

Cutting through the clutter:

marketing products in today's information overload environment.

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In today's marketing world, we are constantly bombarded with information. Some estimates state that we are confronted with 3,500 messages every day... that is 1 message every 15 seconds. Typically this information is delivered to us visually (billboards, web site banners and pop-up ads, print, leaflets and so on) or auditorily (radio and television for example). Worryingly for the marketing community, research has proved that only a fraction of this information enters our awareness. Moreover even information that has entered our awareness momentarily may not activate the brain for long enough to be understood and remembered later on.

It is therefore critically important for marketing professionals to consider what types of information/message delivery will:

- 1) Cut through the clutter and capture the consumers attention.
- 2) Be engaging for a long-enough duration for the message to be understood and remembered later on, for example at the next purchasing opportunity.
- 3) Have a favourable attitude towards it, eliciting a positive rather than negative attitude to the message and the brand.

This article has two parts. In the first part, scientific research is presented which explains how our attention behaves in today's cluttered environment. This research demonstrates that awareness plummets in situations of information over-load. The major principles discovered by attention and memory research are then described. These principles prescribe the types of information delivery that will be effective for marketing activity.

In the second part, the iKyp (information to Keep in your pocket) product characteristics are analysed in respect of the scientific principles discussed. This analysis highlights some of the iKyp features that can make them more effective marketing tools than other media/marketing activities.

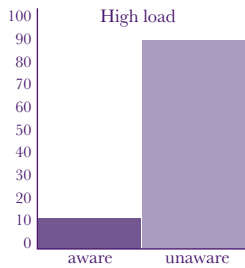


Figure 1. Percentage of people reporting seeing a critical stimulus in a situation of high information load awareness in a study by Cartwright-Finch and Lavie (Cognition, 2006)

Key findings of research into attention

1. Awareness plummets in situations of information overload

Much research has shown that in situations of information overload (produced either by a rapid rate of information delivery), or by showing more than five stimuli to people at the same time), awareness virtually plummets: A phenomenon termed “inattention blindness” or “attentional blink” (in the case of rapid delivery of information). People report “blindness” to all sorts of information in such overload situations. As can be seen in Figure 1 only 10% of the people notice the presence of a critical stimulus (for example a meaningful shape such as a cross) when this is presented in situations of overload. Brain scanning studies (using the method of “functional imaging”) have examined brain responses to situations of information load. These studies have found that the brain ceased to respond to visual information that people were watching in situations of high information load.

Advertisers will often rely on repeat airings of an ad, believing that this will increase the ability of the message to cut through. However recent research shows that in situations of high information load not only does the brain not register visual information in the first instance but it also does not “see” the information when it is repeatedly delivered.

For the marketing community the key issue here is consideration of the context of the marketing activity. It may be more effective to alter the context of the message to reduce clutter than to simply repeat an ineffective ad. Below I describe suggestions for how to make sure the marketed message gets through in today's information-overload environment .



Brain activity works when attended



No brain activity to presented words when unattended in a situation of high visual load

Figure 2. Shows results from a brain scanning study that found that the brain no longer responds to words presented visually in a situation of high visual information load

2. Cutting through the clutter with multi-sensory presentation

The effects of information overload have been typically found in situations where all the information is delivered to one sense: vision only or hearing only, for example. Research using multi-sensory presentation (for example both vision and hearing) has discovered that although people have very limited processing capacity for information in one sense (for example in vision) they can share processing capacity more efficiently between the different senses (for example, between vision and hearing).

This means that people can perceive more information if some of it is delivered visually whilst some of it is delivered auditorily. Figure 3 shows the results of a brain scanning experiment that shows clear brain response to visual information in a situation of high auditory information load. This contrasts sharply with the results from the experiment shown in Figure 2 where the brain showed no response to words presented visually in a situation of visual information load.

Even information presented very rapidly that would normally cause “attentional blink” may not do so when some of the information is presented visually and some is presented auditorily.

An important point here is that the two (auditory and visual) messages have to agree: otherwise the dual sensory (both visual and auditory) method will not be effective (it will in fact exacerbate confusion as the two messages conflict).

Multi-sensory attraction- We have the ability to integrate information received simultaneously from all the senses. Paying attention to one sense, for example tactile information, will draw visual attention to the location of the tactile information and vice versa. Multi-sensory delivery therefore helps to concentrate attention and integrate all the relevant information. Media and marketing tools which use single-sense delivery in a cluttered environment such as leaflets, posters and press ads, are more prone to the effects of attention overload than tools with multi-sensory characteristics.

Odd one out capture of attention- Much attention research has shown that a unique stimulus-say red among blue (see Figure 4) or an odd-shaped stimulus-would capture attention even in situations of high information load. This attention capture applies both to vision and hearing: an odd sound will also capture attention even when people listen to a very rapid stream of sounds.

3. Engaging for long enough to allow understanding and memory

Gaining the consumers attention is obviously critically important to marketers. However this is often pointless unless the consumer understands and remembers the intended message.

Recent research has demonstrated that the duration of exposure to the information delivery has a critical impact on our ability to understand and remember the message.

Information displayed for short-durations is rapidly forgotten, whereas allowing the target audience the time to think about the meaning of the message will ensure far better memory. This is one of the most fundamental principles revealed by memory research: the level of processing of the information delivered dictates how much is remembered later on. Deep encoding that involves thinking about the meaning of the information leads to far better memory than shallow information processing that just involves visual scanning of the material. It is therefore critical to think about ways to engage people's attention to marketing messages long enough to produce durable memory of it.

This evidence flies in the face of current advertising practice. There has been a trend towards creating TV and radio ads which are very "busy" with frequent, rapid scene cuts-partly in an attempt to maximize the amount of information carried in the ad. Also over recent times spot lengths have reduced from c. 45-30 seconds to include more 10-20 seconds ads. In addition outdoor advertising will often use fast changing banners or brand messages. This may be a factor in why many advertising campaigns do not achieve their intended result.

4. Favourable attitude

Psychological research has established that repeated exposure to some visual material leads people to prefer that material over new material. This is termed the "mere exposure effect". This principle is often use by advertisers who use a high OTS (Opportunity To See) media plan. However, recent research has shown that exposure to information that is delivered as a distractor (an ad that disrupts a TV program or a pop-up ad on the web for example) has the opposite effect by creating a negative attitude to the ad. It is therefore critical to ensure that people feel that they have chosen to pay attention to the marketing message and do not treat it as a distractor that they wish to ignore.

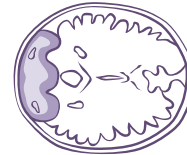


Figure 3. Brain response to visual information is clearly seen in a situation of auditory information load



Figure 4. An odd-colour frame will capture attention to the object in it

Analysis of the iKyp in light of these scientific principles.

1. Cutting through the clutter with multi-sensory presentation

The first part of this report makes it clear that people are not aware of information presented in situations of information overload. A main feature of the iKyp (information to Keep in your pocket) is that instead of bombarding the consumer with information, the iKyp delivers information via different and discrete components (leaflet inserts, samples or other elements that can be pulled out of the iKyp carrier). The “chunked-up” nature of the information delivery avoids problems of information overload.

The iKyp also presents information by using more than more than one of the senses. Although the main information delivery is visual, the iKyp also heavily utilises the sense of touch through its use, for example, of “knowledge wheels” that allow the user to dial-in various messages. Other iKyp variants incorporate information delivery via games, competitions and audio.

The multi-sensory presentation used by the iKyp helps to concentrate attention and integrate all the relevant information across the senses, in line with the “multi-sensory attraction principle” outlined on page 3.

2. “Odd one out” capture of attention

The iKyp is a relatively new product that is very different from the traditional products (direct marketing letters, leaflets and folded cards for example) that it competes with. This helps the iKyp to capture the attention of the end user.

3. Engaging attention for long enough to allow understanding and memory

This is perhaps the strongest point of the iKyp: By using pull-out information, wheels, games, measuring tools and so on the iKyp is likely to engage attention for longer and encourage deeper processing than typical marketing tools (e.g. TV, web or poster ads). This feature makes the iKyp convey messages in a way that allows for both better understanding and better memory as compared with other marketing tools. Moreover the pocket-size nature plus the “fun” and tactile aspects are likely to make the consumer keep and use it for longer. This gives the opportunity for repeated exposure to the product thus increasing the likelihood of a positive attitude to the product and better retention of messages.

4. Favourable attitude

Another strong feature of the iKyp is that the consumer is unlikely to treat it as a distractor, instead the information presented with the iKyp will be read at a time, order and pace that the consumer chooses. This means that the information presented by the iKyp will be treated favourably and the effect of a negative attitude to distracting information is sure to be avoided.



Figure 5. Shows elements that need to be pulled out, thus involving the sense of touch, these pull-out inserts include a plastic tyre tread gauge with a very different usage, texture and feel

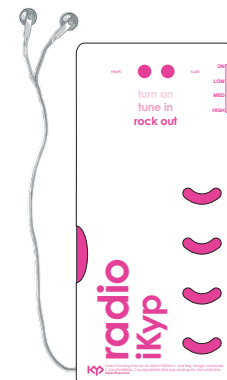


Figure 6. Shows an example of a iKyp that incorporates a radio. This product transmits some of the information visually and some auditorily, hence overcoming the information processing capacity limits that can occur in some traditional media situations

To find out more about the iKyp, log on to www.iKyp.com or call +44 (0)20 7016 8833