



Secret SAUCE

How to pack your messages
with persuasive punch

Harry Mills

An Aha! Red Guide

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Red Guide

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For the A team:
Alicia, Amy and Aria.

About the Author



Harry Mills is CEO of the Aha! Advantage. His clients include GE Money, IBM, Ericsson, Oracle, BMW, AMP, Toyota, Lexus, Rio Tinto, Unilever and the Big Four accounting firms: PWC, Deloitte, Ernst & Young and KPMG.

Harry Mills is the bestselling author of 12 internationally acclaimed books on persuasion, marketing, sales and negotiation. *The Rainmaker's Toolkit: How to Find, Keep and Grow Profitable Clients* was selected by CEO Advisor in 2004 as one of its U.S. top

ten business books, who called it the “new bible in professional services”.

The acclaim for his book *Artful Persuasion: How to Command Attention, Change Minds and Influence People* led to Harry being selected as the Harvard Manage/Mentor for persuasion. The Harvard Manage/Mentor Program goes out to 6.5 million managers in ten languages.

The SAUCE persuasive impact model that forms the backbone of this book is based on scientific research. Recent discoveries in the psychology of influence and cognitive neuroscience mean we can now measure the persuasive punch of a message with confidence.

Business Books by Harry Mills

- *Negotiate: The Seven Step Master Plan*, Gower, 1992.
- *The Mental Edge*, Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- *Just Do It*, MG Press, 1994.
- *Sales Secrets*, MG Press, 1995.
- *Be Positive*, MG Press, 1995.
- *Leadership*, MG Press, 1996.
- *The Deal Makers' Handbook*, MG Press, 1998.
- *Artful Persuasion: How to Command Attention, Change Minds and Influence People*, Amacom, 2000.
- *The Rainmakers Toolkit: Power Strategies for Finding, Keeping and Growing Profitable Clients*, Amacom, 2004.
- *The StreetSmart Negotiator: How to Outwit, Outmaneuver and Outlast Your Opponents*, Amacom, 2005.
- *Power Points! How to Design and Deliver Presentations That Sizzle and Sell*, Amacom, 2007.

Companion Title

The Aha! Advantage: The Revolutionary New Science of Sales Success

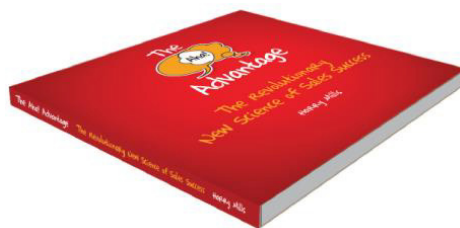
The Aha! Advantage is the first book to show sellers how to *eliminate* buyer resistance by tapping the astonishing power of self-persuasion.

Traditionally trained sellers use forms of direct persuasion to come up with convincing arguments and evidence to *overcome* buyer resistance.

But sellers trained in self-persuasion *dissolve* and *eliminate* resistance by helping their clients generate their own conclusions.

Sellers who use self-persuasion find buyers are motivated to say yes quicker and commit for longer.

Social scientists who study influence have found self-persuasion always (yes always) delivers superior results. In their 2013 book *Hidden Persuasion* that compares the impact of 33 persuasion techniques, the three authors Marc Andrews, Dr van Leeuwen and Dr van Baaren call self-persuasion “the holy grail of persuasion” and rate it five out of five for effectiveness.



Special thanks to Punchline and MSO Design

I have tested SAUCE with a mix of the Aha! Advantage's large government, IT, telecom, utility, automotive and wealth management clients in the USA, Australia, Singapore and New Zealand.

Peter Kerr of *Punchline.biz*, a remarkably talented copywriter, field tested the methodology of SAUCE with a group of his large clients. These included a major telecom company re-launching its brand, a broadband provider targeting new business and a new agribusiness launching a revolutionary new technology.

Peter reports SAUCE is "head and shoulders above any other message measurement tool he has used." He "loves the way you can use SAUCE to craft a message with maximum persuasive impact."

Mark Whitecliffe and his multi-talented *MSO Design* team used the SAUCE methodology for branding, website and collateral creation projects for a range of government, corporate and SME clients.

Mark says SAUCE has "turned gut and instinct-based messaging into an objective science."

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“

The secret of
successful seduction
is knowing how to
dissolve and
eliminate resistance.

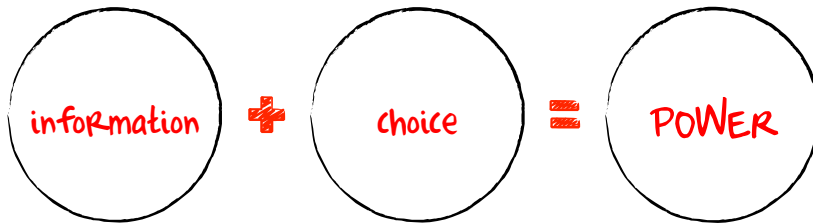
- Harry Mills -

CHAPTER ONE

SECRET SAUCE: The Magic Recipe For Measuring Persuasive Impact

Our message-making needs reinvention

When it comes to messages, what worked in the past won't work today. Two decades of destabilizing and accelerating change have profoundly changed the psychology of how, when and why customers respond to persuasive messages.



For the first time in history the customer holds the trump cards

Digital-driven technologies have armed buyers with anytime, anywhere access to the choices and information they need to call the shots.

Once customers gain power, they become increasingly skeptical, pay less attention and become less reverential to those who try to influence and sell to them.

Marketers and brands are becoming less influential

In our Google-driven world, the influence brands, marketers and salespeople have over customer decisions is rapidly diminishing.

Trust in business is at an all-time low. Customers increasingly base their decisions on reviews from other users, web accessed expert opinions, and price comparison apps.

Stanford professor Itamar Simonson and best-selling author Emanuel Rosen in their book *Absolute Value: What Really Influences Customers in the Age of (Nearly) Perfect Information* write that customers are influenced by two sources of information which they label **M** and **O**.

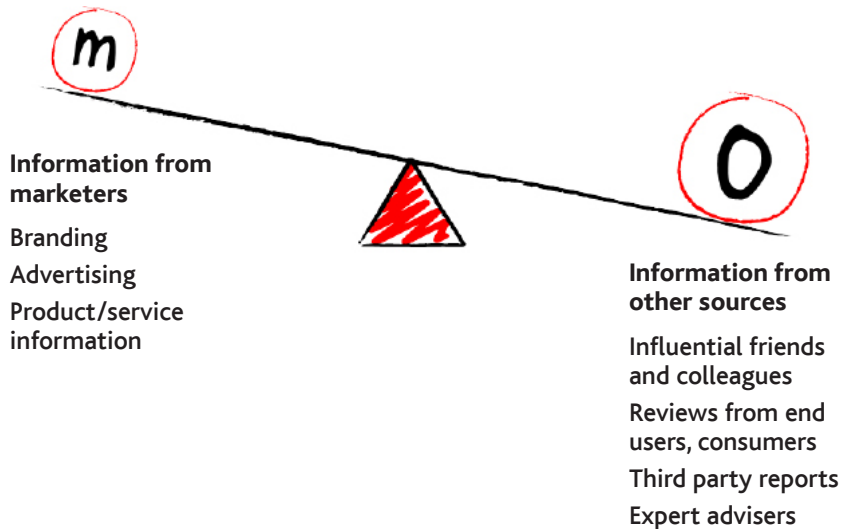
M is shorthand for the information buyers get from marketing information sources. **O** is shorthand for the information buyers get from other sources. In a Google-driven world buyers decisions are being increasingly influenced by **O**.¹

Customers increase their use of **O** when:

1. A buying decision is important
2. A buying decision involves increased risk and uncertainty

Why? Because customers inherently trust **O** sources more than **M** sources.²

M and O Power Shift



Digital communication technologies have rewired our brains

We live in a world where a phone originally invented as a talking device has become a “weapon of personal empowerment”.

In her book *Decoding the New Consumer Mind*, Kit Yarrow says the pervasiveness of digital technology has transformed our lives.³

In the new digital world she reports:

- We skim and scan rather than read
- We’re bombarded and interrupted by a relentless barrage of information

- We're conditioned to want everything faster
- We are increasingly addicted to stimulation and speed
- We're becoming less and less tolerant of anything that requires patience.

Our addiction to digital technologies has meant our adaptive brains have rewired. "We're neurologically different as a result."⁴

In his book *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern mind*, Gary Small describes the new mental state we live in as "continuous partial attention".⁵

In such an environment, for a message to pack a persuasive punch it must pass the SAUCE test.

THE SECRET SAUCE TEST FOR PERSUASIVE PUNCH

Messages with Persuasive Punch are:

- S**imple: One central truth, easy to grasp and picture
- A**ppealing: Different, valuable and personalised
- U**nexpected: Surprising, intriguing and seductive
- C**redible: Trusted, transparent and verifiable
- E**motional: Warm, arousing and plot-driven



Fools ignore complexity.
Pragmatists suffer it.
Some can avoid it.
Geniuses remove it.

- Alan Perlis -

CHAPTER TWO

SIMPLE: one Central Truth, Easy to Grasp and Picture

The Pope asked Michelangelo: "Tell me the secret to your genius. How have you created the statue of David, the masterpiece of all masterpieces?" Michelangelo answered: "It's simple. I removed everything that is not David."⁶

Complex is easy. Simple is hard.

Here is the first version of a speech sometimes hailed by theatre lovers as the greatest speech in any play ever written.

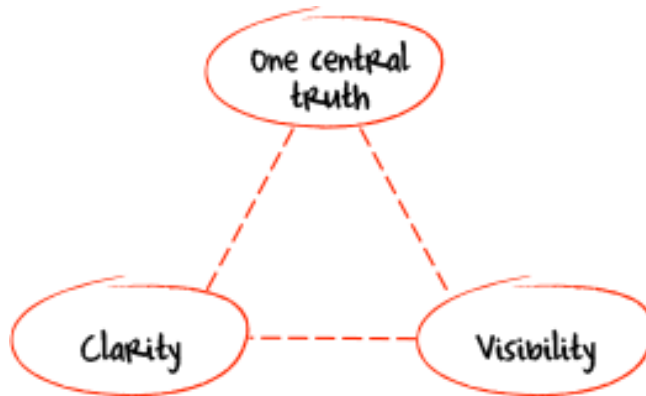
*"To be, or not to be, aye there's the point,
To die, to sleep, is that all? Aye all:
No, to sleep, to dream, aye marry there it goes,"*

Here is the final version:

*"To be, or not to be, that is the question—
Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,"*

Today, it's hard to imagine that the first version was even written by Shakespeare. The original draft comes from an early edition of the play which scholars call "The First Quarto".

The Three Simple Criteria



Simple messages contain one central truth

Success in messaging starts with determining the central truth of the one idea you most want to get across.

Ideas that pack a persuasive punch work much like proverbs. Proverbs, write Chip and Dan Heath, the authors of *Made to Stick*, represent the ideal of what is possible when you strip an idea down to a central truth "that is both simple and profound".⁸

The proverb "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" for example, has endured for over 2,500 years. The core idea warns us not to gamble a sure thing on something that's highly risky.

As it has spread across cultures the words have been adapted to fit local circumstances. The Swedes say “Rather one bird in the hand than ten in the woods”. The Poles, “A sparrow in your hand is better than a pigeon on the roof”. The Russians, “Better a titmouse in the hand than a crane in the sky”.⁹

For a central truth to stick and gain traction it must:

- ***Be distinctive and memorable.*** We remember words that jolt and sparkle.
- ***Ring true.*** Words that exaggerate, over-promise or sound like typical corporate bull, do not attract: they repel. Customers switch off when companies use “fifty cent words to make a five cent point”¹⁰

Brand taglines represent the perfect opportunity for companies to communicate their central truth simply and profoundly.

Take Microsoft’s tagline “Your potential. Our passion.” These words smell and sound corporate. They simply don’t ring true. According to Steven Cone, author of *Powerlines: Words That Sell Brands, Grip Fans and Sometimes Change History*, “It is hard to believe that a company with zillions of customers cares about me and my potential.”¹¹

Take the University of Chicago’s School of Business MBA program tagline “Triumph in your moment of truth.” What does this tagline mean? It doesn’t make sense. It is another example of smart people using dumb words.¹²

Compare these ineffective taglines with two of the best.

De Beers' A Diamond is Forever was penned in 1947 by copywriter Francis Gerety. It still resonates today. "Is there a better way," writes Steve Cone, "to say I love you? A better way to remind men and women what the gift of a diamond conveys?" Gerety's tagline transformed the diamond into a symbol of eternal love.¹³

In 2004 the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority reacting to the downturn in tourists launched a "sexy and suggestive" tagline: *What Happens Here, Stays Here*. Previously, Las Vegas had been positioned as a great family destination, similar to Disneyland. But that positioning didn't ring true. Las Vegas is primarily for adults who come to escape from family pressures and live on the edge. The new positioning worked. The new tagline resonated and tourists returned.¹⁴

Simple messages are easy to grasp

Easy to grasp messages are clear and concise. In the digital world where we skim and scan rather than read, crystal-clear communications are a must. Long winded, obscure phrases are message killers.

37 Signals (now called Basecamp) was founded in 1999 as a web design firm. In 2004 it became a software company with the release of Basecamp, an easy to use project management tool. Over 15 million people currently have Basecamp accounts.

Few companies enjoy a better reputation for communicating with crystal-clear clarity than Basecamp.

Here is a sampling of the crystal-clear messages they have used:

"We build software that does what you need and nothing you don't."

"Software should be easy. Our products are intuitive; you'll pick them up in seconds or minutes, not hours, days or weeks. We don't sell you training software because you don't need it."

"Long term contracts are obscene. No one likes being locked into something they don't need anymore. Our customers can cancel at any time, no questions asked. No set up/termination fees, either."¹⁵

Time-starved readers are deterred by long, densely written communications. If you want to be noticed, remembered and passed along, make brevity your friend.

Short formats of everything are becoming much more popular. Many YouTube videos are now only 30 seconds long. The popular Ignite Talks allow speakers just five minutes each to speak on a topic. Ignite's slogan is "Enlighten us. But make it quick."¹⁶

Most salespeople have heard of the elevator pitch. It's a pitch that is brief enough to be delivered during an elevator ride. Recently, entrepreneurs are being urged to come up with an "escalator pitch". An escalator pitch is "a pitch short enough to make when you are on the up escalator, and your funding prospect is on the down escalator passing by."¹⁷

The idea took root in 2008, after Steve Boyd asked for "twitpitches" to help him determine which companies he would meet at the Web 2.0 Expo in San Francisco. Because a twitpitch is sent via Twitter it cannot be longer than 140 characters, the maximum length of a tweet.¹⁸

In Hollywood novelists and screenwriters use one sentence, 'high concept' pitches to capture the attention of agents or investors. The movie Alien was successfully pitched as "JAWS in space".¹⁹

However, never forget there is a tradeoff between clarity and brevity. Clarity in the end is about finding the right level of detail for the circumstances.

Simple, persuasive messages can be pictured

Social psychologists Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson were asked by a local power company to help sell the advantages of home insulation. The utility offered householders a free energy audit. A trained auditor would go through each consumer's house identifying the requirements to make it more energy efficient. The utility even provided an interest-free loan.

The benefits seemed obvious. Energy savings of 40 percent were common and power savings following the installation of insulation would quickly pay for the cost of the loan.

The puzzle was while large numbers of home owners requested a home audit, only 15 percent of them actually followed the advice of the auditor – even though clearly it made excellent financial sense.

Why? Researchers interviewed several home owners and discovered that most had a hard time believing that small cracks under a door or the lack of insulation in an attic could result in such a large energy loss.

To solve this problem, Pratkanis and Aronson trained the auditors to communicate their findings and recommendations with words that could be pictured. They advised the auditors to tell this to the homeowners:

"Look at all the cracks around that door! It may not seem much to you but if you were to add up all the cracks around each of these doors, you'd have the equivalent of a hole the circumference of a basketball. Suppose someone poked a hole the size of a basketball in your living room wall. Think for a moment about all the heat that you would be losing from a hole that size - you'd want to patch that hole in your wall, wouldn't you? That's what weather-stripping does.

"And your attic totally lacks insulation. We professionals call that a 'naked attic'. It's as if your home is facing winter not just without an overcoat, but without any clothing at all! You wouldn't let your young kids run outside in the winter time without clothes on, would you? It's the same with your attic."

When homeowners heard this speech they signed up in droves. Where previously only 15 percent of the householders signed up, now 61 percent signed up to have their houses insulated. Vivid, picturable language had turned barely visible cracks into holes the size of basketballs. The idea of running around naked in winter also grabs attention and strongly encourages you to take action.²⁰

When professional persuaders want to describe abstract ideas, emotions and concepts, they search for an image-based metaphors.

James Geary, the author of *I is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How it Shapes the Way We See Our World* writes "A metaphor is the process of giving a thing a name that belongs to something else.

In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare tells us “Juliet is the sun.” Here Shakespeare gives the thing (Juliet) a name that belongs to something else (the sun).” Geary continues “On the surface, Juliet is nothing like the sun. Nevertheless she shines. Romeo is increasingly drawn by her gravitational pull. She is the center of the universe. She radiates heat. And her brightness can, of course, burn.”

Shakespeare’s metaphor tells us everything we need to know “about Juliet – and Romeo’s feelings for her – in just four simple words.” Is it any wonder Aristotle regarded metaphorical thinking as “a sign of genius”.²¹

Metaphor is much more popular than we think. Researchers have discovered we use a metaphor every ten to twenty-five words. That adds up to about six metaphors a minute.²²

Politicians know the power of metaphor. Abraham Lincoln’s 1864 election campaign during the civil war *DON’T SWAP HORSES IN MIDSTREAM* warned voters against making a change when times are uncertain. George W. Bush paraphrased the slogan in his 2004 re-election campaign with *DON’T CHANGE HORSES MIDSTREAM*.²⁴

Metaphors abound in advertising. Advertisers are in many ways professional metaphor makers.²⁴

Here are a few of the more memorable ones:

Tropicana uses “Your daily ray of sunshine” to promote its orange juice.

Taco Bell tells us to “Think outside the bun”.

AT&T told us to “Reach out and touch someone”.

Nissan says “Life is a journey, enjoy the ride”.²⁵

Research on the use of metaphors in advertising shows:

- Metaphors enhance the credibility of low credibility messages
- Novel metaphors are more persuasive than familiar ones
- Single, extended, novel metaphors introduced early in a message are especially persuasive.²⁶

In the world of skim and scan, consumers are favoring photos, visual cues and symbolism over words. The popularity of the infographic has exploded. Successful persuaders have responded by dramatically boosting the number of pictures and graphics they use.

The invention of the camera phone has amplified our love and addiction to visuals. The first camera phone appeared in 2002. Just ten years later Facebook users were uploading 300 million photos a day.

Facebook posts that have photos, for example, generate 53 percent more 'likes' and 103 percent more comments than text-only posts.²⁷

Test For Simplicity

Is your message **SIMPLE**?

1. **ONE CENTRAL TRUTH** Has your message been stripped down to one central truth?

Competing messages

One central truth



2. **CLARITY** Is your message crystal clear and easy to grasp?

Difficult to understand

Easy to grasp



3. **VISIBILITY** Is your message concrete, vivid and easy to picture?

Difficult to picture

Easy to picture



SIMPLE MEASURE





The punters know that
the horse named
Morality rarely gets past
the post,

whereas the nag named
Self-Interest always runs
a good race.

- Gough Whitlam -
FORMER AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER

CHAPTER THREE

APPEALING: Different, Valuable and Personalised

In the early 1990s, 31 year old Alex Bogusky, then the creative director of a small ad agency wrote what is today called the hitchhiker ad. It was designed as a press advert and displayed two images side-by-side.

The first image showed a man hitchhiking by the side of the road holding a cardboard sign with the name of a U.S city written on it in black pen. "It could have been any hitchhiker, on any road, on any day." Above it was one bold-type word, "**Sales**".

The second image was similar; a man was hitchhiking by the side of a road holding a cardboard sign. But written on his sign in black ink was the line "Mom's for Thanksgiving". Above it was one bold-type word, "**Marketing**".

Bogusky, who today is referred to as the Elvis of advertising, wanted to show that the difference between sales and marketing was a persuasive message and to show that the agency that wrote the ad knew how to write messages that were compelling and appealing.²⁸

Appealing messages are different, valuable and personalized

The Three Appealing Criteria



Appealing messages are different

On January 9 2007, Steve Jobs announced the launch of the iPhone, a device that would transform what a mobile phone could offer. While smartphone manufacturers kept adding more and more buttons and features, Apple went for minimalism. He offered a phone which was more capable than its competitors with less clutter.

Here is Jobs' introduction to the first iPhone:

"The most advanced phones are called smartphones. They typically combine a phone, email, and a baby internet. The problem is they are not so smart and they are not so easy to use.

Regular cell phones are definitely a little smarter, but they're actually harder to use. They're really complicated. Just for the basic stuff, people have a hard time figuring out how to use them.

What we want to do is make a leapfrog product that is way smarter than any mobile device has been and super easy to use. This is what iPhone is."²⁹

Appealing messages offer high perceived value

Think back to the late 1990s when mp3 players were struggling to win sales. The mp3 manufacturers pushed their tech and specs without much success. But as savvy marketer Bernadette Jiwa says, "People can't fall in love with 32MB and user interfaces."

Then along came Apple with the iPod. The sales message, "1000 songs in your pocket." Now that's persuasive.³⁰

Virtually every iPod review repeated the iPod's "1000 songs in your pocket" message. Because the statement was so concise and compelling reviewers rarely edited or rephrased it. Talk about free advertising.

Appealing messages target self-interest

Dr. Kevin Dutton, an expert on the science of social influence and author of *Flipnosis: The Art of Split Second Persuasion* declares "If you want the secret of persuasion in just a few simple words, it's easy. Appeal to the other party's self-interest – what they think is to their advantage."³¹

Compare the appeal of the promotion "apples contain vitamins and natural sugar" with "an apple a day keeps the doctor away". The first promotion describes facts or features about the apple; the second promotion describes how the apple will help the buyer. The second promotion sells the benefits of what the apple can do.

Features are cold, remote and impersonal; benefits are warm and tempting.

No one has understood this better than John Caples, one of the greatest copywriters of all time.

Caples is the man that penned what has been called "history's most famous ad." In 1925 Caples was asked to write an ad selling a home study course offered by the U.S. School of Music. The copy ran for four pages but it was the headline that engaged readers.

***"They laughed when I sat down at the piano.
But when I started to play!"***

Overnight it became a success. Comedians lampooned but other copywriters "borrowed from it, copied it, and paraphrased it." Sixty years after the original headline appeared a variation was successfully being used by S&S Mills Carpet to sell carpets. Their headline:

***"My husband laughed when I ordered our carpet through the mail.
But when I saved 50%"³²***

Caples, a pioneer of the mail-order advertising industry, knew exactly how to tap the power of self-interest. His recommendation:

"First and foremost try to get self-interest into every headline you write. Make your headline suggest to readers that here is something they want. The rule is so fundamental that it would seem obvious. Yet the rule is violated every day by scores of writers."³³

Benefits are more persuasive when they are specific and meaningful. In a study that evaluated 54 comparable sets of ads, the ones that included more specific benefits had a recall that was 1.22 times better than other ads.³⁴

Remarkably, even experienced ad writers forget to make their benefits specific and meaningful. Another study of 480 full page print ads showed only 31 percent of the ads mentioned specific, meaningful benefits.³⁵

Research also suggests that you should limit the number of benefits you claim for a product or service. When customers start to detect persuasive intent in a message they become increasingly skeptical.

A study by two marketing and behavioral science professors, Kurt Karlson of Georgetown University and Suzanne Shu of the University of California, Los Angeles, measured the number of positive claims prospects would consider before they became skeptical.

The professors found that customers are receptive to persuasive messages that contain up to three positive claims. But every claim made after three triggers ever increasing levels of skepticism.

The takeaway is for messages that are clearly persuasive, it pays to limit yourself to your three highest impact claims.³⁶

In his book *In Defense of Food*, Michael Pollen distills his advice into one three part maxim:

“Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.”³⁷

The advice is compelling and memorable.

According to Ira Kalb, a professor of marketing at the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California, “the brain likes choices but not too many choices.”³⁸

APPEAL MEASURE

Is your message **APPEALING**?

4. DIFFERENTIATION Is your message highly differentiated from others?

Undifferentiated

Highly differentiated



5. PERCEIVED VALUE Is your offer positioned as having a high perceived value?

Low perceived value

High perceived value



b. SELF-INTEREST Do you successfully appeal directly to your audience's "self-interest"?

Generalized benefits

Specific benefits



APPEAL MEASURE

9



There is only one way
under high heaven to
get anybody to do
anything.

Yes, just one way.

And that is by making
the other person want to
do it.

- Dale Carnegie -

CHAPTER FOUR

UNEXPECTED: Surprising, Intriguing and Seductive

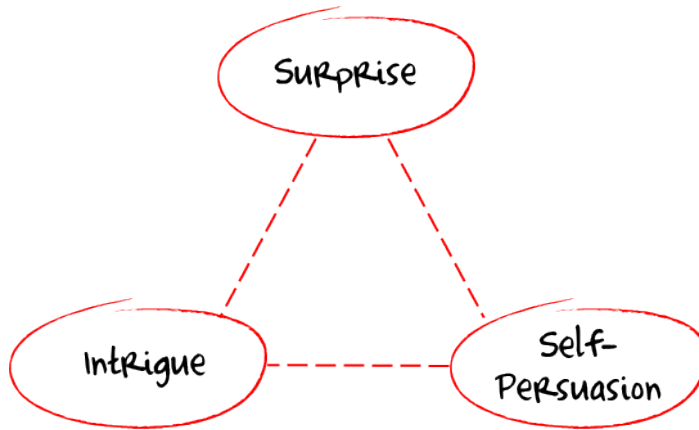
Customers' brains attentional hotspots have adapted to our message-saturated environments by developing mental radars and machine guns to detect and shoot down unwanted messages.

To get under the radar, advertisers have responded by doing the unexpected.

In one ingenious campaign Folgers coffee turned manhole covers in New York City into giant mugs of hot coffee. Painted images of the dark liquid in a round cup were fitted over the manhole covers. They then placed holes in the covers that emitted steam.

When pedestrians walked past in the morning they were greeted by the illusion that there were enormous cups of coffee embedded below street level.³⁹

The Three Unexpected Criteria



Unexpected messages are surprising

We ignore the expected and familiar. Once our brains become habituated to seeing something familiar we no longer give it attention. Surprise cuts through. We remember surprising occurrences.

Our brain craves novelty. Shoppers are attracted by stores which constantly update, rotate and refresh their stock displays. That's why they flock to fast fashion stores like Zara, who constantly change their selections.

Kmart's "Ship My Pants" ad is a clever example of novelty. The ad offers free shipping for items not available in its stores. The ad begins with a customer replying to a Kmart salesperson's news of free shipping with "I just might ship my pants!"

The ad was designed to shock, amuse and turn the mundane act of shopping into a slightly titillating experience. It worked. YouTube views of the ad reached 20 million within four months. YouTube thumbs-up votes outscored thumbs-down votes by 25 to 1.⁴⁰

The UK TV channel G2 was struggling to attract views from its target of young males.

Its ad agency suggested changing the channel's name to Dave. No UK Channel had ever used a first name before. Dave was also informative about the target market and the personality of the channel.

Dave's slogan was "the home of witty banter". People had no trouble remembering that name and spontaneous awareness jumped from two percent to 32 percent in about six months. The ad campaign was highly successful in attracting new viewers, and won an IPA award.⁴¹

Unexpected messages are intriguing

While surprise is the key to grabbing attention, intrigue is the key to holding it. Mysteries intrigue us. In 1951 on the way to an advertising shoot for a small shirt company, David Ogilvy - now affectionately called the Father of Advertising - purchased several eye patches at a five and dime drugstore for 50 cents each. "Just shoot a couple of these to humor me" he told the photographer.

The resulting ad showed a "slender, haughty, mysteriously one eyed male model in a white dress shirt." The ad was accompanied by a long description of the shirts benefits and appeared in the *New Yorker*.

Who was this man with an eye patch and how did he get it? American men were intrigued. Within a week C.F. Hathaway's entire shirt stock sold out. Hathaway had been making shirts for 116 years and was little noticed. Suddenly it was the number one selling dress shirt in the world.⁴²

"The man in the Hathaway Shirt" has gone down in history and is probably the most famous print ad of all time. Before long companies ran ads featuring eye patches on babies, dogs and even cows.

To create mystery and intrigue and hold its readers attention, Ricoh the copier company ran a fresh two page ad for its copier. The first page read:

"Would you tolerate an employee who is anti-social, temperamental, abuses power, wastes office supplies, antagonizes other employees, requires professional help, and makes a habit of taking unscheduled vacations?"

The next page read,

"Then fire your copy machine."⁴³

Unexpected messages become more potent when they tap self-persuasion

There are just two ways to present a persuasive message. You can use direct persuasion - powerful arguments and evidence to convince a customer to buy, or you can use self-persuasion to help customers generate their own conclusions. When influencers help their buyers to generate their own conclusions, buyers commit faster and for longer.

Today's empowered, informed and demanding customers are becoming increasingly resistant to all forms of direct persuasion. Self-persuasion works because it reduces or eliminates buyer resistance. Customers don't argue with their own reasons.

In their book *Hidden Persuasion*, Marc Andrews, Dr. Matthijs van Leeuwen and Prof. Dr. Rick van Baaren compare 33 psychological influence techniques for effectiveness in advertising. They call self-persuasion the "holy grail" of persuasion research. Self-persuasion they say, "has repeatedly been demonstrated to trump any kind of given high quality argument."⁴⁴

The problem of consumer resistance is magnified when the market is already saturated with competing brands. This was the challenge the Cossette advertising agency faced when asked to help launch a new beer, *Molson Grand Nord*, onto the Canadian beer market.

Canadian beer drinkers already had a choice of over one thousand beers, so the ad campaign had to be high impact to stand any chance. Cossette's idea was simple but powerful: create a huge media campaign that would get buyers involved and tap into the power of self-persuasion.

Cossette created a series of commercials based on the adventures of two heroes. At the end of the first episode Molson asked viewers to choose an ending for the commercials.

It proposed two different endings and asked viewers to vote for the one they preferred. A total of 992,000 people voted – that’s 15 percent of all Canadians.

Two months later the ad agency called for another vote to choose the ending of a second commercial. To everyone’s surprise there were 1.1 million votes. Everyone feared, without the novelty value of the first vote, the number of votes would plunge. Here is a brilliant example of what you can achieve when you use self-persuasion to involve customers in the decision process. ⁴⁵

TEST FOR UNEXPECTEDNESS

Is your message **UNEXPECTED**?

7. SURPRISE: Does your message grab your audience's attention?

Unremarkable

Attention grabbing



8. INTRIGUE: Does your message sustain their attention?

Lacks interest

Sustains interest



9. SELF-PERSUASION: Does your message encourage self-generated conclusions?

Hard sell

Self-generated conclusions



UNEXPECTED MEASURE





To be persuasive we
must be believable;

To be believable we
must be credible;

To be credible we must
be truthful.

- Edward R. Murrow -

CHAPTER FIVE

CREDIBLE: Trusted, Transparent and Verifiable

We live in a world where distrust of products and companies is endemic. So it is critical for your message to be credible. If customers distrust your company or message, then they discount everything you say.

If you exaggerate or claim you're the leader or finest in quality when the customer has a different view, you have a credibility problem.

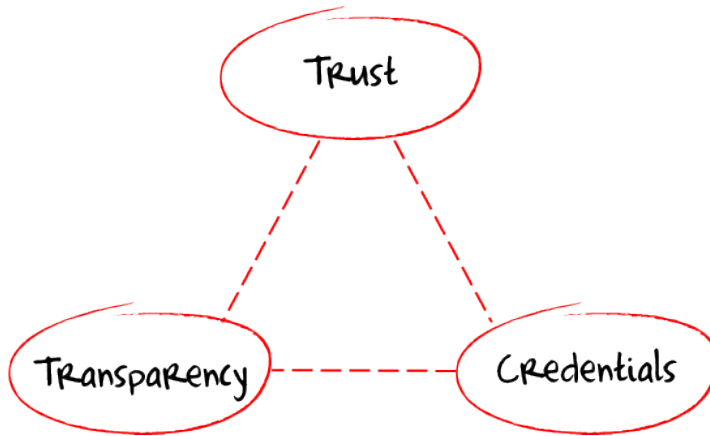
Take Avis Rental Cars. For years Avis promoted its high quality. Claims of "Finest in rent-a-cars" advertisements simply didn't ring true. How could they have the finest rent-a-car service when Hertz was clearly the market leader?

Then Avis admitted it was No. 2. The advertisement declared, "Avis is No. 2. We try harder."

The advertising claims were now credible. Avis, who had lost money for 13 straight years, suddenly began to make money.⁴⁶

"Candor is very disarming," say Al Ries and Jack Trout. "Every negative statement you make about yourself is instantly accepted as a truth. Positive statements, on the other hand, are looked at as dubious at best. Especially in an advertisement."⁴⁷

The Three Credible Criteria



Credible messages are trusted

Popular wisdom says you need to build a trusted brand in order to get your customers to spend. But building a strong brand from scratch takes time and usually takes tens of millions of advertising dollars.

In the first quarter of 2013, a relatively unknown Taiwanese computer company called ASUS reached the number three position in worldwide tablet shipments with almost no initial brand awareness and without investing heavily in its brand.

In the old days, consumers used their past experience with a brand as a “key quality proxy”. If you owned an H.P computer you would use your experience with it to conclude that new H.P models must be good.

But today you can access much better information about multiple computer makers, be they a H.P, Dell or ASUS. You can go to a review site such as CNET or gadget.com and read reviews by experts and regular users.

When ASUS launched the Eee PC in 2007, geek bloggers fell in love with the dirt cheap \$399 netbook. The device from a company virtually unknown in the United States sold almost five million units.⁴⁸

“When quality can be quickly assessed, people are less hesitant to try something new, which means that newcomers like ASUS can enjoy lower barriers to entry” write Itamar Simonson and Emanuel Rosen in *Absolute Value: What Really Influences Customers in the Age of (Nearly) Perfect Information*.⁴⁹

We pay attention to, and act on, messages we trust. Neilson’s 2013 survey of global trust in advertising and brand messages reports “believability is key in advertising effectiveness” and “trust and action often go hand in hand”.⁵⁰

So who do we trust? According to Edelman’s highly regarded Trust Barometer, the source trusted by the majority is “people like me”.

Before the internet people like me would have been an intimate network of friends and acquaintances. But social media has massively amplified “the people like me” and given it a megaphone.

We also trust information sources from friends, acquaintances and review sites much more than marketer-generated information. This is not surprising given the widespread distrust of business.

We trust experts. A decade ago, most peoples' access to experts was limited to magazines or newspaper columns. Today's top experts are a few clicks away and their recommendations are amplified by social media.

Credible messages are transparent

In 1913 *The London Times* ran the following ad:

"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success."

The ad attracted 5,000 applications for a crew of 27 on Shackleton's trip to the Antarctic.⁵¹

Advertising Agency Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) used the "law of candor" to create a remarkable campaign for Volkswagen, starting in 1960.

Many of the advertisements took the novel approach of knocking the product. Here are some of the headlines used:

- Ugly is only skin-deep
- Think small
- Lemon
- The 1970 VW will stay ugly longer.

The campaign was built around what the Beetle actually was: small, simple, economical, reliable and (except to VW addicts) ugly. In 1968 the VW Beetle sold 423,000 units in the US – more than any other single automobile ever sold. The campaign's success is even more remarkable when you consider that the American market was at the time dominated by big gas-guzzling cars.

The Volkswagen campaign was created by the New York agency Doyle Dane Bernbach, founded by Bill Bernbach. Bernbach had a simple attitude to truth in advertising:

"The truth isn't the truth until people believe you, and they can't believe you if they don't know what you're saying, they can't know what you're saying if they don't listen to you, and they won't listen to you if you're not interesting, and you won't be interesting unless you say things imaginatively, originally, freshly."⁵²

Credible messages are verifiable

If you make a fact-based claim you should be able to support the facts by providing the source of evidence. When facts are verifiable, people become confident even if they don't bother to check your claim.

Shoppers are increasingly attracted to shopping on websites that include product reviews. Websites that don't include reviews cause customers to ask "What are they trying to hide?"

Verifiable evidence is persuasive. An analysis of advertising which looked at multiple studies in which some arguments provided sources and others did not, found the inclusion

of sources led to higher persuasion in 17 of the 23 comparisons and it increased ratings of credibility in 7 of 11 comparisons.⁵³

In a further study, the researchers found recall for verifiable ads was 1.23 times better than the other ads. Supporting evidence can often be provided on the Internet, which gives interested customers a low cost way to validate claims.⁵⁴

CREDIBILITY MEASURE

Is your message **CREDIBLE**?

10. **TRUST:** Does your message communicate you are trustworthy?



11. **TRANSPARENCY:** Does your message show you are open and transparent?



12. **CREDENTIALS:** Are your credentials able to be verified?



CREDIBILITY MEASURE





The advantage of the
emotions is that they
lead us astray

- Oscar Wilde -

CHAPTER SIX

EMOTIONAL: Warm, Arousing and Plot-driven

Whether you want someone to buy an ocean liner or a brand of tissues you need to appeal to their emotions.

According to Canadian neurologist Donald Caine, "The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusions."⁵⁵

Even the blandest of subjects can be infused with emotion if the right strings are pulled. Take Texas' brilliant and stunningly successful campaign to slash litter on its highways. The initial advertising campaign Texas officials used to try to reduce littering was a total failure. Most of litterers were aged 18-24 and ignored the calls to change their behavior.

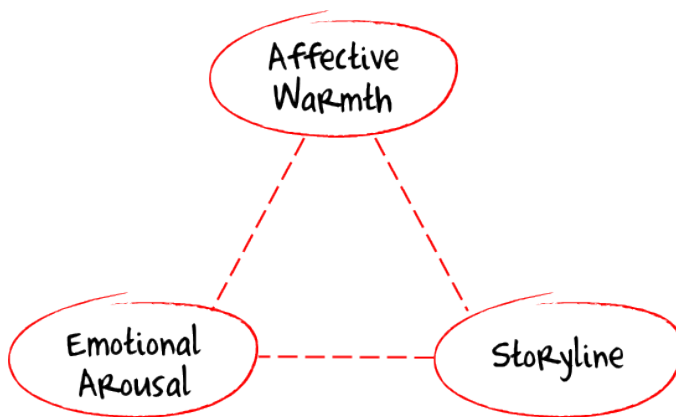
Then officials changed the message to appeal to one of the core 18-24 year old values. Most 18-24 year olds were very proud to be Texans. So the officials came up with a campaign which appealed to their pride in Texas. The campaign centered on a tough talking slogan called "Don't Mess with Texas!"

Sporting heroes such as Dallas Cowboy football players featured in television ads where they picked up litter, crushed beer cans in their hands and muttered, "Don't mess with Texas." Popular country music singer Willie Nelson also pushed the message.

The campaign was so successful at appealing to the emotional psyche of the target group that there is now a mini-industry that sells "Don't Mess with Texas" coffee mugs, decals, and flags.

In 2006, "Don't Mess with Texas" was voted America's favorite slogan. In the first year of the campaign, litter in the state reduced by 29 percent. In the first 6 years, visible roadside litter fell by 72 percent.⁵⁶

The Three Emotional Criteria



Emotional messages have a high affective warmth

We describe friendly people as warm and unfriendly people as cold. Warm and cold are primal sensations that we first experience in the womb and over time begin to associate with emotional states.

In one clever experiment a psychologist casually asked participants to briefly hold a cup of hot coffee or a cup of iced coffee while they were heading to a room to fill out a survey.

On arrival they each read a description of a fictitious person. The survey described the person as intelligent, skillful, industrious, determined, practical and cautious.

They were then asked to rate the person as generous or ungenerous, caring or selfish, attractive or unattractive, strong or weak.

When the researchers looked at the results they found the participants who had held a cup of hot coffee rather than a cup of iced coffee rated the fictitious person as significantly warmer and more friendly.

“The brain” writes Adam Alter, a marketing professor at the Stern School of Business at New York University and author of *Drunk Tank Pink and Other Unexpected Forces That Shape How We Think, Feel and Behave*, “interprets physical and social warmth very similarly”⁵⁷

Another experiment showed that “giving someone the *cold shoulder* can actually make the person perceive a reduction in temperature.”⁵⁸

Conquest, a London based marketing consultancy has devised a way to measure warmth using a metaphor. To measure the impact of its marketing campaigns, Conquest asks consumers to use online avatars to show their attitudes to particular brands.

Instead of asking consumers “What do you think of Brand X?” Conquest instructs participants to “Move your avatar to show how you feel about Brand X.” The closer the consumer moves the avatar, the ‘warmer’ her feelings for the brand.

According to Conquest, the affective warmth generated by an ad is predictive of its success in the marketplace.”⁵⁹

Emotional messages are high in emotional arousal

Why do some messages get shared around? What makes online content go viral? Wharton marketing professor Jonah Berger has spent the last decade answering these questions.

In his ground breaking book *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, Berger provides new insights on the power of emotional messages – and how they spread.

Berger studied thousands of *New York Times* articles to understand why certain pieces of online content get shared. The short answer is *emotion*. “When we care about the content” says Berger, “we share.”⁶⁰

Traditionally marketing researchers have classified emotional messages as positive and negative. Newspapers have long believed negative messages are more viral. Consider the old new adage “if it bleeds, it leads.” Bad news is supposed to generate more attention than good news.⁶¹

Berger’s research however found the key to whether a message was shared or goes viral was not whether it was negative or positive. The key to sharing was a factor which psychologists call *physiological arousal*.

What is physiological arousal? It is the feeling you experience when your sports team is on the verge of winning a grand final. You may have had a similar feeling when you heard a weird noise as you were walking home in the dark. Your pulse races, your palms sweat, your heart pounds.

Arousal writes Berger, "is a state of activation and readiness for action. Evolutionarily it comes from our ancestors' reptilian brains." Physiological arousal motivates a fight or flight response that helps us catch food or flee from predators. Arousal kindles our emotional fire.⁶²

Some emotions such as anger and excitement are high arousal. When we're angry we yell at people; when we are excited we want to take action rather than sit around.

However, other emotions like sadness and contentment stifle action. Think about when people are content, they relax. When people are sad, they sit around.

Here is a matrix taken from Berger's book *Contagious*, which shows how to judge the impact of emotional messages.⁶³

Emotional Message Impact Matrix

	HIGH AROUSAL	LOW AROUSAL
Positive	Awe Excitement Amusement (Humor)	Contentment
Negative	Anger Anxiety	Sadness

Source: Jonah Berger, *Contagious*, 2013

Berger found content that makes us angry gets shared. When Dave Carroll of the group Sons of Maxwell watched on in horror as United Airlines staff roughly tossed his treasured guitars through the air and later discovered his \$3,500 guitar had been smashed, he shared his feelings on a YouTube video clip entitled "United Breaks Guitars."

Within ten days the video had 3 million views and 140,000 comments. Within four days of the video showing, the United stock price fell 10 percent or roughly \$180 million.⁶⁴

Awe is a high arousing emotion. A clip from Susan Boyle's uplifting performance of "I Dreamed a Dream" on *Britain's Got Talent* amassed over 100 million views on YouTube.⁶⁵

Understanding physiological arousal is the key to understanding why people share emails, articles or messages.

Emotional messages have a plot-driven storyline

Story is emotion based.

Lisa Cron, the author of *Wired for Story* says "Recent breakthroughs in neuroscience reveal that our brain is hardwired to respond to story; the pleasure we derive from a well told story is nature's way of seducing us in to paying attention to it."⁶⁶

Stories have high memorability. When Subway told the story of how "Jared Fogle lost 245 pounds by eating Subway sandwiches, dieting and exercising, the TV campaign had the highest recall of any commercial during the 2004 Christmas holidays."⁶⁷

Digital media ad campaigns that tell a story before asking people to buy something are significantly more successful than ads that immediately ask people to take action.

Facebook research conducted with social media advertising technology firm Adaptly tested two comparable campaigns.

The first one, a sustained call to action, featured Facebook ads that used creative content and images focused strictly on generating email subscriptions.

The second campaign featured different “sequenced” ads that first told the brand story and then provided product information before inviting people to sign up.

Ads for both campaigns ran in the Facebook News Feed to similar audiences.

The researchers found the story-led sequence of ads generated 87 percent more people visiting the landing page and 56 percent more in email subscriptions.⁶⁸

TEST FOR EMOTION

Is your message **EMOTIONAL**?

13. AFFECTIVE WARMTH Does your message communicate you are engaging and warm?



14. EMOTIONAL AROUSAL Does your message generate high emotional arousal?



15. STORYLINE Does your message have a plot-driven storyline?



EMOTIONAL MEASURE

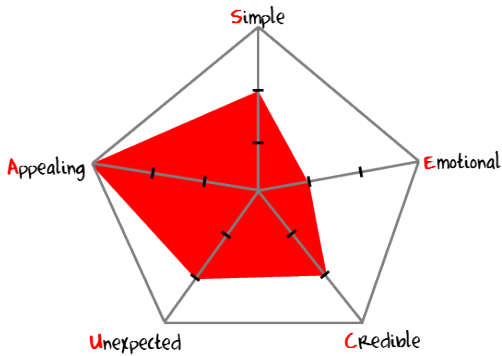
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TOTAL SAUCE SCORE

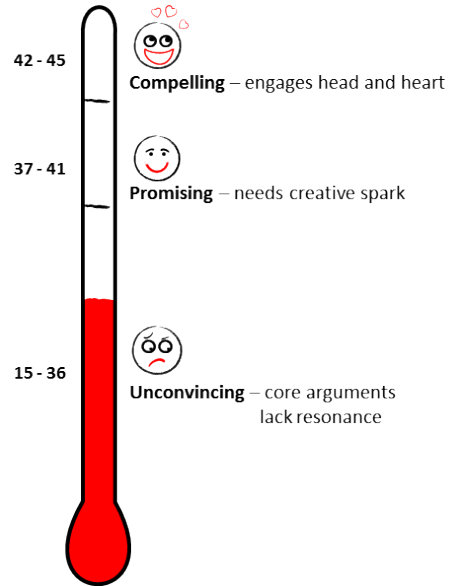
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SAUCE can be pictured as a Radar chart or a heat gauge

SAUCE Radar Chart



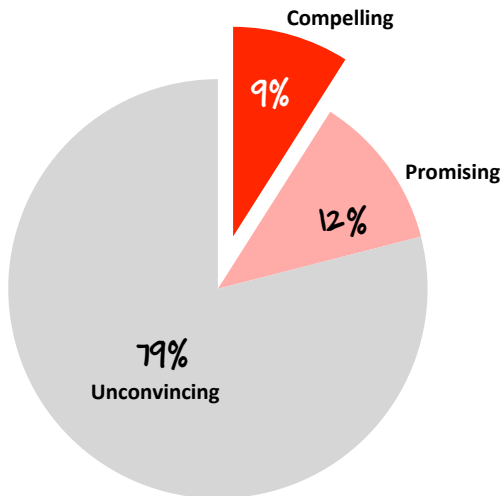
SAUCE Heat Gauge



Most sales and marketing messages fail the SAUCE test

If you judge the success of a sales or marketing message by its ability to generate persuasive punch, only a small percentage succeed. Eighty to ninety percent of the messages we have analyzed for large companies fail the SAUCE test.

Just 9% of Marketing and Sales Communications Pack a Persuasive Punch



SAUCE analysis of banking, IT, and utility marketing messages.



When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudice, and motivated by pride and vanity.

- Dale Carnegie -

Chapter Seven

THE SAUCE PERSUASIVE IMPACT TEST

Instructions

1. Select the message you wish to measure for persuasive impact.
2. Calculate the measure for each of the five SAUCE criteria (out of 9).
3. Use the full set of fifteen questions to calculate the total SAUCE score of your message (out of 45).
4. Plot the individual scores for each of the five SAUCE criteria onto the Radar chart
5. Transfer your total SAUCE score onto the Heat Gauge.
6. Use the SAUCE criteria and guidelines to sharpen your message until it packs the necessary persuasive punch needed to successfully influence your audience.

TEST FOR SIMPLICITY

Is your message **SIMPLE**?

1. **ONE CENTRAL TRUTH** Has your message been stripped down to one central truth?

Competing messages

One central truth



2. **CLARITY** Is your message crystal clear and easy to grasp?

Difficult to understand

Easy to grasp



3. **VISIBILITY** Is your message concrete, vivid and easy to picture?

Difficult to picture

Easy to picture



SIMPLE MEASURE



APPEAL MEASURE

Is your message **APPEALING**?

4. DIFFERENTIATION Is your message highly differentiated from others?

Undifferentiated

Highly differentiated



5. PERCEIVED VALUE Is your offer positioned as having a high perceived value?

Low perceived value

High perceived value



b. Self-interest Do you successfully appeal directly to your audience's "self-interest"?

Generalized benefits

Specific benefits



APPEAL MEASURE

9

TEST FOR UNEXPECTEDNESS

Is your message **UNEXPECTED**?

7. **SURPRISE**: Does your message grab your audience's attention?

Unremarkable

Attention grabbing



8. **INTRIGUE**: Does your message sustain their attention?

Lacks interest

Sustains interest



9. **SELF-PERSUASION**: Does your message encourage self-generated conclusions?

Hard sell

Self-generated conclusions



UNEXPECTED MEASURE



CREDIBILITY MEASURE

Is your message **CREDIBLE**?

10. **TRUST:** Does your message communicate you are trustworthy?



11. **TRANSPARENCY:** Does your message show you are open and transparent?



12. **CREDENTIALS:** Are your credentials able to be verified?



CREDIBILITY MEASURE

9

TEST FOR EMOTION

Is your message **EMOTIONAL**?

13. **AFFECTIVE WARMTH** Does your message communicate you are engaging and warm?



14. **EMOTIONAL AROUSAL** Does your message generate high emotional arousal?



15. **STORYLINE** Does your message have a plot-driven storyline?



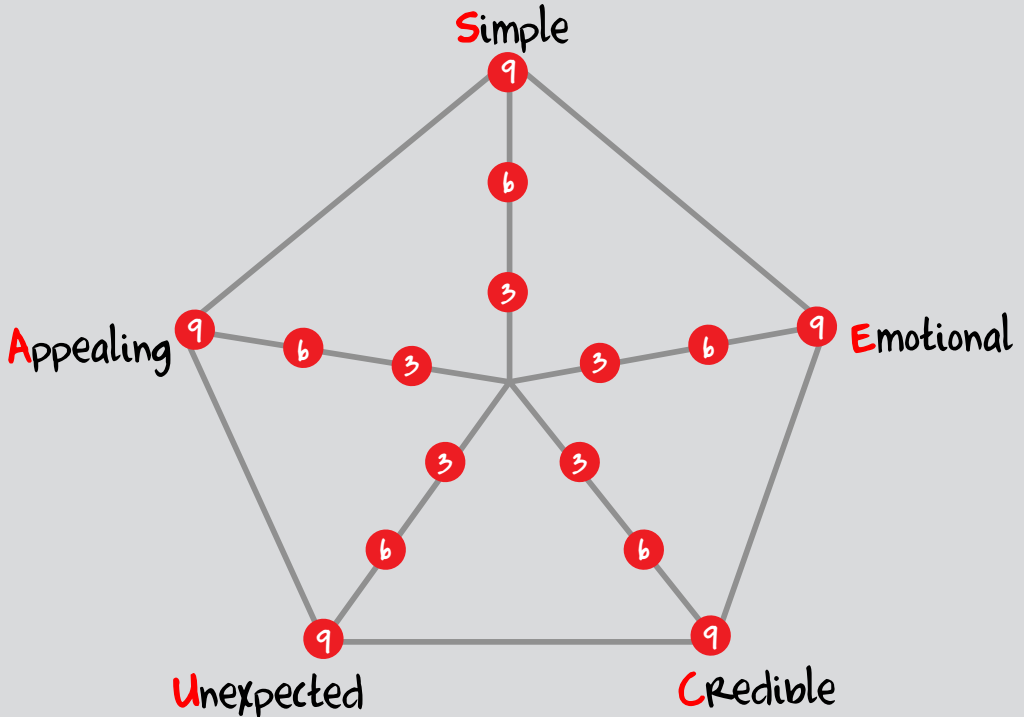
EMOTIONAL MEASURE



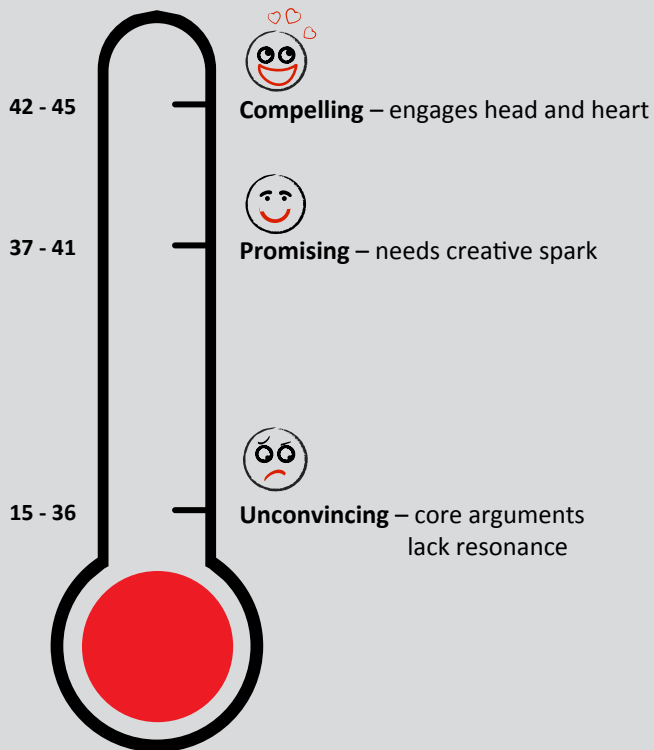
TOTAL SAUCE SCORE



SAUCE Radar Chart



SAUCE Heat Gauge



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