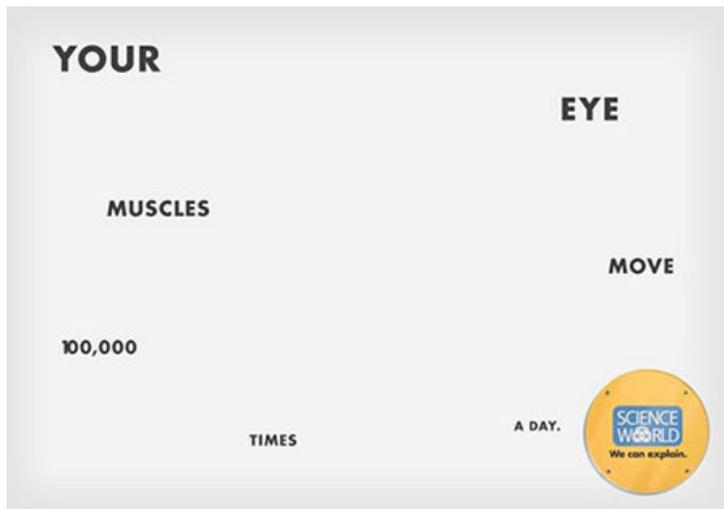




## Whisper, Don't Shout (or *mumble!*)

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With this issue of the *Views* we will pursue further how to train shoppers to buy, in either a cacophonous, or a "silent" marketplace.



Marketers are much given to attempting to communicate with shoppers, conscious mind to conscious mind, even though as much as 95% of a shoppers behavior is under subconscious, autonomic control. To help us understand why we don't even understand our own shopping, much less anyone else's, consider this fact: in a typical day your eye muscles move around 100,000 times. See: "[Portable Eyetracking: A Study of Natural Eye Movements](#)"

All of this movement is a consequence of the fact that your point of focus has to keep moving to avoid burning an image onto your retina. You can over-ride the movement, to an extent, by forcing yourself to stare at an image. You can demonstrate this by staring at an image for several seconds, holding your focus steady, and then

looking away to a blank wall, for example, where you will see a quite perfectly formed negative image of whatever you had stared at. You've burned out the pigments for that image, causing the negative to appear. Fortunately, that *negative* image only lasts for as long as it takes your eye to regenerate the visual pigments.

Really, you look at so much in a typical day that you can hardly be expected to manage adjusting your focus several times a second. Instead, your subconscious, autonomic mind, manages this process *for you*, quite efficiently. This doesn't mean that your conscious mind can't take over at any instant to provide executive instructions to the eye to look over here, or look at that, etc. But it remains that the eye will obey you and then immediately begin its own ceaseless scanning, focusing and reporting to the brain what is going on here in the "outside" world.

### The Clutter Filter

Now that we have established what the eye is doing, generally, during the shopping trip, let's look at some specifics. As we have noted before, half of all trips to supermarkets result in the purchase of five or fewer items, and half from six to perhaps several dozen. In any case, navigating to, and selecting those items is driven by habitual navigation - with some executive mind input; as well as selection from possibly 40,000 items, again driven by a subconscious, habitual process, with some executive mind "supervision."

NOTICE: It may be difficult to grasp the significance of this habitual mind/executive mind interaction, since you are processing this reading with your executive mind, and



probably give little conscious thought to your subconscious thinking - that's what it *is*: *subconscious*, below your consciousness. It is difficult for me, too, but I have the advantage of actually observing and *measuring* truckloads of shopping *behavior*, as well as interviewing shoppers. Interviewing is a conscious mind activity, from the shopper's conscious mind to the researcher's conscious mind. The stark contrast between what and how shoppers *do* and what and how they *say* they do, is typically great - and very significant. Conscious mind (shopper) to conscious mind (researcher) makes a lot of sense. But it is often a poor representation of reality. Possibly even worse, researchers are often so committed to their own conscious thoughts that it doesn't occur to them that their "findings" are really what they already tended to believe. This problem is referred to as "confirmation bias." We are here making a serious effort to avoid this problem; and to come to grips with reality. This comes from a respect for how shoppers actually behave, and why. Behavior is definitive of reality. Observe - measure - manage!

## The Selection Process

Next, we'll focus on the selection process itself, and begin by noting that the real challenge is less the selection of the few items, than the elimination from consideration of the nearly 40,000 items not wanted. This is where the eyes excel in ignoring massive amounts of information, based on habits and subtle cues - essentially a "clutter filter" that dismisses as *clutter* the vast majority of what comes within eye-sight. This is the great challenge for the marketer: how to break through the clutter filter.

## Two Types of "Clutter"

In our first example of clutter, we focus *only* on the clutter that originates with the retailer themselves, and *not* the clutter created by the brand suppliers, which will follow. For convenience we can refer to the first type as "retail clutter;" and the second as "brand clutter." This is an important distinction because retailers and branded product suppliers have different roles at the shelf and we must make a distinction in how they execute their own responsibilities, regardless of the competence of the other party.



Silent, Clean Aisle

Shouting Display

In the aisle on the left, there are probably hundreds of different SKUs, and, although each product can speak for itself, the display is essentially silent. It is a clean aisle, and is the functional equivalent of a warehouse aisle, with the merchandise arranged for the convenience of the "stock-picker." In this case the stock-picker is a "SELF"-service shopper. There is nothing in this common "clean aisle" format that actually contributes to the selling of anything - apart from providing an opportunity for each product to speak for, and potentially sell, itself.

On the right is an example of ineffectual selling, where the retailer is not silent, but "shouting" from the display. One, or even maybe two of those "Hot Buy" shelf talkers, *might* have played a significant sales role, generating real lift. But this blizzard of talkers is the functional equivalent of shouting at the shopper, and the subconscious mind recognizes this as, not communication, but just more noise in the environment.

Remember, the shopper is going to buy a relatively few items in this store on any given shopping trip. This necessarily means that the default function of the subconscious, habitual mind, is to discard, Discard, DISCARD! And no one likes to be shouted at. In fact, all the shouting is more likely to discourage shoppers from approaching this display.

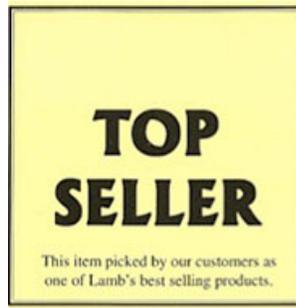
On the other hand, the properly silent shelf can be converted to a genuine salesman, with correct, and *severely limited* overt communication, with carefully targeted shoppers. Here is an illustration, where 50 top seller tags, properly distributed around the store, delivered double digit increases on top of already initial high volume sales

for those 50 items, with the result being a 4% increase for the entire grocery department! The "Top Seller" tags:



And the data for a few of the 50 items:

This is one illustration of the effective use of "whispering" communication targeting the subconscious/habitual mind. The very limited deployment of the 50 small "Top Seller" tags across the entire store - without any reset of the products - shows how effective "whispering" to the shopper can be, as



Product	Before "Top Signage"	With "Top Signage"	LIFT (month over month)
"Top Seller" Items	\$12,002	\$18,251	52%
CORONA 6/12	\$608	\$706	16%
STORE BRAND 2% GALLON	\$4,757	\$5,741	21%
TILLAMOOK FRENCH VANILLA	\$243	\$523	116%
CRYSTAL GEYSER NAT ALPINE	\$641	\$927	45%
FRANZ PREM RND TP WHITE	\$759	\$1,027	35%
KRAFT MAC CHEESE DNR	\$257	\$515	101%
TILL MED CHDR LOAF	\$3,152	\$4,180	33%
TILL MED CHDR SLCD CHSE	\$503	\$1,076	114%
STORE BRAND BUTTER CUBES	\$359	\$1,522	324%
STORE BRAND REG SLICED BACON	\$227	\$1,202	429%
ANG SFT 6 DBRL WHITE	\$498	\$834	67%

contrasted with the blizzard of shouting "Hot Buy" tags cited for the earlier display - discussed above. After illustrations from several brands, we will discuss further why these strategies are effective, and the why-and-how of in-store marketers learning to use some of that 95% of shopper behavior that marketers ignore.

### "Brand Clutter" from Suppliers

So for the brand supplier, retail clutter at varying levels is part of the problem in getting through to shoppers. It's hard to have a conversation in a very noisy place. Of course, the brand supplier can jump into the fray, with promotional money, and attempt to out-shout the crowd. But brand efforts always come back to the #1 communication device of the brand, within the store - their own packages. ANY promotional efforts should be built on the package itself - and this includes the mass advertising outside the store that should integrate closely with the package. For any product already enjoying significant market success, the mass advertising outside the store should conform to the *already* success of the product, and NOT attempt to wholesale redesign the packaging to conform with the mass advertising outside the store. This is the nut kernel of the problem Neale Martin has so well addressed in his book, which is essentially about marketing to the subconscious: Habit: The 95% of Behavior Marketers Ignore. Now for some illustrations of whispering vs. **shouting** (or *mumbling*) on the package, or on in-store promotional materials:

### SHOUTING!!! . . . or mumbling.



Here we see the brand trying to talk to the shopper by shouting to them, (notice the extensive text descriptions in the headings,) but it is just as likely to come across as mumbling, given the amount of other brand marketers also trying to have a conversation with the shoppers. On the other hand, here is a more effective *whispering* to the shoppers:

whispers . . .



Particularly, contrast the wordiness at the top of the shouting/mumbling graphics. Compare this to the simplicity of the "whispered" messages. But there is a good deal more to the whispered messages than the simplicity that lends itself to the visual cues that the subconscious translates complex messages into. Hint: complex messages are processed by the mind into bite size symbols. In other words, they are rarely used by the shopper in the shopping process. The shopper is often NOT attempting to make a rational thoughtful decision at all, but to simply find products, and validate decisions she has already made, possibly months or even years ago.

Now consider a similar strategy used to sell Jif peanut butter at the shelf:



I've commented on this before in How to Sell the Few, Among the Many? There I discussed the role of the #1, as a powerful and simple marker for the subconscious mind, and noted the near empty shelf for the "#1" marked product, even though a similar marker was used on adjacent products; without the #1, and obviously without the sales! For the Unilever products illustrated above, note the *strong* social marketing use of both "America's Favorite," and the more credible use of the same marker across a *suite* of products in different categories. As long as the categories/subcategories are sufficiently distinct to

the shopper, there is *NO* conflict with having more "#1s" or "favorites". (For the multi-brand supplier, this is similar to the retailer's use of the same marker on a *limited number* of products, around the store.) So the Jif example is an excellent use of #1, but it is weakened, to some extent, by trying to use a similar graphic on another product in the line. So the question is, was the goal here to blur or muddy the line between "#1" and a faux-"#1"? This is moving in "shouting" direction, the natural inclination of all too much "marketing" in the stores.

SHOUTING!!! . . . or mumbling.



whispers . . .



Here is another example, where "whispering" delivered better sales than "shouting/mumbling." The large amount of text below the main label contributes to a mumbling appearance to a shopper whizzing by, and the photos further increase the complexity. The switch to the gold medal background and slight rotation of the brand would probably work if all that wonderful blank space in the whispering package hadn't been obscured. I understand. I've had lots of experience with over-communication myself. ;-)

**The Whisper, Shout (mumble) Hypothesis**

What follows is a hypothesis for tying the data and observations together into a coherent explanation of how to use these insights to increase sales for a brand, suite of brands, category or for a full store. There is a chain of linked bullet points below that provide something of a blueprint.

## Steps in Training the Shopper - How and Why it Works!

- **Focus on current purchasers - high volume.**

Success is largely a matter of focusing on the few things that will deliver maximum effect. What's important to most shoppers, and what they are NOW buying most should be your focus. See: Sell to Their "Shopping Lists" (Tell'em Which to Buy!).

- **(All others will be part of the halo effect.)**

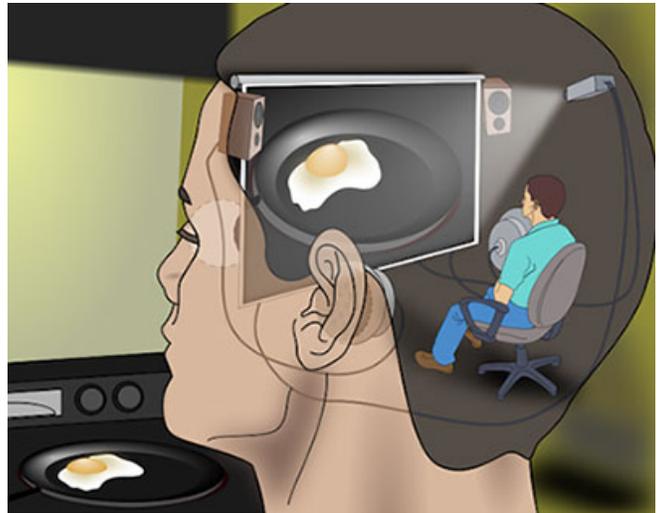
If you do a bang-up job of selling shoppers what they mostly want to buy - it's what they are already buying a lot of, high volume - they will buy even more, but also, will buy more of what is around those few items. See: Mid-Caps: Break Out of the Pack.

- **When the "training marker" first appears with the product the shopper usually buys, the shopper may or may not notice.**

Bear in mind that we are not wanting to talk to all the shoppers in the store about all the products in the store. Trying to do that is what creates the typical in-store cacophony. So... we are not trying to shout and wave our arms to get the shoppers attention. The products we are focusing on are the ones that are already getting a lot of attention. We want to just quietly be there for when one of the large number of shoppers who DO stop to buy, we can establish a bit of a connection with those shoppers', and ONLY those shoppers', subconscious minds. This is why the shopper *may or may not notice* us (our communication.) They don't need to notice, in order to have the outside impact we will have. Neale Martin makes the statement that training shoppers to buy is similar to training dogs - reinforce behavior that you like, in this case by "marking" it. Even a small, whispered message can accomplish this in the noisy store environment.

- **But the "homunculous" notices!**

The homunculous is an imaginary little person that represents your subconscious mind. The little person observes you observing and files that away for future subconscious purposes. Remember your eye moving 100,000 times per day? What did you think it was doing, wasting valuable resources/energy? Not at all, just because you were unaware of it, doesn't mean your eye/brain partnership (the homunculous) was unaware of it. If we are selling to the subconscious, it is preferable to NOT bother the conscious mind, but go straight to the "habit control center," essentially the homunculous. This is not to bypass the conscious mind, but to activate decisions that the conscious mind has already made, earlier.



Really, do you need to make a decision when you are buying a gallon of milk or a loaf of bread? All you need is to execute a habit long formed, with retailers and brands continually throwing up obstacles, because they want to "talk to you about this or that," when you just want to buy what you always buy. Fortunately, your very personal servant, your homunculous, knows your mind better than you do, and turns off all this interruptive communication from the retailer and brand. If their shouting and arm waving does get through to you, chances are it is more of a minor irritation or frustration, than genuinely helpful. (We will write more on "Moral Marketing" in a future *Views*.)

- **(This is the one WE buy.)**

What we are describing now is the training (or reinforcement) of the subconscious mind. With the "top seller" tags on the retailer's shelves, the same as with the "#1 choice," and "America's favorite," in each case we are providing a "training marker" that is simple for the homunculous/subconscious to recognize. We are training the shopper because every time they buy this item (and a lot of people do buy it regularly,) the homunculous is reinforced to say, "Aha! This is the one WE buy." Recognizing the training marker for the absolute, specific, single item that the shopper wants to buy, eliminates ALL time-wasting decision-making.

- **After the homunculous is trained, no thinking is required for future purchases - see the "marked" product and STRIKE! The shopper is trained.**

This is the goal we are after - a well-trained shopper who *automatically* purchases our product(s). Automatic means *fast!* This is why the sales increase. Being able to buy YOUR product faster, provides time to possibly buy a second one of your product, or the halo effect . . . to buy something nearby.

- **Halo effect works both on surrounding products; and surrounding shoppers - perhaps new purchasers.**

This actually works. We can speculate on why it works. Taking as an example the 50 Top Seller items in a single store, all characterized initially as perhaps within the top 1% of items on offer. (For a category strategy it might be 5% of the category.)

Maybe Mrs. B is a new buyer, first time for this product, XYZ. Perhaps, over the next weeks she rebuys XYZ a few times, each time the homunculous noting, so "Mrs. B buys XYZ!" Now, the next time Mrs. B comes down this aisle, perhaps with no intention of buying XYZ, the homunculous notices the training marker, the Top Seller tag coming up. Mrs. B is otherwise occupied, but her hand reaches out without her conscious prompting and touches the product. She acquiesces in the auto-choice, and into the cart it goes!

Now, of the 50 tagged items, Mrs. B actually is already buying several. Each time she buys ABC and LMN, the homunculous says, Aha! Mrs. B is buying *other* of these yellow-tagged items. This has the effect of creating a personal suite of #1 choice items for Mrs. B. But it would also create a bias in favor of additional items, possibly not in Mrs. B's suite, but also labeled as #1 choice. This bias will probably lead Mrs. B to purchase from the *store's* entire suite of #1 items. It is not just the fact of purchasing, but the fact that it is *faster*. Faster purchases are easier, and lead to more purchases, both within the suite, as well as of other items *around* the suite items. Again, see: [Mid-Caps: Break Out of the Pack.](#)

Then there is the halo effect of shoppers who have in the past perhaps never purchased one of the retailer's *suite* products. Certainly, some of these people will notice the Top Seller training tags, even though we have made them as innocuous as possible. We know there is a high probability that if they will only try the item, they will like it - an awful lot of other shoppers in this store obviously do. Thus, without fanfare, by the halo effect, more and more shoppers join the Top Seller suite "club." No formal club required. Loyalty to the "club" is automatic, it is so easy and convenient to buy, and lots of other people like these products, too.

Do you get it? It's just one of the components of double-digit sales increases year after year - focus on the winners, your best selling products AND your best customer/shoppers, *training* them to make purchases easier and you will be a winner, too!

Here's to [GREAT "Shopping" for YOU!!!](#)  
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