



Imagination Report

It dawned on us one day that something we seem to do better than many other research companies is balance solid methods with an unusual quotient of imagination. An imbalance toward the former can make you dull and not very useful. An imbalance toward the latter gets you into the world of truthiness (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truthiness>).

Our methodological credentials should be secure by now, so we will report from time to time on situations where imagination has served us and our clients well.

For a recent study, it was relevant to know about the snow conditions where survey respondents lived—how much, how dense, how cold.



It seemed unlikely that consumers could report on these facts with much accuracy or consistency.

The National Weather Service publishes monthly and annual data for scores of locations—which have ZIP codes. We have GPS coordinates for ZIP codes. We knew the ZIP codes of study participants. A little high geometry associated each participant with the nearest weather records. Voila! We have what we are sure is much better information.

No Comment Needed

A focus group facility is now advertising its "private and spotless bath salons" as a differentiator *vis a vis* those other places that make you use a "communal toilet" down the hallway. And we thought it was fresh M&Ms that made the difference.

An Old Friend

A time comes in life when almost every year is the *0th or *5th anniversary of something important. It was 35 years ago that Paul was introduced to a new-fangled system called SPSS. That originally stood for "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences", disciplines then ill-served by mainframe statistical tools. The blue manual was only an inch thick. The second edition purple manual was more like an inch and a half thick (remember software manuals?).

If you remember the blue manual, you probably remember who played drums on the Mickey Mouse Club too.



Over the years, Paul was instrumental in getting mainframe versions installed at the university where he taught, and then at a large corporation. A version for personal computers was released in the 1980s.

Now SPSS is ubiquitous in business. There are no manuals. SPSS, Inc. has revenues over \$200MM and a product line we do not pretend to keep up with. But the base system and a few of the multivariate modules remain indispensable to our routine operations. If memory serves, one of our very first purchases as a new business was an SPSS license.

Effects of Advertising

Few topics generate as much ink in the marketing communications literature or as much anxiety among ad practitioners. There is no end to bad ideas about how advertising actually works (see next article), though we are finally listening more to cognitive psychologists rather than outdated rat psychologists.

We researchers are hard-pressed to "prove" that advertising has worked. A good campaign can usually be counted on to increase awareness, occasionally to increase consideration, and only rarely to changes in claimed purchasing or brand perceptions.

However, we have both read and now conducted studies using an interesting (and simple) mode of analysis using routine tracking questions, viz.:

- * Unaided ad awareness
- * Prompted ad recognition
- * Stated brand purchasing

Typically, consumers who volunteer awareness of your ads and recognize them are more likely to have made a purchase than those with only one form of ad awareness—or neither.

More Advertising Myths

Writing in the just-published (!) June 2005 *Journal of Advertising Research*, Gerald Tellis does his best to puncture what he believes are common misconceptions about advertising.

If an ad doesn't work in the short run, should it be repeated until effects are seen? Tellis argues no. Pouring on more media weight can't compensate if the ad itself does not grab people emotionally.

So, should we plan on a "wearin" period before effects of the ad kick in? Again, our author says no, citing research that "if advertising does not work in [a short time], it is unlikely to ever work."

Because agencies and their clients have invested money and time in a campaign,

reluctance to pull it is understandable. But an economist would point out that production costs are largely sunk, whether a bad campaign continues or not.

Isn't the best way to improve a campaign's effectiveness to increase the weight (spending)? If you make money buying media you hope so. However, Tellis maintains that the pay-off is greater by working smarter. By this he means better selection of target segments, messaging, and creative strategy. (We didn't pay him to write this—really!—even though the obvious implication is to do more and better research in advance).

The ultimate criterion is how persuasive ads are, right? Wrong. Tellis argues from extensive research, with which we agree, that rational persuasion is not the point. ". . . emotional advertisements are more interesting, more easily remembered, more prone to lead to action, and less likely to arouse consumers' defenses than are argument advertisements."

Since we ourselves want to believe that we are rational decision makers who rely on facts, argument, and reasoned persuasion, it is easy to presume that consumer behavior works the same way. We think not. The evidence is in that nothing predicts advertising effectiveness more than how much people like it. The kind of political advertising that reaches toward a majority (as opposed to the "political base") does not belabor the fine print of party platforms, but makes an emotional connection.

PDA Intercepts

We read this, so it has to be true. Some are advocating arming mall interviewers with PDAs to record interviews, including oral verbatims. Uh, they aren't really program-mable. You still have transcription headaches. Typing or entering answers with a stylus while standing can only be messier than written answers, doncha think?