

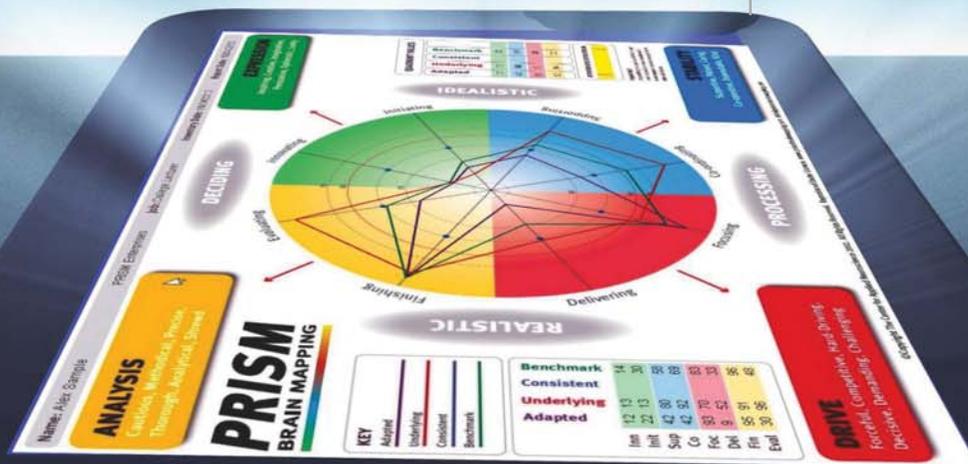
# NEUROSCIENCE, A REVOLUTION IN



**CORRECTLY IDENTIFYING THE CUSTOMER'S BUYING PREFERENCE AND RESPONDING TO IT APPROPRIATELY IS CRUCIAL.**

**BY CHRIS NORTON**

It can sometimes appear that there has not been much progress in the technique of selling since the first caveman flogged a furry mammoth skin to his neighbor, swearing that his spouse would be delighted with the purchase.



# SELLING

Admittedly, in the mid-19th century, that doyen of sales and champion of the positive mental attitude, William Clement Stone said: “Sales are contingent upon the attitude of the salesman, not the attitude of the prospect.”

gies in any given situation and therefore stimulate sales growth. Neuroscience offers us the historically unparalleled prospect of illuminating our understanding of both sides of the equation — the sellers and the buyers — and therefore achieving results

whether the person in front of us is a friend or a foe. Located within the subcortical brain, it is incapable of thought or rationalization and reacts purely on instinct by how it perceives the world around it. Now that is obviously useful when reacting to a life-or-death situation and ensures our survival. However, is it always a useful behavior?

So let’s bring this back to practicalities and think about what this means in the typical sales situation.

If your initial approach to a customer is seen as “unfavorable” to their “threat detector,” it will instantly switch on the fight/flight response. Part of this process includes shutting down all other message receptors, which means any opportunity you had to establish rapport has just been made much more difficult.

To avoid alarming the “threat detector” in your customer’s brain, the signals that you need to give out at that very first point of contact need to be favorable and instinctive — like your body language, which includes your movements, gestures, facial expression, eye contact, appearance, clothes, enthusiasm and posture. Once you’re past this initial first impression, you can get on with developing a relationship with your customer. It is important to note that what alarms one person’s brain “threat detector” may well make another person’s “threat detector” feel comfortable or reassured.

So, the first step in achieving great sales is have total focus on getting past the brain’s “threat detector.” After we have disarmed it, we can then move on to develop and build rapport, and open the potential customer’s message receptors so we can sell to them. This means that we must focus on the customer to identify his or her behavioural preferences so that all our subsequent communication matches his or her behavioral needs.

Correctly identifying the customer’s buying preference and responding to it appropriately is crucial. If done correctly, when faced with a buying choice, a customer’s subconscious will encourage him or her to choose you rather than your competitors — even if your customer believes he or she is acting completely rationally. This sales approach is known as “adaptive selling.”

As a result of the dramatic growth in interest in neuro-selling/adaptive selling, a three-year research project has now been set up at Oxford University to examine its

## As much as 95% of our decisions are made by the subconscious mind.

Now, that was an interesting theory, well ahead of its time. What would Stone have made of the modern advances in neuroscience, I wonder? One can only suspect he would have fallen upon such tools as it presents with alacrity, recognizing that through this research we now have the opportunity not only to shape the attitude of the salesman, but also to identify and therefore better understand the attitude of the “prospect.”

It is easy to forget in this electronic age that all sales eventually involve interacting with people. People with brains, feelings, emotions and — wait for it ... yes — needs. It is more important than ever in today’s tough economic climate that we re-examine much of the old-fashioned thinking on sales strategies. Many top companies continue to invest large sums of money in formal sales training that is proving inadequate to the demands of modern markets. It would be no exaggeration to say that they are merely compounding the mistakes of the past.

These selling systems are largely redundant today because they assume an adversarial environment. But when your customers are your partners — hopefully long term — such tactics are obviously counter-productive. Nowadays, the sales person and the customer are looking for a co-operative and supportive relationship, not a quick fix. This involves mutual respect, trust and essentially, empathy between seller and buyer.

### ACHIEVING SELLING ALCHEMY

Neuroscience works by giving you an invaluable insight into the brain’s processing patterns, which can influence sales strate-

that are mutually satisfying.

All selling is brain-to-brain process, in which the salesperson’s brain communicates with the customer’s. As much as 95 percent of our decisions are made by the subconscious mind. As a result, the world’s largest and most sophisticated companies are applying the latest advances in neuroscience to create brands, products, package designs, marketing campaigns, store environments, and much more that are designed to appeal directly and powerfully to our brains.

Our brain has what could be termed a “threat detector” whose sole function is to decide at the moment of first contact



potential role in sales and marketing — in particular, the neural processes underlying an individual's buying choice.

“This three-year project will be the first large-scale study of how emerging neurological knowledge about human decision-making is transforming the techniques of those who seek to influence the behavior of consumers,” says project leader and Professor Steve Woolgar. “It has far-reaching implications for what we know about how humans make their choices, the role of the brain and the factors at play in everyday decisions we all take.”

A major advance in the field of neuroscience that has particular relevance to selling has been the discovery of mirror neurons in the brain. Basically, motor neuron theory says that when you watch someone perform an action, you automatically simulate the action in your own brain. More recently, scientists have discovered the existence of strong, pervasive mirror networks for emotions. For example, when you experience a friend exhibiting distress while telling you a sad story, your brain simulates similar distress.

Activating the mirror neuron system is one of the most effective ways to connect with customers. Show products being consumed. Celebrate the first sip of hot coffee. Let the customer revel in the action being performed. In the same way as a yawn spreads around a conference room, think of the many ways you can use action and emotion to ignite the mirror neuron system in your customers' minds and bring them subconsciously straight into the experience of your product or service.

### WHAT THE BRAIN LOOKS FOR

Familiarity is about security and feeling safe. We seek the familiar, pleasing and reassuring. We seek the connection that we have had before, because we anticipate the rewards that we know the connection will bring. Customers like to buy from those who are like them and who display the same values, styles of communication and behaviors. This is why effective behavioral adaptability is so important for salespeople.

Paradoxically, the brain is also drawn to novelty. It values and seeks out what is new. Novelty is the single most effective factor in effectively capturing its precious attention. A novel message, product, pack-



age or layout is the key to penetrating busy and selective sub-conscious minds. And of course, pleasure or reward images are irresistible to our brains. The trick is to find out what those are and how to present them to each consumer group. Brain imaging technology is moving this goal from pipe dream to reality every day.

Here are the five main senses and what they mean to the buying brain:

**Vision** - About one-quarter of the human brain is involved in visual processing, more than to any other sense. About 70 percent of the body's receptors are in the eyes, but vision does not happen in the eyes, but in the brain. The easiest and most successful way to capture the “buying brain's” attention is through good visuals.

**Smell** - Smells are mainlined directly into our centers for emotion and memory. Smell cues are hardwired into the brain's emotional center to stimulate vivid recollections. We make such immediate, deep and emotional connections with the smells

we encounter, it makes perfect sense to make scents available to delight or engage the brains of our customers. Once a scent is embedded in a person's brain, even visual cues can cause it to be resurrected and even experienced. A television commercial showing a person savoring the aroma of freshly brewed coffee can trigger these same smell sensations in viewers through what is known as mirror neurons.

**Taste** - Although different, smell and taste share a common goal and often operate in synchrony to distinguish thousands of different flavors. The interaction between taste and smell explains why loss of a sense of smell causes a serious reduction in the overall taste experience, which we call flavor. We tend to smell something before we taste it. Smell hits our brain very quickly. Taste stimulation is one of the senses most easily set off by mirror neurons. Anytime that an appetizing product is displayed, it is important that salespeople show it being enjoyed by others. This is most important

in stimulating desire, and, most importantly, to moving to purchase.

**Hearing** - Hearing allows us to generate deep, nostalgic memories associated with highly emotional moments accompanied by sound. We mark our traditional key moments in life with music; for example, birthdays, weddings, graduations and funerals. Our pupils widen and endorphins increase when we sing, and there is validated scientific data that unconscious patients respond to music. Sounds also influence mood, and supermarkets now use music to enhance sales. When a buying brain hears a drink being poured, the sizzle of frying, or the crunch of crisps, mirror neurons fire in some urgency: "I want some of that."

**Touch** - Although our sense of smell is the most emotionally direct of our senses, touch is the oldest human sense. Consider the sensory capabilities of the product or experience you are selling to the buying brain and examine ways that this can be part of your message. Any product or experience that is tactile must excite and invite the sense of touch.

**THE KEY QUESTION?**

New discoveries in neuroscience are revolutionizing 21st-century business

**I ANALYSE**  
Precision thinking

Organiser  
Analyser  
Detail Expert

**I EXPLORE**  
Lateral thinking

Visionary  
Searcher  
Creator

Results thinking  
**I PURSUE**

Achiever  
Challenger  
Competitor

Feelings thinking  
**I PRESERVE**

Believer  
Supporter  
Guardian

life — nowhere more than in the approach to selling. These insights into the human brain promise to reshape the way in which companies ensure that they get their products or services noticed and bought.

We have learned how the buying brain functions; what's attractive to it; how it decides what it likes and doesn't like; and, ultimately, how it makes that all-important

transition from being a "shopping brain" to becoming a "buying brain."

The brain not only makes behavior, it makes us who we are. It alone decides what is important enough to pay attention to, to remember and to act on. Brain science is now pointing to a future where companies that properly use brain science findings will reach and serve their customers more effectively than those that do not. Only through enhanced knowledge of the brain, and the improved messages salespeople create as a result of such knowledge, can they reliably expect their brand, product or service to be given the attention it requires if the customer is to buy it.

We have found that PRISM Brain Mapping is the best application to give certainty both where our preferred behavioral indicators are now, and as a development tool for self and personal coaching.

I personally have used scores of profiling and psychometric tools over the years, but I have found that within two minutes of explaining the science and application of PRISM to sales people they "get it" and see the possibilities and benefits for their sales achievement and their customer relationships. **E!**

—Chris Norton is a qualified Master Practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming. After obtaining a degree in electronic engineering, he spent 10 years with Honeywell and 13 years with Dell Computer before joining Mentor Group in 2004. Contact Chris at [Chris.Norton@mentorgroup.com](mailto:Chris.Norton@mentorgroup.com)

