

## Martin Lindstrom can read your mind.



Three years ago, Danish marketing guru Martin Lindstrom embarked on a \$7 million brain-scan study of more than two thousand people worldwide to discover the logic—and illogic—behind our purchasing patterns. Today, he reveals that it all comes down to *Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy* (Doubleday). Forget surveys, focus groups, and all those other methods you've been using to market your products. Instead, you should start neuro-marketing—"an intriguing marriage of marketing and science"—to uncover the subconscious thoughts, feelings, and desires that really drive our decisions. From Veracruz, where he is currently at work re-branding the country of Mexico, Lindstrom, 38, a staunch antismoking advocate, spoke about the role—particularly in the tobacco industry—of subliminal advertising. —VADIM LIBERMAN

### What percentage of marketing is effective?

Only about 20 percent, and that 20 percent works because it appeals to the 20 percent of our minds that makes rational decisions. But we know from biology studies that about 80 percent of the decisions you and I make every second are in the subconscious mind, and marketers aren't addressing this. Instead, they are doing the same old stuff: quantitative research, which involves surveying lots and lots of volunteers about an idea, a concept, a product, or even a kind of packaging—followed by qualitative research, which turns a more intense spotlight on smaller focus groups. What we know now is that what people say on surveys and in focus groups does *not* reliably affect how they behave—far from it. That's why I look at what is going on in the subconscious brain.

### But isn't our rational side capable of checking our subconscious thoughts?

In most cases, no. If you walk down the street in Paris, and you smell the wonderful scent of croissants coming from a local bakery, you will be likelier to buy the croissants because that smell will make you feel hungry. Your decision to buy the croissants isn't really rational—it's because you are hardwired

to be seduced by scent. Our sense of smell is the only one of our five senses that bypasses the rational part of our brain. When you're being primed with signals, like smells, that you're not even aware of, your rational mind will never kick in to say, "Hey, be careful, I'm being seduced!"

Now, what if I tell you that the smell the bakery is putting out to make you hungry may not be coming from any of the baked goods inside? Ever walked into a fast-food restaurant with the intention of ordering something healthy, but you end up going for the triple bacon cheeseburger with a side of large fries instead? It was the smell that got you, right? But that smell you're inhaling comes not from a hot, smoking grill but from a spray canister with a name like RTX9338PJS—code name for the just-cooked-bacon-cheeseburger-like fragrance that the fast-food restaurant was pumping through its vents.

### How deliciously deceptive!

Well, at least the place is actually serving the burger. If you're going to have these smells pumped in, then make the burger or bread or coffee available, too. I'm fine with that. But we see these subliminal methods going much further. Research has shown that after taking a

whiff of baked goods, consumers even consider a store's canned and frozen goods to be fresher. Some Northern European supermarkets don't even bother with actual bakeries; they just pump artificial-baked-bread smells straight into the store aisles from ceiling vents. In most American airports, you're likely to smell cinnamon, because people get hungrier when they smell it. In Las Vegas, you will smell cinnamon from the very second you disembark off your plane. It's an artificial smell.

### In *Buyology*, you write a lot about subliminal marketing by the tobacco industry.

Yes, and it's scary. Thanks to worldwide bans on tobacco advertising on television, in magazines, and just about everywhere else, cigarette companies funnel a huge percentage of their marketing budget into subliminal brand exposure.

I just received amazing photos from Formula One in Europe, which is similar to Nascar in the United States. The European Union has banned tobacco companies from advertising at Formula One, but these new photos I have show red and white stripes on the back of a racing Ferrari, and there are also the same stripes painted on the actual roadway. Now, let's be frank. You've seen race cars—they are plastered with logos,

# A company should be able to tell the story with a smell or a color.

right? So it is kind of strange to see a car with no logos on it, with only those red and white stripes that remind people of the Marlboro logo. It *seems* that Philip Morris is the sponsor. I want to be very clear that I don't have any actual proof of this, but when you ask people involved with the races, like the drivers, they say they are aware that Philip Morris is the sponsor.

## Will people respond to subliminal advertising as well as they would if they actually saw brand names and logos?

They'll respond even better. Research has shown that when smokers were exposed to non-explicit images—like a red Ferrari from Formula One—over a period of less than five seconds, there was an almost immediate activity in the craving regions of their brains, in the exact same regions that responded to the explicit images of the packs and logos. More fascinating, there was even *more* activity in the reward and craving centers when subjects viewed the subliminal images than when they viewed the overt images. In other words, the logo-free images associated with cigarettes, like the Ferrari, triggered more cravings among smokers.

One reason is that the smokers weren't consciously aware that they were viewing an advertising message, and as a result they let their guard down. As a smoker, you know that smoking is bad for your health, not to mention expensive, so you consciously construct a wall between yourself and the message. But once the logo vanishes, your brain is no longer on high alert, and it responds subconsciously to the message.

## So just how important are logos?

Let me ask you: Do you own an iPod?

Yes.

Can you find the logo on the front of it? Your answer will be no, because it

doesn't need to be there. That's because Apple owns what I call "smashable components," where even if the iPod were smashed into a hundred pieces, you'd be able to recognize the brand, so you don't need to see the actual logo. Also take McDonald's. The company rarely writes out its name in ads, and when it does, it adds another message, like "I'm Loving It." McDonald's is using sound, stripes, colors to make you aware of the brand. Another example: The football in the 2006 World Cup had the Adidas stripes on it but no name. Instead of companies plastering their logos everywhere, I'd prefer a street environment where you're seeing brands indirectly.

Of course, you first have to establish a profile for your company before you can migrate away from using a logo, but that shouldn't take a company more than about two years to do. After that time, a company won't need the logo. It should be able to tell the story with a smell or a color. That kind of marketing is substantially more effective. An example is Silk Cut, a popular British tobacco brand, which began to position its logo against a background of purple silk in every ad that it ran in preparation for a ban on tobacco advertising. When the ban came into effect, and the logo was no longer permitted on ads, the company created highway billboards that didn't say a word about Silk Cut or cigarettes but merely showcased logo-free swaths of purple silk. And guess what? Shortly after, a research study revealed that an astonishing 98 percent of consumers identified those billboards as having something to do with Silk Cut, although most were unable to say exactly why.

**So when the government bans tobacco advertising, thereby encouraging such subliminal marketing, is it actually helping the tobacco industry?**

Yes!

**Let's move on to sex. We've all heard the cliché that sex sells. Does it?**

No—the controversy around it does.

## Fine enough, but isn't sex an easy means to create that controversy?

The problem is that when you over-emphasize sex, you don't remember the brand. That gets you nowhere. In Europe, there was a huge billboard on a main street that showed a Pamela Anderson-looking girl without a bra on, and she had between her legs a big soda with alcohol in it. I walked by and asked people if they noticed the ad. They noticed, but they didn't remember the brand. Unless you explicitly tie sex to your brand, like Calvin Klein or Victoria's Secret does with underwear, it won't pay off. If I'm selling a vacuum cleaner, then people just remember the sex bit, not the product.

It's the same with celebrity endorsements. Celebrities seem to be running the world we live in. It's getting worse and worse. But we have seen time and time again where celebrities endorse a brand, and we remember the celebrities and think they're funny and clever, but we can't remember the brand. In 90 percent of cases, using celebrities is a waste of money because they are not used in a relevant context.

## If classic selling devices like sex, celebs, and product placement don't work, why are they so prevalent in advertising?

Because marketers are so desperate to use tools that they *think* are working, and we've had no evidence that they haven't worked until now.

People are honestly shocked by how much their subconscious affects the stuff they do every day. Interestingly, the tobacco companies knew what I'd be writing about the day I started the book. It's funny that they have contacted me fourteen times over the last couple of years to work for them. The fact that they are so keen to have me work for them—which I never will—is an indication that I'm actually onto something. ☺