

Appeal to an Audience With These Seven Psychological Strategies

No matter what product or service you're marketing, you have to understand your audience—and understand how they think. The following seven appeals are the most common psychological strategies advertisers use to reach their target audience and persuade them to buy.

Emotional appeals. Emotional appeals are designed to make an audience associate positive feelings with your brand. These appeals generally focus on trust, joy, love, loyalty and happiness, which you can leverage through the use of powerful music and imagery.

Fear appeals. Fear appeals can get people to do a specific thing—like buy a product or recycle—as well as avoid a certain behavior, such as drunk driving. In either case, these appeals are designed to create fear or anxiety about a specific risk. Although this approach is effective, if companies make their ads too scary and intense, they can actually scare people away from their brand entirely.

Humor appeals. Humor appeals get people's attention and help to solidify a brand in their minds. However, organizations must be aware of their target audience's sense of humor because when advertisers miscalculate what people find funny, an ad can fall flat—or worse, cause outrage among consumers.

Musical appeals. Like humor, music is a great way for brands to get noticed and make an audience remember their products. In addition, musical appeals can bring up positive memories whenever someone hears a catchy tune in an ad, which goes a long way toward making them feel good about the product being presented.

Rational appeals. While some products can effectively persuade consumers with tugs to the heart strings, other products demand a more rational approach, especially if the ad is used in a print medium. Rational appeals use logic, facts, and data to convince consumers to buy products, and are often found in advertisements for medications, cookware, and cleaning products.

Sexual appeals. From jeans to cars to cologne to hamburgers, appeals that rely on sex and romance are found in ads for numerous products. Although history has shown that sex does indeed sell—or at least gets attention—sexual appeals have been done so often that in some cases, using them may not pack the punch that marketers expect.

Scarcity appeals. Scarcity appeals tap into people's fear of missing out, so they're a great way to convince people to take advantage of a sale or a limited edition product. However, you have to make sure that scarcity actually applies to what you're selling: If you're advertising a limited time offer, customers will notice if it goes on longer than advertised—and they will lose trust in your company.

No matter what advertising appeal you choose to try, make sure it's appropriate for your audience and your brand. While all of these appeals can be effective in certain situations, if they are used inappropriately, they'll turn consumers off.