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The Limbic System – A Key To Effective Marketing



Want to understand what influences our decision making? Why we do what we do? In this interview, Martin Amann, branding expert and former CEO of Future Brands in Switzerland, Germany and Spain, talks about the area in our brain called the limbic system. Through extensive research and more than 5,500 case studies, Martin has developed the LimbiCODE to serve as a tool for more effective marketing. Clients using his methodology include Henkel, McDonald's, Heineken, Swiss TV, Novartis, and Tourism Board of Südtirol.

What led you to study the limbic system?

For 15 years I was trying to find the answers to why people are taking very different decisions based on exactly the same information. I turned to philosophy and psychology but with unsatisfactory results. This changed when a new discipline called neuro-marketing came to the surface. As I deepened my research in neurobiology, I grew more convinced that this was where I would find the explanation to what influences our decision making.

What is the limbic system?

The limbic system is the 'central processing unit' of our brain that works on an unconscious level at a speed of 10 million bits per second. The primary task of the limbic system is to attribute values and meaning to the pieces of information gathered by our senses.

How does the limbic system work?

All the input gathered by our senses pass through the limbic system which occurs on a subconscious level. There is only a very small percentage of information which the limbic system deems relevant and therefore get passed on to the conscious part of the brain. There are 3 so called limbic imperatives which define a person's unique limbic profile. The limbic profile in combination with connotations made based on past experiences predetermines our behaviour and our decision-making.

How is the LimbiCODE methodology used in effective marketing ?

The 3 limbic imperatives are mainly characterised by Security, Power and Curiosity. A consumer's limbic profile is defined by the intensity of each of these 3 imperatives. Based on a survey conducted with a representative socio-demographical sample of over 5'500 participants we were able to classify people into 6 limbic types. What kind of products, services and brands will appear relevant to a specific consumer depends on which of the 6 LimbiCODE types a person belongs to.

What are these 6 different limbic types and what are their characteristics?

The LimbiCODE types are called:

Preservers: These people strive for security, stability, safety and want to avoid everything that causes anxiety. A strong dislike for change, the unknown and uncertainty.

Performers: These people strive for power, autonomy, status, and luxury.

Hedonists: These people are very curious, embrace risks, variety, and tend to be unsystematic.

These first 3 types have only one strong limbic imperative and can be described as the basic types of the LimbiCODE methodology. If a person has 2 strong limbic imperatives they belong to the 3 intermediate types.

Disciplined (Security and Power): These people strive for control, they need facts and figures, and they are very structured and precise.

Pioneers (Power and Curiosity): These people enjoy exploration, discovery and adventure and they need challenges and they are very experimental.

Tolerant (Security and Curiosity): Persons belonging to this type seek harmony, they are open minded, easy going and environmentally conscious.

In order for marketing to be most effective and efficient the communication for a brand needs to be specifically designed for each of the 6 LimbiCODE types.

Could you show an example of a how the same message gets communicated differently depending on the 3 basic limbic profiles?

Let's take a car as an example. To be appealing for the 3 basic limbic types advertising should use the following wording:

For Preservers

This car has an excellent value for money and is one of our best sellers. It has best scores in crash tests and statics show a very low breakdown rate ...

For Performers

To drive this car brand is a privilege which only successful people can afford. When owning this car is communicating your status and you will be envied by your peers ...

For Hedonists

No one has ever built a car this way. Exemplary of out of the box thinking in combination with avant-garde design providing you a driving experience that you never had before ...

What is the process that you go through with a company to see if they are communicating effectively to their audience?

We help clients in many different ways. There is no standard procedure. Often we start with analysing the status quo to search for limbic dissonances. This can be done with the help of market research or by an expert panel. Our analyses usually consist of looking at the brand in general, the current target group and the communication as well as the visual appearance of the product or service. Based on the findings we then define the target group and support our clients in developing a limbic type specific brand positioning statement which is the base for all future marketing actions. We then assist clients during and after the process of implementation to guarantee that their marketing becomes and stays more effective and efficient.

To learn more about Martin's work please visit his Website www.iflk.ch