

What is Neuroplanning?

If I'm being honest when you first mention Neuroplanning to some people it's clear that it isn't everyone's cup of tea. For some it conjures up visions of people in white coats conducting experiments on unsuspecting victims in attempt to manipulate their minds, read their thoughts and predict their behaviour. Happily the reality is very different.

But it's certainly true that an industry seemingly preoccupied with measuring numbers and reach isn't generally comfortable asking what happens in the brain when people see advertising. Because brains are complicated and scary things best left to scientists and doctors aren't they?

Some curious people at PHD didn't think so which is why we developed Neuroplanning – a proprietary planning tool designed to understand the all important **influence** rather than reach by examining how the brain responds to different media stimulus to see if advertising is likely to affect the desired response.

Neuroplanning fuses the latest findings in cognitive psychology with data collected from an fMRI research project to uncover the generic cognitive effects of different media formats. Or to put it another way it looks at how people's brains respond when exposed to advertising in different media channels.

And when this is combined with existing knowledge about the functions performed by different regions of the brain we have a tool that determines how influential individual media are likely to be at achieving the desired influence.

Neuro-scientists have obviously known for a long time what different parts of the brain do so we know for example that the Amygdala controls emotion and feeling while the Parietal Cortex governs attention.

Neuroplanning builds on this to establish which brain regions need to be activated for the communication task in hand and then measuring - by monitoring the blood flow and electricity in different regions of the brain when exposed to advertising - whether say press or radio are most effective at influencing these parts of the brain.

So in short planners can identify through neuroscience which communication strategy and communication channels are most suitable for a particular task.

It's not brain surgery.

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Neuroplanning in Practice

Neuroplanning is underpinned by 4 key neuro principles ranging from brands acting as engrams in the brain through to the difference between high and low involvement processing.

But while the science may sound baffling in parts (PHD planners are trained in the basics of cognitive psychology) in reality the output is a very useable and open interactive planning framework that sits on our planners desks across all markets.

Initially 5 key variables based around things such as existing perceptions of a brand, level of interest in a category and desired response are inputted into the system by our planners with the output being a recommendation of which of 6 *communication models* is most relevant for the task. Importantly this is an open system that clearly displays all the variables and the effect they have on model selection.

Each media channel is then given an “influence score” for each model based on the findings from the fMRI research project. This influence score is then fused with media costs, production costs and audience impact data to allow planners to arrive at a bespoke and creative solution for each brief underpinned by the rigour required for effective communication.

Neuro-planning is used in different ways depending on the client and nature of the brief. Many clients use neuro-planning for each individual campaign – others have an overall neuro-model for all communication which each individual piece of activity contributes towards. Either way the ability to determine physiological influence has had a very positive influence on our planning as well as being adopted across the agency. Our Search team for example have produced a guide to how Search can best be deployed for each of the models.

Case Study - Irn Bru

IRN-BRU is an interesting example of neuroplanning being used flexibly and creatively to aid the media planning process. The product has an entirely different footprint, distribution and brand equity in Scotland (where it is a national treasure with nearly 20% value share) to the rest of Britain (around 1% value share). Through neuroplanning we identified that we needed to adopt different communication models in Scotland (reinforcing what already existed through a Strengthen model) and the rest of Britain (changing perceptions and driving retrieval through a Subinfluence model).

The Strengthen strategy in Scotland saw us in the nation's favourite media moments - roadblocking TV on St Andrews Day, focusing on key joint-viewing programming on TV, stature formats on outdoor in highly visible locations and cinema in the biggest releases of the summer formed the backbone of the plan. As a result, sales increased ahead of the market and awareness tracking was some of the highest seen in recent years.

In the rest of Britain, a subinfluence model meant a more grass roots approach aimed at slowly changing existing perceptions of the brand over time and creating sampling opportunities. We extended the brand's status as official soft drink of Super League into broadcast sponsorship of Sky's coverage of Super League and activity in and around grounds on match days. As a result, sales and awareness are showing encouraging growth from a lower base.

Part Art Part Science

We believe that Neuroplanning, like advertising itself perhaps, is part art, part science. Neuroplanning doesn't take account of creative work - although the same can be said of virtually any media planning tool of course. But the findings enable planners to identify the optimum 'canvas' for the task in hand as a basis for discussion and collaboration with clients and creative agencies.

Far from being a reductive black box our planners use Neuroplanning and the principles that underpin it act as a catalyst for creative thinking and innovation.

BOX 1

Neuroplanning Communication Models

Strengthen is where your brand is well regarded and the brand engram is full of positive, desirable associations. So for BMW for example a lot of people consider them to be the best handling, ultimate driving machine. Communication doesn't need to change that, only reinforce it.

Breakthrough is where the message you wish to convey is unlikely to be interrogated, either because the audience feels cold to your brand or if it's a low interest category. Take Compare the Meerkat as an example – operating in a cluttered, low interest category they responded by launching Sergei on to the world using media forced people to sit up and take notice.

Disrupt is really the opposite of strengthen. If you want to change associations in the brand engram, either because they are out of date (think Lucozade once being a health drink your mum gave you when you were ill, and now being a cutting edge sport drink), or because they are negative (think Skoda once being a laughing stock and now being a desirable, pushing-on-prestige car marquee).

Connect is where another brand has the set of associations that you desire, and the quickest, most effective or most credible way to gain those associations is to connect your brand to theirs in people's minds. Typically this takes the form of sponsorship or other associations. Which is why (the right) celebrities can work well in advertising.

Subinfluence is based on low involvement processing and is about getting your message under the high involvement radar. The O2 Arena doesn't say anything explicit about a mobile phone network, but it does say much implicitly about O2 being a stylish, desirable lifestyle brand, associations that would arguably be harder to convey in other ways.

Activate is when you know that at a given moment there is a given audience actively in the market for your brand. The task is to give them enough relevant information to get them to choose you over a competitor. This typically – but not always - takes the form of Direct Response messaging

BOX 2

Neuromodel Overview example

Strengthen Model

Goal – Reinforce and build existing brand association

Desired Consumer Response – “This is just the thing for me” “I knew I was right to buy x”

When – Regular or repertoire use or when building on and keeping a brand front of mind

Examples of this – any brand that has relatively good associations and just wants to keep the brand engram activated. A typical advertiser may be Stella, Andrex. The focus should be on building and sustaining awareness and building on the strength of the brand.

Type of campaign (thematic v tactical)? Thematic

Brain Engram – Reinforcing existing associations

Neuro Time required – Long

Underlying Neuro Principle – Hardwire (implicit learning)

BOX 3

Channel Selection

Once the model is established neuroplanning then suggests the optimum media for a campaign based on an *influence score* derived from how the relevant parts of the brain responded when exposed to that particular medium.

Taking the Breakthrough Model as an example (requiring high involvement processing for a brand or category people are neutral about) below are examples of neuroscores for the top performing individual media channels (indexed about 100)

Cinema – 281

DM - 181

Television – 171

Visual Ambient 149

Radio – 139

Online Intrusive formats - 117

But influence scores though only tell part of the story and it's not as simple as choosing the highest scoring media and leaving it at that.

On a pragmatic level we then need to overlay audience impact data along with media & production costs to create an efficient plan as well as obviously accounting for other factors such as likely level of engagement (DM may be effective but to breakthrough it has to be opened) and creative development.

But much more fundamentally we use influence scores to guide thinking and inform what areas we might want to consider rather than as a substitute for it.

As an example, having identified that **Connect** was the best neuromodel for Sage, the business software company, neuroplanning then showed that Sponsorship and Associative Marketing was the most relevant channel when we might otherwise have been expected to focus heavily on newspaper activity. What neuroplanning of course couldn't do was help us develop that channel selection through to execution - a partnership with ITV to bring back the Krypton Factor.