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Are You Fascinating? Pulling the Triggers to Influence and Persuade Others

by Nancy Pekala

Can you fascinate your way to increased sales, new clients and a more engaged audience? Sally Hogshead thinks so and it just might start with your elbow.

During the AMA's recent virtual event, "[Unveiling Marketing Research's Future Online](#)", [Sally Hogshead](#), Author, *Fascinate*, suggested in her presentation, "*How Do You Fascinate?*," that every day, intentionally not, we're using fascination "triggers" to persuade others. Seven potential fascination triggers, including power, trust, mystique, lust, prestige, alarm and vice, help each of us influence and persuade others.

Hogshead suggested that even the shape of your elbow contains hidden clues to how fascinating you are. She cited research which found that men with elbow bones of a certain distance get treated better by their parents, get better jobs, make more money and grow up to marry more beautiful women.



Sally Hogshead

"Consumers are responsive to us for reasons that we have absolutely no idea about," Hogshead noted. "Most of fascination is irrational and driven by factors beyond our control."

She added, "Think about the implications of this for us as marketers. Our consumers are deciding how much our products are worth for reasons beyond our control. If we can understand them, we can start to tap into this."

Unlike marketing, which can be artificial or man-made in some ways, Hogshead suggested that fascination is different than marketing because it is irrational, instinctive, innate and irresistible.

"This isn't logical decision making," she said. "It's something that grips you and controls your wants and desires. It's hardwired deeply in our brains. Fascination triggers are something you're born with and which continues through your lives. It's not something you can control."

Noting that the addictive nature of web browsing today leaves consumers with an attention span of only 9 seconds, roughly the same attention span of a goldfish, Hogshead said marketers need to rethink their brands in today's more competitive environment. A number of trends are driving this need to fascinate including: an overload of distracting choices for the consumer; the rise of the ADD world; a focus on earning rather than paying attention; the ability for consumers to easily shut out messages; a shift from the Information Age to the Fascination Age and the rise of the fascination economy.

"Marketing used to be about information, who had the data or knowledge," the author said. "Today, it's less about the data and more about how you can mesmerize."

In conducting research for her book, Hogshead studied 1,000 people around the country and found that consumers are willing to pay twice the amount for a product if they have an emotional

connection to that product, if they feel fascinated about it or if it makes them feel more fascinating about themselves.

“We need to create some kind of new way of breaking through by creating new messages that can succeed in this kind of environment,” Hogshead said. “Messaging has to be about loyalty, trust and admiration and not just about price.”

She suggested that marketers can begin the fascination process by creating messages that fit one of the seven triggers (power, lust, mystique, prestige, alarm, vice and trust). For example, the power trigger involves the need to command and control our environment. Using rewards and consequences and setting a new standard to set yourself apart from everyone else are ways marketers can take advantage of this trigger for their brands.

Trust is another trigger that focuses on how our brains make decisions. It’s about who we can rely on consistently. “Oprah is one of our most trusted celebrities” Hogshead noted. “She has worn a neurological groove on our brain because we’ve seen her so much.”

She added, “Repeated exposure to someone or something is fascinating. It comforts us since we don’t have to process new information. In a nine second goldfish world, there’s a lot of equity in knowing exactly what to expect. That’s why people like their favorite pair of jeans. They know exactly how they’re going to feel.”

However, Hogshead did acknowledge that trust can be very expensive to earn since it demands consistency over the long term. To utilize the trust trigger, she suggested marketers focus on the familiar, maintain predictability and tap into existing connections.

As part of her research, Hogshead developed the F Score Personal Brand Test (available at <http://www.sallyhogshead.com/fscore>). The 28-question test helps identify your personal triggers and how you compare with a baseline standard. There are no right or wrong answers, but Hogshead said that understanding your triggers can help you figure out how to use them to influence and persuade others.

For example, FedEx is a brand that utilizes the alarm trigger through the threat of negative consequences (“when it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight.”). Kraft, on the other hand, reaches consumers through lust and trust triggers. As a personal brand, Angelina Jolie has high vice, lust and mystique triggers but a low trust trigger as her behavior is not predictable. In general, luxury brands are high on lust, power and mystique.

In order to apply these triggers to make your brand more valuable, Hogshead suggested creating “Gold Hallmarks of a Fascinating Brand” which are characterized as:

- Causing strong and immediate emotional reactions
- Creating advocates
- Becoming “cultural shorthand” for a specific set of actions or values
- Inciting conversation
- Forcing competitors to realign
- Triggering social revolutions

“What makes you polarizing can often make you more interesting,” Hogshead added. “Fascinating messages can get better results.”

[Nancy Pekala](#) is the AMA’s Director of Online Content and Editor of [Marketing Researchers](#). Send your feedback about this article or suggestions for any of the AMA’s e-newsletters to npekala@ama.org. Be sure to follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/marketing_power