

How brands can achieve saliency through empathy

By  Tyrann Burger

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In a world where people are constantly bombarded with ads, messages, and distractions, it can be difficult but not impossible to achieve visibility and memorability. Brands have been searching for a framework that can help them understand their target audiences and determine the best way to reach them at the right time and place. Strategic design thinking can provide this framework.



Source: www.unsplash.com

From awareness to prominence

Brand salience is the ability of a brand to come to mind when a customer is considering a purchase or is presented with a buying opportunity. Brands with high salience are more likely to be considered by consumers when making a purchasing decision, and more likely to be chosen over other brands. Factors that contribute to brand salience include brand awareness, brand image, brand identity, and brand associations. A brand that is highly visible, easily recognisable, and carries a strong, positive reputation, is likely to be prominent in the minds of consumers.

Advertising industry: crisis mode

Brand salience is important because it contributes to increased brand preference, loyalty, and ultimately, increased sales and profits. While marketing efforts such as advertising, promotions, and public relations can play a significant role in increasing brand salience, traditional forms of advertising are no longer as effective as they once were.

Incumbent traditional advertising agencies are still charging eye-watering prices, without being able to convincingly prove their ROI on brand salience. Other industry challenges include the fact that consumers are becoming increasingly resistant to traditional forms of advertising, such as TV commercials and banner ads, having developed 'ad blindness' from constant exposure.

Hard truths and questionable impacts

A lack of transparency in the digital advertising ecosystem has created a sense of distrust among advertisers and consumers alike as a result of ad fraud, viewability issues, and ad placement on inappropriate content. There is also an increasing concern about the impact of advertising on society and culture, with many arguing that advertising promotes

consumerism and materialism, and perpetuates harmful stereotypes that reinforce gender and racial inequalities.



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While brands are trying to address these challenges through the development of more creative and engaging ad formats, the ethical use of influencer marketing, and the adoption of more digitally-appropriate and sustainable advertising practices, they need to take steps to secure salience that aligns with their business values and their consumers' values and preferences. To do this, brands have to connect with people on their level, on their device of choice.

Size matters: the biggest is not the best

Making a big impression no longer refers to advert size. We no longer need a billboard or a prime-time TV commercial to reach our audiences. This is because the smallest screen in the room is now the most important. When people refer to the "smallest screen in the room" commanding the most attention, this refers to the phenomenon of smartphones and other mobile devices taking up a disproportionate amount of people's attention, even in the presence of larger screens such as TVs or computer monitors.

This can be attributed to several factors. For one, mobile devices are highly portable and convenient, allowing people to access them at any time and in any place. Additionally, mobile devices offer a variety of distractions, from social media and messaging apps to games and streaming video, making them highly engaging and attention-grabbing. This has implications for advertising, entertainment, and other industries, as they scramble to adapt to the change in the ways that people consume media and engage with their devices.

Making meaningful impressions

Thanks to the blurring of physical and digital boundaries, the massive volumes of generic content being produced, and the misplaced reliance on data-guiding interaction instead of decorum, digital marketing has become frustrating for consumers and marketers alike.



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As such, brands must rethink their relationships with people — what the brand stands for, how they present themselves, what they say, how they say it, and how they behave. In other words, brands need to learn to be more human in their engagements.

Unlocking humanity through strategic design

Brands with high emotional intelligence are the ones that achieve salience. When brands behave more like humans, paying attention to subtlety and demonstrating value, relevance, good timing, and emotion, they develop stronger bonds with consumers. Brands can use strategic design thinking to transform and become more human-focused in several ways:

- Connect with target audience/users: Brands can use strategic design thinking to gain a deep understanding of user needs. This can be gathering feedback on products or services, observing customer behaviour to identify pain points, and using this information to inform design decisions.

- Design with empathy: This means keeping in mind the emotions, desires, and motivations of users throughout the design process, and designing products, services and experiences that meet needs and exceed expectations.
- Nurture customer engagement: Create immersive experiences that encourage participation and interaction. This can include creating a user-friendly website, a purposeful mobile app, interactive product demonstrations, or hosted events that bring people together.
- Prioritise accessibility and inclusivity: This can be as simple as designing products or services that are easy to use for differently abled people, or using inclusive language and imagery in marketing and advertising, and as important as establishing a diverse and inclusive workplace culture.
- Continuously improve: Brands can use strategic design principles to continuously enhance their products, services, and customer experiences over time. This involves testing and iterating on brand elements, collecting customer feedback, and using data to inform design decisions.
- Create engaging and memorable experiences: Lasting impressions involve harnessing mobile-first engagements, and creating unique and immersive experiences that stand out for users.

By using strategic design thinking to become more human-focused, brands can create products and services that better meet the needs of their customers. By acknowledging that there are humans at both ends of the commercial transaction, brands can build stronger relationships, and ultimately drive long-term growth and success through brand salience by connecting with people on their terms, on their level.

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