

# Making a Science of

**How to deconstruct and quantify consumers' emotional attachments with brands.**



By **Steve Blamer**, CEO, Grey Worldwide North America

In June 2004, *Fortune* magazine published a now-infamous article titled “Nightmare on Madison Avenue.” The premise: Media fragmentation has atomized the marketplace, the term “mass media” has become an oxymoron, the future of marketing communications is all about the next big online-offline/guerrilla/advertisement brainstorm...and as a result, traditional advertising, just like the Asian three-striped box turtle and the Corsican snail, is perilously close to extinction.

It is hardly news to advertisers and their agencies that consumers are increasingly difficult to reach. This is a trend marketers have been wrestling with for decades; in fact, it’s one of the primary reasons why classic advertising has morphed into integrated communications.

Nevertheless, *Fortune’s* sky-is-falling hyperbole overlooks a simple fact: Today, as always, strong brands thrive not just because of smart media plans but because they’ve established powerful, enduring emotional connections with the consumer.

The obvious question: Especially now, why aren’t more marketers using emotion to strengthen their brand relationships?

The reason is simple: Until now, emotions have been guesswork. Existing research tools have been unable to measure them.

Over the past five decades, market researchers have become extremely adept at measuring rational responses. Emotions have resisted quantification. Even research techniques that use terms like “bonding” to describe the apex of their pyramids have really been measuring satisfaction with functional attributes, not emotional connections. In fact, because emotion is nonverbal, most marketers have believed that it is impossible to capture emotional factors in standard research questionnaires.



## Approachability

e.g., “I feel like the brand is accessible, obtainable and approachable—it’s within my reach, it’s in my league.”



## Curiosity

e.g., “I feel the brand is intriguing. It piques my interest and stimulates my imagination. I want to know it even better.”



## Empowerment

e.g., “I feel the brand makes me more confident, self-assured and free.”

# Consumers' Emotions

In the absence of a reliable scientific model, advertisers in search of emotional guidance have largely looked to the unreliable and unverifiable feedback found in qualitative research such as focus groups. As most marketers realize, focus groups provide directional results, not projectable results. Findings depend on unpredictable factors including the skill of the moderator and, in the case of emotions, the ability of consumers to articulate their own feelings.

Three years ago, Grey turned its attention to those elusive emotional connections.

## Learning How to Measure Emotions

We assembled a team of psychologists, social scientists, pollsters, academicians, statisticians and marketers and began an extensive review of literature. The goal: to identify the hundreds of possible emotions that might describe consumers' relationships with brands. At the completion of the literature review, the possibilities were classified and categorized into 15 hypothetical factors, and then 124 questions (including verbal, anthropomorphic and visual questions) were used to evaluate those

factors among 6,000 respondents. In the final validation stage, 27 brands in nine categories spread across durables, non-durables and services were analyzed. Finally, advanced factor analyses helped to determine which questions were the most reliable measures of the emotional relationship consumers have with brands.

What emerged from this process is a model we call "Emotional Triggers," a quantitative model that pinpoints the emotions that trigger consumers' purchases.

Emotional Triggers includes nine emotional dimensions, or factors, that describe consumers' emotional relationships with brands. Each factor is comprised of multiple drivers, both emotional and cognitive. These factors are closely correlated with consumers' reported purchase behavior and explain nearly 60 percent of the purchase decision (non-emotional factors including distribution, promotions and the power of the sales force account for the remaining 40 percent).

The nine factors that were identified, and a brief description of some of the emotions they encompass are shown on these pages. →



## Warmth

*e.g., "I feel admiration and fondness for the brand. I feel comfortable using it. I desire it."*



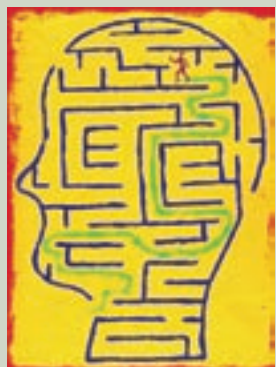
## Trust

*e.g., "I feel I can count on the brand. I feel it keeps its promises. It's honest and won't let me down."*



## Relevance

*e.g., "I feel the brand plays a meaningful role in my life. It really fits me."*



## Familiarity

*e.g., "I feel I know the brand well enough to talk about it. I 'get' it. I feel I understand what the brand is saying to me."*



## Identification

*e.g., "I feel the brand reflects me, who I am. It shares my values and concerns."*



## Pride

*e.g., "I feel proud using the brand. It makes me feel part of a special club. It gives me status."*

← When analyzed through the lens of the Emotional Triggers model, these factors allow the emotional relationships people have with brands to be deconstructed. The process...

- identifies the weak and strong emotional attachments that consumers have for brands
- benchmarks brands against their competition

and, most importantly,

- pinpoints the precise emotions that need to be shifted to influence marketplace outcomes (e.g., purchase interest, brand loyalty, price elasticity and recommendations to a friend) — reliably and quantitatively, in any category, globally.

It's important to remember that the Emotional Triggers model is behavioral as well as attitudinal. It is correlated with consumer purchase decisions and, in fact, also measures loyalty and price elasticity.

Rational benefits are also correlated with emotions, identifying which rational benefits drive consumers' emotions most effectively in a given category.

### Putting Emotional Triggers into Practice

The Emotional Triggers model was first used in 2001, while it was still being refined, due to an urgent situation. Following the 2001 discovery that anthrax had been mailed to government offices and found in postal facilities, and the five deaths that followed, nobody felt good about the mail anymore — least of all the USPS's 800,000 employees, whose morale

had been problematic even before this crisis and who now were on the verge of a strike. The USPS needed to act quickly to restore morale and confidence among USPS employees and the public alike.

Using the Emotional Triggers model, 1,400 consumers were polled to better understand the emotional repercussions. It was learned that, in addition to being afraid, Americans lacked pride in their postal service and identification with postal workers. These significant emotional deficits clearly undermined public empathy, inhibiting the USPS's ability to improve confidence and morale.

Based on the findings, a 60-second television commercial was created and produced in which images of postal workers merge with the words of the



USPS credo and the sound of Carly Simon's anthemic "Let the River Run."

The response was immediate and positive. Postmaster General John E. Potter wrote that the Postal Service received "thousands of letters of recognition from the people we serve every day." Postal employees gave the spot a standing ovation at their annual convention, and *The Wall Street Journal* named the commercial, "Pride," one of the five best spots of the year.

### Using Emotional Triggers Today

Emotional Triggers is now a fully developed model that is used daily to better leverage the role emotions play in the purchase decision of brands, while providing a unique competitive advantage

against competitors. Its effectiveness has been verified in a broad array of categories — from telecommunications to restaurants to packaged goods. In fact, more than 140 brands in nearly 50 categories across Europe, North America and Asia have now been studied. The model has proved valid regardless of language and cultural differences or marketplace development.

The average Emotional Triggers study takes three weeks from approval of specifications (target audience, competitive brands, stimuli and brand objective) to completion. It can be used at any point in the communications process where an emotional evaluation might be helpful. It is most effective when used in conjunction with other research tools found to be effective for a particular brand.

### Communications Nightmare?

Not Really. There's no question that, going forward, media technologies and options will continue to evolve, further complicating marketers' ability to connect with consumers.

But is the communications future really a nightmare? We don't think so.

Our industry has a heritage of adapting to change. Over the decades, we've repeatedly developed new strategic tools for new marketplace realities. While not a magic bullet, Emotional Triggers is unquestionably an important addition to our strategic brand-building arsenal. ■

*For more information on Grey's Emotional Triggers™ model, visit our Web site, [www.emotionaltriggers.com](http://www.emotionaltriggers.com), or e-mail us at [emotionaltriggers@grey.com](mailto:emotionaltriggers@grey.com).*



**Steve Blamer**, Chief Executive Officer of **Grey Worldwide North America**, has been instrumental in the development of the Emotional Triggers™ research model, spearheading the agency's commitment and investment. During his 25-year industry career, Steve has been a client, an agency executive and even an entrepreneur. He began his advertising career in 1979 at FCB Chicago. In 1987, he left the agency world to join a former client in founding, running and eventually selling a successful fruit drink company. He joined Grey in 1989. Since then he has run three of the agency's largest offices — Los Angeles, London and New York. Steve is a member of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Advertising Agencies.