

Too much innovation: Everybody must get stoned

by: [Dominic Basulto](#)

Every week, the **Wall Street Journal** publishes a quick-and-dirty "Tricks of the Trade" column with an expert within a certain field.



Some weeks, it might be a wine sommelier at a fancy restaurant explaining how to preserve a bottle of wine overnight, while other weeks, it might be a big-shot travel expert explaining how to save a few bucks on a travel reservation to Europe. (I find these types of insights strangely addictive, even if I don't actually get to use them.) So anyway, the topic of this week's column was "A salon owner shaves," and it featured the owner of a chain of private men's salons that provide grooming services to men. What better person to explain how to get a nice, close shave? After all, John Allan Meing ("John Allan" to his clients) also has a line of grooming products available at Saks Fifth Avenue and Barneys New York and considers himself something of a close shave expert.

That's why I was surprised to hear that he uses a [Gillette Mach 3 blade](#) -- something you can buy off-the-shelf at the local Duane Reade. As John Allan points out, "Three blades is enough. I tried five blades and didn't see a real benefit from it." Let me repeat: *three blades is enough*.

Which brings me to my innovation question of the day: Is there ever a case when you can have "too much" innovation? I think that companies like Gillette have been laboring under this delusion, with their breathless claims of brand-new technology ("Fusion," "Nitro") or breakthrough shaving experiences (e.g. is Mach 3 a razor blade that functions at three times the speed of sound?). For the past 50 to 60 years, in fact, the razor blade industry has always operated under this assumption -- that rapid, technological innovation with razor blades is the way to go. Referencing this 1948 vintage shaving advertisement, Corey Greenberg of the [Shave Blog](#) weighs in:

"Shavegeeks tend to romanticize the past, and I'm as guilty of it as anyone. I talk about safety razors like they're some pure manifestation of The Greatest Generation, used by JFK, Cary Grant, and Lee Marvin, back when men were men and shaved like men, even though the women probably had legs that felt more like Brokeback Mountain than smooth 'n' silky.

But the more I delve into shaving's past, the more I see that the times, they've never really a' changed much. Witness this 1948 magazine advertisement for the then-new Schick/Eversharp Injector safety razor, and its absurd claim that each and every blade was "stroned!"

Stroned?

That is to say, stropped and honed, like a straight razor's edge -- honed on a whetstone, and stropped on a hanging leather strop. Serious he-men wetshavers who use a straight razor have to periodically hone their razors on a stone, and then before each and every shave, they swipe the blade to and fro on a leather strop to keep the edge keen. But safety razor blades?

I believe Schick was honing all of their Injector blades -- all razor blades are "honed" in one way or another, whether it's done with a stone or a laser beam. But am I really supposed to believe Schick was stropping each and every Injector blade with "30 ft. of leather" any more than I'm supposed to believe that the Mach3 Power's "micro-pulses" make the shave closer?

How *stroned* do they think I am?"

[image: [Shave Blog](#)]

Original post:

http://endlessinnovation.typepad.com/endless_innovation/2007/02/razor_blade_inn.html

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NEWS & INSIGHTS

A Blade Too Far

Gillette's Fusion gives a close shave, but the price cuts deep

About 20 years ago, I laid down my razor. It was a Trac II -- state-of-the-art, twin-blade technology at the time. (I still remember when they added the lubricating strip -- brilliant!) Shortly afterward, the razor companies launched their bizarre arms race. Pivot heads were followed by spring-loaded blades. Mach 3 begat Mach 3 Turbo, and was countered by Quattro. Now there's Fusion, Gillette's five-bladed wonder that hit the stores back in January. To believe the TV ads, all this was necessary because beard hairs require ever more blades and technology to coax them out for snipping. I just watched from the sidelines, rubbing my beard in bemusement.

But recently, faced with the encroachment of middle age and more than a few gray hairs, I decided to return to the world of shaving. I figured I would pick up where I left off, with my trusty twin-blade. But then someone suggested this was an opportunity to put cutting-edge razor technology to the test. What if Gillette's R&D labs really had cracked the secrets of the beard-cheek boundary? My face, preserved as a kind of old-growth forest, would be the perfect proving ground.

I ventured forth to the local drug store and selected a new Fusion Power razor and pack of eight replacement blades. The clerk rang me up: \$39.98, before taxes. Hello? Good thing my employer is paying for this little exercise. In my household, \$40 is what you pay for a month of cable TV, not a grooming tool.

Apparently I'm not alone on that score: There are signs men are balking at Fusion's high price tag. Despite big discounts and massive advertising, sales of Gillette's latest wonder have fallen short of expectations, some analysts say. This is bad news for Procter & Gamble Co. ([PG](#)), which paid \$57 billion last year to buy Gillette, largely for its ability to rake in unprecedented profits with each increase in razor price and blades. On Aug. 2 the company reported 36% higher quarterly earnings, and put a rosy spin on razor sales.

Placing cost concerns aside, I lather up. The first point I'd like to make about shaving with five blades is that it's hard to tell where to put them. With two blades, the business end of the razor is thin enough that you can place it where the beard begins and start pulling. But the blades in the Fusion are embedded in a device that seems to cover my entire face (O.K., it's maybe a half-inch wide, but still). I guess this is why they added the single Precision Trimmer blade on the top of the razor. What I really don't get, though, is the "power" in the battery-operated version, Fusion Power. Push a button and the razor hums. How this helps the morning clear-cut escapes me.

For kicks, I shave one side with the Fusion and the other with my old Trac II. The Fusion side is definitely smoother. But eight times smoother? That's the difference between the \$3.50 I've paid per Fusion cartridge and the 40 cents I pay per twin-blade cartridge.

I know, Gillette says these new blades last longer. Maybe even a month longer. But for a guy who insists on squeezing every last gasp out of a can of Barbasol, each Fusion cartridge would have to last about a year to justify its price. I'm also left wondering, how do you know when the blades are shot? If one goes, can the other four plug along for a while, like a 747 flying on three engines?

My advice to Gillette: Keep cutting the price. And think about that name. "Mach 3" speaks of power and, of course, three blades. And it's hard to misinterpret "Trac II" -- there are two tracks, and you can guess that each one has a blade. That's what I'll be using once my expense-account allotment of Fusion cartridges runs out. The good news is, I think I can milk them until about 2009.

The role of customer feedback in innovation

(Posted by francois to: [Strategy](#) | [adoption of innovation](#) | [marketing](#) | [product innovation](#))

Over at the [Fast Company blogjam](#), Dave Pollard looks at whether great product innovation really starts with the customer - and describes the whole issue as a chicken or egg question.

Involving the customer in product innovation is not an either or proposition - it is something that should always be done - but done in the right context. And when listening to customers companies need to realize that their mileage will vary depending on the type of product or the phase within the product life cycle.

In some product categories, people could care less about the products or the companies that manufacture them - making customer feedback useless at the least, or potentially dangerous if given too much weight.



Newer products that are still primarily appealing to innovators and early adopters have a different problem with potentially similar consequences. Assuming the product is successful, customers probably care about the product in this case. But their ability to innovate ahead of what is available will likely be several steps behind the ability of the team that came up with the innovation - and giving too much weight to customer feedback may limit the future product potential and give the competition an opportunity to catch up and out-innovate the incumbent.

Then you have more mature product categories where people care - probably the area that yields the most valuable customer feedback. Except that here too you have to be careful about how much weight you are giving to that customer feedback. If your goal is to grow your product revenue by 80% in the future, then you have to realize that "all" current customers only make up a fraction of your future customer base. Attaching too much weight to their feedback may eliminate a large number of future customers that do not share their profile. And according to [Harvard Prof. Clayton Christensen's](#) disruptive innovation theory, your trajectory of product improvement will eventually cross the mainstream trajectory of customer need - limiting your potential future customer base, and opening yourself up for a disruptive innovation.

All that being said, and according to MIT Professor [Eric Von Hippel](#), in some fields there are a small number of "lead users" who invent new products out of necessity and who can be [an important source of new product concepts](#). The kind of customer listening that is required in this case is very different from what most people think of when talking about customer involvement in product innovation!

Innovation: Start With the Customer?

One of the most interesting debates on the subject of innovation is where it starts. Some innovation gurus think it begins with pure invention and imagination, unadulterated by focus on a pre-identified customer need. One of my favourite bloggers, Kathy Sierra at Creating Passionate Users, argues for example that [great innovation is about imagining and creating new needs, not satisfying unmet ones](#).

As compelling and recurring an argument as this is among innovation thinkers, I think it's wrong-headed. In a [major research paper](#) I wrote a few years ago on the genesis of innovation, I argued that great innovation has always started and must start with the customer, and with important, unmet customer needs in mind.

More recently, I described [a process, and a tool](#) I call the need/affinity matrix, for identifying unmet customer needs with commercial potential, and the 'communities' of people that share that need and represent the potential customer base for the innovative solutions that address these needs. I'm republishing that article here, and I'd love to hear readers' and fellow blogjammers' comments on the process, the tool, and the whole debate over whether innovation should, or should not, start with customers and pre-identified needs.

Does Great Innovation Really Start With the Customer?

(The flowchart illustrating this argument [can be found here](#)).

There are two opposing views on the role of the customer in innovation. One school holds that all innovations start with conversation, observation, and understanding of the customer (current or potential) with the goal of surfacing and then filling an unmet need. The other school says that customers don't know what they need, at least until they see it, and sometimes a need doesn't

even exist until a solution is available to fill it. There are compelling arguments for both positions, and both have their advocates.

Complexity theory would tend to favour the second view. This theory holds that a true understanding of a problem (such as a need) only emerges in parallel with, and co-dependently with, awareness of possible 'solutions' or approaches. But it could also be argued that conversations with customers, to "think them ahead" and get them to imagine possibilities, and 'cultural anthropology' observation of customers, are approaches that do start with the customer, in order to "find a need and fill it".

The evolution of mp3 players is worth a bit of study to decide if this is really a chicken-and-egg question. Do you remember mini-CDs, about half the size of regular CDs? They were an early attempt to grapple with the lack of portability of CD players -- to fill the untapped (perceived) need for a pocket-sized music player. At the same time, some large, clunky "jukebox" players used mp3 format to compress hundreds or thousands of songs into a small hard drive -- to fill the untapped (perceived) need to transport or back-up a customer's complete music collection. And at about this time, a new product that no one thought would ever be accepted, pay (satellite) radio, was introduced.

Contrast the community (the potential customer) and the job-to-be-done (the perceived need) of each of these inventions:

mini-CD player:

Community/ Customer: students, commuters, workout enthusiasts who love music on the go
Need / Job to be Done: record & play songs with high sound quality with a pocket-size player

mega-mp3 "juke-box" player:

Community/ Customer: fussy aficionados with eclectic tastes, and those paranoid about losing original copies, who sometimes like to port their collection around with them
Need / Job to be Done: record or back up & play an entire 250+ song collection with high sound quality with a transportable player

pay satellite radio player:

Community/ Customer: picky listeners who lack the time or skill to prerecord their own content
Need / Job to be Done: play any of 1000+ 'narrowcast' collections of songs or other audio content, on demand, from anywhere

I bought one of the original 6GB "juke-box" mp3 players, transcribed my entire 'favourite music' collection to it (about 700 songs), and even bought a waterproof, rechargeable (mono) speaker that attaches to it (I use it on the pool deck in summer, and for instrumental backup when we go caroling around the neighbourhood at Christmas). I never understood the appeal of mini-CD players, or the current lot of mp3 players that only hold a few dozen songs at a time. Not my community. Nor did I understand the appeal of satellite radio, since I can simply plug my "jukebox" into the car radio. But I acknowledge that there was a need for these products. Music is really important to a lot of people. The three products were designed for three distinct needs and customer communities.

Soon, the technologies that had been adapted or developed to meet these needs improved to the point that they satisfied additional needs. The new iPod-type players render both the mini-CD player and the "juke-box" player obsolete, since they offer both in one, elegant package, with some incremental advantages to both products' communities at no extra cost. And podcasting now allows owners of music players to prerecord 'narrowcast' content as well, opening the potential that satellite radio, Howard Stern notwithstanding, could be disruptively innovated out of existence just when it looked like it was getting traction.

But would the iPod and its ilk have been possible were it not for the predecessor innovations that filled specific identified needs? Apple prides itself on its "second mover advantage" -- not innovating, but rather studying and significantly improving on existing innovations. And without the Walkman creating the 'need' for portable recorded music in the first place, and the transistor radio before that, would customers have had any idea that they 'needed' a portable music player? Even if someone with great foresight had imagined the possibility of a device with iPod features fifty years ago, it is doubtful that potential customers would have viewed it as any less fanciful -- or 'needed' -- than the flying cars that were predicted in that era.

The truth is that most innovations are evolutionary, rather than revolutionary. That doesn't mean they are incremental -- they are discontinuous, making leaps in design, technology application and functionality, but do so in response to evolving customer needs.

Suppose you wanted to invent the successor to the iPod, the next great portable electronic device. How would you do it? You'd start with potential customers, observe what they are doing, converse with them about their frustrations and wants, identify constituencies or communities of customers with common needs or wants, and articulate the job to be done by the product or service that will meet those needs and wants. Now you can fill in the second and third columns of the table above for the as-yet-undetermined new product or service innovation. When you identify a whole group of jobs to be done for a whole group of different customer communities, you are ready to start imagining possible solutions, using a whole slew of techniques: individual invention, "thinking the customer ahead" collaborative sessions with some of the prospective customers, and group brainstorming.

The successful ideas that emerge from these techniques need to be qualified for economic feasibility (is the technology ready; can we make money at it) and organizational fit (do we have the capabilities to produce it), and then prototypes, pilots or models need to be re-qualified by potential customers to assess market acceptance (using the flowchart above).

What might this process come up with in our search for the next great portable device? Although it's hard to speculate, I would suggest that the results would be very different from, and much better than, the results that come from more traditional 'innovation' processes that start with a 'solution' (some technologically feasible idea that someone thought up, thought sexy or intriguing, and sponsored) and then go in search of a 'problem' (need) to apply it to.

Suppose your target customer community was empty-nesters in affluent nations who are either retired, semi-retired, or working substantially from home or virtually. This is going to be a huge community in a few years. What do they need, what 'job do they need done', that a portable electronic device might solve? I can tell you it's probably not about general information, or news -- the kind of stuff you find on the Internet, or in the information media. It is quite possibly related to health, and to communication. It may be related to recreation. It is almost certainly social.

Do you smell some great potential innovations here, and want to know more? Start with some customers.

[Kraft wants your product ideas](#)

Kraft Foods has initiated [an "open innovation" program](#) to solicit new product ideas from the public. Their innovation program site has the details, and a submittal form. You might earn up to \$5000, or share in licensing royalties (have your patent lawyer handy). Here's what they want:

Kraft is accepting ideas under this policy for new products, packaging, and business processes/systems only. We are most interested in ideas that are more than a concept, in particular new products & packages that are ready to be brought to market (or can be brought to market quickly).

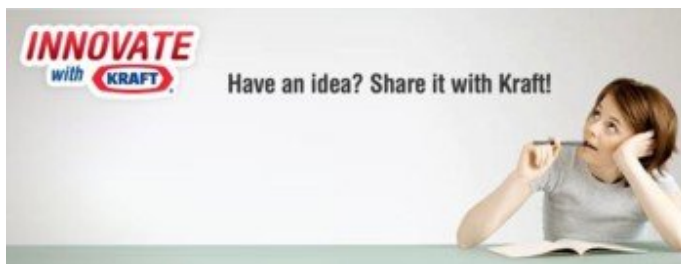
Well, there goes my idea for Anti-oxidant Mac and Cheese.

Kraft seems a wee bit desperate to grab something almost-ready-for-market so they can get it to the shelves ASAP. From their [innovation submittal form](#):

1. Provide a brief description of your idea or technical innovations. Please be sure to tell us its unique benefits and what may make it valuable to Kraft.
2. What potential applications might the submitted idea or technical innovations have?
3. Is it covered by a patent (provide patent number), or has a patent application been filed?
4. Has the idea or technical innovation been commercialized? Where and by whom? Do you have any consumer research data supporting the idea or innovations? If so, please tell us about it.

Why is Kraft doing this?

On the surface, this seems like a Hail Mary innovation strategy. It certainly doesn't give much credit to Kraft's own R&D efforts, which (a [related WSJ article](#)—sub req) tells us, haven't had a "hit" since DiGiorno pizza 10 years ago.



Product “finishing” and innovation arbitrage

Kraft might also be subtly repositioning itself as a “marketing and branding” company, in which ideas come in from all around the world and Kraft simply does the “finishing” to bring them to market. If so, they might be using this initiative to price-bargain professional “[innovation sourcers](#)” who develop innovations and package them to “distributors” such as Kraft. If Kraft can end-run the professional

sourcers with a public program, it can avoid having them eat its innovation lunch, so to speak.

(Outside innovation teams present a very real strategic threat to Kraft and other “mass market” producers. They can source patentable products and then auction them (\$\$\$) to the highest bidder. Call it innovation arbitrage.)

Open innovation and brand context

Open innovation can benefit Kraft, but only in the right brand context. A lot will depend on Kraft’s ability to break from the pitfalls of [traditional brand practice](#). Open innovation at Kraft is doomed if Kraft follows the antiquated “branding” approach in which brands are little more than stylized sales stimulants. That approach is what got Kraft into trouble in the first place.

Today’s “targets” are tomorrow’s holes in the ground

Part of Kraft’s problem is that its top-down brand strategy has “targeted” customers instead of creating them. Now that customers have moved on, Kraft’s traditional “targets” are simply holes in the ground.

If your brand programs are focused on creating customers, collaborative innovation can be embedded in your business process. This is a more holistic—and more manageable—approach than blanket innovation appeals.

Thanks to [Steve Portigal](#), who also provides a very worthwhile “open innovation” link to [Frank Piller’s site](#). Frank provides a broader context for Kraft’s innovation initiative.

[As mass media dies, brands are born anew](#)



If traditional mass media is headed for the grave, and with it mass market advertising, as *Advertising Age* columnist [Bob Garfield](#) (pdf) and [others](#) soberly predict, what will happen to the thousands of brands built on a mass media foundation? Will they crater, too?

On the face of it, one might think that the demise of mass media and mass market advertising is bad news for brands. Actually, though, it's the opposite. It's a tremendous opportunity for brands to be born anew, fresher and more vibrant than ever.

Truth is, brands don't need traditional mass media to survive. In fact, they may be better brands without it. Brands are a joint venture between companies and their customers. Intermediaries can get in the way.

Bob Garfield's "Chaos Scenario"

Bob Garfield's recent [Chaos Scenario 2.0 — The Post Advertising Age](#) makes a persuasive case for the decline of traditional mass media and mass market advertising. It's a follow-up to his [original Chaos Scenario](#) of 2005, in which he laid out [a grim future for the advertising industry](#) in the emerging digital world. In *Chaos Scenario 2.0* Bob introduces new evidence of forces disrupting traditional advertising. He foresees a world "in which marketing — and even branding — are conducted without much reliance on the 30-second spot or glossy spread."

In short, digital innovations are providing new frameworks for companies to join with their customers, without the expense and the repetitive intrusions of mass media campaigns.

Companies are reclaiming their brands

Major brands have seen the writing on the wall for some time, and are exploring new forms of brand value, and new brand avenues to connect with customers. There's a perception that the conventional mass media approach was beginning to hold brands back, that it was coming between brands and customers at a time when brands needed to be closer to customers than ever.

In a sense, companies are reclaiming their brands, dialing down broadcast messages and dialing up direct personal connections, to maximize interaction and value flow between company and customers.

Proctor & Gamble sets an example

One can see this thinking in Jim Stengel's [well-publicized initiatives](#) at Proctor & Gamble. In [a recent speech to advertising executives](#), Jim said:

Building relationships through our brands is the future of marketing. It's not about new media models or new tools. It's about engaging with people in a two-way relationship. It's about seeking to understand the other person rather than trying to control their actions. Trying to control someone is no way to build a relationship—or grow market share long term. We have come to realize that at P&G.

That's why we're changing. That's why we're committed to building brands that stand for something meaningful to consumers rather than just "telling and selling."

The end of brands as "messages"

I'd take Bob's and Jim's arguments a step further, and say that brands are undergoing their own radical change, and will soon bear little resemblance to the ad-driven, mass media brands that once defined brand practice. The message model of brands is on the way out. As it has evolved, it's largely turned brands into the illusion business. This is a double trap that conditions companies to treat "consumers" as a passive audience, and then to churn out undistinguished products and rely on mass media "messaging" to make them seem special. The long-term result is the triumph of hype over innovation and value, with a loss of competitiveness, and customer trust.

That era is now winding down, accelerated by the Internet and digital technology. The once-passive "audience" is now the world's greatest publisher. In the digital era, the role of brands is not to be broadcast, but to deliver value as platforms and programs that customers can use.

For brands, a clear path ahead

To see where brands are headed, check out the diagram in [Brand evolution: from mark, to media, to means](#). One reason for the impending "chaos" in advertising is that brands are beginning the transition from "media" to "means." They're moving from "brands as messages" to "brands as enablers." They're in the seam, like a tectonic plate that's being [subducted](#), to be melted down and spewed forth as entirely new landforms. To those in the old regime, this seems like the end of the world. However, in the new world abuilding, the virgin brandscape is awash with new customer opportunities, on a new brand foundation.

What should companies do?

Here's a short list of what companies can do to transition their brands from a sinking mass media foundation to a new customer foundation. The process begins by reframing your brand as a performance package rather than a persuasion package:

1. **Ask yourself: What is holding our customers back?** That's the first step toward creating brand value.
2. **Revisit the brand mission.** Your brand mission is to create the customers that will drive your business forward. [Creating customers](#) is a structured process of [brand innovation](#) that develops and delivers [value customers can use](#).
3. **Recast your brands as [personal applications](#).** That's what they'll be in our digital age. Brands will be a second skin, 24/7—or they'll be ignored.
4. **Restructure your brand from monolithic to [multi-threaded](#).** The monolithic, essence-based brand sleeps with the fishes. Brands are now performance-based and situational, tuned to a [customer beat](#).
5. **Merge your [brand team](#) with your innovation team(s).** They are one and the same.

At first glance, these steps items may seem daunting, but they can be implemented incrementally. In the long run, they're necessary. We don't want brands to wind up like [this](#).

Sensory Marketing to Jolt Espresso Sales

by: [Roger Dooley](#)

One of the keys to the phenomenal success of Starbucks has been that its stores offer a consistent and appealing sensory experience. The music, colors, and lighting are all important, but clearly the wonderful coffee aroma is what dominates one's senses on entering a Starbucks outlet.

I enjoy brewing Starbucks coffee at home, too, but it never seems quite the same as when I consume it in the actual shop. It turns out that I'm not alone, and that my coffee maker isn't

the entire problem. Yes, coffee in the coffee shop DOES taste better, but not for the reasons you might expect. Research from another coffee maker, Nespresso, shows that 60% of sensory experience of drinking espresso comes from the retail environment!

Nespresso, a subsidiary of food giant Nestle, was faced with a dilemma created by this sensory experience quirk. It had created a home espresso-making system that produced espresso that tasted just as good as what you could find in a coffee shop. Unfortunately, consumers didn't recognize that. Neuromarketing readers shouldn't be too surprised - after all, wine thought to be produced in North Dakota apparently tasted a lot worse than wine from California, even though it was poured from the same bottles. (See Wine and the Spillover Effect.) It's not a big shock that home-brewed espresso might not seem as tasty as what you get in a coffee shop. This "source bias," along with the improved sensory experience in the shop environment, stacks the deck against home-prepared espresso no matter how good it actually tastes.

Martin Lindstrom's video blog describes what Nestle did to try to beat these ingrained consumer perceptions. First, they launched upscale coffee shops in major cities for the primary purpose of creating the high-intensity sensory experience people expect, but also with the intention of showing customers they could get the same high-quality espresso at home.



The second thing they did was to modify the home espresso-making system to release more aroma. This is a brilliant and, I can testify, often overlooked strategy. A couple of years ago I purchased a Melitta coffee-maker. It really did make superb coffee. In addition to brewing it properly, it stored the product in an insulated stainless steel pot. (This avoids the flavor degradation that occurs when brewed coffee sits on a heating element for more than a short while.) While not hermetically sealed, the brewed coffee was injected directly into the pot with virtually no exposure to room air. This may be good for preserving the flavor, but you can guess the problem: very little aroma escapes. My previous Braun coffeemaker was far less sophisticated, but it could be counted on to fill the house with the enticing aroma of freshly-brewing coffee. I was a bit disappointed with that aspect of the Melitta unit, but assumed it was a byproduct of their efficient brewing and storage design. Little did I know that at Nespresso engineers were aware of the aroma effect and working to correct it on their units. (I now have a dual function Krups machine. Its drip brewing side spews steam from the top and the collecting pot has vents, so on that side the aroma is fine. The espresso side also releases lots of aroma, but, to put it charitably, it doesn't quite make me think I'm in the corner cafe.)

I doubt if many consumer firms have taken as many steps to improve the sensory appeal of their products as Nespresso has. Not only did they modify the product itself to improve the sensory experience, they launched an entirely new channel (their branded coffee shops) just to address the perceived sensory gap in the home environment. Few companies may want to open up a chain of retail shops, but just about every company could benefit from a sensory review of their brand and key products.

[How Customers Think](#)

Posted by Roger Dooley under [Neuromarketing](#) , [Neuroscience Research](#) , [Neuroscience and Marketing Books](#)

“About 95% of all thought, emotion, and learning occur in the unconscious mind - that is, without our conscious awareness.”

-Gerald Zaltman, in *How Customers Think*

This is a basic premise of almost everything we write about here at [Neuromarketing](#) - that customers generally can't understand or explain why they make choices in the marketplace, and that efforts to tease out that information by asking them questions are doomed to failure. Furthermore, marketing efforts based mostly on customer statements and self-reports of their experiences, preferences, and intentions are likely equally doomed.

[How Customers Think - Essential Insights into the Mind of the Market](#) by Gerald Zaltman is a must read for anyone interested in neuromarketing. Zaltman is a Professor of Marketing at Harvard Business School and a Fellow at Harvard University's Mind, Brain, Behavior Initiative. Subtitles are *de rigueur* for business books, and the cover of this one features an alternate tag line, "What Consumers Can't Tell You and Competitors Don't Know." It was published in 2003, but has plenty of relevancy for today's marketers.

How Customers Think may read more like a textbook than a business how-to book, but in many cases that turns into a strength. Virtually every statement is footnoted, which both adds credibility and provides a jumping-off point for further research on a particular topic. It's a wide-ranging book, covering such diverse topics as [priming](#), focus group failures, the fallibility of memory, branding, creativity, and much more. This diversity likely means that not all topics will interest every reader, but hard core marketers will find lots concepts to chew on.

Zaltman spends quite a bit of time on metaphors:

By inviting consumers to use metaphors as they talk about a product or service, researchers bring consumers' unconscious thoughts and feelings to a level of awareness where both parties can explore them more openly together.

Zaltman believes that the words that people use when talking about a subject reveal as much as the content. He gives a variety of metaphorical speech in customer interviews. "Liquid" metaphors are identified by words like "spout, leak, pour, spit, brim over, dry up, in midstream, torrent, stream," and others. In a study related to creativity in globally networked organizations, one CEO commented, "One breakthrough idea can be a tidal wave sending people scurrying to higher ground for protection... But people are just afraid to swim in moving waters, they prefer wading in a stagnant pool." Zaltman thinks the language used better reflects subconscious thought than mere statements. He provides a "metaphor elicitation technique" to use in interviews. Such an interview might begin with showing the subject an ambiguous picture and asking how it relates to the topic being studied. Followup questions probe to elicit metaphorical speech and avoid directing the subject toward specific thoughts or goals.

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[Emotional Branding](#)

Another technique described by Zaltman is "response latency." By monitoring precisely how long it takes subjects to respond to a question (by pressing a key on a computer keyboard, for example) to pairings of words or images, true thoughts and feelings can be ascertained. In essence, the presence or absence of "noise" in the subjects' thoughts is being measured. This type of study can help researchers probe implicit beliefs that exist outside conscious awareness. The book briefly touches on neuroimaging techniques like fMRI studies, but that area clearly isn't Zaltman's focus.

Memory and its fragility is the subject of an entire chapter. Zaltman shows how memory can be fallible, selective, conscious or unconscious, altered by subsequent information, influenced by mood, and in general a lot less reliable than most people think.

We'll undoubtedly refer to *How Customers Think* from time to time in future posts - this is one reference we'll keep handy.

Got Smell? Ads Target Customer Noses

Roger Dooley



There's not much doubt that a multisensory ad approach could, if done well, outperform one that appeal only to one sense. Indeed, the Scent Marketing Institute thinks that business will be increasing spending on aroma-based advertising. One current effort is for some California gas stations to spread the aroma of coffee near the pumps to encourage consumers to fill up their travel mug in addition to their gas tank.

I'm a bit dubious as to how well the pleasant aroma of roasted or brewed coffee will mix with the pungent odor of gasoline that one generally finds in the vicinity of the pumps, but it certainly makes neuromarketing sense to push that hot button while you've got a captive audience. (Listen to the story at [NPR](#).) As with junk mail and telemarketing, though, some consumers resent marketers reaching into their nostrils...

In San Francisco, the milk marketing folks decided to attempt an indirect approach to scented marketing. If you can smell milk, it's probably not a good thing, right? So, they decided to permeate the air around their "Got Milk" bus shelter ads with the aroma of chocolate chip cookies. Interesting idea, but the campaign only lasted a day before the city ordered that the smelly ads be removed. In [Freshly baked ads are toast](#), the SF Chronicle noted that the "environmental illness community" objected strongly to the ads.

Although California in general and San Francisco in particular are likely to have greater numbers of unusual activist groups, marketers planning on using scent will have to contend with some negative reactions wherever they go. It's difficult to "narrowcast" aromas, and even aromas that are pleasant to most are likely to be offensive to some people. More generally, chemically reproduced scents are likely to somewhat less pleasant than the real thing, like the aroma of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. Even so, marketers shouldn't abandon the idea of scent-based ads completely - I'll be very surprised if some of them (like the coffee aromas near a place that sells freshly brewed coffee) don't prove to be effective.

Mobile marketers may want to keep tabs a newly-patented cell phone from Motorola - the "[Smell-o-Phone](#)" releases an odor by heating gel packets in the phone. We know marketers like pizza restaurants are interested in texting ads to nearby consumers - what if they could accompany the ad with the scent of baking pizza?