

Ep 110 - Awarded Campaigns: How DP World changed global shipping by questioning a hidden assumption

MichaelAaron Flicker: [00:00:00] Welcome back to Behavioral Science for Brands, a podcast where we bridge the gap between academics and practical marketing. Every week we sit down and go deep behind the science that powers great marketing today. I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

Richard Shotton: And I'm Richard Shotton.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And today we're continuing our miniseries where we explore effective campaigns.

In today's episode, we're looking at. Three degrees of difference, A campaign by DP World. Let's get into it. So Richard, we have chosen this campaign because it is such a critical, interesting insight that makes such a massive impact in terms of effectiveness. So I'm gonna break down today's campaign.

We're gonna talk about it, but it in our minds, it's like a lovely. Story of [00:01:00] an insight that turns into a campaign that has pretty big impact on an entire industry and a lot of data to support it.

Richard Shotton: Yeah, I think you could argue this was one of the most important. Ad campaigns of the year, a phenomenal effect.

Yes, I think su super interesting. Super interesting.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And one of the things we've loved so much about this particular mini series is that we've been looking not at world famous brands or maybe world famous campaigns, but we've been looking specifically at effectiveness work. This is work that has.

Rigorous study around, did the campaign actually make a difference in the market? And in a previous episode, we talked about the IPA effectiveness awards. Today we're gonna talk about we're gonna talk about another campaign and exactly the effect it had in the market it was serving. So let's take a [00:02:00] step back.

The collaboration is between the client DP world. And Edelman, which is one of the world's largest communications of PR companies. DP World is one of the world's largest logistics firms. And they had an insight when they were working on their cold chain logistics systems, that there was cost savings to be had, not just for them, but for the entire industry.

And you need to know a little bit about the cold chain logistics system to understand what was going on here, but I'll break it down. It's not that complicated. To ship food globally, you need to freeze it to a certain temperature and that temperature internationally accepted minus 18 degrees Celsius, and that dates back.

Almost a hundred years to the 1930s, and as it turns out, was a [00:03:00] standard that worked very well, but had very little scientific justification. So DP World, along with Edelman commissioned studies with a number of different universities and scientific groups, and they're looking to see where is the temperature that can maintain food safety, maintain food quality, but that is not any colder than it needs to stop.

Microbiome activity in the food. So the answer is that at minus 12 degrees Celsius, all microbiome activity stops. And so food preserved at minus 15 degrees Celsius is safe for food transport and could become a new standard. So while this sounds small, we're already shipping at minus 18 degrees Celsius.

We're talking about moving to minus 15 degrees Celsius. That [00:04:00] three degrees cuts the energy requirements of not just DP world, but of the entire global transportation logistics system dramatically. Their estimates is if we could move from minus 18 as a standard to minus 15, they would save about 25 terawatts.

Anyone know what a terawatt is? I didn't know, so I Googled it. A Terawatt 25 Terawatts is equal to 25 billion kilowatts, which is the equivalent of removing about 17 and a half million metric tons of CO₂. Even more easy to understand, it's the equivalent of taking 3.8 million cars off the road each year.

So huge environmental impact if they can just reduce the amount of cold storage that they're keeping the food at in global transport and critically. It can also reduce supply [00:05:00] chain costs from between five to 12%, so big money tied up in this. If we can reduce the cost of shipping between five to 12%, it can obviously be a big cost saving measure for DP World, but for the entire industry.

But therein lies the challenge. Who would be the first mover? If you are shipping at less cold than your competitors, very unlikely that you're going to be seen as competitive, very hard to get any one player to change. So DP World saw that the challenge here was to make an industry movement and to change a deeply embedded default that maybe nobody was questioning.

So they created it. The coalition moved to minus 15 C, and they launched this as an unbranded campaign at the COP 28, and the goal was to get everyone to adopt it freely. [00:06:00] It wasn't join. DP world and their push for better energy efficiency, it was meant, it was designed to be a unbranded movement that everyone could adopt.

They commissioned academics to speak about it. They published an open letter to the industry. They created a microsite with films and research, and then they had truly neutral industry experts talk about the difference. And the idea was simple recast minus 18 C as needlessly wasteful, and use minus 15 C as a win-win for the planet and for the business.

The results have been remarkable. Within days of the announcement, 60% of the world's container ship operating operators giants like Maersk and C-M-A-C-G-M joined the coalition and the movement has continued to gain steam. By mid 2025, there was over 55 members all [00:07:00] committing to ship at minus 15. Folks like ikea, major food groups, logistics companies.

It was so compelling that there are even now supermarket trials in the United Kingdom where they're testing can they have food stored at the store at minus 15 rather than minus 18. So pretty exciting case study, big impact on the economy, big impact on the business, and there was a bunch of behavioral science lying at the center of how they approached tackling this challenge that.

We think could make a big difference. So where should we start Richard?

Richard Shotton: I think this is different from some of the other campaigns that we've talked about. 'cause it's not them in a way harnessing a behavioral science bias to make a great campaign. It's them identifying that an industry was falling victim of a behavioral science bias.

That all sounds a bit vague. The bias. [00:08:00] I think that was afflicting. Logistics was what we know as the status quo bias. So it's essentially the argument that once a particular way of behaving gets set, people follow that without questioning whether there are better alternatives. People think to themselves, oh, if we've always done it this way, we should probably carry on.

Someone must have. Set this way of behaving for a very good reason. Now, this definitely relates back to DP world. You know what Edelman discovered was if you talk to a scientist, minus 12 is the necessary temperature. Call it minus 15 to give you a bit of wiggle room. Now, that's the temperature thing should be, but everyone was adopting minus 18.

And what they realize after a while is actually, if you look at. In Brits would be the old fashioned way of us doing the temperature. How Americans still do the temperature? No, no criticism involved. [00:09:00] Minus 18 C is zero degree Fahrenheit and people have just plucked this very round number and said, this is where we should be.

So this is an amazing example of a whole industry wasting millions of dollars, generating millions of tons of unnecessary carbon because they are sticking with the status quo. Now, the experimental evidence that supports this argument for status quo bias, there's a great study from sun who's at Cornell, and in 2021.

She goes out recruits 302 doctors and that's important. And she gives them a thought experiment. So she says, look, you've signed on for the day. You're just starting your shift. You go and see a patient and there are two medications you should give them. Medicine A, medicine B. Medicine [00:10:00] A has these upsides, but these downsides, medicine B has a different mix of upsides and downsides.

And to some people she just says which would you pick for the patient? Now if it's just presented like that, 39% go for medicine, a 61% for the alternative. But then SAR goes out and gets another group of people, gives them exactly the same story about the patient and their symptoms and the two.

Medications available, but this time, she says, last night, one of the doctors on call put down that medicine. A should be the medication given to the patient. Now. Even though the facts about the medicine are exactly the same, suddenly [00:11:00] you get this jump in what the doctors do now it's 74% going for medicine a 26 for medicine B, so no status quo and it's medicine B, that's the most popular.

If someone has previously picked medicine a for the patient, suddenly the doctors jump and think that's the right thing to do. Now this is a fascinating experiment because it's run amongst genuine doctors in a medical setting. These are professionals who define themselves as being evidence-based, sensible, logical decision makers.

People who just weigh up the facts and come to the right decision. But even they are deeply influenced by how their choices are set in front of them. And if something has been preordained, if it's the kind of default. That has been set up. If it's what a previous figure of no particular hierarchy of [00:12:00] validity has chosen.

People are steered by that, and I think that's exactly what happens. DP world, they've always done minus 18. And people think themselves well, if it's always been there, it must have been for a very good reason. Why bother even considering if it could be done better? And what I love about the Edelman is almost because they're not logistics experts, because they came from the outside and because they really probed it, they weren't prone to this bias and uncover a massive opportunity.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I hadn't thought about this in all the prep we did for today's episode, but it strikes me that status quo bias that drove the industry for so long, the campaign that DP World and Edelman decide to launch has this. Insight of we're all gonna do it together. We're all gonna make the change at once, and there's protection in us all [00:13:00] doing it together.

Now, that's not status quo, but there's something about where we have strength in numbers. No one's gonna be an outlier, and if we all make the change together. We can all celebrate the win, but we're also, nobody is exposed if there's a problem. That's not the status quo bias, but there's something about protection in numbers.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. And I think there is, there's a great piece there and that reflects very well on and Edelman and DP World, it would be very easy to think, oh, we've found out this great insight. Let's just keep the savings. To ourself, let's bank the hundreds of thousands or millions of pounds that we're gonna save with cheaper electricity costs.

But as you say, there's a bit of a downside as well, because it's just DP world who go out on a limb. And you are shipping beef from a farm in Argentina, maybe the farmer's wait a minute. Why are you doing it at minus 15 if [00:14:00] everyone else is at minus 18? So there was a great financial opportunity to keeping information to themselves as DP world, but also a bit of a risk.

Other people would've thought if this is the way that the industry's always done it, who are you to to, to change it? Opening this insight up to their competitors. I

think it showed enlightened self-interest. It made it a bit safer for them, but it also passed the savings onto their competitors.

So enlightened self-interest, I think is a fair way to sum it up

MichaelAaron Flicker: And creative problem solving in that. They were looking to solve a business opportunity for themselves, which didn't mean robbing it from everyone else. It's so often that when I try to win, I want everyone else to lose.

When I win I want an unfair advantage in the marketplace. I want to have savings on my energy costs much [00:15:00] more than our competitors. Acknowledging that there was some risk in that strategy because maybe you wouldn't be you, as you say, maybe there would be some question of why you're doing it. In procurement, they might've just lost on the merits.

They were no longer as cold as everybody else, so they could win while they expanded the pie. In some ways, they could win. While everybody else won two and that happened to be good for the environment, but it was really great for their bottom line.

Richard Shotton: I, I think that's a good transferrable learning.

There's a brilliant book about negotiations by Chris Boss called Never Split the Difference, and he doesn't really refer to behavioral science, doesn't really refer to psychology, but an awful lot of the recommendations he makes. There, there are experiments out there by psychologist of behavioral science that support what he says.

So his background was very much as a practitioner. He was a hostage negotiator, I think for the, for the fbi. FBI.

MichaelAaron Flicker: For the

Richard Shotton: fbi. Yeah. And one of the things that he talks about [00:16:00] in the book is moving away from a zero sum mentality. When you're negotiating, don't think. That for you to benefit, the other party has to lose out.

Now, what he often talks about is this idea of what you really should be looking at for is giving the other party lots of information so you can identify. Areas where you can both benefit. And I think that mindset shift in negotiation is

really valuable, not just thinking of hard nosed, haggling, and taking off the opponent.

Thinking that if you come together, there will be areas, there'll be things that you have as one of the parties that you don't really value that are super important for your the person on the other side. And I think trying to identify those wins for both parties is super important.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I spent last summer.

For a week long [00:17:00] education, executive education at Harvard, doing a program on negotiation, and they teach you that there's different types of negotiation and the most unrealistic, the most academic in a classroom only that doesn't really exist in the real world. Almost never. Is a zero sum negotiation that either I win or and you lose or you win and I lose it.

Actually, that doesn't exist in the real world, but it's useful to study them and understand them because it could teach you the basic building blocks of other negotiating strategies. But as you say, Richard. So many people approach life in that way, or approach business challenges in that way. When that's a miscasting of the reality of the situation, there's a bigger opportunity where you don't have to split the difference.

Where you don't have to have, yeah, winners and losers alone. There may be a more advantageous endpoint for one side or the other, of course, but it doesn't have to be a zero sum game. [00:18:00]

Richard Shotton: Absolutely. So I always think it's a a lot of the time I often travel and do talks at conferences or to businesses abroad.

And before I read Chris FO's book, if I suggested a fee and the other person wanted to negotiate, all it was me trying to minimize what I was gonna reduce my fee by now if that happens, having read his book and moved away from this zero sum mindset, what I'll first will do is say, look, rather than reducing the fee.

What else could I give you that doesn't affect me very much.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I'm

Richard Shotton: already coming anyway. You Yeah, I'm already, exactly. I often say I'm already coming anyway. Look, rather than me just do one talk,

why don't I do an extra I'll do a breakfast with your clients or I'll do a little workshop or afterwards I might I'm still gonna have enough time to then get the plane home in the evening.

It's no skid of my nose, but to them it doubles the value. And I credit that all down to Chris Voss and the shift from zero sum mindset. [00:19:00] Zero sum mindset to there are instances where you can expand the pie and you can both gain. And I think that's a brilliant way of approaching negotiations.

Businesses, as you say, life in general.

MichaelAaron Flicker: So this is how we've started the conversation, challenging the status quo. But are there examples where people have used the status quo to their advantage? So we've been talking a lot about that the challenging that, but what about the other side of this?

Richard Shotton: Yeah, so as you say, first up, there is this idea that just because of business has always happened in one way. Do not assume that is there for a very good reason. Challenge it, push it, probe it, just like Aiden one did. But the second way you could think about this is. The people in general, your consumers, your users are prone to the status quo bias.

So when you are thinking about giving them a choice, if you shift the status quo option, the [00:20:00] default option, you can change people's behavior radically. So maybe the biggest scale example of this is certainly that I know of, is back in about 2012. The British government changed the regulations around pensions.

So few years before they had made it law that if a employee paid into their pension. The employer had to add to that there was a certain amount, let's say I put in 3% my employer had to put in 3%, so this is amazing financially. There aren't many times in life where you can immediately turn a pound of your money into two pounds, but not everyone takes up this opportunity.

61% of people take up this amazing opportunity. 39% of people in big companies were [00:21:00] not putting anyone into their pension. The government changed the rules, so now the employee has to actively write down that they do not want any money from their employer. They do not want any money taken out from their own pay packet.

So it's gone from a opt-in scheme. Previously I had to actively say, I want to join the scheme to double my money. Now I have to say, I actively don't want to

be in the scheme. Now we are just talking a few minutes of administration on either side of these offers, but what happens is when people have to opt out, suddenly you've got within six months of this scheme going live, you've now got 83% of employees enrolled.

So we've gone from 61% of the country to 83. Percent. Now, I think this relates very much down to the status quo, because imagine what it's like for a employee doesn't really think much about [00:22:00] pensions. If your HR manager says to you. You're already enrolled. Do you want to actively come out? Suddenly that responsibility on is on you.

You feel like you are deviating from what has been set up as the right way of behaving and a lot of people just won't make that decision. They follow the status quo. So this is, I think, the flip side of the DP world study. This is where you can radically change how people behave. Not by forcing them down any route, but by setting out which is the kind of pre-ordained route.

And even if people have the right to overrule it, how you establish that will, will change behavior.

MichaelAaron Flicker: It brings up for me so much of what we've talked about in Richard Taylor's work around Nudge and what's the right default and what ways to nudge people. Have you and I [00:23:00] spoke about in the past a similar a similar.

Situation. But with organ donation, is there an organ donation?

Richard Shotton: Yeah. So that's a bit more controversial, so

MichaelAaron Flicker: please. But that's why I wanna raise it. Yeah. 'cause I think there's an ethical question that starts to get risen from this. So let's share that one and then we can talk about the learning

Richard Shotton: from Yeah.

So the pensions is a phenomenal success. The government, British government wants people to put money into their pensions because they don't want people getting to. 60 retiring and then living in complete poverty. But the interesting with pensions is it doesn't require active engagement. Now, frankly whether or not I am really involved in my pension or I never pay attention to it until I get to 65, it doesn't really matter.

What matters is there money in the bank that I can then live off When it comes to organ donations, it's a very different scenario.

So going back [00:24:00] to the beginning, there's a very famous chart that sometimes gets shown, which is a variety of European countries. And it shows the proportion of people on the organ donor list.

So this is the list which says when you die, if you're on it, the hospital can take your organs and give 'em to other people. And it's a very stark chart. Countries which are opt-in, as in you're assumed not to be on the list unless you actively tell someone you are. You get about, I dunno, five, 10, maybe 12% of people on the organ donor list countries where it's opt out.

That is the state assumes you want to donate your organs unless you actively sign a form saying you don't. The number of people on the organ donor list is about 90, 95%. So you see this and you think, wow, this is an amazing example of how you can steer choice by changing the default, by changing the kind [00:25:00] of status quo of how they the state set up.

However, there are some real skeptics about how successful this is because of course, what you want is not presence of names on a list. What you want is there to be a large enough supply of organs that when people other people need them, they're there to be used. And that's where the organ donor bit falls down because often.

What hospitals find is if a family is in a horrible situation where their loved one has been in a car crash and the nurses come in and say can we take the corneas or the kidney or the liver, if it's been an opt-in situation, most families are very happy with that to happen.

They think their loved one [00:26:00] actively wanted to do this thing, and they're happy to. Let those wishes occur. If it's an opt out situation, many people will turn around and say wait a minute, my brother or son, or whoever it is, they never said that they want to do this. You can't take those things. It's that's not fair.

And most countries, whatever the law is, they're not gonna overrule a grief stricken family. So it's a slightly different situation. Organ donation. In which you need people to be actively involved in the decision. It's not just enough to change the default, because if they're not actively involved when it comes to the moment of choice for the family, they will often overall that decision.

So I think it's a really interesting distinction of when defaults are powerful and when they're not quite enough.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I and I'm thrilled we're discussing this because it helps you as, it helps you [00:27:00] analyze the status quo bias in a little bit of a different way, rather than just knowing whether you should challenge the status quo or use the status quo to your advantage.

You have to think about not just what the leading indicator is, how many people do we have on a list versus not, but did we get to the result we wanted, which is, as you said, actual organs donate it. Or in the example of pensions, actual money in the bank, you like what we really need is cash on the ledger so that you have it when you retire.

And so thinking about. For brands, the business case that they're trying to address, the problem they're actually trying to solve, does the leading indicator actually get to the desired result?

Richard Shotton: Yeah.

MichaelAaron Flicker: To me is another layer of analysis that's required to apply the insight correctly.

Richard Shotton: The great thing is if you do that analysis and you realize you are in a tricky situation like the organ donations I.

It [00:28:00] then gives you opportunity once you've come to that realization that you could then think about what's the tweak we can make to improve the situation? And I apologize, I can't remember the exact details, so we'll put the proper number as the proper attribution in the show notes, but I think it might have been maybe Tennessee or Mississippi.

I've got a feeling it was a kind of southern state in the US where they came up with this idea of essentially forcing people to make a decision. You weren't saying which decision they had to make, but they had to make a decision about organization. So you go in to get your driving license in one of these states and you have to say, are you happy to join the organ donor role or are you're not happy?

Now people still have choice, active decision to make, but they can't just ignore it. So that is a brilliant way of generating a much larger organ donor list [00:29:00] without falling for this problem of passive ascent because the real

volume of people who would be happy to have their organs taken after Don sit somewhere between the 90% we get in opt out countries of course, and the five 10% we get in opt-in countries a lot of people.

Can't be bothered to think about it 'cause it's not a nice subject if they're forced to think about it. Maybe you, it's 25 or 30 or 50% of people who are happy to join and that high quality 50% is better than you know this very passive. 90%. So once you. As you say, really probe and analyze what's needed.

Then you can start changing the behavioral science principles you use to get to the, or the right tactics you use to get to the ideal place.

Michael Aaron Flicker: In our book, *hacking the Human Mind*, we talked about the red sneaker effect [00:30:00] and how you can stand out by breaking a category convention, and then that confers status and prestige.

You and I have often talked about picking the right thing to break convention on is the art because you do not want to break convention on something that's really critical at the first level, changing the shipping temperatures, that seems like an inalienable thing to do, like product safety matters.

Most of all. Let's not break that category convention until. Edelman and DP World frame it. As it's a one that we all can break together. It, they make it safe to break and they do a lot of groundwork to make it safe. They have independent studies. They have a website, they have an open letter, so they set it up so that it's.

Not that hard to break this convention and we're all gonna do it together. [00:31:00] So it's interesting how they both broke the status quo and they used this idea that once it could be the default. It's easy for everybody to pile on and we'll put the case study video in the notes. They spend a lot of time talking about how quickly everybody adopts it.

I'm sure there was groundwork to be done there's something about that it's now the status quo that everybody might be safest to be on.

Richard Shotton: There's something along the lines of the quote by f Scott Fitzgerald, where he says something along the lines of the sign of a first class intelligence is the ability to hold too contradictory.

Truths in your head at the same time and still operate. And I think the brilliant bit of age of them, and they live up to that Fitzgerald quote, is they recognize

that the herd and the norm of behavior, the existing way of behavior can be utterly [00:32:00] flawed and therefore they chose to. Analyze it and probe to see if it was the right thing to do.

But once they had discovered it was completely wrong, they recognized the power of the herd. Men, we have to get everyone acting together or our efforts could be completely futile. So it's a lovely example of taking this slightly contradictory approach. Love it. I think it's one of the best campaigns I've heard about in a long time.

MichaelAaron Flicker: For those of us that are excited about marketing, excited about doing things that make a big impact in the world, how many of us had heard of this? Until it won. What was it, Richard? Did it, won it.

Richard Shotton: Oh, I think it was a PG Grand pre. So the a PG is called, is the Account planning group in the uk. And it is the not quite trade body, but it is an organization for planners and strategists and they have a series of awards.

It's probably not quite as. Well [00:33:00] known as the IPA Effectiveness Awards, but they have a great showcase of awards and the Grand Prix is the kind of highest title you can get.

MichaelAaron Flicker: We'll drop the link. Everyone can read more about the campaign, but. To just know that there's really big work happening that you may have not heard about.

It's exciting. It's it's invigorating to learn about these campaigns and really pick 'em apart and see what we can use in our own work because of what others have done.

Richard Shotton: Yeah, it's very easy to see these amazing campaigns and think, that's brilliant. Be really impressed by the strategic thinking of a group of planners and creative, but then think okay, that's all very nice of them, but I've got my own problems.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yes.

Richard Shotton: The great thing is about if we analyze them through this behavioral science lens, you can start to see the bits which are transferable. And the single biggest thing here for me is all around one, just because something has always happened, don't believe it's the right. Thing to do. That's the status quo [00:34:00] bias in in the kind of negative blocker amount.

So question, some of these receive wisdoms, but then secondly. Use the power of the status quo bias to your own advantage now, how you set up what the predetermined option is for your users that will affect how they behave.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And with that, we've come to the end of our effectiveness episode on DP World.

If you found today's episode engaging, please share it with others that you think would find it valuable, and if you would like, comment or follow our pages, it helps us find more listeners just like you. Until next time, I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

Richard Shotton: I'm Richard Shotton.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Thank you so much for listening.

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