

Into the Wonderland of Neurodesign

by Jeff Sandgren, Technology Editor, BrandTech News

Upon learning that NeuroFocus, a curious company that is busy gleaning insights from deep inside our skulls, had recently published findings from a study of the male brain, I thought it prudent to benchmark my male psyche.

It turned out to be a choice like that of Alice, curious to see where the rabbit was going, and stumbling inadvertently into Wonderland. My simple initial curiosity was, am I a 'normal' guy?

"It all depends on what your spouse thinks of you," cautioned the instantly disarming Dr. Pradeep, CEO and neuro marketing White Rabbit, "your estimate of your own normality can be overly exaggerated."



Dr. Pradeep is a genial, energetic fellow, whose frequent humor provides comic relief from topics as heavy as brain-wave analysis. Nevertheless, I decided to proceed with caution, since there were clues here that my wife might already have this guy on her payroll. Better to leave the personal introspection aside, I thought, and focus on the more general applications, starting with: what, among all their neuro-discoveries, has been the most surprising so far?

According to the good doctor, they run into interesting insights all the time, nearly every day. But there have been a few fundamental surprises.

Big Aha's

"One big 'aha' concerns the over-sixty segment, and how we talk to them," explained Dr. Pradeep. "Their brains seem to almost always discard negative messaging. There's a difference between suggesting to an over-sixty person that they should put their money where it's safe (negative spin) versus suggesting that they put it where one day their grandchildren can have access to it (positive spin)." The latter approach, according to this analysis, will likely be more effective.

Another 'aha' concerns the teen brain. Since the different parts of their brain develop at different rates (the reasoning part of the brain develops more slowly than the emotional part of the brain), talking to teenagers should use the language of emotion, rather than the language of reason.

"I'm not just talking about marketing," Dr. Pradeep added, "but about teaching and even parenting. We might want to tell them they shouldn't drink before they're ready, that they should drive more carefully – what a frustrating exercise that is when we approach it based on rational arguments!" He didn't offer a positive alternative here (sorry, parents), but we assume it should be along the lines of "You know, getting a DUI or wrecking your car is SO awesomely uncool."

So what about the male brain? What's the best way to talk to me?

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Doctor Pradeep suggests that “... the cliché is to characterize the male brain as having a natural propensity to focus on scantily clad images; but that is an overly simplistic way of characterizing what is actually a more complex underlying emotional phenomenon. We don’t tend to think of guys as emotional, so we talk to them in the language that grabs their attention.”

The doctor conjectured further. “What if you understood the emotional territory that men’s brains occupy? Then you could talk to them in the language that their brains are actually focused on, but do so with a certain emotional high ground.”

At this point in the interview, I abandoned the notion of selling this story to Cosmopolitan instead of using it in BrandTech News. The notion that men’s brains have such a thing as “emotional high ground” might be too tough a sell.

So what about the female mind? According to Dr. Pradeep, “It is only a crude and senseless man who would simplify the female mind. The female mind is mysterious.” And again, the contagious chuckle.

Seriously, there are insights being gained, and he promised that NeuroFocus will be revealing some big aha’s in the near future. Dr. Pradeep did note that, while we (the royal Marketing We) seem to agree that there is a *Trillion-Dollar Woman* out there shopping, much of the marketing and message crafting still isn’t directed towards her, because it is still being created “... by guys, for guys. We all give each other high fives about how wonderful we are, but too many times we aren’t targeting the decision maker in the language that is natural to their brains.”

Enabling Neuroscience

So how does all this mapping of our brain territory come about? The enabling technology that NeuroFocus uses for their psychocartography is the well-established Electroencephalography (EEG); but not the gooey experience that most of us envision, with greasy sensors stuck in your hair and a plethora of wires tethering you to the monitors.

Instead, NeuroFocus has developed Mynd™, the first ‘dry’¹, full-brain, wireless EEG apparatus, to map in great detail the parts of your brain that are active when you are sensing and considering various stimuli – without overlaying the subconscious stimuli of being tethered by a mass of wires, or worrying about messy cleanup afterward. Mynd effectively untethers the wearer, and the brainwaves it is capturing can be transmitted wirelessly to any Bluetooth-enabled device.



The Mynd™: neater, cleaner, and more stylish than several hats we saw at the Royal Wedding

The real magic comes when this is coupled with pixel-level eye tracking, at a rate of two thousand times a second. Test subjects can then be exposed to various packages, ads, images, messages, etc. while adorned with

¹ The Mynd headset does require a very tiny amount of hair conditioner to make contact with the scalp
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the NeuroFocus headgear. A neuro-physiologist can observe in real time, and the ensuing data-stream can be analyzed and interpreted after the session. The focus of NeuroFocus is on what they deem to be the three key parameters: attention, emotional engagement, and memory retention—because neuroscientists know what physical parts of the human brain correlate to those mental activities, and the EEG can reveal their activation.

But what about this Big Lurking Question: was this neuroscience a creepy Orwellian invasion, or a way for Marketing to better understand and tailor the big wide world to little old you and me?

“Neuromarketing is just using science to understand what motivates us ... and what makes us behave in certain ways,” the doctor assured me.

Focus on Retail

There are many applications for the findings of this research, so it’s not surprising that NeuroFocus has offices in such insight-hungry locations as New York, Hollywood, Cincinnati, Tokyo, London, and more. The company is a world leader in the fast-growing neuromarketing research field, with numerous patents for its advanced technologies and a blue-chip client list representing the top companies in many Fortune 100 categories.

One solution area that is especially relevant to many of our readers is marketing to shoppers, online and in-store. In fact, Dr. Pradeep is one of the Keynote Speakers at this year’s upcoming “Shopper Insights In Action” (www.iirusa.com/insights/homepage.xml), along with such big names as A.G. Lafley, former CEO of Procter & Gamble, and Shopper Insights VP’s and Directors from Best Buy, Campbell Soup, Macy’s, Family Dollar, and GameStop.

Asking Dr. Pradeep about marketing at retail revs him up even more, like bumping an electron in the great atomic structure of neuroscience up to an even higher level. But he isn’t just enthusiastic about it – he’s clearly vexed.

“There is your consumer, just a few feet away from your product. There is your consumer, in your store, with money, ready to buy,” I could smell the ozone coming through the phone line, over a crackling high-pitched whirring sound that had nothing to do with bad reception. “What is the impact of marketing in that scenario, to a willing person with money in their pocket? Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent sending messaging to the consumer on the couch, far, far away; yet brand marketers have difficulty justifying a few dollars more at retail.”

Doctor Pradeep suggests a new term, *Storefront Marketing*, to synthesize both the physical retail in-store environment and the online web storefronts (as distinct from webpages where goods are not being offered for sale), a very consumer-centric definition that defines a moment in time and space (or cyberspace) where a consumer is potentially on the verge of a purchase.

“You’ve done all your broadcast and print advertising, all your brand building, and now the consumer is *right there* at the point of purchase, eyeballing your merchandise. How are you connecting with them? What



Dr. A. K. Pradeep, CEO NeuroFocus

conversations are you replaying? Are you trying to start a brand new conversation? Or do you think your previous marketing was *so profound* that you don't need to converse with them again?

“Marketers aren't connecting the dots at retail. It's about selective replaying, and that thinking hasn't happened yet. The brain of your consumer at retail, it's the *same brain* you've been talking to. What would happen now if you could *selectively replay* the key parts at that moment? Neuroscience facilitates this by isolating these particularly evocative and memorable snippets. *These* are what you need to give to your creative folks, so they can reactivate those snippets in the consumer's mind and trigger a replay of the whole story.”

We observed a common maxim of Storefront Marketing (by whatever other name you reference it): that you only have a few seconds of a consumer's attention in which to engage them and draw them to your product or offer.

“That is precisely the point,” Dr. Pradeep replied. “If only you could know at the point of purchase what was important to your consumer, and you could tastefully reactivate it, then the whole experience could be recreated in their mind, and you could have them engaged.”

Predictive Analytics

In addition to guiding the design of your Storefront Marketing, Dr. Pradeep believes that the combination of neuromarketing and predictive analytics can be especially effective. And he had empirical evidence to back it up as his verbal tempo and tone hit the accelerator again.

“We did an experiment with a major client, in which we went back and looked at marketing with over two years of data, and applied to that history the predictions that our neuromarketing research would have made. We wanted to see how our predictions correlated with real in-market performance. In some scenarios, you might be very happy to find a 20 – 25% correlation of prediction with in-market results. In our case, we found a correlation in excess of 80%.

“Imagine, if you could know in advance how to make 80% of your ad budget effective. What would you do? How much better would your performance be? What costs of wasted advertising could you save? The predictive capabilities of these solutions are going to be phenomenal.”

Tapping the brakes just a bit, Dr. Pradeep noted, “Look, the whole truth of the human brain will remain forever unknown ... but we can get closer and closer. Purchase decisions are made at the brain, so the closer we are, the better our opportunities.”

Neurodesign

Finally, we asked Dr. Pradeep for his view of the future of neuromarketing. There was a rare pause.

“When someone markets to me, I want them to talk to me like I actually have a thinking and feeling brain – like I am someone who is not fooled easily. People want to be talked to in a way that shows respect, that evokes thoughtfulness and passion.

“When we look back from the future, I think the very term ‘neuromarketing’ will become an anachronism,” foretold Dr. Pradeep. “I think the future is about *neuro-design*. By better understanding the human brain, we

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can move up the chain beyond marketing, to truly designing for the consumer products and offers that will genuinely be of greater service and relevance.

“Look at all the dials and knobs and instructions we have to deal with today. Who thought I’d want to have to learn all this stuff? Think of neurodesign as if everything was designed by Apple. Brand Apple takes the time to make sure their products are fit for human consumption. We have agencies to decide if food is fit for human consumption, but not product interfaces.

“Marketing informed by neuroscience can do better. It can improve how we speak to and engage consumers. It can direct products and features that appeal to the human brain, pricing that is not confusing, promotions that actually make sense.”

In summary, Dr. Pradeep believes we need to “demolish the glibness of marketing, put science in its place, and migrate marketing to the loftier world of design.”

After the interview, I reflected that my initial impression of Dr. Pradeep was all wrong. He wasn’t the White Rabbit. Clearly, he was The Caterpillar. My mind was full of smoky, intoxicating images of a future where the inner mysteries of my brain directed the world of product design and marketing with magical efficiency. I half-stumbled outside for a breath of fresh air, but still felt a bit dizzy, so I sat for a moment at the base of our maple tree.



An unknown time later, my wife woke me with a gentle shake.

“What are you doing sleeping out here?” she asked, “and what were you dreaming about? You kept saying ‘curiouser and curiouser’.”

Okay, so my estimate of my own normality may, in fact, be just slightly exaggerated.

Editors’ Note: for those who would like to go further on this topic, Dr. Pradeep has authored a book titled “The Buying Brain”, a business book bestseller (according to CEO Read) published in 2010.

