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Susan Gunelius: Marketing Communications

10 Common--and Effective--Emotional Triggers

Spur potential customers into action by using these cues in your marketing campaign.

By Susan Gunelius | March 02, 2010

URL:

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/marketing/marketingcommunicationscolumnistsusangunelius/article205240.html>

It is important to appeal to consumers' emotions when crafting marketing messages. Think about how you feel when you hear marketing messages and how those feelings affect your own buying decisions. Just like you're moved to action by an emotional response to marketing messages, so are all consumers. Your copywriting should accomplish two goals: It should make consumers feel something, and it should make them act on those feelings.

Once you identify the target audience for your marketing messages, you need to consider which emotional triggers you can connect to those messages. Following are 10 common emotional triggers that you can tie into your marketing messages to make the sale.

1. **Fear:** Fear is an emotion that can be used in a wide variety of marketing messages. Insurance companies often appeal to the emotion of fear with messages like "Don't get caught with too little insurance."
 2. **Guilt:** Consumers are easily affected by messages that trigger emotions of guilt. Nonprofit organizations use the guilt trigger effectively in copy such as "Don't let them suffer anymore."
- <insert ad here>
3. **Trust:** Trust is one of the hottest trends in marketing, and every company seems to be trying to jump on the trust bandwagon in their marketing messages. Financial companies are leading the way with messages like "no hidden fees."
 4. **Value:** Value is another hot trend in marketing, and many promotions appeal directly to the emotional trigger of getting a good deal. For example, promotional messages that say "If you find a better price for the same product, we'll match it" are effective in piquing feelings related to value.
 5. **Belonging:** Few people truly want to be alone. Human nature dictates that most people want to feel like they belong to a group, and customers often purchase products in an attempt to feel part of a specific group. Many companies effectively appeal to consumers' desires to belong, using copy like "You're part of the family."
 6. **Competition:** The old adage of keeping up with the Joneses is an adage for a reason. Many consumers are affected by a competitive desire to feel equal to or better than their peers. Copy like "Make them drool" is a great example of a message that elicits feelings of competition.
 7. **Instant Gratification:** We live in a world where people expect instant gratification in all aspects of their lives. Messages that cater to a sense of urgency are well-received by consumers who already desire instant gratification. Use words like now, today, in one hour or less, within 24 hours, and so on to appeal to the emotional trigger of instant gratification.
 8. **Leadership:** A lot of consumers want to lead the way in trying new products, and this audience responds strongly to marketing messages that appeal to their feelings related to leadership. Messages that make them feel like they're first or in control are powerful for this audience. Phrases such as "Be the first on your block" effectively appeal to the emotional trigger of leadership.
 9. **Trend-setting:** Many consumers want to feel cool or trendy, so appealing to those emotions in copywriting is fairly standard. Variations of "all the cool kids are doing it" are commonplace in copywriting and can be used to market a wide variety of products and services to an even wider audience. The famous Gatorade ad featuring Michael Jordan and the copy "Be like Mike" is a perfect example.
 10. **Time:** In the 21st century, people are busier than ever. As such, they desire more free time to pursue personal interests, spend time with family and friends, and so on. Marketing messages that appeal to that desire for more free time are extremely effective, such as "Cut the time it takes to vacuum your house in half."

There are many emotional triggers that you can use to evoke feelings among your target audience and move them to action through your marketing messages. People see a lot of marketing messages every day, so you have to give them a reason to digest yours by making them feel something when they see or hear it. Feelings are powerful, and copywriting offers a unique opportunity to tap into that power and leverage it for your business's gain.

For a quick primer--or refresher--on effective copywriting check out this excerpt from *Kick-ass Copywriting in 10 Easy Steps*, [10 Steps to Effective Copywriting](#).

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