.”

## “The Emotional Matrix”

This tool enables companies to examine “what motivations cause people to act and how people’s feelings will, in turn, further influence their actions.” Use it to “frame business issues” according to a psychological context to create emotional buy-in.

“The business of emotion detection, using speech analytics, is already a \$400 million industry.”

The emotional matrix involves the “four core motivations” – “defend, acquire, bond and learn” – and relates them to the emotions. For example, “acquire and anger fit together because anger often involves seeking control.” And, “disgust can involve rejecting an idea (learn), person (bond) or object (acquire).” Use facial coding and the emotional matrix to improve your operations and activities in these important areas:

- **“Branding”** – Facial coding enables you to quantify an otherwise difficult-to-measure concept, such as loyalty. Using facial coding analysis, companies can develop strong, customer-oriented rationales for their branding. Because facial coding tells you how to connect emotionally with your customers, you can link your customers’ “beliefs about themselves to an enduring belief in the brand.” The result: an “emotionally healthy” brand. The most important emotion for branding is pride.
- **“Offer design, packaging and usability”** – Business consultant Tom Peters states that “design is about emotion.” Packaging must nurture the senses and “trigger subconscious emotional responses”: The object is to make the customer feel that he or she is a winner because of a purchase. Do this, in part, by working to create the emotion of awe among customers and prospects.
- **“Advertising”** – Awe is also the primary emotion you want to inspire among prospects through your advertising. This transcends the usual objective of advertising, which is to promote prospects’ awareness of your product or service. Advertising should also encourage the prospect to give full consideration to your sales proposition and then persuade him or her to buy your product. Make sure your advertising’s “images and concepts” support those the prospect “emotionally endorses.”
- **“Sales”** – Organize your sales activities around the message that buying your product or service represents a “safe, beneficial choice” for the customer. Hire salespeople who possess the “emotional aptitude to build customer relationships.” This “relationship approach” is crucial to any sales organization. Salespeople must be “upbeat, resilient and caring.” Job prospects who generate true smiles during interviews are upbeat. Those with a low sadness quotient regarding rejection are resilient.
- **“Retail and service”** – Dissatisfaction is an intensely personal (read: emotional) state for customers. Not only do dissatisfied customers dislike the company; they announce this negative news to everyone they can find. Aim to delight customers with superior service. This way, you enhance their feelings of self-worth. When it comes to service, “relief is the crucial emotional outcome.”
- **“Leadership”** – Corporate leaders inspire employees by coming across as winners who will enrich those who work for them both emotionally and financially. When employees join a company, they “subsume” their individuality to become part of a larger whole that will deliver benefits to them they could not achieve on their own. However, this works only when corporate leaders come across as unselfish individuals dedicated to the greater good of the group. Leaders who display selfish emotions quickly drive quality employees out of the organization and into the arms of the competition.
- **“Employee management”** – In no other area of business does emotion weigh as heavily as it does in managing employees. “Rational hiring criteria miss the large role emotion plays in the outcome.” Research shows that “50% of new hires will fail within 18 months.” Performing facial coding analyses of job candidates can increase your number of successful hires, but if this is impractical, then at least try to judge job candidates on the basis of their emotional compatibility with

the job.

## About the Author

**Dan Hill** is the president of a consultancy firm that helps global companies measure and manage emotions through specialized research tools such as eye tracking and facial coding.

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