

Killer communication

Heather Maitland looks at using design to make your marketing communications more effective

Our potential customers need to understand our marketing communications and remember them positively when they make a decision about how to spend their leisure time. So how can we increase understanding and positive recall?

Both depend on how much attention our potential customer focuses on the communication, subconscious as well as conscious.¹ Everyone subconsciously scans their environment all of the time. When they do focus conscious attention on something, the subconscious analysis can give it a feeling of familiarity. Their brains interpret this familiarity as approval which leads them to behave in a favourable way towards it. Marketers love this because subconsciously based preferences are easily formed, can't be argued with and are relatively long lasting.²

We can enhance this effect by increasing the efficiency of that subconscious processing.

Putting words on the right and pictures on the left reduces the amount of brain power needed for subconscious analysis. This is because people process material in their right-hand visual field using the left side of their brain and vice versa. The left side of the brain is more efficient at doing a preliminary analysis of words and the right is better at interpreting pictures. Experiments show that we can take advantage of this by placing adverts with words to the right of editorial and those with pictures to its left. Within

our adverts, if we want to improve recall of our brand, we should put text-based brand names to the right of pictures or to the left of text. The longer the text or more complex the picture on which the reader is focusing their conscious attention, the longer the time the reader is unconsciously processing the brand name.³



As marketers, we need to do all we can to avoid interference with this subconscious analysis by other adverts on the page and illustrations and slogans in our own adverts.

The bits of our ads that we hope will grab a reader's conscious attention can interfere with subconscious processing. To minimise this, if we want the reader to recall verbal information accurately, then we should place any pictorial attention-grabber to the right of that

information. A verbal attention-grabber such as a slogan should go to its left.⁴

When customers are looking for particular information, e.g. finding out what events are available on a particular date, they are engaging in goal-directed search behaviour. Browsing through a season brochure uses a different part of the brain. This is exploratory search behaviour and involves subconsciously analysing the whole visual field to see where conscious attention could most profitably be focused.

We need to use different design strategies depending on the search behaviour our potential customers are most likely to use. If viewers are engaging in goal-directed searching, e.g. on a diary page, we need to help them limit their attention to a subset of the information. Size is a key factor: the information cues should be bigger than anything else.

Contrast is the next most effective factor, making the information cues look different, e.g. colour on a mainly black and white page.⁵

In exploratory search mode, readers linger on focal areas longer if there is little visual competition. This means they remember more and are more likely to gather the kind of information they need to make a purchase. The most obvious way we could reduce visual competition is to have just one event or activity on a page. Most of us don't have the budget for this. Or we could make one event much bigger than the rest but this would be at the expense of all the other events we have to sell. The research found that

