

Marketing vs. the Human Brain

Marketing is an art that requires a tremendous amount of skill to be successful. It requires in depth knowledge of both the product that is being advertised, and the consumer base for which the product is being advertised to. The human mind and the way that it operates has always been a huge mystery to marketers, as they continue to search for a logical way in which individuals decide which products to buy. Based on previous studies of the human mind, people do not always decide to buy different products based on logical processes. Many times what people say they think about a product and how they actually feel about that product are two completely different things. This is a very intriguing thought, and many people are left wondering what it is that could cause somebody to act this way.

The perfect example of the illogical decisions that people make in regards to their choice of one product over another, is the Pepsi Challenge. For everyone who is unfamiliar with what the Pepsi Challenge is, it is a blind test that was conducted by Pepsi comparing the taste of their cola with the cola of Coke. Equal amounts of each type of soda were placed in identical cups for a blind folded candidate to take a taste. The test concluded that the majority of participants actually favored the flavor of Pepsi Cola over their competitor Coca Cola. The logical inference that can be made from results like these is that Pepsi's sales should increase above the sales of Coke, but this simply was not the case. Coke's products continued to sell at a level higher than Pepsi. What could possibly be going on inside the minds of consumers to create an illogical response like this?

Scientists have wondered for a while what could possess somebody who had a clear preference for the taste of one soft drink to purchase another. Thanks to the new technology that was created in the arena of neuro-imaging, scientists at the Human Neuroimaging Lab at the Baylor College of Medicine were able to conduct the same experiment while tracking brain activity. What they discovered was astonishing. When they conducted the study on blindfolded participants, the majority of participants preferred Pepsi as they did in the previous study. These scientists discovered that the part of the brain associated with rewards, the ventral putamen, was five times more active when the participants tasted Pepsi than when that individual tasted Coke.

The researchers also conducted a repeat of the test, but this time they did not blindfold the candidates and the cans that they were drinking out of were clearly visible. In this test, the majority of candidates preferred the drink in the trademark red Coke can. Another intriguing fact about this test was the fact that significantly different parts of the brain were at work than in the previous test. The medial prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain associated with logical thinking and reasoned judgment, showed significant activity in this secondary study.

The results of this study goes to show how complex it is for marketers to try and decipher exactly how people make their decisions. From the initial study it appears obvious that Pepsi sales should be well above the sales of Coke, but just the opposite occurred. It appears that the

brand name or the design of a label has a lot more to do with the overall result of whether or not an individual will purchase one product over another. From this study it is difficult to tell whether people are more attracted by the brand name Coke, or if the attraction is due to the aesthetic design of their product, but it definitely shows that something about Coke products grabs the attention of consumers. Today, marketing professionals are using neuro-marketing techniques to try and decipher exactly what causes people to decide one product over the other.

If the idea of neuro-marketing can be put to good use, we will begin to see benefits for both companies and consumers. Many people view the idea of neuro-marketing as a threat because they may see this type of marketing as a form of mind control or the ability of another person to read their mind. This is not at all the definition of neuro-marketing. Neuro-marketing is based on an understanding of how the human brain works and how decisions are made, whether they are based on logic or impulse. Marketing methods such as this will not only help companies to improve their own brand image, but it will also increase the relevancy of specific ads to the markets and demographics that they are targeting. Consumers will become introduced to products that are more relevant to their needs. With the combination of neuro-marketing and web morphing, consumers are going to have the ability to easily find the products they want and need, with the click of a button.