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WHITE PAPER

Four Memories

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The original method of pretesting was recall testing because marketers understood that for an ad to be effective, it had to leave something behind in consumer memory. Unlike promotions, ads create long-term value because of the brand structures that they build in our memories.

But one of the chief lessons from modern neuroscience is that the old tape-recorder model of memory long held by recall testers was overly simplistic. It is now well established that there are multiple memory systems in the mind, not just one. It seems pretty clear now that for an ad campaign to build strong brand value, it must make at least *four* kinds of deposits in the different memory banks of the mind.

To understand the four kinds of brand memories that are important for advertisers, it might be helpful to think of a simple model about how we learn to make a sale.

Bright young people who come to work for me are afraid of the very idea of selling. Fear of rejection is one reason for this. As a result, their preferred method of approaching a client or prospect is to send an email. They quickly learn that, by itself, this doesn't work very well. So, as their level of knowledge builds and their confidence grows, they reach for the phone. They soon discover that over the phone, they hear something that was missing from an email, perhaps something in the tone of voice. What is being said, they realize, is sometimes not as important as how it is said. An emotional dimension has been added through voice, and a relationship begins. But even this is not always enough to close a sale. Finally, when they are competent enough in doing their job so that I am confident that they can properly represent the brand of my company, they get on a plane to make a sales call in person. Here, the final discovery is made: The real trust that comes from physical eye contact is essential to getting to the handshake that turns a prospect into a loyal customer.

Selling in person is more effective than selling at a distance—and in large part this has to do with the different kinds of memories that are created with the sales call.

The *semantic memory system*, which can be thought of as the rational, verbal part of the brain, is the place where advertisers can send e-mail. These emails communicate features and benefits, product concepts, unique selling propositions, brand positionings. Semantic memories are those that can be accessed with traditional recall testing methods.

The *episodic memory system* is the place where personal, autobiographical memories are stored. Where were you on 9/11? The images that just came to mind form your personal narrative of the events that you have lived through, real or imagined, and how you felt about them. Advertisers can telephone their brand stories to this memory system of the brain with radio or television or other storytelling media. Recognition, rather than recall, is a better way for researchers to access these emotional memories.

The *procedural memory system* is the oldest place of memory, where physical sensations and physical skills are stored. What does a headache feel like? How do you remember how to dance or drive a car? Advertisers can shake hands with the brain in two general ways. The first, through the operation of mirror neurons, is through the magic of physical-action-at-a-distance that I call “virtual consumption.” It’s why bite-and-smile, product-in-use, or other kinds of brand experience scenes in ads are so important. It’s also why we consumers get so addicted to watching sports or playing video games. The second way that brands can reach out and touch someone is through click-throughs and other action-interactions in this new high touch age of iPhones, iPads, Kinect, and other internet-machine extensions of our bodies. We researchers have much to learn about how to measure the impact on advertising ROI of these new physical brand memories being formed.

The fourth type of memory that is important for advertisers does not pertain to the brain but rather the brand. It’s the *brand identity tag* that links the other three types of memories to your brand’s name or icon or other identifier. This then turns the other three types of memories into a valuable property in the brain that you can monetize. Measuring brand linkage across the three different memory systems of the brain is a work in progress on which modern neuroscience can perhaps shed some light. (If you would like to read more of my ruminations in these areas, you can find them on the Resources Page of our website, www.ameritest.net.)

The implication of thinking about advertising from the standpoint of the multiple memory systems of the mind is that advertisers need to develop a clear strategic framework for designing ad campaigns that sell the head, the heart, and the hand of the consumer.