

# on one's very best behavior

The ultimate task of marketing communications is to change behavior. Unless we get customers to behave in ways that benefit our clients' businesses, our value to those clients is at best marginal.

It seems odd then that so many agencies still insist on presenting strategies and campaigns focused solely on achieving brand awareness or changing perception as the final outcome. Of course, the traditional view is that awareness leads to preference then to action. This process appears totally reasonable, so reasonable in fact that to suggest otherwise is tantamount to heresy. The problem is that, while reasonable, this process can lead to an oversimplified approach. It's an approach that enables the agency to do the easy part and then wash its hands of responsibility thereafter. Factor in the complexities of a business-to-business sales cycle, and this kind of simplistically linear approach looks very shaky indeed.

Of course, below-the-line agencies would say that they already focus on changing behavior of consumers. They have nowhere to hide from poor response figures. If they don't perform, they're out, they would say. When below-the-line campaigns are done well, they can have a significant impact on the client's business. With the latest data planning techniques, it is easier than ever to identify what stage a customer is at in the buying process (although this is still complex in business-to-business). And with variable print, we can now tune offers ever more precisely and get closer to true one-to-one communications with the customer.

The problem is that even with such sophisticated data intelligence, much of the industry still relies on the carrot-and-stick approach. The customer is either incentivized with an offer or warned of the consequences of inaction. Alternatively a long-term CRM approach is undertaken in the hope that the good will generated (and occasional nudges) will lead to increased loyalty and greater propensity to repurchase. In an age of ever falling response

rates, "do not call" lists, and brand disengagement, this is no longer enough to guarantee success.

### the challenge of behavior

Instinctively, behavior feels like a messy business. Even psychologists can't agree precisely what drives it. A moment's thought reveals that the number of internal and external factors that may affect a person's behavior at any time must be huge. And anyway, surely it is simply impossible to predict a person's behavior with any degree of accuracy (although anyone who drove to work this morning did so many times with amazing accuracy). I even read one blogger recently claim that behavior was immutable (obviously he wasn't a former smoker).

The answer, in fact, lies not with the intricate workings of the mind but with the identifiable signposts marking the process of change. This coupled with a deeper, more useful understanding of the individuals involved and a better way of structuring communication offers a blueprint for today's marketers. Of course, all that sounds wonderful in theory.

Over the last year-and-a-half, we at Banner have been working to build a structured behavioral change methodology. To do so, we stepped outside the world of marketing and communications that we're all used to. As interesting as many of the latest "advertising theories"

“Instinctively, behavior feels like a messy business.”



are, too often they appear designed more to sell books for their authors or differentiate their agencies in credentials meetings than to achieve tangible results for their clients. The buzzwords may sound good but ultimately have little depth (certainly too little to risk already tightened budgets on).

The methodologies we adapted to our needs had the advantage of long empirical histories (over 50 years in one case). They had enormous sample bases for us to draw on. And they'd been tried and tested in virtually every field except marketing. We used a behavioral change model that's helped people quit smoking, lose weight, and take up new lifestyles. We adapted the world's leading personality typing theory to deliver a truly actionable segmentation system. And we implemented language strategies that have been used everywhere from sports coaching to Ross Jeffries' Speed Seduction. The results have shown that far from a dark art, behavioral change is a pragmatic, achievable aim.

#### what we've learned

It's amazing what you discover when you look a little deeper. One element to the methodology concerns personality typing, and we have developed a behavioral index. This takes the theories that underpin the Myers-Briggs typing system and applies them to whole markets. So far we have typed over 10,000 people across a range of markets and geographies. The results have been fascinating.

There are 16 types in the system. In an average population you'd expect them to roughly even out with no single type gaining more than 10% share. When we indexed IT directors, however, we found that in the U.S. just three personality types accounted for almost 60% of the market (in mid-market companies one type alone made up 38% of respondents). This was repeated in Europe. In the U.K., three types made up 40% of IT directors. In France two types made up 47%. And in Germany, four types made up 69% with a single type, accounting for a quarter of the market.

This kind of clustering is interesting in itself. It shows what many human resource professionals have known for a long time—certain personality types are drawn to certain professions. But

for the international marketer, the lessons run far deeper than that.

The clusters in each market were different. Often radically so. The top scoring type in the U.S. scraped barely 5% in Europe. The pattern in France was diametrically opposite to that in Germany. And the single type that accounts for a quarter of the market in Germany comes in at just 14% in the U.K.

#### what does it all mean?

A personality type profile can tell us an enormous amount about the behavior and motivations of an individual customer. How they make decisions. How they like to be communicated with. How they function in teams. What angers them. Even their parenting style and what happens to them under stress. In fact there are some 24 different categories of information.

Before we even add in the change model or language patterns, we can already see that to achieve real behavioral change we need to structure our messages very differently in each and every market.

Taking the IT directors example, in the U.S. we would want to show evolution over revolution, we would want long-term consistent messaging, and we would build in a loyalty component. In France, we would sell the vision, focus on the theory, and never claim our solution is the only solution. And in Germany we would focus on the short-term benefits, on the practical application, and give the audience opportunities to touch and feel the products.

What this shows is that once we have the right tools and right understanding, we can elevate behavioral change out of its apparent complexity. We can begin creating strategies and programs that explicitly and directly work towards altering customer behaviors. That's because it's behavioral change that hits the bottom line. It's not awareness. It's not perception. It's not intention. And unless today's agencies can clearly demonstrate how what they do positively affects customer behavior (without smoke or mirrors), they run the risk of becoming marginalized. ●

*Mike Jarvis is  
international media director  
of Banner Corp.*

“  
...we can  
already see  
that to  
achieve real  
behavioral  
change we  
need to  
structure our  
messages very  
differently  
in each and  
every market.”  
”