



# Emotional Connection Can Build Strong Brands Seven Ways

‡ The fourth in the series of strategic marketing white papers by Hiebing, an integrated brand development and marketing firm

**Summary:** A strong emotional connection between your target market and your brand can increase sales volumes, increase customer loyalty and enable you to charge up to 200 percent more than your competitors. Brands are increasingly being forced to choose between two positions: discount brand with little emotional connection and premium brand with a lot of emotional connection. This article describes the elusive nature of emotional connection and offers seven different ways you can strengthen the connection between your brand and your target market.

Emotional connection is a powerful way to link the heart of your target market with the soul of your brand. This connection is the degree to which your customers care about your brand beyond its rational attributes. It is more psychological than logical and more unconscious than conscious. Above all, emotional connection can make a big impact on your business.

## **Emotional Connection Can Make Your CFO Cry**

The business results of emotional connection can bring grateful tears to the steely eyes of the flintiest CFO. According to a 10-year study,<sup>1</sup> brands that evoke a stronger emotional response than comparable goods are able to sell in greater volumes, create rabid customer loyalty and charge 20 to 200 percent more than their competitors. Customers were willing to trade up to such products across many business categories, from beer and dog food to household appliances.

The researchers concluded that brands are now being forced into two distinct categories: (a) low-priced commodities or (b) brands you will pay more for because you care about them. Brands in the middle of the road will get run over, either by the low-price leaders or by the brands people love.

## **All Buyers Are Affected by Their Emotions. Few Buyers Are Aware of It**

Many businesses operate on the assumption that their customers make decisions consciously and rationally. Even in technical categories (or in business-to-business), this assumption is largely false.



Thanks to the structure of our brains, no human being is immune to the influence of their unconscious emotions.<sup>2</sup> The rule of thumb among cognitive scientists is that 95 percent of all human behavior is unconscious.<sup>3</sup>

Emotional connection is even more critical if your target market is female. Women already control or influence over 80 percent of the purchases in the United States, a total of around \$3.5 trillion every year.<sup>4</sup> They base their decisions primarily on emotional characteristics such as relationships and on what your product will do for them personally. They don't like reading lists of numbers, specs and statistics.<sup>5</sup> (Then again, who has time?)

Emotional connection is easy to overlook because customers are often unaware of their deepest motivations, especially when those motives are not socially approved. Such motives can include greed, ambition, status-seeking, fear, anger, love, lust, disgust and pride, to name a few. What people can consciously articulate has only about a one in ten chance of being truly accurate.<sup>6</sup>

### Categories and Brands Differ in Their Emotional Opportunities

Not every brand can be Nike or Harley or Madonna. Not every brand can have enthusiasts tattooing the company logo into their forehead. In categories like car repair or hemorrhoid medication, customers basically want the whole subject to go away. In categories like candy and soft drinks, the driving emotion is really just a mood or whim. But even the most humble product or the most fleeting mood can have the right emotional connection. And every appropriate emotional connection can be maximized.

Two strategic questions any business should ask are: (a) which emotion can we own? and (b) how much emotional intensity does our category and brand merit? Both answers are defined and limited by your target market. But within those limits, you can tailor almost every business decision you make to maximize the appropriate emotional connection.

Product design, price, distribution, packaging, promotions, media spending, co-branding, cause marketing, marketing communications, and staff recruitment and training can all be tweaked to get your customers to care more. The goal is to use all the touch points of your business to create a consistent emotional effect in your customers.

### How to Find the Right Emotional Connection

If you do not wish to become a low-priced commodity or a discount brand, there are seven techniques you can use to identify and strengthen the customer's emotional connection with your brand.

#### 01. Develop Your Own Emotional Eyes and Ears

You can't act on what you can't see. So if you want to better manage the emotional connection with your target, you will need to develop your own emotional eyes and ears.

Fortunately, divining the hidden motives and feelings of others is a skill we are all born with that can be enhanced with practice. First, however, you must give yourself permission to shed your social, professional, academic and adult conditioning. Then, you must practice becoming conscious of your own subconscious feelings.

As you begin to observe other people, assume that their literal surface explanations are covering up deeper motives that they are not conscious of. Assume they see the world differently from you and that their perceptions make sense to their unconscious mind.

Pay more attention to context than to content. For example, what *didn't* they say or do that you would normally expect? Isolate one of your senses as you observe. Ignore what they're saying and watch their body language. Or close your eyes and listen to the sound of their voice, not their words. Listen and observe more, talk and act less.



## 02. Apply a Marketing Model Based on Emotional Experience

Marketing models have evolved over time. The models differ in how they define the target, what action the target is expected to take, what is being sold and what kind of benefit results.

### Unique Selling Proposition Model:

A... CUSTOMER... BUYS... a PRODUCT... with UNIQUE RATIONAL benefits.

*Example: Visine gets the red out*



### Brand Image Model:

A... DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP... IDENTIFIES WITH... a BRAND IMAGE... with LIFESTYLE BENEFITS.

*Example: Pepsi, Generation Next*



### Emotional Experience Model:

An... EMOTIONAL DESIRE... USES... a PRODUCT... to ENHANCE A LARGER EXPERIENCE.

*Example: Starbucks*

In the Starbucks example, the target market is not the whole person. Even though the customer may be the same person demographically (for example, mothers age 25-50), if they are in a different mood they will probably choose a different product. Therefore the target market is essentially the person's mood, desire or emotional need.

They use the coffee product, not as an end in itself ("Good to the last drop"), and not as a lifestyle choice ("I'm a Starbucks person!"), but as a means of delivering a larger emotional experience (comfort, reward, escape, etc.). The focus is on the experience at the moment of usage.

The product is only *part* of a larger experience. The larger experience includes the store environment, the time of day, the social occasion,

other customers and even other non-coffee products such as books and music.

This new model represents a profound transformation of our market economy. More and more, consumers are no longer buying products, services, rational benefits, lifestyles or information. Instead, they are seeking satisfaction of their emotional desires through the purchase of complete experiences. To apply this model, you must understand your customers' emotional needs and develop the appropriate emotional connection.

## 03. Use Indirect Testing Methods

When was the last time you heard someone admit, "I bought this expensive new car because it shows my loser neighbors how rich and superior I am... ha, ha, ha!"? They are much more likely to say "Gee, it's such a well-made car, it just makes sense to pay more." Base your marketing decisions on what customers say, and you are likely to be misled.

Instead, study actual behavior through observation. Or use indirect testing methods. Use projective techniques, such as asking them to choose their most and least favorite images. Then look for underlying patterns. There are even biofeedback testing services that measure emotional responses directly.

## 04. Use the Two-Year-Old's "Why? Why? Why?" Discovery Technique

Tell a two-year-old child the sky is blue and they will ask you "Why?" Ask *yourself* why someone should care about your product and service, and keep asking why until you get to the deepest possible motivation. For example:

**Q: Why do homeowners take out home equity loans?**

A: To fix up their houses.

**Q: Why do they want to fix up their houses?**

A: Because they are tired of living with stoves with broken burners, old torn wallpaper and avocado refrigerators.



**Q: Why are they tired of living with old broken stuff?**

A: Because it BUGS them every day of their life.

This new line of inquiry led a bank to use a message in their direct mail: "Fix the things that bug you." This generated far more responses than the old messages, which focused on "dream homes" and "good loan rates."

The end result of the "Why? Why? Why?" process is a clearer definition of what the emotional connection is really about. This can be clarified further using the following technique.

**05. Use the "It's Not About..., It's About" Approach to Find a Fresh Insight**

In a television show called "The Profiler," the lead detective was renowned for figuring out the hidden motives of various serial killers. Inevitably, she would say something like "It's not about killing his victims, it's about creating a work of art." Like the TV detective, a skilled marketer looks beyond literal rational surface explanation to find the hidden emotional consumer insight.

**It's Not About ..., It's About**

Here are some examples of consumer insights. Most came out of testing different message strategies.

Product/Service	It's not about...	It's about...
Banking	Rates	Freedom
Community donations	Guilt or helping others	Acting on your beliefs
Convention center	Meeting facilities	Inspiring employees
Music creation software	The latest technology	Being an artist
Date rape prevention	Right and wrong	Punishment
Hotel/Resort	Amenities, facilities, activities	Connecting with loved ones
Micro-brewed beer	Taste, price, quality	Showing off your knowledge and taste

**06. Develop an Emotional Strategy First to Guide Your Message Creation**

United Way campaigns typically rely on several

proven types of emotional appeals: (a) feel guilty because people are suffering and they need your help, (b) feel confident that we're spending your money well and helping people, or (c) feel like you are a good person because we thank you for helping.

A typical rational advertising message strategy might look like this:

**Typical Message Strategy**

Convince managers and employees in community-area businesses to donate money to United Way because donations are used efficiently to help lots of people.

Instead, one local United Way used a more emotional approach to message strategy: The approach involved creating short answers to seven questions. Note that the target is defined emotionally rather than demographically ("men and women age 18 to 65," or "managers and employees").

The emotional insight was that there are people who donate, give to others and volunteer. And there are people who don't. And that those people who give do so primarily because of a core belief that they should help others. Rational subjects such as "how well the money was spent" or "how many people were helped" were not the main point of the communication.

The reason to care was not about the company but about the individual's own emotions. The call to action was more of a request to remember individual beliefs than to donate money.

In general, emotional answers to the questions were chosen over rational answers.

The resulting advertising campaign listed various shared beliefs ("I believe in the healing power of chicken soup. I believe everybody cries. I believe children are our future..." etc.) and then challenged people to think of and act on



what they believed (“What do you believe?”). The campaign achieved record donation levels, motivated volunteers and was selected by United Way as one of the best in the nation. It was a demonstration of the financial power of finding the right emotional connection. It works as well in the for-profit sector as it does in the non-profit sector.

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### Seven-Question Message Strategy

#### 01. Who are we talking to?

People who were raised to believe it is their duty and privilege to help others.

#### 02. What's the point?

Act on what you believe by donating to the United Way.

#### 03. What's the key word(s)?

Believe

#### 04. Why should I care?

Because I believe it is my duty to help others. It's who I am.

#### 05. Why should I believe you?

- ◆ You have something you believe in
- ◆ United Way has a cause that supports your belief
- ◆ Donating to United Way is an easy way to act on your beliefs

#### 06. How should I feel?

Noble. Inspired. In touch with the core values and beliefs of my higher, better self.

#### 07. What do you want me to do?

Remember what you believe, and then act on your beliefs.

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### 07. Use Emotional Cues

You can use the power of emotional cues to trigger the appropriate emotional response. Cues are how we know what we know. They can be visual, verbal, environmental or experiential. There are usually several positive cues that must be present, and several negative cues that must

be absent, in order to produce the right emotional effect. Cues are often surprising. Research can help you uncover them.

For example, hospital physicians were surprised to learn that their primary target market (mothers) took the physician's diplomas and technology and competence for granted. Instead, the mothers cued on something the doctors considered peripheral: bedside manner. Moms wanted to feel cared about as people. So they cued in on the doctor's tone of voice, eye contact, unhurried manner and lack of condescension. The surprised physicians used the customer focus group tapes to train new physicians in better bedside manner.

### Conclusion

You've learned the many business advantages of a strong emotional connection with your target market. You've learned seven different ways to leverage the power of emotional connection. Thank you for staying emotionally connected enough to read all the way to the end of this article.

### Sources

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### **Dave Florin** President/Partner



Dave's job is to see that our clients are served by the latest and best practices in our tried-and-true area of expertise: target-market-driven communications. So he has continued to attract top talent from around the country, add new areas of knowledge and set new standards of performance across all communication disciplines. Dave's passion is his proven commitment to client service, creative quality and brand strategy. He has been an invited speaker for organizations like the National Retail Federation, the Retail Advertising and Marketing Association, the International Institute for Research and the Investment Council Institute. His client experience includes Nestlé, Famous Footwear, General Motors, Northwestern Mutual Life, the National Retail Federation, Coors, Coca-Cola, PerkinElmer and JanSport. Dave is married and has three daughters. He is an avid reader who enjoys the great outdoors and anything Wisconsin Badger-related.

### **Sean Mullen** Creative Director/Partner



Sean Mullen's creative work has been recognized by nearly every important advertising magazine and award show, including *Adweek*, *Ad Age*, *Archive*, *Communication Arts*, *Print's Regional Design Annual*, *Creativity Annual* and the Clio shortlist. He has won more Addy Awards than you can shake a marker at. Providing a unique blend of verbal and visual thinking, Sean is as comfortable with a research deck as he is with a Pantone book. He has done effective, award-winning work for clients like Toyota, Famous Footwear, Fiskars Craft and Garden Tools, Montana Gourmet Knives, JanSport and Nestlé. In his spare time he's been known to guest lecture at Marquette University and the University of Wisconsin. If he's not at home with his wife and two children, check the garage. His bicycle won't be there either.

### **Barry Callen** Vice President/Partner, Creative Strategy



For over thirty years, Barry has championed effective, emotionally relevant communications for clients like Nestlé, Orkin, Planters-Life Savers, Epic Systems and Dean Health System. Barry's ability to fuse strategic thought processes with creative development led him to produce some very powerful tools in Hiebing's branding arsenal—including both Message Strategy and our NameCalling™ process. These days, when he's not developing strategies, you might find him teaching at the UW Graduate School for Executive Education. To unwind, he writes and performs everything from comedy to music, and tries to avoid getting struck by lightning again.

### **Jeane Kropp** Strategy Director/Partner



Over the last decade, clients with brands in over 90 countries have invested over a billion dollars in the new products, strategies and communications that Jeane helped create as a consultant. Her thinking has inspired marketing communication successes such as the MasterCard "Priceless" campaign, the double-digit annual sales growth of Kraft's DiGiorno pizza and the extremely successful repositioning of 36 brands in 150 SKUs for Canada's Vachon snack cakes. She has helped pioneer new strategic models for everything from SKU simplification to packaging concept evaluation. Some of Jeane's other brand experiences include Motorola, Nabisco, Kraft, Jergens, UDV/Guinness, ConAgra, Glidden Paint and Boise Cascade. Jeane knows what it's like to be a client with an old brand to revive or a new product to introduce. After receiving her MBA in marketing and management from Indiana University, Jeane worked client-side at Procter & Gamble (Scope, Crest Toothbrushes, Old Spice) and at Oscar Mayer (Lunchables, Bologna, Louis Rich Turkey). When she is not caring for her clients' brands, she and her husband provide foster care for teenagers and dogs, preferably not simultaneously. Jeane has also cliff-dived into Iceland's glacial waters and walked barefoot on hot coals. Pretty relevant experiences for building brands.

Since 1981, Hiebing has helped hundreds of clients find, design and deliver powerful communications that have increased brands' impact and profits. As a brand development and marketing firm, Hiebing delivers fresh insights into the Dynamic Linkages between targets and brands, and creates vibrant communications to improve brands' relevancy and value in consumers' lives.

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