

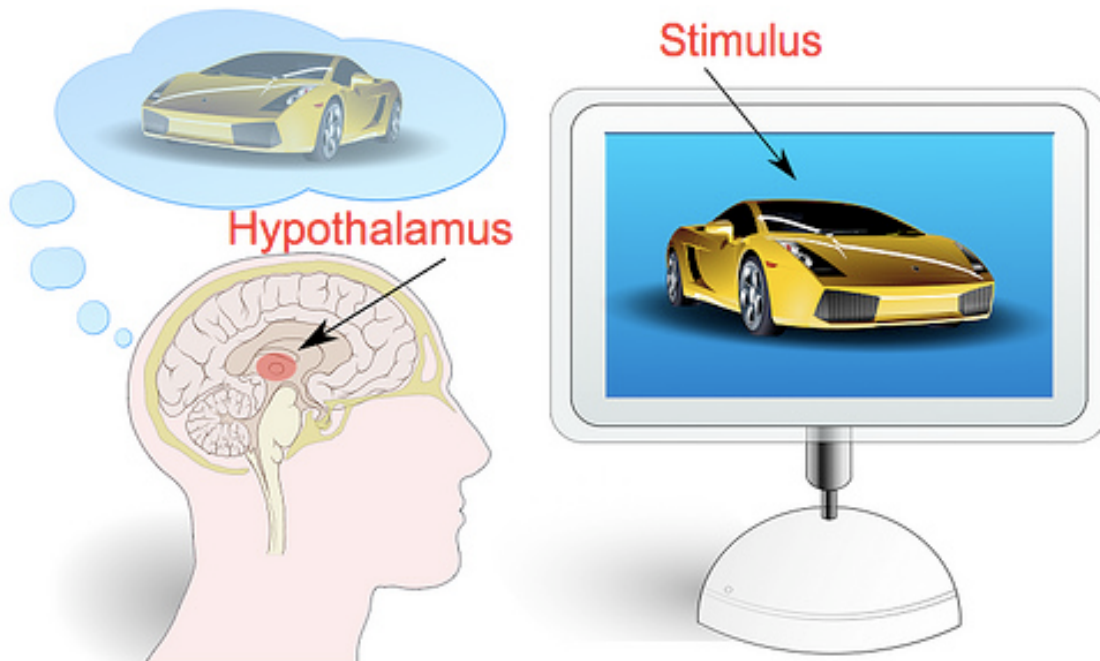
Neuromarketing Hope and Hype: 5 Brands Conducting Brain Research

BY [Kevin Randall](#) Wed Sep 16, 2009 at 1:26 AM

Even before the age of *Mad Men* marketers were trying to tap into the human subconscious to influence consumers to buy their products.

But over the last decade or so, as the fields of neuroscience and marketing science (as some like to call it) have evolved, the area of Neuromarketing has emerged. Today more companies are investing in the technology and studies. Neuromarketing blogs ([Roger Dooley](#)) and books ([Buyology](#)) are being accorded more attention and legitimacy. Nielsen's recent investment in researcher [NeuroFocus](#) has increased the influence and credibility of neuromarketing. However, the field is young and a bit like the wild west. And many in and out of marketing have raised concerns about the reliability and ethicality of neuromarketing.

What is Neuromarketing?



Neuromarketing is the practice of using technology to measure brain activity in consumer subjects in order to inform the development of products and communications--really to inform the brand's 4Ps. The premise is that consumer buying decisions are made in split seconds in the subconscious, emotional part of the brain and that by understanding what we like, don't like, want, fear, are bored by, etc. as indicated by our brain's reactions to brand stimuli, marketers can design products and communications to better meet "unmet" market needs, connect and drive "the buy."

It is commonly accepted that traditional market research is flawed because consumers don't know, can't articulate, or will even lie in a focus group about their purchase motivations. Neuromarketing research removes

subjectivity and ambiguity by going right to measuring observable brain behavior. Respondent attention level, emotional engagement and memory storage are common metrics.

Techniques include:

fMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging)
SST (Steady State Topography)
EEG (Electroencephalography)
Eye Tracking
Galvanic Skin Response

So who is using neuromarketing (aside from consultants)?

Microsoft is now mining EEG data to understand users' interactions with computers including their feelings of "surprise, satisfaction and frustration."

Frito-Lay has been studying female brains to learn how to better appeal to women. Findings showed the company should avoid pitches related to "guilt" and guilt-free and play up "healthy" associations.

Google made some waves when it partnered with MediaVest on a "biometrics" study to measure the effectiveness of YouTube overlays versus pre-rolls. Result: Overlays were much more effective with subjects.

Daimler employed fMRI research to inform a campaign featuring car headlights to suggest human faces which tied to the reward center of the brain.

The Weather Channel used EEG, eye-tracking and skin response techniques to measure viewer reactions to three different promotional pitches for a popular series.

But the practice of neuromarketing is not without its critics and issues. First, consumer advocates and other groups have claimed neuromarketers are exploiting people to "sell us crap we don't need" and creating unhealthy and irresponsible addictions and cravings.

Second, neuromarketing still suffers from the issue it is trying to overcome: the artificiality of market research. Brain activity in a lab may not equate to brain behavior in the mall where the buying decision is consummated.

Third, neuromarketing studies have not been common in the B2B arena, perhaps because the customer buying process tends to be lengthy and involve many people so it may be difficult to measure these decisions reliably.

Fourth, the cost of conducting these studies today is prohibitive for many companies. Neuromarketing is only poised to grow in use and influence. But as the practice makes its way out of the lab and into the real world, at the grocery aisle, onto your computer perhaps...a debate, well beyond marketing, will rage.



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