MARKETING | PERSUASION | PSYCHOLOGY | SALES

# The psychology of selling

*You cannot imitate what everyone else is doing and stand head and shoulders above the competition at the same time. The timid shall remain forever invisible. You must look at the competition to see what they're not doing, instead of emulating what they do.*

by **Linda Caroll**

plus ATTACHMENT

2103 words | 9 pages

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It was 1979. A home computer was almost unheard of and my calculator was the size of a paperback book. I worked in advertising and retail sales management for a national company. (This is no admission of age, I stopped aging years ago.)

I sat among a room full of strangers, awaiting the start of a course called "The Psychology of Selling." Little did I know the impact it would have. I use those lessons still today. They apply as much to the Internet as they do offline.

Just as the class was starting, a somewhat frazzled young man, tie askew and hair ruffled, hurried in the door. The instructor yelled out very loudly; "**DON'T SLAM THE DOOR**!"

Then, he turned and looked at the class, grinning, and asked us: "What did you just visualize?" The entire class started to laugh.

When the laughter subsided, he softly said, "Please close the door quietly." The poor guy closed the door and slunk off to a seat, probably wishing a hole would open up in the floor.

The instructor grinned. "Not bad," he said. "Not even five minutes into the class and you learned lesson two." He turned and wrote on a flipchart:

## *"People do not visualize a negative"*

Wildly waving his felt marker, he went on to explain that if we give people a negative command they will visualize just the opposite. That if you say "Don't" slam the door, they'll visualize a door slamming.

That applies to marketing commands, too.

## *That's why "call today" and "do it now" will get better results than "Don't wait".*

One brave soul (was that me?) raised a hand and asked what rule number one was. The instructor stopped. He made a great show of capping the felt marker and placing it on the table.

I was beginning to wish for that hole in the floor. Mr. Late was grinning at me across the room. I could identify.

In a very melodramatic manner, the instructor (who reminded me of Groucho Marx) sauntered up to a young lady in the first row. I breathed a sigh of relief. He stared at her for a minute, then held out his hand and said, "Hand me your pencil". She did.

Grinning again, the instructor walked through the rows of chairs waving the pencil over his head. "People - follow - directives", he announced.

Suddenly he stopped. He pointed the pencil at yet another student. "If I told you to jump off a bridge, would you?" he asked. The student snorted and said no. The instructor went on to say that:

## *People— as a rule— will follow a directive if there is no apparent reason not to.*

Personal harm is a pretty good reason not to. As a whole, we are even more inclined to follow a directive if it will result in a positive gain.

The discussion carried on, of course, but with that thought in mind, take a good look at your ads. Do you include a directive? The buzzword for it is a "call to action". Are you telling people what "to" do? Or what "not" to do?

Test your ads. Send out the same ads you're using now, but changing the ending directive. Keep a notebook and log the results with each change. Sure... it takes a little time. You're worth it. The difference... could be absolutely amazing!

**Psychology Of Selling II**
There was a buzzing in the room, the kind that comes from many voices speaking with whispered enthusiasm. Anyone walking by the room would have thought there was some type of covert operation being planned.

Heads bent, brows furrowed and pencils flew across paper, scratching furiously. Ads were being rewritten.

It's funny how one small noise can freeze a room. All heads lifted in synch, eyes turned to the front of the room at the sound of "Groucho" turning the paper on the flipchart.

He uncapped his felt marker with a flourish and wrote boldly on the flipchart;

***"Advertising is all about Unleashing Desire!"***

He pointed his marker at a slouching Elvis type in the second row. Wagging his eyebrows and rolling his eyes in true Groucho fashion, he drawled "What is it YOU desire?"

After the laughter subsided, the instructor surveyed the room, arms crossed on his chest. "Seriously. What do you think are the two things that people desire most?" he asked. Someone chuckled.

A tentative voice from the back of the room suggested, "Money?" The instructor paced the room thoughtfully. "Anyone agree?" he asked. A few

voices mumbled in agreement.

"What's the first thing you'd do if you won a million dollars? he asked. He pointed at students at random. "Pay off bills," "Quit my job," "Go on vacation," "A new car."

"Do you suppose," he asked "that people don't really want money itself? That maybe they really want what money represents to them?"

The instructor paced the room silently for a moment. He looked out the window and combed a hand through his hair.

Turning, brows furrowed, and asked; "Did you know that all your wants and all your needs stem from two primal desires? Gut level, deeply instinctive primal desires."

You could have heard a pin drop. Elvis was actually looking curious.

Striding to the front of the room, he underlined the words on the flipchart.

***Advertising is all about Unleashing Desire.***

Carefully, he printed underneath it;

***Our primal desires are to experience pleasure and to avoid pain.***

Tapping the marker on the flipchart for emphasis he stated clearly; "Every single thing humans do — stems from one of our primal desires."

He went on to explain that if an ad focuses on primal desires, it is more successful than if it just talks about product features. And that an ad that elicits emotion based on a primal desire is one powerhouse of an ad!

He explained that "Stop the pain" sells better than "The best headache

remedy". That "You *can* afford the house of your dreams" is better than "Affordable mortgages".

He asked us to open the newspaper and find six ads that did not address a primal need. And rewrite them so they do.

Do you want to write ads that sell? Really sell? Look for ads that don't address a primal desire. Attach each ad to a piece of paper. Underneath the ad, rewrite it so it addresses a primal desire.

When you've done a few dozen of those, you'll start to see a difference in the oddest place. Your sales.

See, if your ads don't cut it, people will assume your product doesn't either. But wait... that's a subconscious parallel assumption, and that's the next topic.

**Psychology of Selling III**

Pencils ceased scratching and eyes turned to the front of the room at the now familiar sound of "Groucho" turning the paper on the flipchart. He closed the flipchart. Leaned it against the wall next to the door.

Oblivious to the class, he set his briefcase on the desk. One by one, he placed his felt markers in the little pockets in the top of the briefcase.

Glancing at the class with a hint of a smile, he began to gather up his notes. He tapped the stack on the desktop. Tap, tap. Tap. He put them in the briefcase. Click. He closed the briefcase.

Following his lead, students began to gather up their notes, papers and ads. Pens were tucked back into pockets and purses.

Still silent, Groucho placed his briefcase next to the flipchart, right beside the door. Almost casually, he strolled to the desk. Perched on the edge. "What are you doing?" he asked.

There was a brief silence, as 20 people pondered the question. "Getting ready to leave?" Elvis ventured. The question mark was audible.

"What makes you think it's time to leave?" Groucho asked. Glancing around the room, the expressions were pretty comical.

With an exaggerated expression of sudden understanding, eyebrows raised, Groucho announced "Ahhh— I see! You thought that since **I** packed up my things...." Murmurs of agreement came from the class.

"That would be an assumption?" Groucho asked with a grin and a chuckle.

"Subconscious parallel assumptions!" he announced, watching the class for reaction. He stood up and paced the room.

"If you walked into the Gucci store, you would expect the watches and handbags to be authentic Guccis, right? Yet, if you walk into a bargain store and see a bag labeled Gucci on sale for $10, you assume it's a knockoff. Yes?" Heads nodded in agreement. He continued.

"I had a meeting a few years ago. A very memorable meeting," he said very intently. He paused, as though in reflection.

Turning, he snorted. "I don't remember a damn word the guy said." "I DO remember the ketchup on his tie. Very unprofessional, the ketchup." He laughed, amused by the memory.

"Assumptions," he said again, with exaggerated emphasis. "They can work for you or against you." He waved his hand, pointer finger extended. "One. **ONE typo can change your ad from dynamic to unprofessional.** Just like the ketchup." It's subconscious.

He went on to discuss the parallel assumptions that people make. If your ad is misleading, people assume you're dishonest, or that the product is somehow inferior and you have to mislead to sell it. That if you have typos in your ad, you are unprofessional.

***He emphasized that if YOU come across as unprofessional, your product instantly 'becomes' inferior, too.***

Glancing at the clock, "Groucho" announced that he had one more assignment. As students shuffled to pull out pencils and pens, he held his hand up, 'traffic cop' style.

"Go — buy a notebook. The 99 cent kind.

> ***Every time an ad, or a sales-person, does something to turn you off... to lose the sale— big or small— write it down.***
>
> ***Every time an ad, or a sales-person, does something to light up your eyes and make the sale— big or small— write it down.***

Keep it. Read it from time to time. The more you put in your notebook, the more you'll understand. You will be surprised at what you discover. About yourself first. And about selling."

Walking over to the door, Groucho turned to the class. "Understand that people make assumptions based on what you say and what you do. If you don't learn to make that work for you, it will work against you."

He tucked his briefcase under his arm. Picked up the flowchart. With a smile and a wink, he was gone, leaving us to ponder just a while before we went on our way.

Now go— buy a notebook. The 99 cent kind.

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**Linda Caroll** has over 25 years of experience in marketing, design, copywriting and business consulting.

She developed a fascination for the psychology of marketing in the late seventies. In the late 70s and early 80s she worked in the retail sector, applying her marketing and promotion methods to three divisional stores.

In the mid eighties she started working from home. Her eclectic client list included giants such as an International Charity, Canada Post and a National Dinosaur Museum... as well as small home based businesses. Her first articles were published in the early nineties.

She developed my first website 10 years ago, in 1995 and had an entire portfolio of clients before she finished her own. Linda's design clients have been featured in Forbes, The New York Times, The Toronto Sun, People magazine, Playboy Online, Upclose Magazine, Home & Garden Television, Culinary Thymes, ABC News, The Salt Lake Tribune, Houston 11, The Washington Post, The Honolulu Star, The Washington Post & more.

> *"My website isn't about me. It's about you, and whether or not I am the solution you're seeking. The same thing applies to your website. It's not about you. It's about your customers. It's to help them decide whether or not you are the solution they are looking for. If your customers like your website, trust me, you'll like it too."*

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ATTACHMENT

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# How strange that we waste time and horde money

*You want more sales. More profit. For those that can see the bigger picture, there's a Eureka! moment in this rather unusual strategy.*

by **Linda Caroll**

817 words | 4 pages