

IT'S ALL IN THE HEAD

This issue our training and coaching specialists are all focusing on what's going on in the head of customers or what's filling your mind, as a beauty professional. What happens in the mind, how the brain ticks, the thinking and thought processes, all impact on everything. Reading up on the subject helps us get a handle on understanding our customers and understanding ourselves helping to make us more effective, more fulfilled and better at our jobs.

In beauty product development we often hear tag lines proclaiming the likes of 'the alliance of science and nature'. In our understanding of the brain and how it works when making choices – making decisions – or when it's carried in the head of a busy, busy modern day person, it's all about science (understanding how the brain works) and emotion. In other words we can understand how someone can weigh up the best beauty product for them...but then they see the luxurious packaging on another brand, or the celebrity endorsement, or the gift-with-purchase, and science or logic is pitched in the bin, for an impulsive emotional reaction... or is it?

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ABOUT TRAINING SPECIAL

Esprit Magazine's Training Special is a regular section focusing on supporting you in your jobs with features written by business, training, sales and communication experts helping you to grow your sales, communicate more effectively and keep up to date with the latest trends and research in retailing.

Training Special sets out to help you run your own 'business' even more successfully, whether your business is running your own counter, your department or your own pharmacy.

Please let us know what you like about this section, what you found useful and what you would like to read about in the next issue's Training Special, by emailing: andrea@esprit-magazine.com.au

Understanding the minds of buyers



BY DR ROB ANDERSON B.SC; PH.D

What if you could better understand what is going on in the minds of your prospective customers? What if you could understand more about their buying intentions? What if you could align your sales communication with their buying process? This article will provide you with some ideas about how to do this more effectively.

Research several decades ago by psychologist J P Guildford and published in his book "The Nature of Human Intelligence" showed that human decision-making involves three types of distinct but inter-related, sequential thinking processes:

1. cognition thinking to understand the situation a person is facing; then
2. divergent thinking to explore their options and alternatives and then
3. convergent thinking to select the best product or solution.

You may be wondering why this should matter to you in selling? If you can understand which type of thinking process a prospective

where, who, how and occasionally a why. As a result you will understand more about their situation and what they need or want. You will understand what is in their "mind's eye".

Buyer motivations are many and varied and a number of simple acronyms exist to help you remember these. One of these is "SPACED".

- S Safety
- P Performance
- A Appearance
- C Comfort
- E Economy
- D Durability

1. COGNITION THINKING

If you reflect for a moment on something important you have bought recently, firstly you will have explored your own current needs or desires by asking yourself what do I want; why do I want this; how will I look or feel; where can I get it; when do I need it; how much will it cost me; how difficult will it be to get it etc.? In this process you will have formed a mental picture of your current situation, your needs and wants. This process is called cognition thinking.

buyer is using you will know what stage they have reached in their buying process. You can then use the most relevant communication and selling approach.

When you are with your customer, if they are still trying to develop a mental picture and uncertain of what they need or want, then as the sales professional you can help them refine it. This is arguably the best time to engage with your customer. Here you should ask open-ended questions starting with what, when,

2. DIVERGENT THINKING

Returning to reflect on your own recent purchase, once you had formed your mental picture of your desired product, you would have then set about exploring your options, possibilities and alternatives.... you would have gone "shopping around". You would have asked yourself questions such as: where are the different places I can get this; can I get it cheaper there or here; is this better value than that; is this colour more suitable than that one; is this product easier to use than that; will this one last longer than the others; is this brand more reputable than the others; how will I look in this; what will my friends say, think, or feel if I buy this? This process is called divergent thinking.

One or two of these factors are likely to be more important to your customer than others.

Don't be tempted to second guess the customer's mental picture and jump straight to trying to sell something they may not need or want. Why customers buy is logical from their perspective not yours.

If you are talking with a potential customer who is in this thinking phase, you can now use your product knowledge and expertise.

From what you have understood you should help them explore their options by:

- showing them specific relevant features and advantages of products which match their mental picture;
- comparing and contrasting ie. differentiating relevant products (see later for more information on this important topic);
- showing them how the specific product works for them; highlighting the benefits;
- listening well to what the customer feeds back to you.

3. CONVERGENT THINKING

Now return to your own recent purchase. Once you had spent enough time exploring all your options and alternatives during your divergent thinking phase, your final decision was probably quite easy and quick – almost automatic. You would have been able to say – “I know this is the right choice now”, or “it’s obvious which one I must buy”. If this final choice wasn’t this straightforward you had not spent long enough in the two previous thinking processes of convergent and divergent thinking. Typically, buyers spend the least amount of time in making the final decision (convergent thinking) than in exploring their options (divergent thinking), than in understanding their situation, need and desires (cognition thinking).

So when your customer has explored all their options with you, their final decision should be a simple “I’ll buy this one thank you” because it fits most closely with the mental picture they developed in cognition thinking and refined during divergent thinking. If this is not their response, then you should go back to understanding their needs and wants and exploring further options to find a better fit.

Logic and Emotion in Buying

The information above highlights the structure underpinning a person’s thinking processes during buying decision-making. In addition, however, emotions play a significant role in why customers make the choices they do and the emerging world of neuroscience offers some fascinating insights.

Through his research, Stanford neuroscientist, Brian Knutson, has zeroed in on some primitive aspects of decision-making. He states: “We come equipped to assess potentially good things and potentially bad things...”. Knutson calls this ability “anticipatory emotions.” He believes: “...that these anticipatory emotions – the intuitive or more emotional regions of your brain are already priming the decision-making process...and foreshadowing outcomes...well in advance of when your cognitive areas are brought in to evaluate options...”

It is one of the challenges you face every time you talk or meet with a customer. The anticipatory emotions that your customers experience run the gamut from: this is going to be a waste of time; they’re going to pressure me into making a commitment that I don’t want to make because I’m still exploring my options; it’s not



going to be informative; they are going to bore me; they aren’t interested in me, only in selling me anything, and so on.

The anticipatory emotions of your customers, the ones that are already priming your customer’s decision-making process and foreshadowing outcomes well before they meet you, are often times anticipating the worst outcome. So, when you start the discussion by saying... “let me show you our new promotion” or “here’s a new product which has just been launched” you may have just validated their worst fears and expectations. The customer may not want to hear about the products that are important to you and their reaction may be a swift move on or to the exit.

Differentiating your Products

You must think about how you manage the first few moments with your customer, how you create the best possible first impressions and how you grab your customer’s attention. Grabbing attention is particularly critical during the customer’s divergent thinking phase when you have to differentiate products. This is reinforced by the story below.

A college professor walks into class with an empty glass jar. Without saying anything, he grabs some large stones and places them in the jar until it’s filled to the top. Then, he lifts up the jar and asks, “Is this jar full?” The class says, “Yes.” The professor says, “No, it’s not.” He reaches under his desk and grabs a handful of gravel. He pours the gravel into the jar over the large stones. He holds up the jar and asks, “Is this jar full?” Once again, the class says, “Yes.” The professor says, “No, it’s not.” He reaches under his desk and pulls out a bag of sand. He pours the sand into the jar, over the large stones and gravel. He holds up the jar and asks, “Is this jar full?” The class answers correctly this time and says, “No, it’s not.” The professor smiles and says, “You’re right.” He pulls a glass of water out from under his desk and pours it into the jar of stones, gravel and sand. He then asks, “What is the message I’m trying to convey

to you?” And someone in the class says, “You are trying to show us that there is always room for more.” And the professor says, “No. The message is that if you want to get the large stones in the jar, you have to start by putting them in first.”

The point of this story is that if you want to deliver a sales message to your customer that is memorable, it’s best to use a powerful framework. First, you need to determine what the US-based communications specialist – Corporate Visions – calls Power Positions. Power Positions are the “large stones” of your message and pass three crucial tests: they are unique to you, important to the customer, and are defensible through proof.*

In summary, as a sales professional you should be aware of the type of thinking process being used by your customer when you first meet with them and then throughout your discussion. Have they come to see you whilst trying to refine their mental picture of their situation, needs or wants – they are still using a cognition thinking process? Are they exploring their options and alternatives – they are using divergent thinking? Or, are they about to select the best option to match what’s in their mind’s eye – convergent thinking... and importantly very close to buying. As a result of this awareness you will be able to connect with them during their buying process using appropriately aligned sales communications. In addition, when your customer is ready to receive information on your products you must differentiate them strongly and memorably.

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*Corporate Vision’s Power Messaging programme and www.sellingsecrets.com.