



CRACKING THE MEMORY CODE

Memory is the invisible force that makes everything in marketing work, or not. Here's how to use it to create an unfair advantage.



Cracking the Memory Code is part of VCCP's Challenger Series.

VCCP's logo is a young girl standing up to a bear. It encapsulates our commitment to face up to life's biggest challenges. We were founded as a challenger agency alongside O2, and when O2 went from dead last to category leader, we remained a challenger agency.

Challenger doesn't mean underdog. It means taking on the challenges in the category, and winning - a behaviour that tends to keep brands at the front, not the back.

The Challenger Series is therefore about embracing the industry's big questions, and answering them.



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THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Are you the bit that gets remembered or forgotten?



01

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

What's on the other side of a penny? Some of the more observant among you will have noticed. But the vast majority of us, despite repeatedly being exposed to, don't have a clue.

We think of humans as being built to remember. But in reality, we're built to forget.

That explains why study after study shows such poor recall of advertising. After only a couple of days, most people can neither recall our advertising nor remember who it was for. The elephant in the room is that most people don't remember what we make.

That's not a failure of our industry. It's a success of the human mind. In being exposed to thousands of messages a day, it has evolved to filter out what's important from what's insignificant. If it doesn't feel important, it won't get remembered.

But if human memory is weak, it is also powerful. What gets remembered can be remembered for a lifetime. Not just treasured childhood memories. Cornetto ads stay in there too, waiting to be woken up by a passing ice cream van.

This reflects the binary way we talk about memory. Someone either has a memory like an elephant, or a memory like a sieve - they remember forever, or forget instantly.

In truth, memory is both. We discard what doesn't feel important, and forever hold on to what does.

Understanding the difference is what separates unremarkable advertising from unforgettable.

So the question for anyone working in this industry should be - will my marketing be the bit that's remembered, or the bit that's forgotten?



IF TALKING ABOUT PENNIES, ELEPHANTS AND SIEVES SEEMS TRIVIAL, HERE'S WHY IT'S CRITICALLY IMPORTANT TO WHAT WE DO

"Brand salience is ... the propensity of the brand to be thought of in buying situations. This is reflected in the quantity (how many) and the quality (how fresh and relevant) of the network of brand information in memory, or the brand's 'share of mind'. Salience differentials have a huge impact on individuals' personal brand repertoires, and at aggregate level they do much to explain the market share differences between brands."¹

This summary from Jenni Romaniuk and Byron Sharp is written with the rigour and complexity of academic research. But its implications for us are simple and enormous.

Brands are big because they are big in our minds.

Romaniuk and Sharp go on in that research paper to explain that it matters very little what consumers think of our brand. What matters fundamentally is that they do.

Memory defines not just whether our brands are thought of, but how they're thought of, and whether they're bought. Being memorable unlocks almost everything marketing sets out to do.

If following the brand effect on marketing isn't enough, how about following the markets? IG Group has a market capitalisation of £2.66 billion. They offer trading services and advice. Their 'Learn to Trade' service shows the relationship between the most recognised brands in the world and their share price performance. Apple. Google. Amazon. Microsoft. Coca-Cola. Samsung. Toyota. Mercedes Benz. McDonald's. Disney. Higher recognition correlates with higher returns. Memory makes money.²

Consumers don't remember everything, but what they do remember, they act upon. What gets thought of gets bought.

¹ <https://www.marketingscience.info/wp-content/uploads/staff/2015/08/9419.pdf>

² <https://www.ig.com/en/trading-strategies/what-are-the-top-10-most-recognisable-brands-in-the-world--200217>



MEMORY MAKES MONEY



INTRODUCING THE MEMORY INDEX

So if memory is so important, what gets remembered?

We set out to find out. Our proprietary Memory Index tested the people who matter most - the general public - to see what adverts they remember, whether they could name the brand, and what it was they could recall.

This isn't just VCCP work - we tested some of the best work from across the industry and the last sixty years - to see what had stuck, and why.

What we found most incredible is how much people can remember - when they want to. For every nine out of ten ads that end up on the scrapheap of memory, there's one that we carry around forever. Ads not aired since the 1970s can still sit fresh in people's memories.

That's not Campaign readers. It's someone who has no idea what a distinctive asset is, but thought the Hamlet ad was funny enough to remember it half a century later. It isn't necessarily the ads we venerate as an industry either. When it comes to memory, characterful beats clever every time.

We know that at its best, our industry can make incredibly memorable communications that last beyond the duration of a campaign and even a career. And that being memorable is what counts at the shelf, the search engine and the till. So how do we do it? And perhaps an even more pressing question for our industry: how often are we doing it?

THE MEMORY INDEX'S MOST MEMORABLE ADS



Cadbury Gorilla
2007



Cadbury Mum's Birthday
2018



Coca-Cola Holidays Are Coming
1995



Haribo Boardroom
2014



Specsavers Rollercoaster
2000

THE METHODOLOGY



VCCP commissioned the UK's leading commercial behavioural psychology consultancy and partner business, Cowry Consulting, to explore the science behind memorable advertising. This involved an exploration of 100 of the nation's favourite ads from the last six decades, selected from existing opinion polls to be put under scrutiny.

Cowry Consulting tested the ads using two scientific techniques for memory encoding. Firstly, a recognition and recall test to understand how embedded the adverts are in people's memories. And secondly, an implicit

response test to understand the complexity of emotional responses to the adverts.

The study gives us a fresh perspective on what drives long-term effectiveness, understanding what magic combinations of ingredients create memory-making advertising.

You'll spot that we've used the findings throughout this report, but if you would like to talk to us about in more detail, please email us at memoryindex@vccp.com.

MOST MEMORABLE ADS BY CATEGORY

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MEMORY MAKERS

What does what we do, do?
Forgotten brands
Unmissable, unforgettable



02

MEMORY MAKERS

What does what we do, do?

As marketing people, we get asked a lot of complex questions: how can a demand-side platform help my business; how will AI revolutionise creative?

So how about a simple one? What does what we do, do?

Does it make people buy things? Not necessarily and not directly. The excellent IPA datamine tells us that the most effective marketing takes around six months to turn up at the till. Depending on the category, 95% of the customers seeing your message might be out of market for the next two years. Seemingly the more we chase short-term sales, the less we sell.

Does it make customers love things? Byron Sharp's work with the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute showed us that customers tend to love what they buy, not buy what they love.³ In relationships, habits come first.

The iconic Porsche ad doesn't make us fall in love with a Porsche as a child. It just reminds us that we did.



³ Conceptualizing and measuring brand salience, Jenni Romaniuk and Byron Sharp

The Intention-Behaviour Gap: people form decisions to change their behaviour (e.g. being physically active on a regular basis) but do not take action. Studies have shown that intentions explain only 36% of the variance in behaviour and that changing behavioural intentions does not necessarily lead to behaviour change. Rhodes, R. E., & de Bruijn, G. J. (2013). How big is the physical activity intention-behaviour gap? A meta-analysis using the action control framework. *British journal of health psychology*, 18(2), 296-309.

Porsche | Schoolboy - The quickest way to build memories is to tap into the ones that are already there.

Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SWPHKU1XZU

Cadbury's Mum's Birthday does little to persuade viewers of the qualities of Cadbury chocolate. It builds on the positive associations we already have with Cadbury: the purple, the shop, remembering being young and small at the counter. When VCCP started working with Cadbury, our first action was not to create a new position. It was to go back to the one it had had since its origin. Mum's Birthday builds on an emotion Cadbury has been tapping into for 200 years: generosity. It has proven a highly effective piece of communication.

It's no accident then that Cadbury adverts appear twice in the top ten of our Memory Index. And in case you're wondering if we rigged the research, one of them wasn't made by VCCP. Cadbury has remained committed to keep talking about the same core beliefs in the same distinctive brand world - catnip for memory.

For the same memory-building reasons, Cadbury's most recent 200 year anniversary work doesn't just draw on generosity, it recreates that iconic advert. It strengthens memories, and makes them more likely to be

acted on in the very place it depicts: the counter. Just as Romaniuk and Sharp found, the more likely you are to think about the brand at the buying moment, the more likely you are to buy it. Whoever gets remembered, gets revenue.

Our job is not easy, but it's no more complicated than that: to get our clients' brands and products remembered, ideally at the moment when it makes the most difference to the business.

If that sounds simple, it doesn't mean it's easy. Competition for attention is nothing new, but the volume of communications has grown steadily during the last decade according to independent sources like Ofcom. In the battle for attention, marketers are increasingly outnumbered, no matter how strong their budgets.

That means before being unforgettable, brands have to be unmissable. But there are as many small advertising formats as there are small ads (while brands who would never have advertised at the back of a catalogue seem mysteriously happy to advertise at the bottom of a website).

It has never been easier to be invisible.



Cadbury | Gorilla - A regular in polls on the UK's favourite adverts.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2016/jan/07/how-we-made-cadburys-gorilla-ad>



Cadbury | Mum's Birthday - Building on existing memories with emotion.



Cadbury | Yours for 200 Years | Mum's Birthday - Spot the difference? Revisiting strong memory associations in the place they matter most: the shop counter.

FORGOTTEN BRANDS

The unfortunate consequence is, most of what we do is being forgotten.

Surveys vary but the results are the same.

Last year, 59% of Americans recalled less than 1 in 10 of the ads they'd actually seen in the last 24 hours.⁴

89% of global advertising isn't recalled at all.⁵

Less than 16% of adverts can be recalled and correctly attributed.⁶

Different surveys asking the same question and getting the same answer: most of what our industry makes is going straight through the sieve.

Our communications simply didn't feel important enough to remember.

That's the advertising that gets looked at. A third of online ads displayed are still never seen by anyone.⁷

In North America, a report by the highly regarded Association of National Advertisers showed that \$22 billion in media spend a year is wasteful or unproductive.⁸

4 Marketing Brew: <https://www.marketingbrew.com/stories/2023/07/18>
5 <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/context/1523980#:~:text=Which%20is%20why%20just%204,because%20advertising%20ignores%20most%20people.%22>
6 Ehrenberg-Bass Institute
7 <https://www.iabuk.com/opinions/uk-viewability-hits-highest-point-ever#:~:text=UK%20impressions%20hit%2070.9%25%20viewability,increase%20quality%20following%20advertiser%20demands>
8 <https://www.ana.net/miccontent/show/id/r-2023-12-ana-programmatic-media-supply-chain-transparency-study>

UNMISSABLE, UNFORGETTABLE

Being remembered asks us to be first unmissable, then unforgettable. To be unexpected enough to be noticed, but consistent enough to be remembered. It is no mean feat to be both unexpected and consistent.

But when your customer walks into the aisle your product is positioned in, or sits down in front of an empty search box to research your category, being unforgettable is everything.

So why are we spending 2024 talking about the blindingly obvious?

Because not enough of us are doing it. At its worst, marketing can feel like stock language on stock photography. Things we forget making, and our customers don't remember seeing.

At its best marketing is a magical profession that keeps brands at the top of people's minds and on the tip of their tongues.

So how do we do that?



DESIRE PATHS: HOW MEMORY WORKS

What gets remembered?
Desire paths
The levers of memory

03

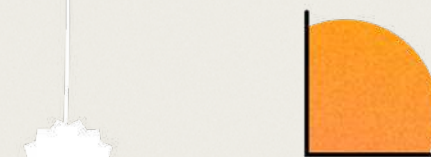
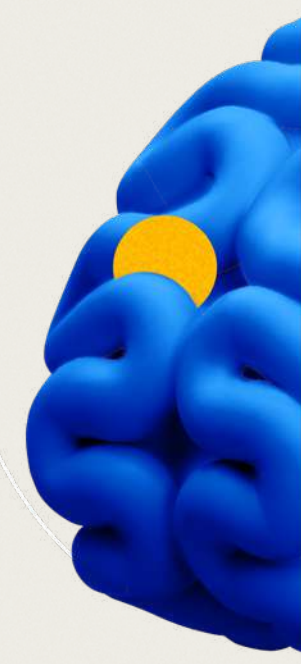
WHAT GETS REMEMBERED?

What gets remembered is really two questions: what do we store and what do we recall.

So what do we store and what do we recall?

Behind all the complex neuroscience is a simple answer:

**WE STORE WHAT FEELS IMPORTANT,
AND WE RECALL WHAT'S EASIEST**



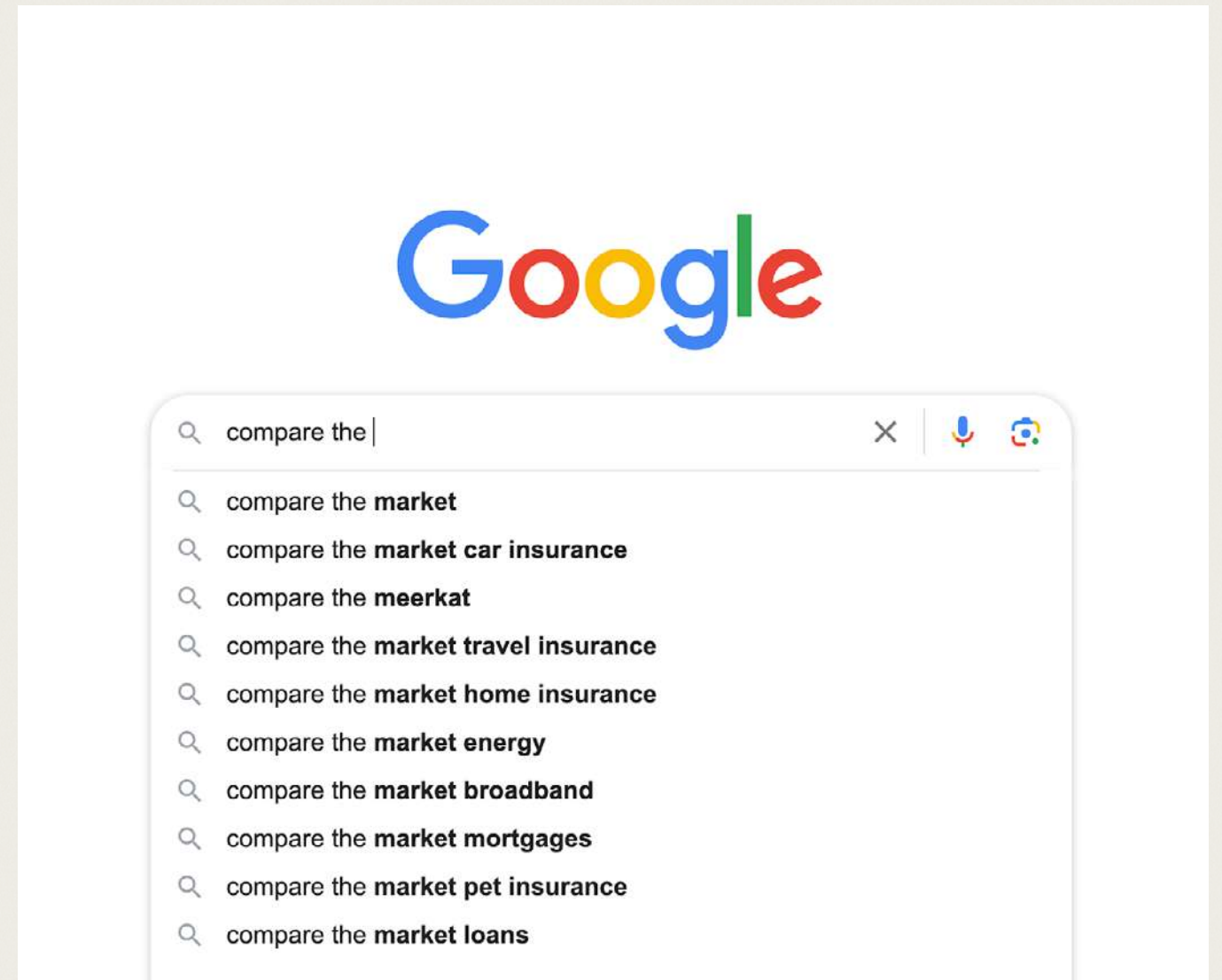
MEMORY ISN'T REALLY STORAGE, IT'S MORE LIKE A HABIT

The more we think about something, the more we think about something.

That's true for both storing and recalling: we strengthen a memory when we are reminded about it, and we strengthen a memory when we remember it. Memory gets strengthened both ways.

Seeing a Compare The Meerkat ad reminds me to search for Compare the Market; searching for Compare The Market reminds me of the advert.

You're more likely to be killed by a champagne cork than a shark. But because we remember shark attacks from news articles, we think they're the more credible threat. Availability Bias means it isn't just our actions that are driven by ease of remembering: it's our beliefs. We don't just remember Compare The Market better, we believe it's a better comparison site because we remember it.



Marketers and neuroscientists might not drink in the same bars, but we work in the same fields: understanding and working with the human brain. There's no reason any of us would know about Hebbian Theory, the 1940s neuroscience principle. But it explains why memory associations are fundamental to marketing working on a deep brain level. Memory isn't just a trend in marketing. It's how marketing works.

Hebbian Theory tells us that "cells that fire together, wire together".⁹ It's been described as the brain's evolutionary superpower. It makes it easier for us to find important things later.¹⁰

It means that things that we remember together tend to get recalled together. Walkers and crisps, holidays and easyJet, chocolate and Cadbury. It means at search engines and shopping centres brands are more likely to be recalled and then bought. 50% of marketers consider top of mind an important metric.¹² What's odd is that 50% don't. Perhaps that's the apocryphal 50% of marketing that isn't working.

And as Google dangles cookies over the marketing food waste bin, the importance of being remembered at the right moment - and not just targeted - becomes even more important.¹³

It has significant implications for the way we think about creating memories for brands. Memories aren't just stored files, or things in a cupboard somewhere in our minds waiting to be picked off a shelf. They're links between things. Memories do not exist in isolation. To be stored and then recalled, they have to be joined together.

Granted, it's hard to visualise neural pathways, the links between neurons inside your own mind. But funnily enough, pathways in real life work just the same way.

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebbian_theory

¹⁰ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/science/774840/Super-Human-gene-networks-people-learn-evolve-hebbian>

¹¹ <https://provokedinsights.com/2021-trends/>

¹² Farris, Paul W.; Neil T. Bendle; Phillip E. Pfeifer; David J. Reibstein (2010). Marketing Metrics: The Definitive Guide to Measuring Marketing Performance.

¹³ <https://www.emarketer.com/content/google-turns-off-cookies-30-million-chrome-users-that-s-just-1>

HEBBIAN THEORY IN ACTION

Neuroscience meets brand salience: brands that are remembered for a category are most likely to be spontaneously recalled when thinking about that category.

| | | INDUSTRY LEADER IN UNAIDED AWARENESS |
|----|-------------------------|---|
| 01 | eCommerce |  |
| 02 | Footwear |  |
| 03 | Technology |  |
| 04 | Toys |  |
| 05 | Cleaning Supplies |  |
| 06 | Non-Alcoholic Beverages |  |
| 07 | Personal Care |  |
| 08 | Furniture |  |
| 09 | Insurance |  |
| 10 | Luxury Items |  |
| 11 | Automotive |  |
| 12 | Packaged Food |  |
| 13 | Banking & Investing |  |
| 14 | Hospitality & Tourism |  |
| 15 | Clothing |  |
| 16 | Alcoholic Beverages |  |
| 17 | Outdoors |  |
| 18 | Beauty |  |

Hebbian Theory in action: I experience a brand in a specific category, then when I think of that category I name that brand (US research).¹¹

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED A PATCH OF WORN GRASS CUTTING BETWEEN TWO PATHWAYS? THERE'S A NAME FOR THEM

Town planners call them desire paths. Places people actually want to walk, rather than where we want them to walk. It's often the shortest or easiest route to where we want to get to.

They're almost exactly how memories work.

Something makes us walk that pathway for the first time. Maybe we're late, maybe there's an ice cream truck, maybe we've just seen someone else do it.

At first it doesn't leave much of a trace. And if you don't walk down it again, it will disappear. But if you keep walking it, soon you'll have a deeply-worn path that you're inclined to follow again and again. A desire path.

Emotions act like steamrollers, carving deep memory pathways quickly.

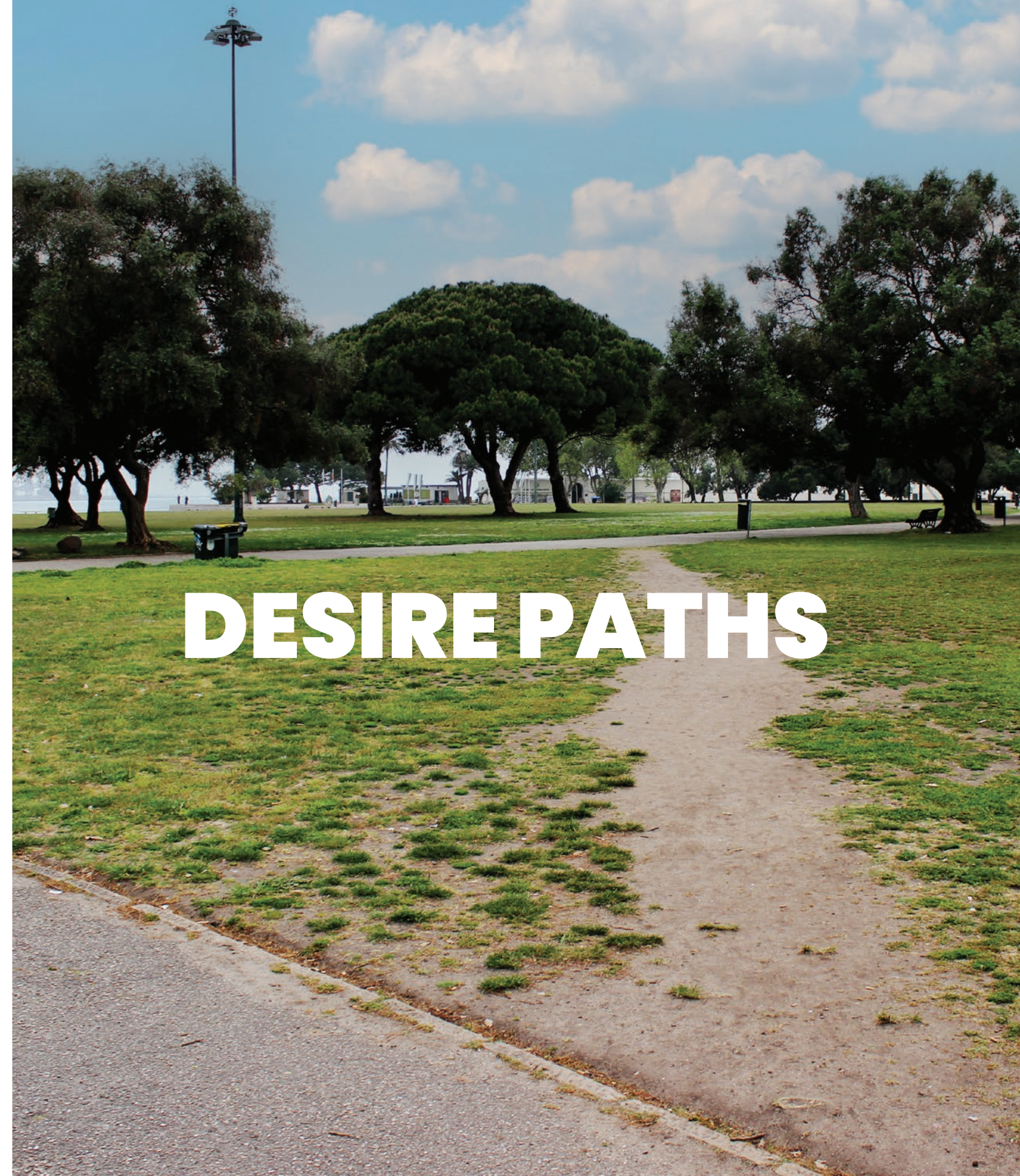
Ultimately these well-worn pathways become the highways of the mind, the things we think about every day.

Desire paths give us a useful way to think about getting brands to be remembered. It means simply making brands 'memorable' is a weak objective.

What's more helpful is to think about what our brands are already remembered for - the pathways - and to encourage and deepen those associations.

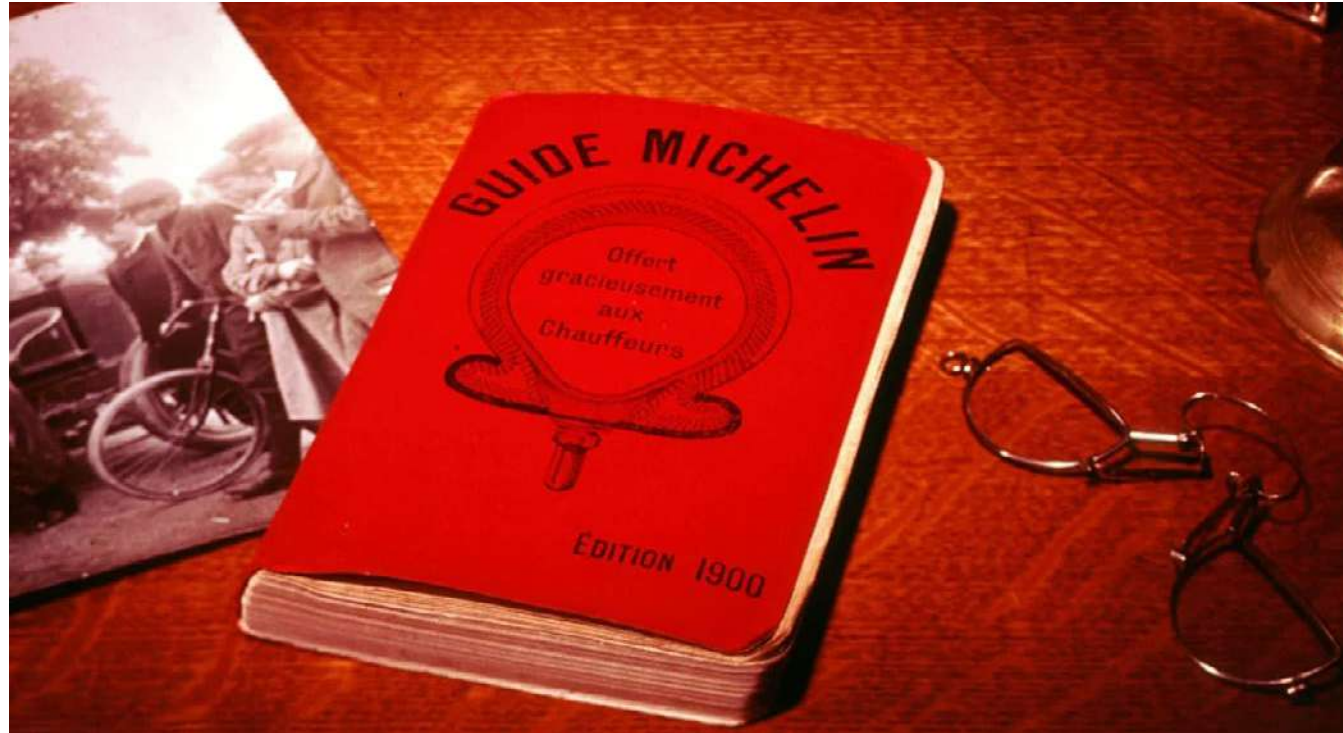
Like town planners trying to build pathways where people don't want to go, we have a hard - and expensive - time trying to get customers to think things they don't already think about our brands. Strengthening associations that are already there, that link our brands to actions that make sense to the consumer, are much more likely to succeed.

Conversely, there's a double reward for making your brand easier to remember at the right moment. People don't just think easier is easier, they think easier is better. We call it the path of least resistance effect. Being easy to remember doesn't just mean you're top of mind, it means you're top of the favourites list too. They're called desire paths for a reason: they're not just shortcuts. They're places people want to go.



BRAND EXTENSION HEAVEN

The challenge (and expense) of trying to create new thoughts in consumers' minds is often dramatised when it comes to brand extensions. The Michelin Guide and Colgate toothbrushes built on deep mental associations and thrived. Colgate Meals and Levi's Tailored Classics floundered. That's why picking the path of least resistance is a commercial imperative.



Source: blog.hubspot.com/marketing/brand-extensions



Brand extension heaven: helping me do more of what I already do with you - the Michelin Guide and Colgate toothbrushes.

Source: www.aliccan.com/product-page/colgate-360-soft-medium-toothbrushes-8-ct

THE GRAVEYARD



Source: blog.hubspot.com/marketing/brand-extensions



The graveyard of brand extensions: Colgate Meals (albeit mystery surrounds whether this was a true NPD launch), Levi's Tailored Classics. Even power brands are only powerful where they have powerful associations. The barrier is not permission, but memory association.

Source: www.blog.hubspot.com/marketing/brand-extensions

THE LEVERS OF MEMORY

If memory associations are so important, how do we make them?

Cowry, VCCP's behavioural science experts, have isolated twelve specific variables that encourage these memories to be made. Aptly, I can never remember them. But simply put, what we remember comes down to five big things:

- 01 / Is it easy? (EASE)
- 02 / Is it linked to something useful in my life? (LINKS)
- 03 / Do I think about it often? (REPETITION)
- 04 / Does something emotional make me go there? (EMOTION)
- 05 / Is there something interesting to do there? (ENGAGEMENT)

Like those town planners building paths or blocking them, we can either work with how people remember or work against it. You can guess which is more successful.

The point is not to bore marketers with neuroscience. The point is that there is a specific way things work in our customers' heads. And if we get it wrong, our brands won't sell. Understanding how memory works is a superhighway to how brand communications work, or don't.

THE TWELVE VARIABLES TO MOVE FROM SHORT-TERM TO LONG-TERM MEMORY

(Source, Schacter)



RING A RING O' ROSES: WHY MEMORY MATTERS

Ring a ring o' Roses - the brain as a gap filling machine

What shall we call our new detergent?

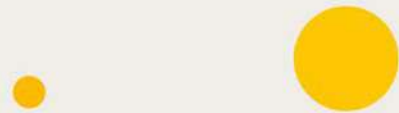
04



RING A RING O' ROSES

THE BRAIN AS A GAP-FILLING MACHINE

Why does it matter what our customers remember?



15 Schacter, D.L., Searching for Memory, p65

Being memorable is clearly able to improve our brand scores. But if that memorability fails to have an effect at the till, it is of little benefit.

For a long time, brand marketing has been spoken about as a dark art: some invisible force in the background having slow but important effects on businesses.

The truth is, the relationship between what we remember and what we do is much tighter than we might assume.

Just as a hard drive is a poor analogy for memory, a computer is a poor analogy for how we think.

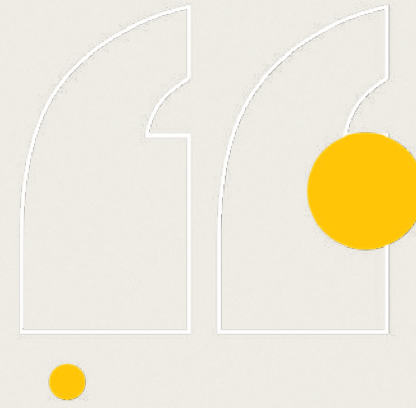
When presented with a problem we don't calculate what the right answer is. Instead we bung in the first answer that pops into our heads. Whether it's the perfect answer is irrelevant - the brain looks for the best fit answer it has to hand.

As Kahneman explained, we're not an algorithm looking for a perfect answer, we're an association machine looking for the easiest one. The less we're 'involved' in the purchase decision, the higher the reliance on these automatic responses.

It's the same force at work that creates the pathway in our memories. When we think of an answer we don't create a new pathway, we walk down the pathway that's already there.

As the neuroscientists put it: *"When we remember, we complete a pattern with the best match available in memory; we do not shine a spotlight on a stored picture".*¹⁵

If neuroscience isn't your thing, here's the same principle explained by my two-year-old daughter as she is sung the nursery rhyme 'Ring a ring o' Roses...



**RING-A-RING O' ROSES,
A POCKET FULL OF POSIES.
A-TISHOO! A-TISHOO!
WE ALL FALL ...**

DOWN!



It's the same mechanism that lets us finish
Compare the -, that refreshment means -.

It's not hard work to produce answers
when the answers are stored together.



WHAT SHALL WE CALL OUR NEW DETERGENT?

When Tide - the biggest selling powder detergent in the US - developed a liquid detergent in 1975 they set about naming it. They came up with ERA - a new name, brand and packaging.¹⁶

It performed poorly on the shelves. Nine years later, Tide launched a liquid brand that was easier to remember, and easier to buy. They called it Tide Liquid.¹⁷

The marketing department at P&G knows their stuff. But that mistake highlights the importance of understanding how memory works for marketers.

With a brand hat on, we might think "how do I make this easy to recall at the shelf?" and come up with a new, confusing name.

With a human brain hat on, we might think "how do I make this easy to recall at the shelf?" and come up with something that's a lot more successful.

Tide Liquid went on to build a lead in market share that it maintains today, with the same name and packaging.



16 <https://hbr.org/2017/01/customer-loyalty-is-overrated>

17 <https://tide.com/en-us/our-commitment/americas-number-one-detergent/our-heritage>

It's easy for the marketing brief to be "what's our new idea?". But often our best new idea is our old idea. Christmas advertising has become a competitive battleground in advertising, creating column inches of earned coverage as brands seek to out-innovate each other in this year's spectacle. But the most memorable Christmas advert? Holidays Are Coming.



Coca-Cola | Holidays Are Coming - Red, routine and repeatable. Sometimes your best idea is the one you've already had.
Source: www.coca-cola.com/gb/en/media-center/holidays-are-coming-iconic-advert-returns

LAWS OF MARKETING, OR RULES OF THUMB?

An old wives' tale
The laws of memory



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AN OLD WIVES' TALE

Trying to search for the rules of marketing is a fairly underwhelming process. Rule #1 is "Make yourself known."¹⁸ Thanks for that - any tips on how?

Part of what makes marketing difficult is that we don't have rules, just rules of thumb.

Creativity works. Retail is detail. Be top of mind. Frequency is everything. Emotion is everything. The product is everything. The medium is the message! Be more targeted. Measurement is everything. Be distinctive. Be consistent. Be new! Engagement matters. Reach matters. Create intrigue! Put the brand in the first five seconds.

They're not really rules we can follow, they're just some things that work sometimes. And if you tried to do all of them at once you'd be bent-double and bankrupt in a month. The other option is you can pick a tribe - be a consistent Ritson (the answer to the question, "What if Charlie Brooker worked in marketing?"), a distinctive Dave Trott, or a brand-penetrative Byron Sharp, and assume anyone who thinks otherwise is a lunatic.

Like all good old wives' tales, there's some truth and some genius in all of these rules of thumb. But if we don't understand why they work, they become difficult to implement, and open to misinterpretation. On that note, the most misremembered saying is "feed a cold to stave a fever" - if you've been starving people with fevers, please stop.

Knowing that things sometimes work is very different from knowing how they work. Aztecs would sacrifice humans to bring on rain and crops. Sometimes when you do a sacrifice, it rains later - but that doesn't mean you've made it rain.

None of us working in marketing communications are naive idiots. Marketing is a community of smart and curious people. But even the best marketing literature tells us more about when marketing works than why it works. We know fame often brings success, penetration comes with frequency, creativity drives memorability.¹⁹ With rules of thumb we're stuck trying lots of things and hoping that they work. It's only when we understand how that success happens that we recreate it consistently - and move from hoping for rain, to making it rain.

HOW DO YOU MAKE IT RAIN?

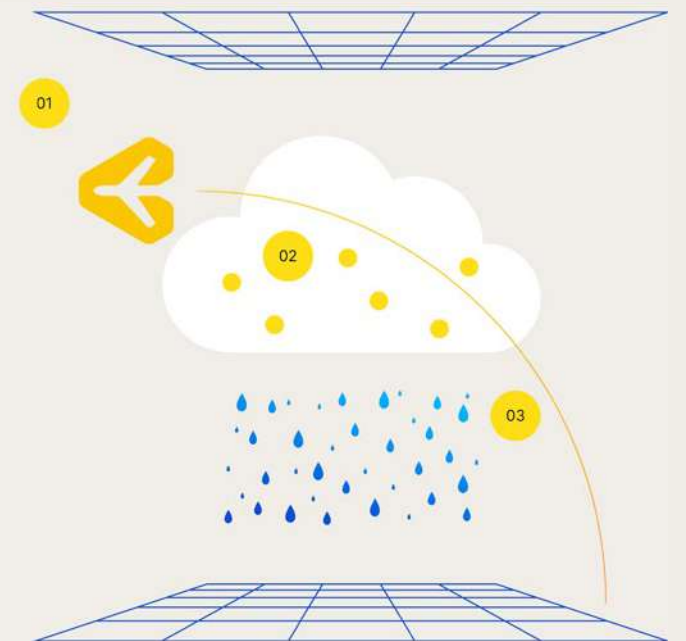
HUMAN SACRIFICE



Beware a man with a theory - Aztec depictions of human sacrifice. Getting results after doing something isn't the same as causing them.
Source: en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tzompantli_Tovar.jpeg

CLOUD SEEDING

- 01 An aircraft injects silver iodide or other substances into the atmosphere.
- 02 The chemicals mimic the particles that serves as surfaces for condensation that creates water.
- 03 Once the condensation creates water droplets that are large enough, the rain will fall.

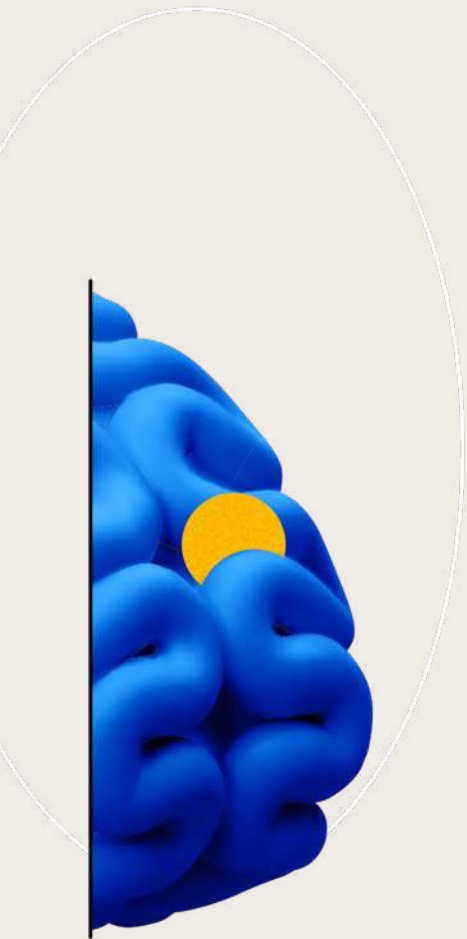


Cloud seeding works through physics rather than wishful thinking, resulting in more rain and fewer wasted lives.

18 <https://martech.org/5-simple-rules-marketing/>

19 See Binet & Field, Marketing in the Era of Accountability; Sharp & Romaniuk, How Brands Grow

FROM RULES OF THUMB TO LAWS OF MARKETING



Compared with marketing, Googling the rules of physics gives a very different set of results. They are laws, things that always happen.

When you just watch what happens, you get rules of thumb. When you understand why it happens, you get laws. Things that always happen. Things you can use, and plan for.

Memory dictates how brands are remembered, stored, recalled, and acted upon. It's the bit that connects your marketing to what the customer does next. Memory is the physics of advertising.


Sane customers might not click on banners. But they do remember marketing, and they do act on marketing. If we do it right.


That's why memory is so important. It gives us a map to understand how marketing gets remembered, and acted upon.


THE LAWS OF MEMORY


The laws of memory are so fundamental to how brands operate that the laws of memory can be used as laws of marketing.

We would venture two things about these laws. That they are both conspicuously obvious, and often ignored.

LAW  01
Memories that are never stored will never be recalled.

LAW  02
Things that get remembered together, get recalled together.

LAW  03
The more I remember you, the more I remember you.

CRACKING THE MEMORY CODE  51

MEMORIES THAT ARE NEVER STORED WILL NEVER BE RECALLED

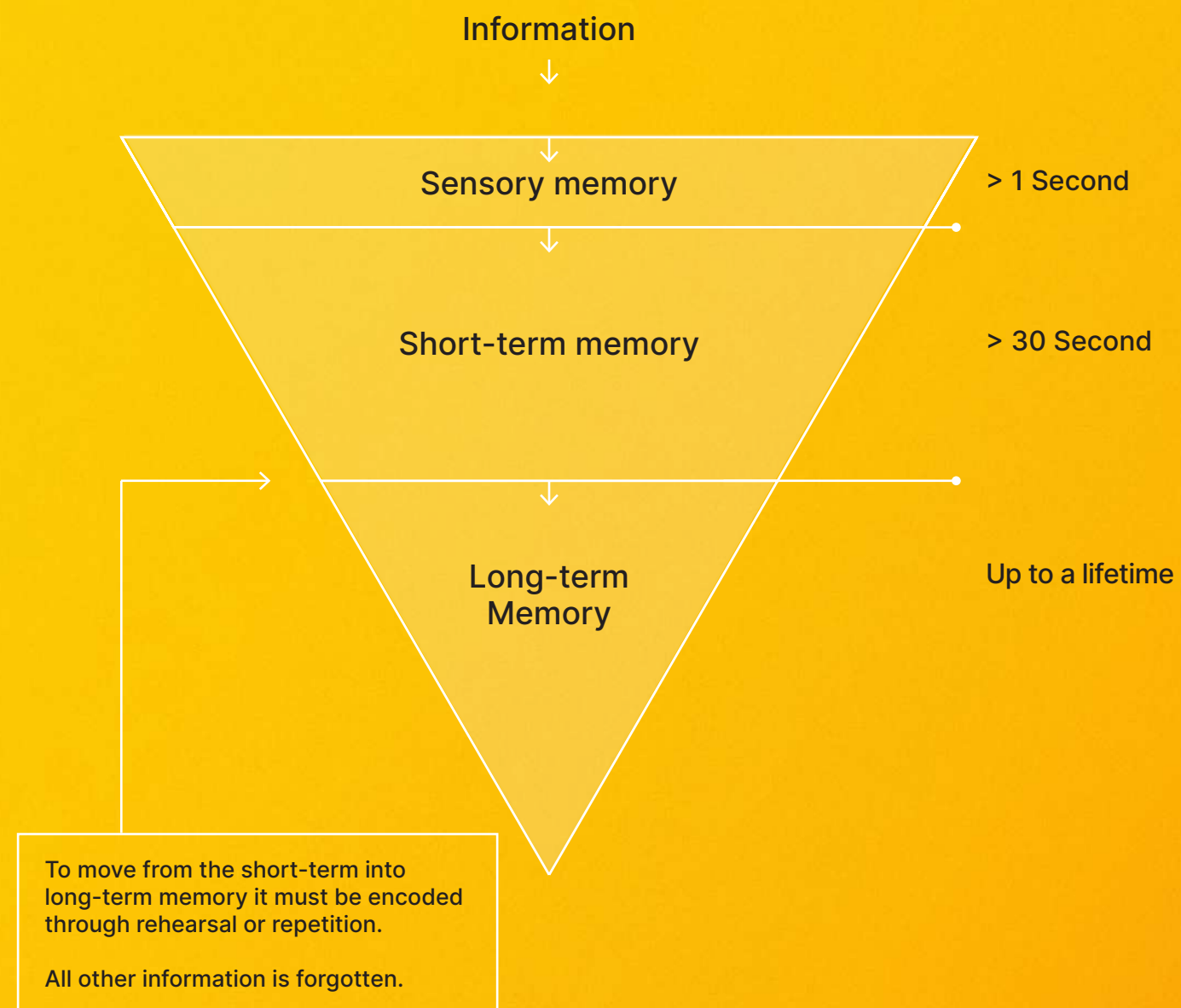
Say hello, wave goodbye

To survive the first 30 seconds of information processing and become a memory, brands have to survive two journeys.

The first is into sensory memory. It sounds simple, but I actually have to see or hear you. If your marketing isn't seen or heard, it has no value. Simply being present on the page is not enough.

The second journey it has to survive is from your short-term to long-term memory. Short-term memory isn't really memory at all. It's just where we hold things while we're sensing them. It's the place where we recite the coffee order to ourselves. These are like footprints on a beach rather than paths through memory, unlikely to survive more than thirty seconds.

THE SCIENCE OF MEMORY HOW DOES IT WORK?



(Source, Schacter)

How brands make that journey is a whole separate exercise. Those twelve variables Cowry isolated are the pathways by which things become remembered, or 'encoded'. How easy your brand communications is to encode - its 'encodability' as our Founding Partner and Chairman Charles Vallance says - is critical to being remembered.

Humans can only remember so much at once. How many of us have been in conversations about including one more proposition or proof point in a piece of communication? Memory demands that we chunk things down, let people absorb one piece of information at a time. Instead of asking "what do we want customers to know?", a better question is "what do we want customers to remember?".

Put simply, if the information is not:

- easy to comprehend
- associated with something I already know
- seen more than once
- easy to engage with or connect emotionally with

... it's unlikely I will ever remember it.

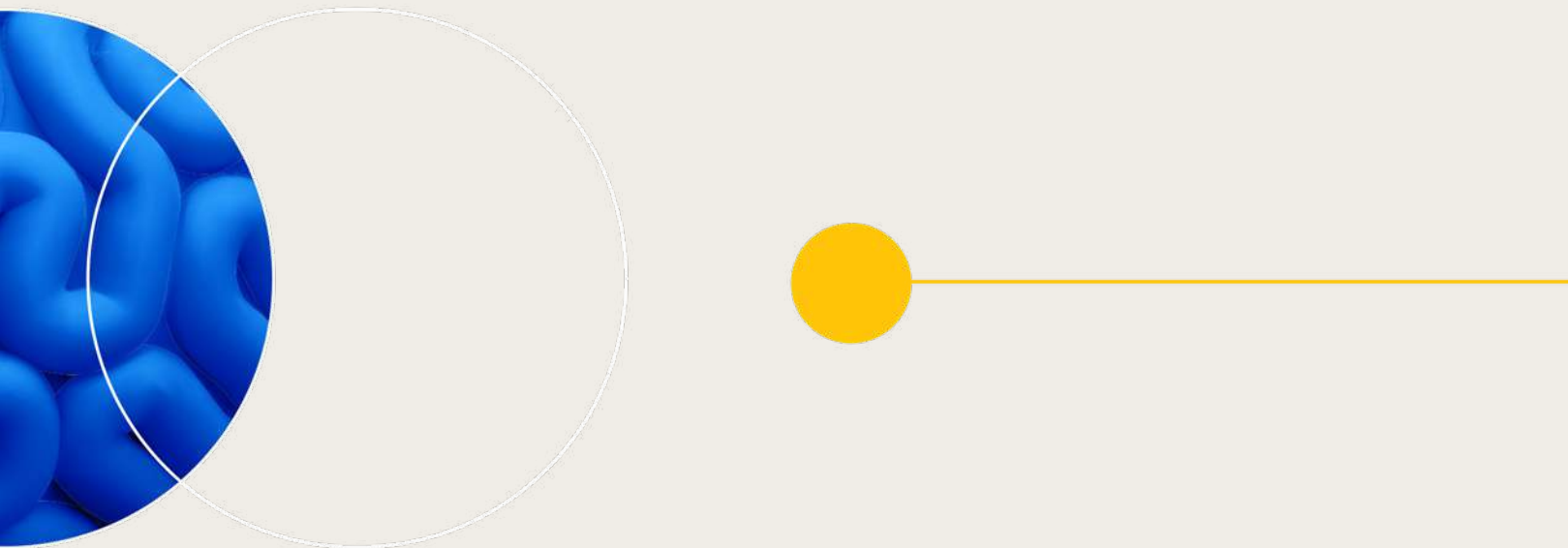


Source: www.facebook.com/conservatives/photos/a.288165009278/10157455142179279/?type=3

Readers in the UK will remember the "oven-ready" Brexit deal. It makes interesting reading against that list. People don't buy complicated ideas. They do not make it past short-term memory. They live, like recited phone numbers and food orders, in a temporary part of memory, only to be discarded as soon as the information is gone.

THIS LAW IS WHY SO MANY OF THE RULES OF THUMB OF CREATIVITY BEAR OUT

Emotion, character, surprise and humour fill the Memory Index. Creativity has a clear value for memorability. If we're boring, they're ignoring us.



20 Genova, Lisa, Remember: The Science of Memory and the Art of Forgetting

21 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeigarnik_effect#:~:text=In%20psychology%2C%20the%20Zeigarnik%20effect,tasks%20better%20than%20completed%20tasks

EMOTIONS

Emotion acts as a lightning rod between all three phases of memory. It makes things more likely to be remembered, processed, and then stored deep in memory, then recalled. As famed neuroscientist and author Lisa Genova states, "The more emotional, the more vividly and elaborately detailed the memory."²⁰ Emotional messages are more likely to be stored, even at lower frequency. Just as detergents promise whiter whites at lower temperatures, emotional advertising lets you be remembered without having to turn the media frequency up.



John Lewis | The Long Wait

Source: www.ok.co.uk/lifestyle/john-lewis-christmas-advert-2011-14474240

INCOMPLETE INFORMATION HELPS TO

The Zeigarnik effect is the principle that incomplete information is more likely to be recalled, not less.²¹ Fittingly, no one remembers the word Zeigarnik properly - since it's meaningless information. But it has been making brands memorable from Heinz Invisible Ketchup to Got Milk?. Decisions that don't make sense rationally ("why would I make my advert incomplete?") make perfect sense in terms of memory. We remember things we engage with and have to think about.



Heinz I Invisible Ketchup - Who said leaving the product out was a good idea?! Top 20 in the Memory Index.

Source: www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/heinz-tomato-ketchup-targets-pubs-promo-campaign/913833?src_site=marketing-magazine

UNEXPECTEDNESS

Emotion is too often seen as a byword for making people cry. Yet unexpectedness is even more powerful in creating emotion as well as attention. Surprise intensifies emotion up to 400%.²² The nucleus accumbens acts as a pleasure centre in the brain, and it fires more when a pleasure is unexpected (the opposite is also true: if you don't want a birthday party, being surprised with one is even worse). Meerkats in a price comparison ad is a surprise that defies our expectations, intensifying our enjoyment and memory. The challenge is to integrate unexpectedness into things that already make sense, to make it easy to comprehend. As Charlie Chaplin once said, the secret to humour is logic. Just sticking an unrelated animal in doesn't work.



Compare The Market | Compare The Meerkat

DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE FUNNY, TELL ME A JOKE

Four of the top ten adverts in the Memory Index play on humour. Laughter is an intense, positive emotion that shortcuts attention into deep memory. Humorous ads have survived in memory from Heineken's Water in Majorca and Campari's Luton Airport in the 1970s, through to Hamlet's Photo Booth in the 1980s and McDonald's Eyebrows in 2023.



Campari | Luton Airport
Source: www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/best-ads-50-years-campari/1494263

22 *Schultz, Wolfram - <https://hbr.org/2019/10/when-surprise-is-a-good-negotiation-tactic>

HARD TIMES AND HARD SUBJECTS



McDonald's | Raise Your Arches
Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWMUUhmdFs



Hamlet | Photobooth
Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpW9B9UzrkE

Humour has utility. Humour and memorability are strongest in hard times: in the UK the economic hardship of the 1970s and the A-B-Cs (Austerity-Brexit-Covid) of the 2020s. Humour widens the landing zone for confrontational subjects as well - Reebok's Belly's Gonna Get You scored highly in the Memory Index for likeability and memorability despite its caustic subject matter.

Eye tests are an awkward, low-interest subject. Should've Gone To Specsavers makes a campaignable joke out of not getting your eyes tested. And it's one of our highest performers in the Memory Index.

In short, being funny gives us permission to talk about more things. If your brief is boring or awkward, it might be time to make light of it.



Reebok | Belly's Gonna To Get You
Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5JLIX2wmU

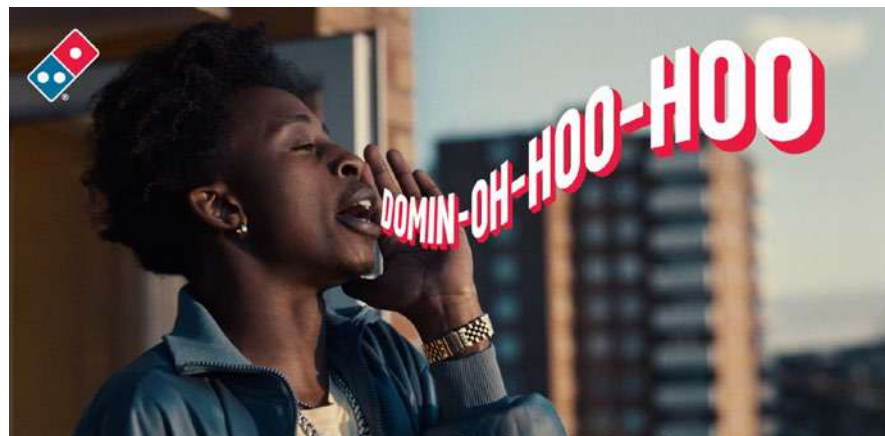
RHYTHM & RHYMES

Long languishing in the annals of advertising, rhymes and rhythmic language are a powerful force in memory. They create a double link in memory - the rhyme links the words together alongside the meaning. Like a path with perfect symmetry, the brain wants to walk down it. Jingles come with a free frequency boost: because people repeat them to themselves, they become more engrained.²³ Rhyme goes even further, becoming its own kind of reason. The rhyme-as-reason effect means that people believe information that rhymes simply because it rhymes. "If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit" is powerful not because it's logical but because it's irresistible. Simply put, without a jingle, your ad won't twinkle.

Just One Cornetto, If You Like a Lot of Chocolate on Your Biscuit Join Our Club, Everyone's a Fruit and Nut Case, Do the Shake and Vac, I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke - jingles pepper the Memory Index, being recalled long beyond reasonable expectation.

In *The Singing Neanderthals*, Steven Mithen explains how language is evolved not from words but from sounds and music, as language is experienced more like birdsong than legal text.²⁴ Its tone, rhythm and rhyme convey meaning in a way that even a newborn child can understand what a mother means, even if they can't understand what they're saying. Research has shown people clap in the right place even when they can't hear the words. We all know when to laugh, even when we don't understand the joke. There is more rhythm to language than is written down.

Despite their power, jingles are out of fashion. But as Domino's showed in *I Yodel*, using language as music doesn't have to mean writing something that sounds like a 50s radio advert. It means that sound matters more to memory than semantics.



Domino's *I Yodel* - New ad, old tricks. Using sound and wordplay to trigger memory. Top 20 in the Memory Index.

23 Genova, Lisa, *Remember: The Science of Memory and the Art of Forgetting*

24 Mithen, Steven, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body*

FREQUENCY

All else being equal, frequency increases the likelihood of information being retained. But it isn't enough. In the intro we talked about how seldom people remember what's on the back of a penny. Frequency alone doesn't guarantee memory.

Surveys consistently show that even high frequency information isn't remembered if it isn't seen as meaningful or important.

That's because for information to be stored in memory it has to be processed. If I don't think the information is important, I will never process it and never remember it, no matter how many times you show it to me.

Conversely, emotion has such a catalytic power on memory that if the experience is compelling enough, I only have to see it once to remember it forever. No amount of media frequency can buy memorability, but a memorable piece of communications is worth its weight in media gold.



What's on the other side?

In *Holidays are Coming*, Coca-Cola tapped into both sides of the memory equation, creating a piece of communications which scored highly on likeable, joyful, and feel-good factor allowing it to be shown repeatedly without negative responses, to great effect.



Coca-Cola *Holidays are Coming* - Memorability paired with frequency: nothing to dislike. Source: www.coca-cola.com/gb/en/media-center/holidays-are-coming-iconic-advert-returns

THINGS THAT GET REMEMBERED TOGETHER, GET RECALLED TOGETHER

Remember, remember

If we've done a good job of the first law, our brands will be remembered. But how do we know if they'll be recalled at the right moment, at the shop or the search engine?

Humans can't easily access their own memory. There's no part of the brain where 'favourite chocolate bars' are stored. Memories are scattered pieces of information ('engrams') that get dug out when the right triggers are there.

The trigger has to be specific. If I ask you what you did last Saturday, it's a monumental effort (by the frontal cortex) to throw suggestions (at the hippocampus) until it stumbles on the right trigger.

The tricky part is that those cues - those triggers - are part of the memory. They're baked in with the act of remembering. You can't save a memory with one hook and then pull it out with another.

That means that when brands create memories they have to weave in the cues that will ensure they are retrieved at the right moment.

If you show people a gorilla, they might easily retrieve the memory of the gorilla advert. But place them in a corner shop and there is no easy way back to that memory (though the colour purple on a bar may trigger the association).

So there are useful memories and useless ones. Spending money on encoding information about your brand which isn't later retrieved is a waste of money - marketing money - your money.

Of course, there is already a word in marketing for this process. It's salience. The storing of information alongside a trigger, and the retrieval of that information when that trigger is presented.

WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK OF WHEN THEY THINK OF YOU?

Nationwide Building society is an interesting example of 'what you're known for'. When people were asked to name a mortgage, savings and current account provider Nationwide was top of mind. When people were asked to name a current account, savings and mortgage provider, Nationwide came last.

Memory depends not just on being known, but on what you're known for. A very simple, fast test is to see what your brand is searched for alongside. If people don't put your brand together with those needs in a search box, chances are they aren't doing it in their heads.

CATEGORY TRIGGERS, CONSUMPTION MOMENTS

We've already talked about Specsavers and humour, but Should've Gone To Specsavers is a prime example of storing the relevant information together. The ad, and the line, is about an eye test. The line contains the name of the brand so there's low risk of misattribution. The trigger - needing an eye test - is not bolted on, it's baked in.

which sound very similar. The memory magic of Compare the Market is more than sticking a funny animal in it.

Two giants of memorability come from soft drinks. In very different styles, both these adverts hard-wired the idea to the moment of consumption.

Compare the Meerkat operates on the same associative principle. Go Compare, Compare the Market, Moneysupermarket are unusually easy to conflate. The value of baking the name into the idea is especially high in a category dependent on Googling a series of words

Diet Coke Break wired Diet Coke to a consumption moment so directly that you can probably still remember what time Diet Coke Break happened. You've Been Tango'd created an entire campaign thought around the experience of drinking Tango.



Diet Coke | Diet Coke Break - If you can hear the music, imagine the conversation, and recall the time Diet Coke Break happened every day, it demonstrates how a single trigger can unlock all the information surrounding it: an entire episodic memory.
Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmVexzzVfDA



Tango | Slap - A category consumption moment transformed through humour.
Source: wegiveyouverve.com/blog/our-favourite-ads-1/

Both are in the 20 most memorable ads of the last fifty years. For anyone who sees 'brand' and 'product' as antithetical, these are hard examples of strongly memorable brand work built around a product

consumption moment. The tension between 'show the product' and 'sell the brand' is a soluble one. Remember Jaffa Cake's Total Eclipse?



Jaffa Cakes | Full Moon - An execution built entirely around the product shot and product consumption moment, and scoring highly in the Memory Index a quarter of a century later.
Source: tomlikestowatch.wordpress.com/2019/11/03/jaffa-catastrophe/

The point of this law is that 'memory' in an abstract sense has no utility to a brand. Someone simply having heard of you is a much weaker force than spontaneously thinking of your brand at the consumption moment. Memory only has utility when it's

tied to something useful for the brand, otherwise it can be 'known' but never come up when it counts. Staying tight to the category triggers and the consumption moments means you're more likely not just to be remembered, but remembered at the right moment.

MEMORY IS WHERE YOU MAKE IT

Remember that time we were drunk? People who remember things when they're drunk aren't very good at recalling when they're sober. No great surprises there.

What is interesting is that if you get those same people drunk again, they're more likely to recall things that happened when they were drunk. "Things that get remembered together get recalled together" is just as true of the environment we remember in.

No-one is suggesting we get customers drunk. But there are direct implications for media planning. If you want your brand to be recalled in a specific environment, it's more effective to be remembered in that same environment.

High-street brands are more likely to be recalled in the high-street if you advertise to people in the high-street. Media targeting isn't just about buying audiences, it's about buying the place and state of mind they're in to match it to that place and state we want them to remember us in.

No person is one person. We have many different sides to our personality. The value of targeting is not just an individual but a relevant state of mind. HSBC's long-term airport holding doesn't just target an international audience, it targets them in the context of being an international traveller.

The question for marketers is not "are you known?" but rather "what are you known for and when are you remembered?".

There is no marketing value in being a loved brand who is not remembered at the checkout or the search bar.

The implication is a significant one: marketing has to be encouraging customers to associate the brand, the product and the trigger.

Whatever your customer is thinking when you want them to think of you, that's what you need to knit together.



Proximity media isn't just directional - it makes sense to talk to people in the places you want to be top of mind.

Source: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/william-eccleshare-emergence-green-shoots-clear-channel/1689773>

THE MORE I REMEMBER YOU, THE MORE I REMEMBER YOU

The more I see you

If you haven't seen the Pixar classic (aren't they all?) *Inside Out*, I'll forgive you for ditching this report right now to indulge in something of real substance instead.

In a scene which would move any parent to tears, the protagonists fall into a pit of forgotten childhood memories, watching cherished memories evaporate into dust.



Disney | *Inside Out* - If we don't cherish them, they disappear
Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVPTbSkHa9s

And that is very much how neuroscience describes memory. While there is no robot going around Hoovering up old memories, it is only there forever in theory. To remember things you have to cherish them - you have to keep remembering them. If a memory has no relationship to the things we think about every day, the pathway back to it is lost. We won't remember to remember. It's the same with childhood friends, university professors, favourite snacks. Unless you still think about them from time to time, they become harder and harder to remember. When memories stop being useful, we stop remembering them.

That's as true for childhood toys as it is for brands.

That means turning up over time with the same familiar cues. Like Tide, we can't just be orange and clean once. We have to keep turning up. Happily, memories are reinforced as much through usage as much as exposure.

That means if we've done job two correctly, the brand work connects to the consumption moment, and the consumption moment takes us back to the brand work. The late, great Jeremy Bullmore wrote an elegant piece on this called *Plonk and Placebos*. When we consume things we enjoy not just the product, but the brand that brought us there in the first place. It's why I feel pleased with myself for writing this on a Mac.

But there's a tension. If we just keep saying the same things, won't people start ignoring us?

The following sentence is in neuroscience gobbledegook:

"It turns out that only a certain kind of semantic encoding promotes high levels of memory performance - an elaborative encoding operation that allows you to integrate new information with what you already know."²⁵

I read this three times before I understood its significance to what we do. Old information alone becomes unstimulating. But new information, no matter how exciting, is useless unless it's tethered to things people already know. If you change everything, all of it will be forgotten.

This law takes us into the first major implication of this memory work: should I change, or stay the same?

IN WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

"Most consumers are simultaneously neophilic – curious to discover new things – and deeply neophobic – afraid of anything that's too new. Or, to put it less pseudo-scientifically, people want something that's a bit new but also deeply familiar."²⁷

The simple truth is that brand marketing demands that we innovate while staying the same. Having strong, distinctive assets that we deploy consistently doesn't restrict us. The stronger and better known those assets are, the more able they are to hold new creative ideas that arrest our audience's attention.

The strength of Cadbury's brand assets stored in customers' memories allowed Cadbury to take all of the words off a bar and remain a surprising, but strongly branded asset. It is surprising (remember law No.1), and at the same time entirely familiar (law No.3). It gives us a new reason to talk about something old, which is the power-combination for memory.

It's the same reason why O2's launch work is still memorable and attributable 22 years later. Although completely new work at the time, it established a strong brand world (bubbles, blue gradient, customer enablement) which O2 has never stepped away from, even as it has introduced new campaign ideas. When we experience the original ad now we are not just experiencing the advert, we are experiencing the whole communications history ever since.

When Compare The Market was forced to broaden their character world, asset strength allowed them to fold in new characters without breaking the brand world.

Strong assets allow us to innovate without breaking our links with the memories already in our customers' heads.

The important question for every brand is not what you want to be known for, but what are you already known for? Knowing the answer to that question gives us the ability to be creative and keep capturing attention.



Cadbury - Purple, generous, how to be surprising and the same.



Compare the Market - Strength of character world allows for injection of fresh thinking.



O2 - 22 years building an indelible brand world.

27 Thompson, Derek - Hit Makers: The Science of Popularity in an Age of Distraction

CAMPAIGNABLE CHARACTERS - SHOOTING STARS VS SUPERSTARS

Research backs up what Law One tells us, that by being surprising, distinctive and often humorous, characters can be powerful memory tools.

We did find an interesting rider to that. Law Three tells us that we have to keep remembering something. That means that campaignable characters - ones we can keep coming back to time after time - tend to rank more highly than one-offs. John Lewis' Penguin and Levi's Flat Eric (who starred twice) are standout, memorable ads that rank around the middle of the Memory Index. But characters like the Andrex Puppy and Sergei the meerkat performed in the top 20.

The point is not that they're better characters or better executions. But the ability - and willingness - to keep coming back to the same characters in new ways over time builds a fortress of memory. Conversely, Cadbury Gorilla performed extremely well as a single execution because it performs so well on the attributes of Law One: it is unexpected, funny and joyful - but it was extremely difficult to campaign as a character, limiting its longevity.

A similar rule applies for celebrities. In general, they are less well remembered than characters. No endorsement advert broke the top 20. With one exception. Walkers' Gazza was part of a long running campaign starring the same celebrity for nearly 30 years.

Characters are powerful tools. The richer and more repeatable their stories, the more powerful a tool they are for memory.



John Lewis | Monty the Penguin - A classic, but campaignable?

Source: www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/penguin-power-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-john-lewis-christmas-advert-9845967.html



Levi's | Flat Eric - Famous but fleeting.

Source: www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/unsure-creative-idea-youre-probably-something/1521607



Walkers | Salt & Lineker (Gazza) - The rare phenomenon of long-term celebrity endorsement.

Source: www.facebook.com/thfcbanter/videos/gazza-on-the-walkers-1996-tv-advert-lol-/550871245511460/

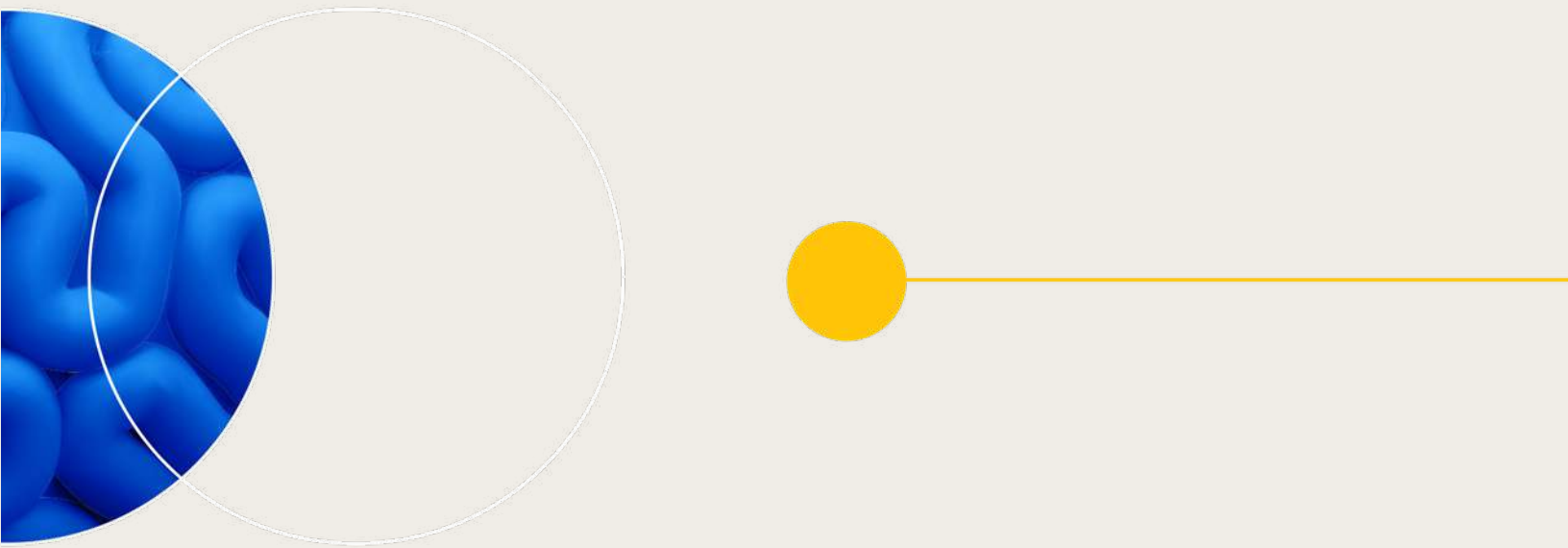
CULTURAL POWER

Simples, Cornetto, Should've Gone To Specsavers - although we tested ads for memorability, the ad is only part of what makes the communication memorable.

Coming back to a character and a brand world are not the only way of building memory through repetition.

Some brands are able to break through the culture barrier and become part of society, not just marketing. When customers start using your language and your ideas, it is not just flattering to the brand, it is reinforcing its memorability.

Just One Cornetto became a song people sung to each other, Wassup? became a phrase people used, Should've Gone To Specsavers is a comic insult, Simples is a catchphrase used by a UK prime minister. Not all of them bought frequency through advertising; they all earned it by becoming social objects that people re-use.



DID YOU SEE THAT BANNER AD LAST NIGHT?

Doing something worth talking about is a triple benefit. It's more likely to be noticed and remembered. It's more likely to be shared. And in the sharing, it's more likely to be remembered.

As Lisa Genova says, "With every retelling, you are reactivating the memory, reinforcing the neural pathways that encodes the details of what you experienced, making the memory stronger."

Memory tells us what we already knew, that doing work worth talking about is powerful not just for our brands, but the businesses they serve.

Conversely, low impact marketing is a triple jeopardy. I don't notice it, I don't process it, and I don't want to talk about it. It doesn't build distinctive assets that make it easier for me to be remembered later. What doesn't get noticed and remembered will never be recalled, and never have a commercial impact, no matter how many impacts we buy.

Being remembered is not the default. Right at the beginning we saw that most of what we make is never remembered. But we have powerful tools on our side to create memories that count, if only we choose to use them.

DESIGNING FOR MEMORY

What do you want to be remembered for?



WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED FOR?

Humans don't remember everything. But what they do remember, they remember forever.

And as complex as marketing can seem, it's as simple as this: what gets remembered gets bought.

Communications exist on a knife edge between being instantly ignored and absorbed forever. All of us working in marketing operate on that knife edge. It is what makes our work challenging and endlessly fascinating.

There is no magic formula for how to win in marketing.

But by understanding how marketing works, we're better equipped to make decisions that will have a greater impact where they matter: in the minds and behaviour of our customers.

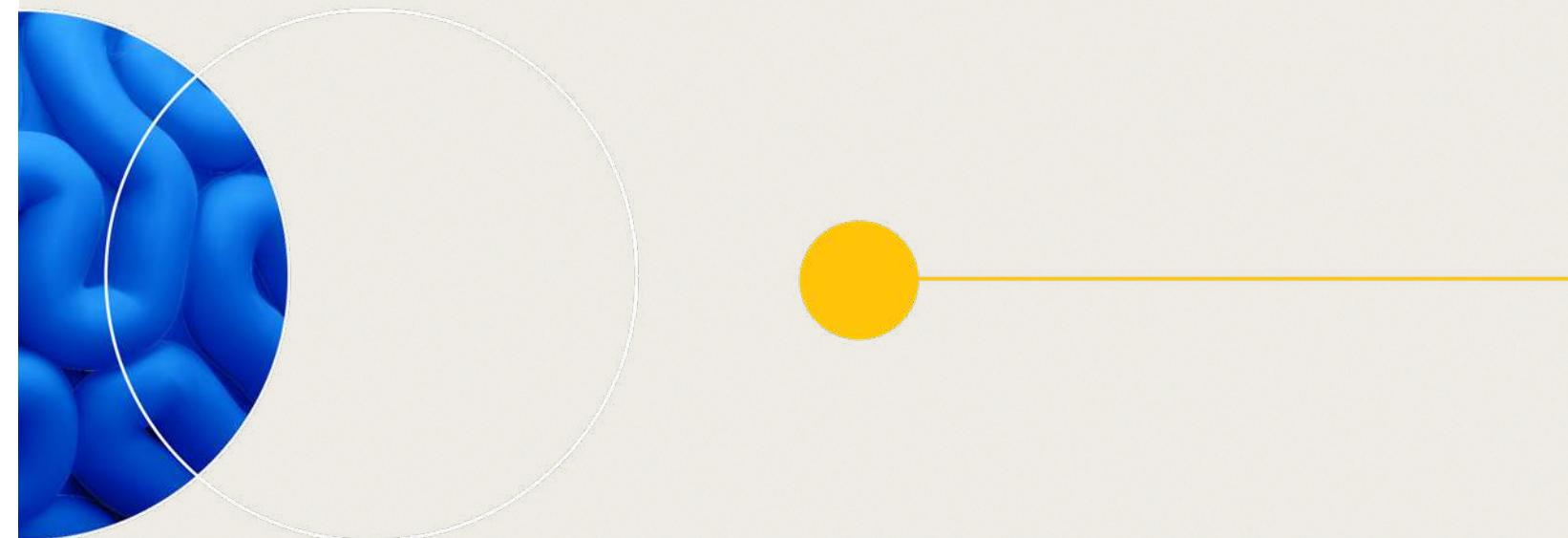
For a long time we've understood what marketing can do, but not necessarily how it works.

Once we understand the force of memory sitting underneath everything, it unlocks our understanding of some of the most important questions in marketing: How do I get remembered at the point of purchase?; Can I extend my brand into a new area?; How do I protect market share against competitors?; Should I change my brand assets and positioning?

Memory is the physics of advertising. The invisible force that explains how everything works, and how to make it happen.

By understanding how memory works we can design for it. We can become memory-makers - the people who are able to be top of mind at the right moment, and win in the market.

In an era where competitors are trying lots and hoping it works, knowing how things work is a way to jump the queue to growth.



The results of the Memory Index make for heartwarming research on our industry. Though there is no one way to build memory, success depends on us having the creativity to capture people's imagination and the brand consistency to stay there. As competition for attention increases and targeting cookie pools shrink, our ability to get brands noticed and remembered at the right moment only becomes more important. We cannot simply buy our way around the problem with frequency and targeting. We cannot cheat and talk about something that's not the product.

Across these hundred executions there is an incredible corpus of work, which delivers memorability with a longevity that we should be proud of as an industry. Great communications last.

The holy trinity for all communications is to make something that is memorable (law one), rooted in the product need (law two), and campaignable over time (law three).

We live in an era of incredible technical complexity. There are hundreds of routes to market, all with different metrics, vendors and criteria.

The neuroscience behind memory is undoubtedly complex. But its implications are astoundingly simple.

That means even the most complex marketing communications problem can be clarified by one simple question: how will this help me be remembered at the right moment?

This research on memorability leaves us all with a simple and wonderful challenge.

If I'm not finding it interesting, why should the consumer? If I don't remember it, why would they?

Whatever you choose to invest in, being remembered is never the wrong decision. No one ever got fired for being memorable.

Memory is an invitation to make work that is interesting, joyful, funny, unexpected and unforgettable. Not just because it's more fun to do, but because it creates value for the brands we do it for. We're at our most effective when we're creating work that we can't turn away from, and can't stop talking about. Work that gets thought about for brands that get bought. Unforgettable work for unforgettable brands.



**SO NEXT TIME YOU THINK OF A CONSUMER,
REMEMBER TO ASK YOURSELF THIS SIMPLE QUESTION:**

**ARE THEY GOING TO
REMEMBER ME?**

CRACKING THE MEMORY CODE

