the smartest ways for marketers to tap into consumers' innate intelligence

Nancy Harhut had no intention of putting herself at risk of being arrested for solicitation. She was just behaving like all smart marketers – trying to advertise her products where she knew consumers would see them.

During a recent webinar hosted by think**tv**, Harhut – whose next book, *Using Behavioral Science in Marketing*, launches next month – told a story about trying to sell chocolate bars as a teenager to support her high school.

Though setting up at the mall might have been a smart business move, it brought the attention of a local guard who asked her to leave or face legal consequences. Eventually, she acquiesced, but not before gamely asking the guard if he was interested in a chocolate bar himself. In response, Harhut watched him reach behind and, instead of a set of handcuffs, bring out his wallet.

"It was not exactly a logical rational response. And that is because he was relying on his innate intelligence," Harhut explained. "And the truth is, your customers and prospects do this more often than you might think."

Building upon the research in books such as *Thinking, Fast & Slow* by Daniel Kahneman, Harhut reminded the audience that your customers and prospects will default to hardwired behaviours — certain automatic, instinctive, and reflexive responses that are ingrained in humans ("innate intelligence"). She then went on to outline three key principles of Innate Intelligence that can drive action for marketers:

1. It's not about how people think but how they feel
2. Your target's choices are less rational and more reactional
3. Humans rely on auditory cues

Keeping these behavioural science principles in mind and incorporating them into your campaigns will prompt increased engagement and response to your advertising.

Starting with the first rule – it's not about how people *think*, it's about how they *feel*; Nancy outlined four key principles to keep in mind:

Principle #1: Use emotion to connect with customers and prospects

Seasoned marketers know they get more engagement through emotion, but Harhut wasn't simply talking about tugging at people's heartstrings. What's important is tying the campaign to an emotional response, focusing less on the product and more on the emotional benefit, like helping them avoid a challenge or an ongoing pain.

The examples: Harhut harkened back to an Ottawa-based business intelligence company called Cognos, now owned by IBM. While its software is designed to provide data-based insights to large enterprises, she showed advertising creative that described its solution as "the antacid for a diet of tough decisions." Salesforce-owned Slack took a similar approach with an ad featuring a woman on a unicorn. A happy metaphor for what it's like to sit through fewer meetings, thanks to Slack's messaging tool. In both examples, the ads chose to focus on the emotional upside of using the products, instead of the detailed product attributes, to positive effect.

Principle #2: Showing customers how to avoid pain can be better than talking about gains

So many brands focus on showing off their products' great features. Instead, Harhut said they might want to focus on "loss aversion," or marketing that taps into what customers fear.

"There's nothing wrong with benefits," she said, but a little well-placed loss aversion is very important "because people are feeling those losses twice as powerfully, and they're twice as motivated to avoid them."

The examples: Think of a cash-conscious consumer who's on the fence about ordering flowers for their friend Cathy online. Then, they see a message on the flower shop's website: "Order Cathy's gift today or pay more! Prices increase tomorrow!" This creates a sense of urgency and drives action. Harhut said this is the same reason Blackberry, which makes software to avoid cyber threats, published a "threat report" on the rising number of incidents where hackers compromise IT security.

Principle #3: If it's ours, we feel it's more valuable

Many people have sold their homes over the past few years, and some of them might have been unpleasantly surprised when their realtor ran the comps and told them what it was worth. This is tied to "the endowment effect," which means we can over-value items where we feel a sense of ownership.

The examples: Tell a consumer they have "unused credit" in an account you created on their behalf, Harhut suggested. "Accept or surrender" your stake in a lottery. Keep your registration active by logging into a website to avoid being deleted. These all work because people realize their accounts or profiles – something that they "own" – will expire.

Principle #4: We feel guilty if we don't pay back

"If someone does a favor for us, we want to return the favor. We want to even up the score," Harhut said. Another word to describe this is "reciprocity," and it works as well in advertising as in trading favours with your next-door neighbour.

The examples: Harhut showed a campaign from Sun Life Financial that offered consumers a free-to-use tool to research their financial goals, suggesting it could be used to prepare for "life's important moments." A similar campaign from Nationwide Financial talked about a gift "chosen just for you" by an advisor. Harhut noted that people feel guilty if they don't respond to such offers.

Harhut summarized by saying “our choices are less rational than we often realize, they’re more reactive: Reaction comes first, while reaching a rational thought comes later. We are hard-wired to react now.”

For more details on Principle #1 (Emotion) and an outline of the other 2 Principles (More Reactional than Rational & Auditory Cues), watch the complete on-demand version of this practical and highly rated webinar featuring Canadian-specific brand examples throughout.

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