

Brand Attraction

If you're reading this, the chances are you have an interest in branding. As a brand strategy, design and communications agency, we see branding as a tool capable of transforming every aspect of a business. Branding influences all the ways people experience and interact with your business.

Evolution has given us with a relatively limited range of responses and behaviours. Rather than develop new ways of responding, we tend to adapt behavioural patterns to new situations. This is what we've done with branding, where **we bring many of the responses and behaviours we use in mate-selection to our relationship with brands.**

In this Acumen paper we point to ways in which marketers and brand owners can learn from the science of love and dating to make more effective approaches and build stronger relationships.

When it comes to interacting with others, evolution only equipped us with some basic patterns to do with 'fight or flight', group protection, pair bonding, etc. And there hasn't been time for us to evolve new behaviours to meet the unprecedented demands of our technological world. So, we adapt our basic patterns to new circumstances. Branding is one of these new circumstances.

Sweet talking

Consider, for instance, the now familiar dating profile. Research has found that the ideal profile talks 70% about the writer and 30% about the person they are hoping to find: these are the profiles which get the best results. And the balance is important. If the writer writes too much about themselves, they come across as self-absorbed. But if they write too much about the person they are looking for, they come across as evasive.

This is the same formula we use for brand and corporate propositions. Which should come as no surprise, since they do much the same job and are interpreted by the same cognitive processes. An effective proposition talks 70% about 'who we are' and 'what we do', and 30% about 'who we do it for'. Its optimal length is the same as that of a dating profile, too: 200 to 300 words.

"The first key to successful flirting is not an ability to show off and impress, but the knack of conveying that you like someone. If your 'target' knows that you find him or her interesting and attractive, he or she will be more inclined to like you."

- Kate Fox | SIRC Guide to Flirting

A picture is worth...

As with words, so also with photographs. When it comes to looking at dating profile pictures we find ourselves making judgments about what the person's personality is like, what their values are, whether or not we might want to go on a date with them or even maybe spend the rest of our life with them.

Brand Attraction *continued...*

We form... impressions within seven seconds of noticing them. And that they are extraordinarily difficult to change once we have formed them.

It's well known that we base our first impressions of new people 55% on their appearance and body-language, 38% on their style of speaking and only 7% on what they actually say. What is less well known is that *we form these impressions within seven seconds of noticing them*. And that they are extraordinarily difficult to change once we have formed them.

However, the same principle applies to each piece of marketing collateral we encounter: and for the same reasons. The way we interact with marketing materials is identical to the way we interact with other people. Generally, we've formed an impression of the brand before we've read a single word.

We look for the same things from a brand as we do from a person. We're considering confidence, attractiveness, trustworthiness and excitement. And, above all, we are evaluating how it makes us feel. Indeed, it's not too far-fetched to suggest that we're assessing the brand as a potential relationship partner.

Across a crowded room

When two people meet, they begin a process of mutual exploration and escalation to intimacy which is fraught with possibilities of failure. Successful couples negotiate these stages with behaviours that stimulate their partner to produce bonding hormones. This process is the same in the relationships people build with brands.

Typically, two people who are attracted to one another will make eye-contact and hold it for more than a second (which might sound like a very short amount of time but is significantly longer than the eye-contact we make in everyday situations). If the woman then smiles at the man, it is a signal for him to approach her.

Marketeers know materials need to be eye catching and gaze holding, and graphic designers are adept at creating treatments which draw the eye. But the take-away here is that branded marketing collateral must do more than grab our attention. Critically, it also has to smile: to engender warm feelings, signalling us to approach.

The next level

Dates, like sales, need to be 'closed' if the daters are going to progress to a relationship. To close, it is necessary to ask. In marketing terms, this constitutes the 'call to action'. But this is where we see a marked difference between the two activities.

On a date there is, hopefully, a progressive deepening and intensifying of connection between two people, culminating in their mutual desire to take that connection further.

Brand Attraction *continued...*

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In the initial interaction with a brand there may be an 'extensification': the opportunity to access further information or drill down into the details: but there is not usually a deepening or intensification.

In particular the call to action is likely to be disappointing. It may serve the purposes of the brand but frequently doesn't provide any pay-off to the prospect or provide any excitement of 'taking things to the next level'.

This is ironic, because **brand owners are hoping for a very similar result to daters: a long-term monogamous relationship with someone who will lavish lots of attention and money on them, sing their praises to others, and be loyal for life!**

We believe branding can learn a great deal from dating. It can learn to better understand the reactions and behaviours people bring to brands, which are the same as they bring to their personal relationships. It can learn to give more value and pay more attention to non-verbal elements.

Brands can learn to create more satisfying 'user experiences': experiences that are not just about functionality, but about trust, charm, humour, excitement, intimacy and escalation.

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