

Anchors: Capture the Feeling

Anchoring is a technique that captures the feelings, memories, and emotions of certain events, places, or things. The psychology behind the technique's success lies in the use of elements from a previous situation or circumstance to replay the emotions and feelings of that experience. An anchor can be anything that brings up a thought or feeling and reminds you of something you have previously experienced. It will usually reproduce the exact emotion or feeling you experienced at the time. Remember the experiment of Pavlov's dog? It's the same idea: You use a certain stimulus to create an association that will bring about a particular response.

An anchor can be produced either externally or internally. Anchors don't have to be conditioned over a period of several years to be established. They can be learned in a single event. The more powerful the experience, the stronger the anchor will be. Phobias are an excellent example: Most phobias are established after one single, intense experience. Here we talk about three different sets of anchors: smells, music, and symbols. There are other elements (sights and taste) that can be used as anchors, but these three stimuli are powerful in evoking memories in our minds.

Smells: The Aroma of Persuasion

Our sense of smell is so powerful that it can quickly trigger associations with memories and emotions. Our olfactory system is a primitive sense that is wired directly to the center of our brain. By four to six weeks, infants can tell the difference between their own mother's scent and that of a stranger. Almost everyone has experienced situations in which a smell evoked a nostalgic (or not so nostalgic) memory. Think of the smells that take you back to your childhood. For some it is the smell of fresh baked bread, of freshly cut grass, or of the neighborhood swimming pool, etc. You can go back fifty years in a matter of seconds with the sense of smell.

Fragrances, aromas, and odors trigger memories, feelings, and attitudes in our minds. Smell can enhance or reinforce desired responses as well as positive and negative moods. There are multiple examples of this. Supermarkets with bakeries fill the air with the warm aroma of breads and coffee. Some children's stores send baby powder through the air ducts. When you walk through the mall, the food merchants will make sure you smell their cookies, cinnamon rolls, and Chinese food. Real estate agents are famous for having tenants bake bread before they have interested buyers tour the house. Large amusement parks will pipe in certain scents at certain times of the day to trigger responses and get immediate reaction. The use of smell in these instances is an attempt to link the seller's products and services with a positive attitude, thereby inducing the shopper to buy. In the same way, you can link positive smells with your message to create a positive attitude in your prospects.

There have been numerous studies conducted on the bearing scent and fragrance have on association. A 1983 study conducted among undergraduate students found that female students wearing perfume were rated as more attractive by male students. Scents were even found to improve scores on job evaluations in a study published by the Journal of Applied Psychology. Of course, offensive odors can also be used (and actually have been

used) to evoke a negative response. This tactic was once used while campaign committees were rating and appraising political slogans. Not surprisingly, ratings for the slogans went down.

Music: Feel the Beat

Music is much like smells in that our brains link music with attitudes and experiences from our past. Music is closely tied to our emotions. Think of the theme music from “Rocky” and then think of “Jaws”; the two movie themes evoke different emotions, don’t they? Local gyms pipe upbeat music outside to associate passersby with high energy and good times inside. In one case, a local convenience store had problems with teenagers loitering outside. The store wanted the teenagers business, but didn’t want the drugs and fights that seemed to go with it. They decided to play a Frank Sinatra song outside the store and soon found that the teenagers voluntarily stopped loitering. You may still remember that particular song played during the dance with your high school flame. Music has a powerful pull on us and triggers instant memories.

Because music is so powerful, persuaders need to carefully select the music they’re going to use. Advertisers often use a popular song or a catchy jingle. Notice the next time you watch television how many songs you recognize from all the commercials – you will be surprised. Every time the ad is played, the tune reinforces the product’s appeal. Music is universal because it has the power to evoke the emotions shared by all of humanity. We know music can soothe the savage beast by creating instant energy and excitement.

The Might of Symbols

We live in an especially symbolic world. Symbols bypass our thoughts and our logic and they affect our perceptions and behaviors. Take gold, for example. As one of the world’s most precious metals, gold is very symbolic of wealth and success. Countless stories are told of the search for gold. But, if you stop and think about it, there are other precious metals that are harder to find and far more precious. Gold, however, just holds a certain symbolism; it denotes success and wealth.

Symbols can also help us understand and feel a message without actually having to undergo the experience. For example, a skull and crossbones on poison says it all – we don’t have to ingest the poison to know of the fatal experience. The simple symbol of a red stop sign triggers an automatic response. For many, the sight of a police car on the highway will also trigger the automatic braking response.

Think of these symbols as you read them and pay attention to the feelings, memories, attitudes, and experiences they trigger in your mind:

- Crucifix
- Statue of Liberty
- American flag
- Military uniform
- Wedding dress
- Star of David
- World Trade Center
- Swastika
- Olympics
- Christmas tree

When you are trying to mold attitude as a persuader, it is useful to know how symbols shape the attitudes of your audience. Make careful study and research of the symbols you want to use before you employ them. If used well, they will influence your audience's feelings and behavior to your benefit. Marketing and advertising executives use symbols in a very sophisticated way to manipulate consumers. For example, did you know that the average child recognizes McDonald'sTM arches before he or she is even twenty months old? There are symbols of freedom, symbols of success, and symbols of poverty. Find and use the symbols you need to create the proper association with your prospect.

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