

Affiliation: Create the Link

Another aspect of the Law of Association is the use of affiliation. Persuaders want you to affiliate their company with positive images, feelings, and attitudes. We tend to affiliate our feelings with our surroundings and environment and then transfer our feelings to those we are with. For example, one technique that is often used is to feed the prospect lunch. Why? Because people like the individuals and things they experience while they are eating (if the food and company are good). The idea is to link something positive in the environment with your message.

For example, a good game of golf, a weekend at the beach, NFL tickets, or an exotic cruise would all typically build positive associations and feelings in your prospects. Do you remember ever noticing how, after a crushing winning victory, sweatshirts sporting the University's logo were displayed all over the place? People want to be associated with winners. In fact, a study showed that when a university football team won, more students would wear that college's sweatshirts. The bigger the victory, the more college sweatshirts become visible. When you bring positive stimuli into the situation, you will be associated with the pleasant feeling you have created.

We are going to discuss four different affiliations that are most often used in the world. They are as follows: advertising, sponsorships, images, and color. Each of these techniques has a unique role in affiliation.

Advertising: The Billion Dollar Persuasive Industry

Advertisers and marketers use affiliation to evoke valuable associations in the minds of their prospects. They know that babies and puppy dogs automatically carry great associations of warmth and comfort in the minds of their audience. Consequently, we see tire commercials with babies and car commercials with puppies, even though cars and tires aren't really warm and cuddly. These warm appeals grab our attention and create positive associations in our mind.

Want some other examples? Consider some of the popular slogans: "Like a good neighbor," "The same as home-style cooking," "Like a rock," and "The breakfast of champions." Using slogans in this way, marketers are able to readily create positive feelings and associations without having to create a new image. They simply create even stronger and more positive associations with what already exists.

One of the most common examples of advertising affiliation occurs in the alcohol and cigarette industry. How often do you see a lung cancer patient in a cigarette ad? Instead, advertisers in these industries use young vibrant people who are in the prime of their lives. The beer companies want you to associate drinking beer with having fun and attracting the opposite sex. Their ads portray images of men and women having fun, while surrounded by beer. Their message is, "If you aren't drinking, you aren't having fun." On an intellectual level, we all know that these are just advertisements, but the associations they arouse in us stick in our minds.

When companies need to change their image, they usually find a good cause to latch on to. They will typically find a good social or environmental issue they can tap into. For example, an ice cream company advertises their support for an environmental movement and yogurt companies start a campaign to stop breast cancer. You also see patriotic endorsements being employed to create a positive association in your mind. The simple sight of the American flag, or the phrase “Buy American” or “Made in America,” can trigger instant positive associations.

In the 1970’s, the big American car dominated the U.S. automobile scene. American carmakers had no fear of imported automobiles. There was a tradition in most families to always buy the same make of car. Imports were associated with being cheap, unreliable, and a waste of money. When the baby boomers came along, however, they became better educated and they refused to blindly follow the guidelines laid out by their parents. They saw a car with better gas mileage and reliability at an inexpensive price. The negative association shifted suddenly from foreign cars to American-made cars and the rest is a history. The turnaround almost put American carmakers out of business, and still, to this day, they lose big market share to imported cars. As the tide turned, American car companies had to learn to make new associations with their cars.

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