



Neuromarketing makes getting inside your customer's head easier than ever.

BY MICHAEL HAMILTON – PRINCIPAL - GETSYNCHRONICITY

Q: I'm looking for new ways to learn what makes my target audiences tick. Where should I look?

A: Traditional marketing surveys remain a good sources of information, but over the past year, the science of Neuromarketing has emerged.

“Hard science” is steadily finding a home in our marketing toolbox. Some scientific disciplines—biometrics, for example—are still finding their way. Others, however, have become full dues-paying members of the marketing mix and are generating a great deal of interest and practical applications.

One such crossover is Neuroscience, resulting in the new discipline called “Neuromarketing.” This article offers a brief overview of neuromarketing in general, as well as of how some of its specific findings can be applied to the tradeshow and event marketplace.

A little history. My interest in neuromarketing began recently when I read an article in the May 2016 issue of *Event Marketer Magazine*. This article discussed a book released in 2015 by Darren Bridger entitled *Decoding the Irrational Consumer*. In it, Mr. Bridger used “neuromarketing data to reveal how consumers’ primal instincts affect their decision-making.” It’s a fascinating area of study, and after I read the article, and then did some independent research, it soon became clear to me that neuroscience has a great deal of insight to offer tradeshow marketers. As the article further stated, “Bridger explores why consumers are somewhat irrational when it comes to calculating value.” If you have any tradeshow experience at all, you’ll immediately relate to the “irrationality” of attendees. This will also trigger our shared yearning for a better understanding of their motivations, as well as the desire for new tools and tactics that may help control them.

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A section of Mr. Bridger's book discusses seven of the most wide-ranging *heuristics*, or "rules of thumb," that influence consumer behavior. The EM article, however, had a distinct B2C bias. My goal here is to review these seven "rules of thumb" and apply them to the B2B tradeshow world.

1. Loss Aversion and The Endowment Effect.

Simply put, this heuristic states that human beings are motivated more by the *fear of loss* than by the *prospect of gain*. Makes sense to me. As hunter-gatherers, we lived an immediate existence; planning rarely went past the next meal, or the next tree. This innate attitude, then, tends to make us place a higher value on the things we already own, as opposed to things we may someday own. In the world of consumer sales, this is why "product trials" remain popular; trying something before buying it enables a seller to "remind" the user of the benefits they've already experienced, rather than trying to convince them of something intangible, such as future perceived "benefits."

Tradeshow connection. Getting someone to agree to a trial over the phone or via email can be a daunting task. The tradeshow environment provides prime face-to-face opportunities to entice prospects with a "mini-hands-on-trial," which, in turn, will make them more likely to sign up for an extended trial. More trials = more sales. Therefore, if your product or service lends itself to a free trial, not only should you consider adopting the model overall, but it should become a major component of your tradeshow program.

2. Anchoring and Framing

Communicating the value of a product or service is hard. Persuading a prospect to pay your asking price is harder. To make the price of a product or service more palatable, it is a common tactic to position your "target price" in between a few higher- and lower-priced options. This makes your target price appear reasonable and obtainable. We've all experienced this. Neuromarketing calls this "numerical bias."

But this numerical bias is more far-reaching than people think; its influence can be seen not just in pricing scenarios but also when people rate things. Experiments show that exposing subjects to key numbers (high and low) prior to having them "rate" different products profoundly affected how they rated nonrelated items, ideas, or experiences.

Tradeshow connection. In a word ... measurement. The psychologist Stuart Sutherland pointed out that in surveys that ask subjects to rate something, those subjects will be drawn to the middle rating choice, especially if the rating offers only three levels. The high rating *feels* overly generous; the low rating *feels* unduly punitive; but the middle rating feels "*just right*." Therefore, when constructing a metrics program in your exhibit, whether it's focused on your products or on your overall booth experience, make sure that the choices you give attendees are varied, wide-ranging, and specific enough to adjust for numerical bias. If they aren't, your results may not be as meaningful as they could be, and they could very well be misleading.

3. The Affect Heuristic and First Impressions

Pretty simple, really. As humans, when we meet a new person or visit a new place, our first assessment is *emotional*. Our rational assessments come later. However, this emotional

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memory is the most long-lasting, and the rational one fades fairly quickly. Again, this makes sense; “*You won’t remember what they said, but you will remember how they made you feel.*”

Tradeshow connection. Prospects’ first impression of your booth (read: brand) will have a profound impact on their future attitudes toward your company (and, subsequently, their buying behavior). Exhibitors (and Exhibit Houses) work hard to design exhibits that are open, are inviting, have good traffic flow, etc. They also integrate eye-catching videos, colorful brochures, and dramatic lighting to make exhibits stand out from the rest. All to make a good first impression.

However, an area that is *routinely* overlooked is the behavior of the booth staff. Study after study continually proves that the #1 thing that dictates tradeshow attendees’ attitude toward an exhibit (and the brand) **is their interaction with the booth staff** ... and you don’t get a second chance at that first impression. All of your cutting-edge booth design, cool technology, and free giveaways will come to nothing if your booth staff isn’t properly trained to engage and interact with attendees *in the tradeshow environment*.

4. Social Proof

Consumers often look to others as a shortcut to making good buying decisions.

Consumers often look to others as a shortcut to making good buying decisions. This is another intuitive rule of thumb that makes immediate sense. It’s all about word of mouth. If you have a positive buying experience, you’ll tell two or three of your friends. If you have a negative experience, you’ll tell 50 of your friends. It’s simple ... it’s obvious. However, with the advent of Social Media, a singular bad experience can go “viral,” and the metaphor is never more apt. Negative social media can “infect” your brand and take you down.

Controlling negative social media, however, is not the focus here; that requires a carefully planned and implemented campaign. However, tradeshow can help inoculate you against negative social media. How?

Tradeshow connection. As I’ve mentioned in many of my previous posts and articles, tradeshow are an ideal place to generate tons of positive social media content. Twitter, Instagram, FB, Snapchat, LinkedIn, etc., can all be populated with videos, pictures, and other media of happy consumers having a positive experience with your brand. Tradeshow are also uniquely positioned to enable you to build a large library of these assets in a relatively short time (three or four days). This content, then, can be carefully repurposed in myriad ways over a course of weeks and months.

How is this an inoculation against negative posts? If you fill your brand’s social media with all of this positive content, the few (inevitable) negative posts will be drowned out by sheer volume. Even if a few negative posts do force their way into the light of day, their credibility will be severely compromised when compared with all the “positivity” surrounding them.

5. Availability

This is a “neuroscience-y” way of saying “sticky.” If the information you’re attempting to communicate, especially at your tradeshow, is “sticky,” then it is mentally “available” to your targets when they are thinking about buying.

Again, this is a simple concept—make your message memorable, and consumers will remember you when they’re ready to buy something. Easy to say, not so easy to do, especially if you have a complex solutions story in a highly technical market. (Advanced ASIC Chip Synthesis anyone?)

This challenge is compounded at tradeshows. Many companies need to present their complex message and, in the space of a few minutes, make it clear, memorable, and “available.”

Tradeshow connection. Gamification. Again, I urge you to review several of our past posts, articles, and case studies to explore how companies from multiple vertical markets use gamification to tell their complex solution story in a direct, memorable way. Gamification also has the added benefit of being fun, and I don’t have to remind you that when your audience is having fun, they’re paying attention and forming powerful memories, making your solution story and brand promise—as neuromarketers would call it—available.

6. Hyperbolic Discounting and Emotional Forecasting

That’s 147 in Scrabble, by the way. As the EM article states, this is a fancy way of saying that people generally prefer their rewards now rather than later. (Why didn’t the neuromarketers just say that? Because ... science.)

Of course, there’s more to it than that, especially when you consider that once a person has received a reward, their memory of how good it made them feel wears off fairly quickly. Let’s apply this to how an attendee experiences your exhibit:

- First impression from booth staff ... good feeling level 1.
- *Promise* of a reward ... good feeling level 2.
- Engagement activity that makes messages “available” ... good feeling level 3.
- Attendee *receives a reward* for participating, and the rep defines next steps ... good feeling level 4.

Conversely, if you were to greet attendees as they enter the booth and **immediately** give them a giveaway, they are wrenched into good feeling #4; the rest of their time in your exhibit may not match top this initial euphoria, and they may not remember how receiving that gift made them feel. This is a wasted investment and a missed opportunity. Therefore, it is best to carefully choreograph the *good feelings* in your exhibit and spread them out across your attendee’s entire booth experience.

7. Binary Self-control and Impulse Purchases

People find it easier to totally abstain from something than to moderate their consumption of it. Tell me about.

This heuristic goes on to describe how, when we’re under stress, we tend to seek out treats to relieve that stress and reward ourselves for persevering.

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Tradeshow connection. I don’t know about you, but attending a tradeshow, and walking the floor, can be a highly stressful activity (to say nothing of **exhibiting** at a tradeshow). Therefore, attendees need treats. What a revelation! This “treat” can take many forms: massages, food or beverage, or simply a nice chair in which to sit.

However, I’d like to extend this idea beyond the physical.

I’ve learned that if you provide a simple, clear, and well-directed booth experience for attendees, enabling them to learn about who you are, what you do, and what you can do for them in a quick and clear manner, they will thank you for it. They will view this experience as a “treat,” compared with other booth experiences that were disorganized, off-putting, or just plain boring.

Clarity and focus are appreciated by attendees, and wouldn’t it be nice if they viewed visiting your exhibit as a treat?

Conclusion. There is not a lot left to be said other than that neuroscience is taking many of the marketing truisms we already know from our collective experiences and is better defining and quantifying them. This, in turn, enables us to better understand our target audience and create and implement better-informed strategies to better “get inside their heads.”

Knowing something is happening is one thing, but understanding WHY it’s happening so you can CHANGE it, is quite another. I look forward to seeing what neuromarketing reveals about us in the future.

Perhaps it will explain why I’ll walk the length of two football fields just to get a blinky ball.