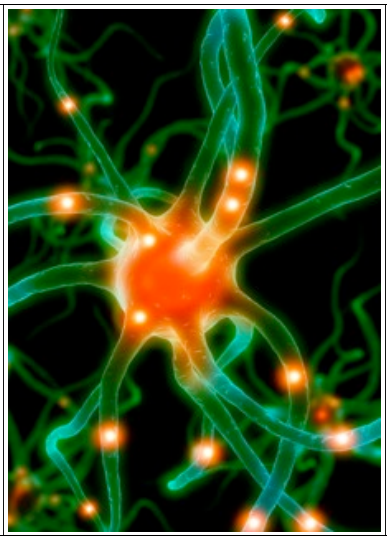

Switching sides.

A study from Neurofocus says up to 75% of information has been organized wrong. Including our website.

We came across a remarkable study from a California-based firm called Neurofocus about four weeks ago. The study analyzed how our brains interpret and process information, and why simply switching placement of graphics and text on a page can have a profound impact on how material is absorbed.

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We were intrigued. We investigated further. And what we found made us change how we do things. We thought this information so significant that we're even re-designing our website based on things we've discovered.

Neurofocus' research has attracted the attention of some key heavy hitters. Nielsen, considered one of the most conservative research companies in existence, has made a significant investment in the company. A number of Fortune 500s are using its techniques with success. And more are lining up.

The company gathers information using eye-tracking, galvanic skin response (GSR) data, and EEGs (electroencephalography). Neurofocus analyzes a variety of variables, such as placement of images versus placement of text; motion and animation; and different advertising models. Test subjects view material on a variety of screens, ranging from plasma TVs to cell phones to YouTube video windows. Subjects were segmented based on age and gender because of biological differences in the brain.

But what's particularly interesting is that the neurological research seemed to supersede difference in testing caused by demographics or culture. Neurological responses recorded for English speakers matched those of Hispanic audiences, for example. And the research demonstrated that cultural and demographic cues in conventional research can sometimes throw off the results.

In a number of comparisions of ads analyzed with Neurofocus's approach and with traditional research, the Neurofocus people were able to match effectiveness predictions with conventional research. In one instance, the company advised a major financial firm to use one of six ads in a test series. The CMO of the firm noted that conventional testing indicated the ad was the "most mediocre" of the group. But when it ran, it generated more response than any of the others.

What's also interesting is that the neurological research can be done with much smaller test groups—10 or 20 people rather than hundreds, or in some cases, thousands.

The research doesn't just apply to advertising. It's being used to determine optimum price points for cars, for television programming, for product placement, and even audio.

Some of the things Neurofocus discovered convinced us to rethink some of the things we do. For example, people interpret information on different parts of a screen with different sections of their brain. Typically, the elements in the left visual field are interpreted by the right frontal lobe. The elements on the right side are picked up by the left frontal lobe.

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The right frontal lobe is better for interpreting images and iconography. The left is better for semantics and quantative information.

So a logo or image works better on the left side of the visual; copy and numbers on the right.

That means that if the information is in the wrong place, the advertiser has reduced the engagement potential of the ad. In fact, when Neurofocus looked at a variety of materials in the marketplace, their estimates are that as much as 75% of communications may be less than optimized for how your brain wants to gather information.

A quick review of information we recalled over the last day or so tends to reinforce this: logos typically are on the lower right of ads and spots; websites (including ours, until now) mix up visuals and information; even the lead template in PowerPoint is structured so that text goes on the left and images are placed on the right.

We may be limiting the engagement of our audiences before they even see our materials.

How important is this engagement? A competitor to Neurofocus, EmSense, recently conducted a study on how award-winning advertising from Cannes and from the Effies (a competition that measures advertising effectiveness) affected neurological response. The study indicated that the award-winning ads engaged the brains of the audience much faster than typical ads—in about 1.5 seconds rather than 5 to 7 seconds.

And it reinforced a finding we've seen before: the study suggested that both the Cannes and Effie winners would be effective, which parallels other research we've seen that award-winning advertising in general is more effective than run of the mill stuff.

So with these things in mind, we decided that we should make some changes to our website, taking into account some of the lessons of neuroscience. We are also using this as an opportunity to build in some additional interactivity and reference. We changed the placement of links. We separated our logo and tagline. We looked at the positioning of a variety of elements.

We're even going back and updating old articles to reflect this new approach (that's in process). And we'll keep on top of this technology and provide updates as we learn more.

In the meantime, if you'd like to learn more about how your brain processes information, take a look at the related articles to this story. Or **contact us** and we'll share more with you.

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