

# The New York Times

MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2005

## Advertising | Stuart Elliott

In an industry that has historically snubbed research on marketing, the field is suddenly in vogue.

FOR years, advertising research was perceived on Madison Avenue as a staid, even quaint, field with little practical relevance. Now, as clients increasingly hold agencies accountable for effective ads, the researchers are being eagerly sought out.

In response, the research industry is intensifying its efforts and looking at issues like trying to determine the return on investment for advertising spending, improving the measurement of audiences in media like television and the Internet, helping agencies identify the most efficient media outlets and increasing the role that market research plays in reaching consumers.

Those topics and others are being discussed at the 51st annual convention of the American Research Foundation, which began yesterday at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Lower Manhattan. More than 600 people are expected to attend the conference, which continues through tomorrow.

Spurring the researchers' work is the growing realization among marketers that "you can't inject people with your brand anymore; people have to come to you," said Bruce F. Hall, partner and research director at Howard, Merrell & Partners in Raleigh, N.C., part of the Interpublic Group of companies.

As marketers shift from chasing consumers with rational reasons for buying a product to enticing them with emotional reasons, "it felt like we were missing something," Mr. Hall said in an interview last week. "You can ask people what they think about an ad, but until you move them on an emotional level, their behavior will not change."

For instance, in a project that the AnswerStream division of Howard, Merrell handled for the CorningWare line of products sold by World Kitchens, "we found if you ask people what color bakeware they want, they say white, because it goes with the kitchen," Mr. Hall said. "But CorningWare has already sold everyone on the planet a set of white bakeware."

Based on this research, Mr. Hall said, AnswerStream recommended that the company rethink the way it designates its product lines, emphasizing color and pattern. "On a precognitive level, it's actually about the way things look to people and not what they're called," he said.

Mr. Hall is to be part of a presentation this morning at the convention that will provide an update on a project meant to find ways to measure the effects of emotion in advertising. The first phase of the project was centered on beer ads.

The initial research conducted by AnswerStream, which tries to determine the emotional impact of ads by measuring physiological responses like heart rate, had one unexpected finding: ads that focus on product attributes, like the low carbohydrate content of the Miller Lite beer brand sold by SABMiller, can generate emotional responses from consumers, just like ads that are expected to yield such reactions (the humorous, story-telling "Whassup" commercials for the Budweiser beer brand sold by Anheuser-Busch, for example).

"A more fundamental issue than the need for different media to reach consumers," Mr. Hall said, "is the need to find ways to get them to respond to ads because you tap into something that means something to them."

That sentiment was endorsed by another executive who is to speak today at the conference, J. Walker Smith, president at Yankelovich Partners, the market research company.

"When marketers wrestle with their media budgets, trying to decide whether to use traditional media like TV or take some of those dollars and put them into new media like the Internet, the debate is pushing us in the wrong direction," Mr. Smith said in an interview last week.

"The real issue in re-engaging consumers

is good marketing practices versus bad marketing practices," he added. "We have to change the way we practice, regardless of the media."

Mr. Smith is to present the results of a survey on receptivity to marketing, updating one he conducted last year. That survey, presented at the 2004 management conference of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, generated considerable discussion on its findings that negative consumer perceptions of advertising had significantly increased, making the tasks of advertisers and agencies considerably harder.

"There are those looking for the new media to be the saviors for advertising," Mr. Smith said, "but we can use the new media to be ever more intrusive and saturating, creating ever more clutter."

That may be a reason for the new survey's finding that "there are still a lot of things consumers don't like about advertising," he added. "There probably hasn't been as much progress in changing that as we think."

For instance, 56 percent of survey respondents said they avoided buying products that overwhelmed them with advertising, up slightly from the 54 percent who said so in the 2004 survey. And 69 percent said they were interested in ways to block, skip or opt out of being exposed to advertising, the same percentage as in the survey last year.

All is not lost for Madison Avenue, however, the survey suggests, because respondents said they valued advertising that they could choose to see "when it is most convenient"; when it was personally communicated "by friends and experts I trust"; when it was "customized to fit my specific needs and interests"; or provided useful information about competitive brands and products.

Still, Mr. Smith said, negative consumer attitudes toward advertising "remain the single biggest barrier to improving return on investment for marketing spending.

"Until we get better at engaging consumers," he added, "they're going to continue to push back and resist what advertisers are trying to deliver to them."