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# Selling to the converted?

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The goal of most advertising is to  
deliver on customer acquisition.  
That's not what most ads  
actually do.



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Ask most marketers what advertising is meant to do, and their answer will almost certainly involve people who don't buy their brand, or who don't buy as much of it as they would like. Whether you're shifting perceptions or simply driving sales, the chances are that your objective involves creating brand preference where none existed before.

Unfortunately, many advertisers and their creative agencies are operating blind when it comes to customer acquisition. And this is because they lack insight on the position their brand occupies in different consumers' brains to begin with. As a new TNS study of the short and long-term impact of ads reveals, that's a massive oversight.

## Magically vanishing brand benefits

One of the ads in the study is a **very funny execution for the Australian iced coffee brand, Dare**. It shows a cyclist suffering disastrous consequences because he is too dozy to distinguish between a lamppost and a parked truck when locking his bike to something. Aggregate effectiveness testing would show this



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ad doing the business: it doesn't just involve a large proportion of the audience, it motivates them; and it shows strong Affective Memory Potential<sup>1</sup> as well, building the associations in the mind that cause consumers to pay attention and gravitate towards the brand in the future. There's only one problem: these impacts are hugely concentrated amongst those who already drink Dare and already like the brand. Amongst those who didn't have an existing preference, the impressive numbers start to disappear; as far as potential new customers are concerned, Dare's nice-looking ad is neither driving short-term motivation, nor creating long-term brand benefits. It is selling – but only to those who are already buying.

It's not alone. Our analysis shows that large numbers of ads which appear to be driving purchase behaviour and building Power in the Mind<sup>2</sup> in fact have very little impact on those who didn't already prefer the brand. The influence of these ads is restricted to those who would most likely have bought the product anyway. They may be great at the task of retention, strengthening and reaffirming existing brand loyalty, but in most cases that's not what they are being paid to do.

### **A far-from-level playing field**

Distinguishing between recruitment and retention when developing and testing ads is vital – because the brains of the two different audiences have very different starting points. And, for this reason, the response of one group tells you very little about the response of the other. Consumers with an existing brand preference have already constructed affective memories around the brand, connections between neurons within the brain that fire up rapidly and to powerful effect when they experience something to trigger them. The Dare ad does a great job of firing up the Dare-related affective memories in the minds of existing customers, and the results demonstrate that these affective memories are very positive and powerful. They ensure these customers' attention, and they motivate them by reminding them that they care about the brand. Deeper analysis of Affective Memory Potential reveals a self-reinforcing cycle: the ad's novelty and unexpectedness cause memories to be updated and strengthened; humour packs a powerful affective punch, encouraging the impact of stronger associations within the brain; crucially, the existing memories encourage the customers' brains

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to see the ad as relevant, and therefore worth creating new memories around.

In this way, the pre-existence of affective memories creates a seriously uneven playing field for advertising. They make it far easier to create impressive brand impact amongst existing customers – but they also ensure that the results amongst those existing customers tell you nothing about how those ads will play amongst people who are not already likely to buy your brand.

This means that ad effectiveness data throws up very different results depending on how you analyse it. Differentiate between the consumers that are already engaged with a brand and those that are not, and things start to look very different. The impact of [Barclays' matey ads for its Pingit money transfer service](#) in the UK, [Wells Fargo's emotive meditation on conversations](#) in the US, the [La Vie est Belle fragrance brand in France](#) and many more besides, all fall away dramatically and disappointingly when we ask whether they can deliver on customer acquisition.

## Building motivating memories among the non-engaged

But our analysis proves that this fall-off is far from inevitable. Advertising is certainly capable of building preference from scratch – but it requires something more than the characteristics that appeal to existing fans. In Australia, a backwards-running ad with a [jaunty soundtrack for Vegemite](#) outperforms all others in building new affective memories. In the US, there's the insurer [Allstate, with a hymn to embracing risk](#) in life that sells to both the converted and those that were previously unengaged. There's [Motorola, with an ad promoting the functions of a new phone](#) that delivers whether Power in the Mind already exists or not; a sexy [Russian ad for the cherry drink Ya](#) that does the same; and a sweeping execution for Spain's [Loterias y Apuestas del Estado that delivers huge impact](#) amongst many who don't play the lottery.

What do these ads have that other apparently creatively strong executions do not? Why does Vegemite succeed where Dare falls short? What is it about the Allstate ad that makes it more likely to



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attract new personal finance customers than Wells Fargo? When we analyse the Affective Memory Potential of these ads, the characteristics that combine to create deeper, long-term impact within the human brain, we find a consistent and crucial difference starts to emerge between those that deliver on customer acquisition and those that do not.

All do well on Novelty (which is vital for capturing attention and building or strengthening affective memories) and they score well on Affective Impact (which floods the brain with chemicals to build stronger neural connections); the crucial difference between them is their ability to establish Relevance amongst people who have no pre-existing relationship to the brand. This is the key challenge

that advertising must overcome to build affective memories where none existed before – and it's where Dare, Wells Fargo, Barclays and the rest fall short. There is no single magic formula for conjuring up Relevance in this way, but Vegemite, Allstate and the others suggests various techniques and characteristics that work.

The Vegemite ad's novelty comes from the simple device of showing in reverse a pair of hands preparing a breakfast of poached egg on toast; its affective impact comes from the feel-good soundtrack that accompanies it; its all-important relevance comes from the egg. Vegemite is one of the world's great 'love-it-or-hate-it' products. Those who have rejected it in the past have to be convinced that it is relevant to them in new



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contexts. The reverse order of the ad means that it doesn't have to pitch itself as relevant to people who like Vegemite; it's relevant to anybody who likes poached eggs for breakfast. That's a lot of Australians.

The ads for Wells Fargo and Allstate are both stirring and emotive with slowly building soundtracks, but Allstate has two crucial advantages. Firstly its affective punch is just straight-out more powerful: great script, delivered enthrallingly by a child narrator, thought-provoking ideas and imagery. It's hard to watch without hairs standing up on the back of your neck, and that gives it more chemical raw material to work with when building motivating associations in the brain. Secondly, and interrelatedly, its themes are universal and universally relevant. Allstate's ad is about embracing life with all of its everyday threats. It's a theme that all people encounter every day – and the characters and situations shown in the film are carefully chosen to bring this everyman universality to life. Wells Fargo's ad, on the other hand, is far



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less universally relevant. Its theme of the power of conversations works amongst existing customers who can relate to the idea of having conversations with the bank, but it means far less to those who haven't experienced this.

## **Short-term response, long-term benefits**

As an IPA study by Binet and Field demonstrated a few years ago, the key to delivering sustainable, cumulative growth in sales lies in building affective memories. Such 'emotional priming' as they referred to it, enables each ad to build from a higher base when it comes to market share. Based on the TNS analysis, we need to add the requirement that the building of affective memories must take place amongst consumers where no emotional priming previously existed. This is crucial for delivering the cumulative effect. It ensures that brands get a long-term return from their investment in each campaign, increasing share by acquiring new customers whilst reinforcing it by strengthening affective memories amongst those who love them already.

## **Recruitment or retention: make a conscious choice**

The balance between these two processes of customer recruitment and customer retention depends of course, on the size of the brand in question – and how many people are likely to have an existing relationship with it. If a Coca-Cola ad does a great job amongst people who already have a positive regard for the brand, then it's most likely doing a great job full stop. But for brands such as Dare or Allstate sustainable long-term success absolutely depends on their ability to appeal beyond their existing consumer foothold. Many brands do consciously follow a retention strategy, protecting share and growing spend amongst existing customers at different times and for different reasons; but many more are following a retention ad strategy without actually realising it.

## **Relevance and creativity**

In this piece, we have argued for the importance of establishing relevance amongst people who do

not already consider your brand or product relevant to them. Ensuring that your creative applies to as many potential customers as possible sounds like a recipe for banal advertising – but not when you look at the ads that succeed. A full understanding of Affective Memory Potential helps to target relevancy in ways that are both imaginative and powerful; indeed it demands it. If the executions are not novel and unexpected they cannot engage our neural networks in the first place; if they don't stir deeper motivations or desires, they won't take full advantage of the opportunity to do so. The Loterias y Apuestas del Estado ad is a sweeping tribute to the enduring power of dreams and imagination; the Ya ad is an unashamed dose of fired-up sensuality; Motorola's is cosy empathy in action; Allstate's is an epic about the human spirit. All are engineered to get the parts of the brain that matter buzzing – and to do so in a way that doesn't depend on the existing role of the brand in people's lives.

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## About the authors

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Since joining TNS in 2002, Anne has built extensive experience of delivering brand equity and communications programmes to brands across Asia Pacific. Her expertise ranges from planning and pre-testing of advertising programmes and touchpoint planning, through to in-market evaluation and optimisation via brand tracking and cross-media evaluation'.

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<sup>1</sup>Affective Memory Potential is TNS' measure assessing the long term brand-building potential of advertising – covering the three dimensions of Novelty, Affective Impact and Relevance – which shows whether the campaign will be noticed and brand associations assimilated into long term memory.

<sup>2</sup>Power in the Mind is TNS' measure of emotional connection or psychological attachment. It is a purely attitudinal measure, and reflects the way an individual feels about a brand. Validations show that this psychological attachment translates into in-market decisions and brand performance.

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TNS advises clients on specific growth strategies around new market entry, innovation, brand switching and stakeholder management, based on long-established expertise and market-leading solutions. With a presence in over 80 countries, TNS has more conversations with the world's consumers than anyone else and understands individual human behaviours and attitudes across every cultural, economic and political region of the world.

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