

International scientist unpacks real reason for advertising

Nicole Hartnett, marketing scientist and senior research associate with the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, recently addressed marketers, media strategists and planners, on 'The real reason why marketers need advertising'.



Nicole Hartnett

"This is in line with our promise to continually share 'Insights that Ignite' with our valued clients," said Gill Randall, joint CEO of SPARK Media, which hosted the event. "Our membership of the institute is now into its 13th year, and hosting the various EBI academics over the years has seen many of South Africa's marketing and media professionals buy into the EBI world view of evidence-based marketing. We are proud to be firm believers and strong advocates for the scientifically proven marketing principles and laws, espoused by the world's largest group of marketing scientists."

Hartnett's main research area is advertising, with a particular focus on brain-friendly creativity and its relation to ad-effectiveness. The presentation referred to the major advances in neuroscience and our understanding of how the brain works, to provide additional evidence to the established EBI principles.

"Because after all, we advertise to 'brains' not people," said Hartnett. "It's a gatekeeper to our consciousness."

"Our brains use both emotion and rational centres when making decisions, not one or the other, as previously thought. We are never fully emotive without cognition and vice versa. Most of the decision-making happens unconsciously, so 'catching' a brain in a distracted and cluttered environment becomes a challenge. We are task-orientated, so we tend to screen out anything that is not relevant at the time."

"So, how do we best create the 'mental availability' needed to leverage the probability of your brand being thought of in a buying situation (the real goal of marketing)? Emotion trumps rationality in creating memory structures and retrieval of messages. However, you need both for brand-building efforts."

"The stronger the network of association brands can build over time, the higher the probability of the brand being thought of in more situations. Advertising and marketing interventions that can evoke an emotion does this more effectively than just a rational message. Having said that, a simple message like '50% off' elicits emotion too."

"Most consumers are more inclined to 'notice' brands they use (relevance), than non-users of the brand. This makes it harder to try to engage light and non-users and we know from the EBI that it is critical to do this, in order to grow your brands."

Tips

Hartnett went on to offer a few tips to help achieve this:

- Cut through mental screening – emotions and relevance.
- Use easy to notice branding! Use consistency and leverage distinctive assets.
- Refresh existing memory structures (know what is in people's heads – and make the message clear and simple).

"Advertising works best when it refreshes existing (and sometimes creates new) memory structures, but it is poor at making arguments to get us to think rationally about it," concludes Hartnett.

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