



Use Neuroscience, Psychology, and Iconology To Align Desire and Design for Real Results

By J. Duncan Berry, Ph.D.



It is hard to pick up a business publication these days and not see an article describing the “magic” of good design driving profits. Is it any wonder? Despite the value of Pine and Gilmore’s vaunted “experience economy,” people still crave beautiful objects — and they always will!

Since time immemorial, whole cultures experience continuous aesthetic trickle down effects. In historical terms, those who stake out the aesthetic high ground first have been the victors of style. Now more than ever, the market rewards the aesthetic high ground very handsomely. Style victors are now becoming category victors.

The question on everyone’s mind is: how do I get a map to the aesthetic high ground in my category? What does this “place” look like?

Marketers have been headed in this direction for many years, though too slowly. Beginning with the Ernest Dichter’s “depth boys” of the 1940s and 1950s up to the archetypal “discoveries” of Clotaire Rapaille, the metaphor elicitation of Jerry Zaltman and the growing ranks of neuromarketing researchers, businesses have long placed a premium on getting to the core unconscious

and emotional drivers that cause consumers to move their hand to grasp a product at shelf.

A new way to translate

Until now, there has been no adequate way to translate the abstract findings of motivational research into actionable design criteria. Enter NeuroDesign™, a proprietary design research and management instrument being developed at laga (Lipson Alport Glass & Associates).

NeuroDesign’s central premise derives from the insight that emotion not only shades but often determines purchasing decisions. Commercial imagery (brand, package, and identity design) that elicits the proper emotional response outperforms purely “functional” imagery. In short, emotionally resonant design positively impacts sales, and thus profits.

NeuroDesign is a systematic process for: 1) leveraging already identified emotional drivers of a given brand or product; 2) constructing a coherent map of visual analogs for these drivers; and 3) applying them to a brand or product’s existing equities. This process creates a carefully graded spectrum of emotionally powerful visual communication options.



All Figured Out

NeuroDesign™ enables companies to identify, measure, and strategically mine existing emotional equities. For example, on mile after mile of shelves, body-oriented design cues refer masculine and feminine shapes. How often do we truly see the high-waisted, slim-hipped, frontal female form embedded in the Palmolive dish soap bottle? Physical references to the female form address tacit, unconscious associations with the product, the labor, and its container. For more recent concentrated formulas and packages, the female formula has been conserved and compressed.

Mechanical Resonance

Gender associations have dominated product and package representations in the home cleaning and health and beauty categories for generations. Only recently have more abstract or mechanical references come to change the emotional charge associated with dish soap. The operative emotional engagement is to heighten the sanitary, scientific, and impersonal quality of the soap experience—to literally depersonalize it.

This strategic design process will enable firms to enhance existing equities to sharpen and magnify the emotional component of their messages. It also will help firms differentiate their offerings in more emotionally resonant and pointed terms. Companies can then stake out the shelf-set with more confidence and adjust nimbly to new competitive offerings by staying not just “on message” but “on sweet spot.”

Neurology in practice

NeuroDesign is built upon an interlocking cross-section of the most advanced thinking in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities on the subject of visual communication. Specifically, neuroscience has experienced an explosion in scope, range, and utility since 1990. It has been said that more has been written about the brain in the last 15 years than the combined total of the preceding 20 centuries!

One core insight from neuroscience is that emotion plays a far more significant role in our lives than we have previously thought. Fully 95% of our brain’s operations occur below the level of conscious thought. Combined with the fact that this compact organ, which accounts for about 2% of our body mass, consumes fully 30% of our calories, then we can come to grasp the magnitude of the emotional dimension of life.

Thanks to the enormous advances in non-invasive imaging technologies over the last decade, neuroscience has thrown open a window on the mental processes at

work when we are exposed to specific phenomena, how we react to them and the decisions made as a consequence. Particularly interesting are the gaps between what these technologies show as happening in our reactions to an object or image and what we say about it. Literally, we are unable to speak—or sometimes even acknowledge—the truth about our own emotional responses to a brand, product, graphic, or package.

A psychological edge

As neuroscience gives us an understanding of how we work from “inside,” psychology can help us understand how those forces work on the “outside.” A current school of psychological thought that descended from Darwin’s ideas has developed a systematic vocabulary for describing and explaining emotional phenomena. Derived in large part from the vibrant insights of Silvan Tomkins, today’s cohort of emotion-based psychologists is led by Paul Ekman of the University of California, San Francisco.

The central point of this body of work has been an analytical tool for parsing the expression of emotions on the human face as well as to locate and identify so-called universal emotions. Universal emotions are inner experiences we all have—whether we are children from sub-Saharan Africa or Canadian retirees—and we can recognize the visual cues of that experience because they are fixed in coordinated muscular actions.

Because we can identify and isolate the specific visual signs of emotion, expressed on the face by



patterns of muscular movement, and because research has shown how we recreate emotions within us based on the emotional expressions we encounter (a process called emotional contagion), we can now account for the creation of emotional experience.

The iconology discipline

This discussion takes us to the third discipline that helps coordinate and shape the findings of neuroscience and psychology—iconology. This is certainly the least well-known of the triad, but it offers the material from which one can build a bridge from the heady world of brain scans and laboratory analytics to real world design.

Iconology is a method of visual

continued on page 58

continued from page 56

A Change Agent in Change.” The speaker will be Harris E. DeLoach Jr., chairman, president and chief executive officer of Sonoco Products Company. In this presentation, DeLoach will make the case that the packaging industry must transform itself from being viewed simply as suppliers into partners capable of meeting rapidly changing customer demands.

Dennis McGrew, president and chief executive officer of NatureWorks LLC, will start the day on Tuesday, October 31, at 8:30 a.m. with a keynote presentation titled “Creating a Sustainable Future: Growing the Bio-Resin Market in a Greening Economy.” This session will highlight what it takes to bring a bio-resin to market, from engaging brand owners and retailers to the required technical expertise in understanding fit-for-use applica-

tions of a new material to understanding the partnerships needed with key stakeholders. ■

For more information about Pack Expo International 2006, visit www.packexpo.com; phone 703-243-8555; fax 703-243-8556; or email expo@pmmi.org.

SUBSTRATE REVIEW

continued from page 48

integrity and affect sales. PET with UV protection can offer brand owners a safe, convenient, and durable health and beauty aid material while maintaining a competitive cost position by eliminating the need for expensive additives. ■

SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING UPDATE

continued from page 51

like GE, Ford Motor Company, and Wal-Mart. Looking for ways of retooling their workforce in key areas of sustainable systems thinking, businesses are finding MCAD's distributed format allows them to reap the benefits of better-educated employees without losing valuable productive time and costs, associated with out of town workshops and traditional certificate venues.

The curriculum was created with the idea that every participant would take away a solid set of actionable tools applicable for any design or business challenge. Working designers from the o2 Global Sustainable Design Network and environmental professionals from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency crafted the program to be what they wish they had had when they were in school—and what all schools should be teaching now but haven't quite caught up to yet.

MCAD's offerings include a variety of accessible learning modes, from intensive five-week workshops to complete certificate tracks geared to their industry. With each of the learning modes designed to help participants not only become highly skilled problem solvers, but to open new channels for innovation. The goal is to make it easy to look to tomorrow while still being profitable today. ■

Wendy Jedlicka, CPP is president of Jedlicka Design Ltd. (www.jedlicka.com), is chapter chair for o2-USA/Upper Midwest and liaison for the o2 Global Green Design Network (o2.org), and packaging and economics faculty for Minneapolis College of Art and Design's groundbreaking Sustainable Design Certificate Program (www.mcad.edu).

DESIGNER'S CORNER

continued from page 14

analysis developed by Aby Warburg at the beginning of the last century. Warburg was an heir to the famous German banking family and one of the founders of modern art history. It seeks to account for the spontaneous appearance of specific visual formulas that convey emotion. These visual formulas reappear in widely disparate times, cultures, and locations.

A deep dive into visual communication, iconology offers the ability to capture and assess the form, content and emotional significance of visual communication. With a foot in art history, iconological analysis is the most robust form of content analysis available—a kind of semiotics on steroids, detached from the suffocating strictures of its linguistic model.

Taken together, neuroscience, psychology and iconology provide a near unassailable foundation for NeuroDesign. As such, NeuroDesign offers a strategically sensitive method for guiding the design process from upstream conceptualization through prototyping that provides a robust, scientifically validated platform enabling managers and designers to speak the same language as they pursue a common goal: emotionally resonant design that drives profits up. ■

J. Duncan Berry, Ph.D., is director of the Applied Iconology Inc. research firm that specializes in neuromarketing research analysis. He is currently working with laga to create a new design research and management tool called NeuroDesign™, an exacting analytical framework for orchestrating emotional resonance through design. Dr. Berry can be reached at dberry@laga.com.