Unlock Creative Effectiveness and C-Suite Buy-In With Neurodesign

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Selling creativity in large multinational companies can often be a laborious challenge. There is always pressure from the C-suite to maximize return on investment. And that's before we even get to the age-old subjectivity challenge—everyone in the business feels entitled to an opinion when it comes to a piece of creative work, whereas they'd rarely question their lawyer or accountant's judgment. There is always the risk of a piece of work being rejected or watered down to the extent that the original idea is entirely lost.

We always look at how best to mitigate against subjectivity in matrix decision-making organizations, moving closer to objectivity. Australia's Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, as well as the work of Byron Sharp and Jenni Romaniuk, have led the charge to help remove some of this subjectivity by focusing on the power of distinctive brand assets that businesses need to leverage for brand recognition.

But there's another powerful tool we can add into the mix to further sharpen brand communication—neurodesign, the application of neuroaesthetics. While there are some elements

of neuroscience used within advertising already, this emerging field can add a potent layer in the realm of creativity, amplifying those brand assets and their effectiveness by reaching consumers on a more powerful nonconscious level.

Neuroaesthetics is a subfield of cognitive neuroscience and is traditionally defined as the scientific study of the biological mechanisms involved in our experiences with beauty. By understanding and using neural pathways, neurotransmitters, cognitive processes, memory, perception and emotions, neurodesign can create experiences that resonate instinctively at a nonconscious level with audiences and deliver tangible value.

It removes subjectivity from the equation by grounding decisions in human behavioral science, enabling us to push beyond personal preferences and gut instincts to create work that is not only visually appealing but also strategically sound. This allows us to develop a vocabulary that helps us eloquently articulate the power of our work and compellingly argue for solutions that are not just beautiful on the surface but also effective in achieving brand and commercial objectives.

Leveraging the subconscious

Neurodesign needs to reflect five basic human truths: that the brain craves ease and order, that humans have a limited attention span, are visually driven, respond to emotion and are attracted to beauty. There are 16 neuroaesthetic “triggers,” including Cusps & Curves, Orientation, Color, Agitation & Calm, and Anticipation & Tease.

Using neurodesign doesn’t offer a paint-by-numbers template or form a creative straitjacket, which seems to be a common

misconception. Looking at a piece of creativity with these sensory triggers in mind allows you to calibrate design assets to resonate with people's subconscious, convey desired brand attributes and drive desired behaviors and actions. Understanding the principles of visual perception, for example, using Orientation allows us to create communication layouts that are easier to decode, guide the audience's attention and highlight key messages effectively.

Some of the neurodesign triggers feel quite logical. Color is one of the most obvious ones, as we have an instinctive sense of what various colors tell us. Take yellow and black, a combination that signals danger in nature (such as on wasps and hornets) and we therefore translate these innate learnings into the world around us on things like high voltage warning signs.

The Cusps & Curves trigger espouses that sharp and pointy cusps evoke fear, something edgy and dangerous—hence their use in the automotive design of the sharp and angry Lamborghini—while curves are softer, making us feel safe, secure and encourage interaction. Curves are inherently soothing, so we see curves being used in categories like personal care and baby products.

A more abstract trigger, meanwhile, is Error. Our brains are easily hijacked and we are trained to spot things that are out of the ordinary (we get a nice dopamine reward for spotting an error). So, Error can be used to great effect across your communication. U.K. opticians Specsavers, for example, uses it in its communications to underscore its tagline, "Should've gone to Specsavers." Take the brand's very smart billboards where the poster has been deliberately misapplied to a site—a simple idea, executed brilliantly. The obvious error draws you in, making the message that much more memorable.

The true litmus test for the success of a CPG design is ultimately on the supermarket shelf or online storefront. The

fight for relevance is harder than it’s ever been, and that small piece of packaging or brand communication has to deliver commercial success against ever-increasing competition. If you understand the range of neurodesign triggers and how they can be applied, then your creative work will test better in research and impact more on consumers’ lives.

Professionalizing design

It feels like a no-brainer (pun intended) to say that knowing how the human mind works and thinks should inform the decisions that creatives and marketing decision-makers take. But one of the most powerful aspects of neurodesign is its ability to bridge the gap between creativity and commercial success.

The advertising industry is increasingly looking to behavioral science and neuroscience to remove the subjectivity and ensure that comms work tests better—System1 is doing a good job leading this market and promoting it with clients as a new business tool. Procter & Gamble and other multinational corporations have also invested in neuroscience to drive more certainty into commercial effectiveness. But there is still a way to go within wider creative roles.

Creatives and marketers, both agency-side and in-house, should start thinking about integrating neurodesign and how it can make the creative product more commercially effective. The best way is to turn to experts to help embed the principles of neurodesign into your teams’ everyday psyche and practice—but you can start by just being more aware of potential triggers that may be inadvertently built into visual output. You can move gradually toward more deliberate employment of these principles to enhance your work.

Each of the 16 neuroaesthetic triggers help in isolation, though are more often used together when reviewing creative work. They’re sticky and become part of your everyday parlance, helping you focus on objectivity—how the brain reviews and reads the creative stimulus placed in front of it. By aligning creative vision with underlying principles of human psychology, we move a step further to professionalizing the perception of creativity at the highest level—so those sell-ins at C-level become that much easier.

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