

Riger

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How Much Repetition and When?

Breaking through

Since 1885, when Herman Ebbinghaus' work on memory was first made public, we have known that people are quick to forget even the most meaningful material.

In fact, according to Educational Psychology, individuals will forget 27% of what is learned after just one day. After 30 days, 70% of what is learned is forgotten. And when it comes to most marketing-oriented information, people forget nearly half of what is learned after just 30 seconds.

Now, add to this the staggering amount of clutter caused by the thousands of commercial messages which bombard us daily. A recent study estimates that the average American sees or hears some 7,000 messages every day...most of which are either quickly forgotten, ignored or filtered out in some other way.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that if you want your advertising to be remembered, you must hit your target audience as often as possible. Repetition exposes a message to prospects who still remember your last ad. This helps build awareness and move prospects from basic awareness to knowledge, to conviction and, finally, to action.

So how much repetition (or frequency) is enough? Experts agree that the first advertising exposure usually provides some value, but the consumer can't be expected to fully understand the selling proposition. The second exposure is more valuable, yet the consumer still probably hasn't gotten the full message or hasn't been persuaded to take action. Research shows that beginning with the third exposure, the consumer is more likely to take action. Recall of message continues to increase through approximately 10 exposures.

In recent years, media planners have adopted the term "effective frequency," which means exposing the target audience to messages enough times to pass a minimum threshold of communication, but not enough to result in overexposure. Overexposure results when you continue to reach a prospect after a purchase decision has been made, or to the point of "burnout."

Advantages of flying

With repetition being so important, what if your budget doesn't permit high frequency over a long period of time?

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According to research published in the *Journal of Advertising Research* (December, 1977), "bunching" or "flighting" messages, rather than spacing them evenly over a schedule, increases awareness.

Using 13 ad exposures over a year, Dr. Edward Strong of Tulane University tested several different ad schedules for total awareness. He concluded that "concentrating ads in flights produced greater effect per ad." For example, in the case of a product with no seasonality, 13 evenly spaced exposures over 52 weeks produced an average recall of 27%, while a schedule which tended to "bunch" the same number of messages over less time, yielded average recall of 31.3%.

Strong concluded that "there is a synergy arising from scheduling two advertisements closely in time." That is, the effect of two exposures close together is greater than the effect of the two separated in time from each other.

As a result, advertising effectiveness depends greatly on the ability to deliver the same or very similar messages to the same audience over and over again in concentrated flights. Because frequency of message is largely budget driven, it's critical that advertisers remain focused with every media dollar they spend.

Frequency dos & don'ts

- **Do** determine your communication goals and objectives.
- **Do** realize that different rules apply to different products.
- **Do** remember that both the nature of the product and the creative can affect frequency.
- **Do** analyze your competition's media usage and frequency.
- **Do** make sure that chosen media effectively reach the product's primary purchasers.

- **Don't** forget that different media are perceived in different ways.
- **Don't** increase your frequency simply because you get a deal.
- **Don't** spread your budget too thin.
- **Don't** settle for average frequency; always try to achieve "effective frequency."

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