

ADWEEK

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Emotional Intelligence

The dos and don'ts of plucking at consumers' heartstrings

If you want to know which emotions are most meaningful to the consumer's connection to your brand, the last thing you want to do is ask her or him. That people buy based on deep-seated, usually unconscious, emotional reactions to products or services is well established. If you ask directly, you'll hear that their purchases were based on "rational" decisions, but underlying that is something much deeper. They buy because that product or service fills their need to feel good about themselves—attractive, pampered, nurturing. These drives are basic human instincts, hard-wired into us, and every brand needs to know how it stacks up in the minds and hearts of customers and prospective customers.



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If you tap into the right emotional connections, you'll build long-lasting relationships with loyal brand customers. If you use emotional marketing in the wrong way, you could drive people away and erode your market share—and waste your marketing dollars. Which of these four emotional marketing mistakes might you be making?

The empty promise. The conventional marketing wisdom, "Sell the sizzle, not the steak," is off base. Without the steak, there's nothing to sell. Studies have proven that people buy for emotional reasons, and then justify their purchases with logic. So when we make an emotional promise, we need to back it up with real features and benefits. Although an attractive empty promise may create trial, it won't get you repeat purchases or brand loyalty.

The emotional mismatch. An emotional mismatch is when the link between the emotional benefit and its rational feature or features doesn't quite make sense. An example is

the GoDaddy.com "broken strap" commercials, featuring a buxom girl almost baring her breasts when the straps of her flimsy GoDaddy tank top break. Although there's a brief mention that GoDaddy.com is a Web site where you can buy domain names for as little as \$1.99, do low-priced domain names make you feel sexy? In fact, the titillation in this ad might be so distracting that people won't get to the message at all. Sex doesn't always sell—sometimes it un-sells.

Using the wrong research techniques. People won't reveal their souls to help you sell them products just because you ask. There are four main reasons for this: First, people hate to think they might make emotional decisions with their money, so they

hide their emotional motivations from themselves and look for logical reasons to justify their purchases. Second, emotional reasons for purchases are socially undesirable (greed, status, lust, envy, etc.), so consumers will deny them even if they're aware of them. Next, the connections between emotional benefits and their features are largely beyond consumers' awareness. And finally, many consumers fear that if we really knew what would make them fall in love with our brand, we'd sell them things they don't want or need.

Savvy researchers have borrowed exercises and projective techniques from the behavioral sciences to overcome all these obstacles and ladder up the benefit chain to valuable emotional insights. Using Jungian archetypes and guided imagery, for example, we have been able to get powerful insights into the psychology of brands. These approaches make it possible for respondents to project their deep emotional motivations for purchase while maintaining a safe dis-

tance from what might be highly charged material. The exercises give them permission to share their feelings from what they see as the "not me."

There is one more emotional marketing mistake—one that can ruin your campaign, even if you do everything else right.

Blurting out the emotional benefit. The purpose of emotion in an ad is to indirectly create a connection with the prospect that fulfills a wish or need. But, if you call out the emotional benefit directly, your target might feel invaded and actually reject the premise and the product. Emotional marketing insights are for marketers to know and consumers to experience. All of the reasons that make it necessary to be indirect in your research methods count double when it comes to execution. It's a serious mistake to take a targeted emotional motivation for purchase and blurt it out to the prospect. Ford did this in its "Tough Trucks" ad: "We don't just make our trucks tough, we make you tough!" If you asked a buyer if he bought a Ford truck in order to feel tough, do you think he would admit it? No way.

So how to do it right? Truly excellent advertising delivers an emotional punch fully consistent with, and supportive of, your product's most desirable features. In a radio advertisement by Radio Works, a conversation is heard between a woman and her ex-husband. "Harry? Don't you remember me?" She reminds him that they dated all through college, took a trip to Greece, got on the wrong boat, wound up in a Turkish prison and, after they escaped, got married on a sky-tram in the Swiss Alps. Back home they decided to get a divorce and worked out the settlement over dinner at Dee's. "Dee's?!" exclaims the man. "Yes! Now I remember! I had the halibut steak!" He then exuberantly describes the meal in detail. After the woman leaves in disgust, an announcer says, "Try our delicious halibut dinner, for a limited time only \$4.95. Dee's, an experience you'll never forget."

What emotional benefits does this inspire? A sense of control over your own pleasure, independence, adventure and humor. At the same time, all the emotional benefits have been clearly linked to a long list of sensorial, stimulating, mouthwatering and satisfying features; and all for a price you can afford, even if you're strapped with alimony payments. I don't know about you, but I'm going to Dee's!