

The role of memory and media in converting consumers for brand growth

By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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At Spark Media's annual event, a top marketing scientist from the Australia-based Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, Dr Virginia Beal got attendees thinking and rethinking the role of memory in reaching consumers. While there's no one-size-fits-all approach, you'll do well to factor in light media buyers and light media users.



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Durban had a splendid time at our EBI seminar, where they gained insight into key media principles for Brand Growth. The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute is the world's largest centre for research into marketing. We had the pleasure of bringing out Virginia Beal from the EBI who has had 15 years of marketing experience. She specializes in media research which investigates how people use media and the effect this has on advertising effectiveness and media scheduling. We can't wait to have her in Cape Town and Johannesburg 💎💎

A post shared by [SparkMediaSA](#) (@sparkmediasa) on Sep 13, 2018 at 5:31am PDT

& Ice Hotel on 13 September 2018, Spark

Media's joint-CEO Gill Randall welcomed attendees to the Cape Town leg of their countrywide roadshow event.

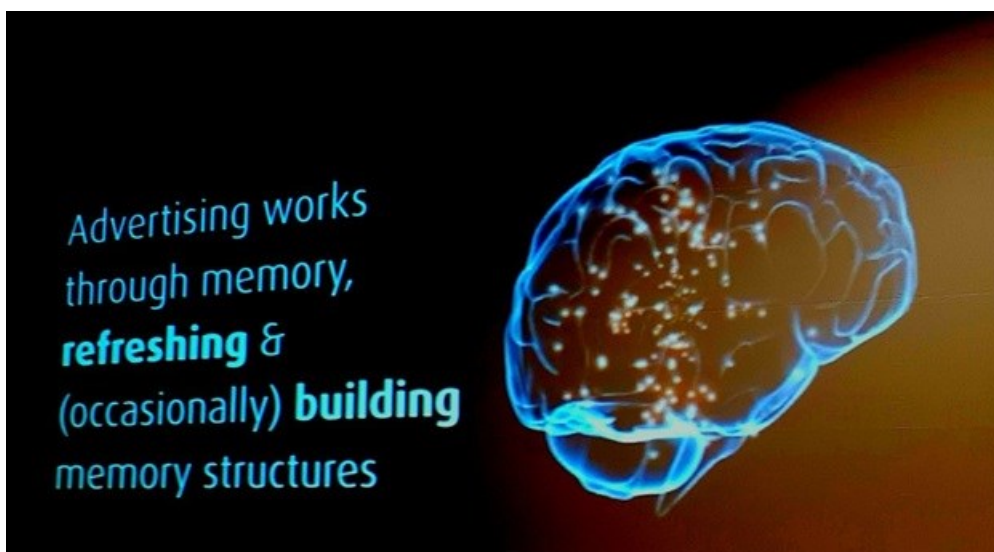
Randall also explained their affiliation with the not-for-profit Ehrenberg-Bass Institute (EBI), which is focused on sharing marketing knowledge.



The theme of Dr Beal's presentation.

The speaker this year was EBI senior marketing scientist Dr Virginia Beal. She discussed the essentials of media consumer behaviour, unpacking how marketers can optimise their media scheduling budgets, based on empirical evidence, in a presentation titled: 'Making media work for brand growth'.

Dr Beal said we know advertising works through memory, but we need to better explore the five dimensions of that.



A slide from Dr Beal's presentation.

The first dimension is **who we ideally want to reach** with our media buy.

To grow, we obviously we want to reach all category buyers – but beyond reaching everybody, in the market, it needs to be appropriate to the category we operate in.

Marketing is the race car, media is the race track

Doug Place, chief marketing officer for Nando's SA, explained Dr Beal's point well:

“ There's often a misunderstanding between media and marketing, with digital punted as the future of consumer brands, to which Place says nonsense, marketing is the future of consumer brands – that's just now taking place more prevalently on digital media. Marketing is the race car, media is the race track. ”

So it's not just a case of doing more on digital for automatic brand success, but about being strategic and running your campaign on the right channels to reach those customers.



#Loeries2018: Marketing Leadership and Innovation winner, Doug Place!

Leigh Andrews 17 Aug 2018



Dr Beal said **category buying behaviour** can help with media buy as it's fairly predictable, but we need to also look under the purchase frequency to see the pattern. The **lighter buyers of the category**, often making irregular purchases, are interesting to note.

For example, EBI's annual data on breakfast cereal purchases in the UK shows that the average for this is 25 times a year, but 61% of buyers purchase from this category less often than that.

Why you shouldn't ignore light buyers of your category and brand

It's also interesting to note light buyers with specific brand purchasing. Based on reasonably new data from the EBI that looks at the results over time, they found that 35% of Head and Shoulders shampoo buyers in the UK only bought the product once in six years.

Zooming in on why they're such light buyers, Dr Beal explained that most are light buyers of the category overall, and they also buy from a repertoire of brands within the category. So your brand is really fighting for the consumers' attention, as brand loyalty is not what it once was.



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Shifting focus to **heavy brand buyers**, Dr Beal said these are worth more to marketers in terms of media strategy as they are the more loyal buyers of your brand.

We need to look at what marketers and advertisers can do to nudge further sales from the heavy buyer base. This tends to be smaller than the light buyer base yet they are already 'converts', predisposed to your brand over the others in the category.

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Dr Beal says when faced with competing brands, it's our memories that direct what we notice. So purchase decisions are not hard-wired by biology but rather soft-wired by memory.

The measure of total reach is important, with wastage often overstated as it has saved many brands.



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Moving from the 'who' to 'when' to speak to those consumers, Dr Beal said there are three principles to consider:

1. Recency;
2. Continuity; and
3. Maximising reach over the run of the campaign.

When people are contacted closer in time, the more recent memory refresh means there's a greater propensity for them to buy your brand.

The role of recency and familiarity in resonating with consumers

So you need to create a continuous presence, both to capitalise on the recency effect, as well as to catch new purchasers as they enter the market.



A slide from Dr Beal's presentation.

Doing so means you reach light media users more effectively and also helps your consumers build memories of your brand.

Elaborating on the factors to consider here, Dr Beal pointed out that as consumers, we switch off a little cognitively and don't pay attention when we see an ad repeatedly. With the **familiarity effect**, we keep processing the ad and recognise that we've seen it before. But our level of memory is much higher when the message is spaced out over time.

So the propensity to buy is nudged by advertising, and while there is a level of decay of advertising effects, there's no need to present the same message again and again over the same evening, as there is a lingering effect.



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That said, competitor advertising can lessen the impact of your brand's messaging and being completely off the air is like saying, "take advantage of my buyers' memory structures." We need to be present.

What to do if a competitor is outspending your advertising budget

So while it's best for your messaging to be spaced out, you should also aim for **cumulative reach across targets and time**.

Dr Beal explained that each spot in a campaign needs to ideally reach someone and move them from zero to one exposure, as the largest impact from advertising happens then.

“ If you have the chance to reach two people once or one person twice, rather reach two people once. ”

Dr Beal says that even if a competitor is outspending you and bursting in your space, you'll get the best results if you stick with a spaced-out strategy that moves people from zero to one. This means smaller brands should be minimising frequency to get this right over a longer period of time.



Actual impact, not cost per thousand

Claudelle Naidoo 9 Mar 2015



Your first ad will also deliver 100% pure reach, so you need to get that timing just right for most media types as you grow reach you also grow frequency. Dr Beal says to do so with due course to seasonality too, and where those budgets usually are throughout the year.

Factoring in the natural monopoly effect and double jeopardy of media

Moving on to the aspect of **where**, Dr Beal reminded us that marketers have a myriad of choices of where to place their media buy. The big media often do what the smaller ones can't in terms of overall reach, at a better pace.

There's also a **natural monopoly effect of large media**, where the shows with better ratings are also better at reaching the light users you're after. Note that there's no 'one size fits all' approach for this, as there's no complete data on cross-media consumption. That said, Dr Beal points out that the fundamentals of audience consumption of media do fit into best practice for this.

There's also **double jeopardy of media**, as small brands are penalised as a result of larger brands' reach, as well as the fact that those smaller brands tend to have a smaller audience that they interact with less frequently.



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The same pattern exists within the various media types, including online media and social media platforms.

Dr Beal says double jeopardy is useful in terms of knowing how niche media restricts reach. As a result, you should prioritise big media first, then complementary media that hits your light brand buyers as well as light media users, based on reach and audience quality. She acknowledges this is difficult in a fragmented media landscape.

Audience quality and rethinking retargeting

In thinking of your audience beyond size, it's also about the audience quality and using Facebook not just to buy ad space, but also to see what's represented by the Facebook likers of a brand. This tends to be skewed towards the heavy brand buyers, as consumers won't like the brand on Facebook if they're not already buying it or interested in buying it in future.

Note that these are *not* the people you want to reach, as they are already your brand fans.

Dr Beal also cautioned that retargeting is not necessarily the answer for digital marketing, as the consumer may have already been on that holiday or went in store and found they didn't like the fit of those clothes, so they don't necessarily want to see them again.



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Mari-Louise Kaplan 27 Oct 2016



There are two main questions to consider when selecting media:

Does the opportunity to see = exposure and memorable impact?

1. Will the opportunity to see (OTS) convert to exposure?
2. What impact will it have on the consumers' memory?

As part of that, you also need to note what constitutes that opportunity to see, as the baseline threshold for what was considered the opportunity to create the exposure. Dr Beal says we often compare apples not just to other apples or oranges, but to sushi in this regard.

Also factor in how the messaging is competing with other ads from other brands, as well as which devices are used to see the brand messaging, and the effect of those device-specific distractions around the consumer.



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Leigh Andrews 8 Jan 2018



The main advertising avoidance behaviours per media type, like **cognitive switch-off**, often can't be measured behaviorally. Lastly, Dr Beal says to think of the memory enrichment aspect. Is the messaging just visual, just auditory or both? We take in 99% of information through our eyes, but this depends on the specific campaign.

Next, we need to factor in **how much spend** is appropriated.

Dr Beal says advertising budget is not typically thought of as forecasting, but this is a key factor in determining a likely

response from the market based on levels of spend. The EBI uses leading climate forecasters' principles to drive what is spoken about.

Forecasting for ad budgets

Key among these is to **be conservative**. You don't necessarily need to go for the biggest budget, rather stick to the cumulative knowledge around different techniques for budgeting. Also, use multiple methods for a robust budgeting forecast. Dr Beal said the three main methods are:

1. Externally focused market-based;
2. Linking to profit and the internal performance of the brand; and
3. An objective and task-based method that considers both internal and external factors.

Keeping this all in mind and focusing on how to enhance the consumers' memory of your brand, Dr Beal said that after considering reach, it's about the visuals and ensuring your advertising is correctly attributed to your brand. This is Advertising 101 but often missed in the industry.



My generation failed to create loyalty

Erik Du Plessis 22 Nov 2017



You need to create creative ads that grab attention and creates an emotional response, while also leading to more processing of the brand so that there's a stronger link in the consumers' memory. It's not necessarily even about creating an intense emotional reaction – something they like and will be willing to pay attention to when they see it again.

Putting it all into place: Make fewer, better ads that reach the right consumers at the right frequency

Dr Beal also says to put those 'light buyers' and cognitive misers first, who get away with thinking less when given the opportunity – we all do this when we're tired, like watching TV after a long day in the office. This flows through to the concept of **making fewer, better ads** and investing in getting the work out there, with the greatest impact possible.

To recap:

Who: Across the five dimensions, you need to speak to your entire buyer base and the light buyers

When: Aim for a continuous presence to capitalise on the recency effect and the gap between exposure and purchase

Where: This depends on the task at hand, but use media with the biggest audience and where the light brand buyers are likely to be

How much: This is calibrated to what constitutes the category. A general rule of thumb is to set aside 10% of the brand's gross profit, budgeted out for continuity with reach

How: By building appropriate memory structures, refreshing consumers' links to your brand to get them to buy. Novelty and familiarity both create attention.

Remember that exposure effects fade over time, yet creating one winning ad can be effective for years.

That's why the simple messaging of the Cremora TV ads, first aired in the 1980s, have stood the test of time:

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ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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