

2012



## HONDA AND NEUROMARKETING

The car maker Honda is one of a growing number of businesses using neuroscience to learn how and why consumers decide what to buy.

Using some of the latest brain science technology - Honda UK has researched the emotions of buyers visiting car dealerships. Heart rate, respiration and muscle contraction are among the responses logged in an attempt to identify the triggers for a sale. This is analysed against a range of other data about test subjects' experiences in each salesroom.

Honda found the results so persuasive that it is remodelling showrooms and retraining staff to tailor pitches according to a potential buyer's state of mind.

Ian Armstrong, Manager of Customer Communications for Honda UK, explains:

***"Conventional research only gets you so far because it's rationalisation after the event, and most decision-making is done subconsciously. We set out to measure physical changes people cannot consciously control."***

Honda is not alone in believing brain science can boost the bottom line. A growing number of businesses say that traditional ways of understanding consumers - direct questioning, observing our behaviour - don't explain why we buy one product over another. And they are turning to neuroscience for the answers.

**Honda achieved a 24 per cent growth in sales  
in March 2012 over March 2011**

Professor Gemma Calvert is co-founder of the Neurosense Consultancy, which claims to provide consumer insight by scanning volunteers' brains. She uses functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to identify which parts of the brain respond to certain stimuli, and electroencephalography (EEG) to track the brain's electrical activity. She says,

***"A growing focus of our work is arming clients with knowledge of when it's most appropriate to use a particular marketing technique,"***

British broadcaster GMTV used the procedures to gauge receptiveness to adverts at different times of the day. Steve Elliott, GMTV Head of Research enthused,

***"The findings have been received more positively than any research we've ever done,"***

It's easy to see why. The study - which monitored responses in parts of the brain associated with enjoyment and understanding - concluded that the brain is more receptive to advertising at breakfast time, and that this is as effective an ad medium as peak-time TV - for which advertisers pay a premium. Steve adds,

***"It's an approach that provides a well-rounded argument when combined with other data, and it's hard to question the results when findings are accumulated in lab conditions."***

This last point demonstrates the persuasive power of neuroscience-based research.

John Bunyard is co-founder of Newcomen Group, which applies science to business problems and worked on Honda's project. He says,

***"A scientific approach in business is undoubtedly the way ahead, but we are already seeing examples of some marketing-services people attempting to bamboozle clients with science."***

Nevertheless, growing demand from advertisers for proof of how communications work means the industry is under pressure to find a new model. Cheaper, more flexible neuro-imaging devices are in the pipeline, as entrepreneurs seek to cash in on an emerging market in the business world for modified medical diagnostic equipment.

Bunyard says:

***"The next generation of monitoring tools for use outside the laboratory is where things will get really interesting. In an ideal world, the technology would be invisible and the subject barely conscious of it at all."***

So... the irresistible forces of demand and supply are propelling neuroscience towards the commercial mainstream.