Ep 112 - The Four P's of Marketing: Promotion

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 diving into our miniseries on the four Ps of marketing.

In today's episode, we explore promotion. Let's get into it. So Richard, this is an episode we've been excited to record for quite some time.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. The four Ps has been a great miniseries, I think. Okay. Promotion is our bread and butter. So this is, there's some really nice examples coming up.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yes. So as a reminder, you have in the four Ps you have place, you have product, you have.

Help me out here.

Richard Shotton: Price

MichaelAaron Flicker: Price. And then you have

Richard Shotton: promotion.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yes, we got that. We got a little confused there. [00:01:00] But we have these four major classic areas that help when you first learn about marketing, they create the they create the pillars from which all marketing, thinking and and much of original marketing academics come from.

And promotion is really maybe the one that's gotten the most conversation. It's the one where when you get into marketing and specifically advertising, it's where a lot of people's brains go. So when we're talking about promotion, we're

referring to all communication activities that are used by the brand to inform, persuade, or remind.

The target about the brand. And so the goal of the promotion pillar is to generate awareness, highlight its unique the brand's unique value and ultimately to drive sales. And under the umbrella of [00:02:00] promotion sits advertising, sales, promotion. Pr, social media, direct marketing, all of the ways that you talk about the brand.

And so it's really a quite a big umbrella. And so often when you're engaging with brands or you're engaging internally at an agency, you're reminding people there's so much more than just promotion. Don't limit your thinking only to the promotion pillar. But that's why we saved it for the fourth of four because we said.

Let's get through these other critical pillars. But now we've got a little time to indulge. We can talk about the many ways that behavioral science can impact the pillar of promotion. And I think let's get into it with that. How's that sound?

Richard Shotton: Sounds good. Sounds good.

MichaelAaron Flicker: So from our book.

We have this lovely study and we have this lovely story. [00:03:00] So I'll set the place to get us started here and and we'll use it as a jumping off point. It's the late 1970s and imagine a American fish importer that you may have never heard of. His name is Lee Lance, and he has discovered this amazing.

New fish that he believes will be perfect for the American palate. It's buttery melting your mouth flavor. It's flaky but firm, and he just knows that the American market would love it, but restaurant to restaurant, he can't seem to get anyone to pick up the fish and start selling it. And eventually has this insight.

You know what? Maybe it's the name of the fish itself. That's my problem. It's not the product, it's the actual name. And he thinks maybe Patagonian tooth fish isn't the most appealing thing to put on a menu. He [00:04:00] renames it. Chilean sea bass. And in the 1990s, they see a 30 fold increase in consumption in America alone.

So this is an amazing reminder that sometimes a single. Word or a single name could have an oversized impact on the effectiveness of your brand, on the effectiveness of your product. And when you and I were talking about this and

authoring the book, we looked for a study that could really. Typify this, how could we bring it down to one academic study?

And we found a great study run out of the University of Washington by Elizabeth Loftus and John Palmer, and it's 1974, and they're going, they're running a study to see if they can determine the impact of a single word. So [00:05:00] here's how the study goes. They show one of these classic car crash scenes.

There are two cars. They're speeding towards one another, and everyone who is a part of the study sees the same video clip. And what they're asking is, how fast was the car moving when they. Now this is the trick. When they touched each other, when they collided with each other, the trick in the experiment is that they change the word, the verb used to describe the action that's occurring.

And so in some instances, they asked how fast was the car going when they contacted one another. Other times they say, hit bump, collide. It. And at the top end, how fast were they going when they smashed into one another? And by changing just that one word, [00:06:00] how fast were the cars going when they contacted one another?

The average response is 31.8. How fast were the cars going when they smashed one another 40.5 miles an hour? That's a 27% change by just changing that one word. And it's a great example. How just changing one word can have a big impact on how people perceive what they're seeing in the video.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. It is an amazing video and we'll stick a link to a replication of it in the show notes.

And the original reason the academics did this study was that they were really skeptical about witness testimony. They believed that a skilled policeman could, by the words they used, steer what people remembered about an instance and an instant and get the witness to say what they wanted. So they were trying to run an experiment to make people a little bit more skeptical about witness testimony.

I. [00:07:00] What was proven in the criminal world is super relevant in the commercial world. It's essentially an argument that we don't experience reality neutrally. What we experience is filtered through a lens of the language that's used to describe reality. So if I say, these cars smashed together that has a sense of energy and speed, we assume they were going faster.

And if I say the cars. Contacted each other now that principle, that language affect our actual experience of the world. I think Lance was a genius to realize that in the world of fish now who wants to eat a Patagonian tooth fish? It feels spiky and inedible and unappetizing, chilian, sea bass much nicer.

And he's not the only fish importer that's had this idea. I think what's even more amazing is it's a repeated tactic that fish importers have used. [00:08:00] So it used to be that people tried to sell dolphin fish. No one wants to eat a dolphin. Not even that. They are related to dolphins, but no one wants to eat something that's called dolphin fish.

So it was rebranded as mahi. No one wants to eat mud bugs, so they were rebranded as crawfish. Now amazing again and again. We see this idea if you change the language, you change people's experience in the event. Now, of course 99% of our listeners, maybe 99.99% of our listeners are not gonna be working in the fish import business.

But all these experiments, people should focus on the core insight or the peripheral detail, and you could apply this whatever business you work in. If you run a restaurant and you want people to order. Vegetable dishes. Don't refer to them as meat free. That emphasizes deprivation. Refer to them as feel grown.

That's much more appealing. If you are [00:09:00] running a clothes store. Don't say that you sell secondhand clothes. Know that just makes them sound a bit old and poor quality. Say that it's vintage. If you are a politician and you want people to be happy paying their. Inheritance tax, call it estate tax.

If you are a Republican and you don't want people to pay that tax, you want to be angry about it, call it a death tax. It's the same thing, but one draws attention to the fact that it's asked for an inopportune time. One draws attention to the fact that it's generally paid by very rich people.

If you change the language, you can change people's perception of the event. So I think there's so many opportunities for brands here.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And I think something that can get easily misunderstood, I think. Everyone can generally agree that language is important, and the way you frame something is critical that we can all agree on.

The point that we're driving at here is think about the most critical part of your [00:10:00] sales proposition, the most critical part of your branding, and be very

cautious about the way you use those words because they leave it emotional resonance on the listener, on the buyer that you can, that, that you can use.

To your advantage if you're very specific. So of course be thoughtful about all the words, but we're making the point about the specific value prop in that moment. Is that fair?

Richard Shotton: And I think maybe pushing on this point of. People we say people recognize the value of language. I think they do to a degree, but my argument would be most people underestimate the importance of the language that's used.

Now, there are extreme examples and this amazing one from Lee Lance that demonstrate that and people might get, okay, I can see I eat a chili sea bass, not pascalian tooth fish, but I think often businesses will leave. An inappropriate word on the website because they assume if the product's good enough, if the situation is dealt with it well enough it doesn't matter that much.

So [00:11:00] really mundane example, and this one's backed up by evidence, there's a lovely study from 2019 by Robert Peterson who's at the University of Texas, and he looked at the language you use to describe items that aren't there to buy on a website. And in his experiment sometimes those items were labeled.

Unavailable sometimes out of stock, sometimes sold out, and he gets people to go through a purchasing journey, a thousand plus people, and they are randomized into different groups and people see the situation with a different label. He then asks everyone to rate how disappointed they are with the website, and his finding is people are 15% less disappointed if you say an item is sold out rather than unavailable.

And his argument, it's is all about what that language infers. If you say unavailable, it insinuates the organization that's been really poor in their logistics. [00:12:00] If you say sold out or suddenly you as a business are drawing attention to the fact that the brand is very popular and that harnesses social proof.

We want things that other people want so even in these areas. I think an awful lot of people would look at their website and think all the language is great. I've said, it's out stock. That's absolutely fine. What we are arguing is these tiny changes, even in areas where people are assuming it's all okay, there's so much room for improvement.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I think this is it's a great reminder for us all as marketers to say, where can we even take something that we think is good and make it great by saying, have we really been intentional? The one other area that comes to mind, Richard is in the B2B space when you're selling maybe to what you assume is a more technical buyer, so often, we've seen that brands that have a technical buyer or selling to another business [00:13:00] with, let's say, a more educated buyer, they'll use terms or they'll use phrases that we would call inside the wet way or inside baseball. These are American terms. They mean that they're only known to the people that are in the game.

And there may be a danger in that as well, right? Because when you do that, you are really assuming that you understand that the other person who's buying it understands, and that may or may not be true and you're cre and you might be unintentionally creating creating dissonance or creating an a distance with your buyer.

Especially when we have more technical products to sell, or more B2B products to sell. I think this rule really is helpful to say, what do we, if you stepped away from it how could it be affecting someone that's in the buying journey? Even in those instances, I think you might find that there's a more effective way to talk about it.

Maybe [00:14:00] without using technical terms.

Richard Shotton: Oh, I think that's a very fair point. The, it is very easy in the world of professional services B2B to fall into the trap as an expert of using complicated language because you are so used to it. It feels second nature. The problem is you are generally selling to someone who doesn't know your services as well as you do almost by Yeah.

Definition. And therefore it's, it can feel far more complex and off putting than often we believe. So yeah, a radical simplification of language when it comes to professional services would be a great boon to everyone.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Okay. That covers our first area of how we want folks to approach promotions and be really thoughtful about the language that they use.

And we have another take on this, a separate, interesting example that we thought we would bring to the table.

Richard Shotton: And there were so many examples of where you can apply behavioral [00:15:00] science to pro promotion, and therefore we've really narrowed down on some of the more surprising examples. The Patagonian two fishes isn't as well known as it should be.

Another lesser known campaign is from Buckleys, so you know. If you've got Canadian listeners, they'll know this inside out. But if you are in any other market around the world, it's not a very well known brand. And that is a a shame because they have been amazingly successful. So Buckleys was this family owned brand set up in 1990, and it does reasonably well.

It comes from this kind of small start to, from a reasonably big cough syrup in Canada. So by 1986, it was the ninth biggest cough syrup in the market. But still lots and lots of brands massively outselling it. So in 1996, they decide that they're gonna change their advertising. [00:16:00] They get this amazing copywriter called Peter Burn, and he comes up with one of the great lines in Canadian advertising.

Now he comes up this phrase, it tastes awful and it works. That was the strap line in 1986. It's still the strap line today. And the success was phenomenal. By 1992, they were the biggest cough syrup in Canada, not through increasing spend. They were still massively outspent by the global players, but within six years, they had got to the top of the market.

And I think a lot of this is based on a really sound, psychological insight. People. Are skeptical about what brands say they are. Aware that brands cannot be all things to all people. So what Buckley's did by admitting to a flaw, they harnessed this amazing idea [00:17:00] called the pratfall effect.

So the pratfall effect. We've discussed this on many different occasions. We cover it in the Guinness Chapter of hacking the human Mind. It's the idea that we find people or products more appealing if they admit to a flaw. So the original work was done back in 1966 by Elliot Aronson at Harvard, and what he essentially showed in his experiment was if you have footage of a contestant doing amazingly well at a quiz.

And some people watch that and then rate how much they like the contestant, and you show other people the same footage, but then you add on a little bit at the end where the contestant makes a mistake. Is that second group, the people who see the amazing performance and the spillage of a coffee cup down the contestant itself, they will rate that contestant as being far more appealing than the group that just see a, an amazing quiz performance.

And to the order of [00:18:00] 45. 5%. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So this was the first experiment in the era of practical effect. And it's essentially the argument that. We find people or products would admit to or exhibit a flaw that much more appealing.

MichaelAaron Flicker: It's such a human thing to just assume you should avoid your weaknesses, go to where you're strong, be be extra focused there.

But as you're talking about. You have to think about the receiver of your message. People know that advertising is designed to sell things to you, and so naturally their defenses are higher. Bill ach, a famous leader in the industry, in the advertising industry, once stated a small admission. Gains a large acceptance.

And so it, it was his insight that created that that he [00:19:00] used on many great campaigns. He was the leader that did Avis campaign. We're number two, so we try harder. Same concept, right? That, that there was a small admission. Hertz was number one in the market, Avis was number two. Everyone knew that they were a smaller competitor.

So you can give that small admission, but you can get a really large acceptance because of it. I think it's just it. It requires you to stop thinking about only what do I wanna sell? How much do I wanna sell it? And you have to start thinking about the receiver. What do they hear? And what other preconceived notions do they have about you that allows you to start communicating in this way?

Advertisement: Yeah,

Richard Shotton: absolutely. And I think wonderful quote from Burn Back draws attention to the fact that admitting a flaw makes you more believable. And if tangibly prove your honesty, everything else you say becomes that much more believable. And I think it gives, as you say, a bit of humanness it makes you feel a bit more approachable [00:20:00] less of a show off.

But the interesting thing with Buckley's, and I think some of those great pieces of work that, that Biba did is they didn't just pick a floor randomly. Now. The third benefit of admitting a flaw is if you pick the right one. So Buckley's is always about the foul taste. So the line is, it tastes awful and it works.

But then they play with that very creatively. So there were some particular lines they came up with. One of my favorites is a poster and it's got a picture of the bottle and it says The largest bottle we sell is 200 milliliters. Anything larger

would be cruel. It tastes awful and it works. Or there is a great line and really early ad from mid eighties.

And it was a picture of was it, I think Frank Buckley was the of the kind of face, the figurehead of the company I wake up with. I wake up with nightmares that someone gave me a taste of my own [00:21:00] medicine. It tastes awful and it works. So what they did very cleverly was emphasize foul taste because they knew.

That people tend to have this sense of trade offs in their mind that a brand can't be all things to all people. So if you say you taste amazing, people assume you're probably not as potent. Whereas if you admit you taste foul, you've got bad taste. People assume your efficacy has has gone up.

So the key thing to use this bias, which differentiates a medioc use from a brilliant use, is to think what is your core strength? And then is there a mirror weakness that you could admit to, which would emphasize that strength? Now there is experimental evidence that supports this, so it's not quite so well known as some of the other academics we've talked about.

But Ger Bonner that Bela Feld University ran a brilliant study in 2003, [00:22:00] and he shows people ads for a fictitious Italian restaurant. Divide the participants into three groups, and the first group just see a ad, which makes positive claims about the business, essentially emphasizes it's got this lovely cozy atmosphere.

And when people rate the quality of that business, I think it was a seven point scale. The average rating is 4.29. Higher the better. Okay?

Second group of people, they see that same description about the cozy atmosphere. Then the ad also admits to a weakness or a flaw in the restaurant. But crucially, the flaw is unrelated to the positive.

So it talks about the cozy atmosphere, but then says we don't have any dedicated parking spaces outside. And you see this very small improvement. Maybe it's from that credibility point. Maybe it's just from the humanness of admitting a flaw, but it's very small. It's [00:23:00] they go up to 4.515% improvement.

But then this idea of the power of a related flaw. People, the third group, they see the same discussion of the cozy atmosphere. But this time, the ad also mentions that unfortunately, we can't accommodate parties of more than four

people. Now that weakness of not being able to accommodate big parties is completely intimately related with coziness.

It's a demonstration of the smallness of the restaurant and when the weakness is linked. To the benefit, that's when you get the biggest effect. That was the group that had the highest rating for the restaurant. So there that group rated a 5.62 out of seven, whereas remember just saying the positive stuff was 4.29.

So there is this 31% increase in appeal of the restaurant if you admit to a related flaw. So the thing I think brands can learn from [00:24:00] Buckley's. If don't just randomly pick a floor, you wanna be spending an awful lot of time. Think about what is the ideal floor for your particular brand,

MichaelAaron Flicker: and maybe to drive home the point.

If you believe that people are going to fill in the blank anyway, they're not just going to receive your messaging, your promotional messaging, with 100% belief they're always going to fill in. But here's the counter valence. Here's the balance. By giving them the counter valence first by saying, here's this law and here's the mirror strength.

We're giving them the, we're giving them the setup already, and we know. What we've covered for a long time, that humans are a little cognitively lazy. They're not going to do the extra level of investigation interrogation if we give them something to set up. So if we give them a really [00:25:00] believable flaw, like Buckley's taste terrible, if we give them a believable flaw, like this tiny restaurant is cozy, and so they can't take more than four seats, more four diners at a time at the table.

We are really giving them that interrogation that they are likely to do anyway, but we're giving them the best version of that interrogation that gives us the best light and puts us in the best in the best area. So if you believe people are going to be evaluative in their analysis, then it only behooves us to give 'em the best version of that evaluation.

Is that fair?

Richard Shotton: I think that's, I think it's a lovely way of putting it. People know that products can't be perfect. They can't be all things to all people. There are always trade offs. So that's the assumption people are coming to your communications with. If you just tell them the amazing things, you've left it up

to them to work out where the negative is, and they might assume the [00:26:00] negative lines in a very important area.

If you steer them, if you tell them where the negative is. Area is actively well, you can steer them towards a, an area of only limited consequence. So absolutely do not assume. The best thing to do is just list all your positives. If you do that, your audience will be thinking about for themselves where the negative lies better to be proactive, better to steer them.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Certainly the data shows if you steer them and the jackpot is if you steer them with where you have in your strength, then you've given yourself a double benefit. A, you've removed the interrogation they were gonna do on your promotional claim anyway, and B, you've given them a positive to, to balance it out, which is going to, which is going to give you a better outcome than not addressing it at all.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. And you mentioned Burn [00:27:00] back earlier. You can see the same thing with vw they had famous lines like ugly is only skin deep. Now, why would a car brand tell its audience? It doesn't look very fancy. But I think what they did in a lot of the body copy was say essentially, look.

We are not beautiful. But the reason we're not beautiful is because we don't prioritize aesthetics. That's what Ford do. That's what General Motors do. At Volkswagen we are solely interested in engineering excellence. So essentially they use the ugliness as that proof point for engineering excellence.

Too many businesses think that people hear what they say. If you just say you're amazing, that doesn't mean people believe you're amazing. You've got to, I think, use some of these tactics to tr to translate the benefit and make it more potent, more believable, and admitting to that mirror flaw is one way to do that.

MichaelAaron Flicker: [00:28:00] I was just thinking about how as an American, I don't know Buckley's cough syrup, but I do know Listerine. And Listerine, yeah. Uses almost a exact same tactic. They say the taste you can hate twice a day, right? Yeah. I mean that it's the same concept of, because it's so effective. It must be not pleasant to rinse your mouth with it.

Richard Shotton: And there is something there. As an industry, we're often obsessed with originality. But you've got Buckleys in Canada using this tactic list reading in America. There was, TCP did it in Britain with very similar lines. You, in this particular category, the marketers have taken ideas that have worked really well in one geography.

They've identified the behavioral science principle at the heart, and they've applied them elsewhere. I think as an industry should be doing that far more, rather than thinking every brief we have to come up with an idea. Offer a blank sheet of paper. Let's [00:29:00] learn from all those brands that have faced similar challenges in different markets.

I think there's a massive opportunity to do that more.

MichaelAaron Flicker: It, you and I on a completely different area were so it was so fun to discover that in Britain they have the fluent device, the character. Discover the Meca and I had no idea it was the almost same exact character as the American Geico Gecko.

These were same, nearly same industries with nearly the same characters doing nearly the same stunts in their advertising. They, you could layer them next to each other and you would see similar behavior. Really incredible.

Richard Shotton: Yeah, absolutely. So you think. Geico created the Gecko first.

And crucially, you've got this gecko with a British accent being quite charming. Few years later, compare the market in Britain, which is an insurance [00:30:00] comparison site, does something remarkably similar. They create Alexander the me Cap. 'cause they play on this idea that people are turning up at his website, compare the Meca and they are actually looking for compare the market, the insurance comparison site.

And he has this very strong. Russian accent, and it's a carbon copy of the idea and it has been phenomenally successful. And compare the Meca, we're a small player. I think they may be fourth, before the Meca came along, and now they're by far and away the biggest player in Britain in that particular market.

And that isn't in any way to disrespect the agency behind it in Britain, VCCP, they've. Worked out what's been very successful elsewhere. They've taken that idea of converting a vague, abstract idea of value for money into a tangible, concrete thing that you can visualize, and that makes it much, much more powerful.

And then the way they've executed their individual bits of creative are phenomenally [00:31:00] funny. That is a very hard thing to do. They have executed it absolutely amazingly so I think they had the humility to learn from

elsewhere, and then the executional brilliance of, of, of the, what, probably a 20 year campaign now,

MichaelAaron Flicker: and it's a final comment on this and then we can get back to all the promotions.

But it's interesting to think about when you look for inspiration mouthwash and cough syrup, you may not look in those categories, but practically they're both things that go in your mouth that have a taste that are leading to an effect an insurance provider. Like Geico and a comparison site of multiple insurance providers, they may not see themselves as in the same narrow category when you go to look for inspiration.

So even the point of where you go and look for inspiration or go to look for what learnings you can have, [00:32:00] not being so narrow as only looking at. Brown alcohol, spirits, or clear alcohol spirits. Not looking only at candy, but looking at all things that you eat can really help widen the aperture and get you the right insights.

It's just a nice reminder when you're thinking about how to get inspiration for your promotions. You could be a little bit more broad if you think about the consumer behavior behind it.

Richard Shotton: Another great use of the practical effect in advertising would be good things come to those who wait.

This Guinness line and I might get slightly wrong, but Heinz ketchup, I'm pretty sure a few years earlier, said something remarkably, which is the, isn't it the best things come to those who wait. Guinness, one of the most successful lines ever, remarkably similar to a line that a. Source brand ran a few years earlier.

So absolutely you can still, '

MichaelAaron Flicker: cause in Hinz, you have to wait for the ketchup to come [00:33:00] out. Just like in Guinness, you have to wait for the head to go down after the bartender's first pour. So they both have the same flaw, which is it takes a little longer to get to the product that you want.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. Yeah.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Brilliant. Okay.

Richard Shotton: Yeah,

MichaelAaron Flicker: so let's go to our third bias. Yeah. And our third insight that we want marketers to be thinking about as they're saying, how can I improve my promotions? How can I do even better in the promotional pillar?

Richard Shotton: Yeah. So what we've started with are. Two surprising campaigns. A lot of people won't have heard of but's, cloth syrup or the patian tooth fish.

For this third example, we pushed it even further and thought what experiment is out there that we can't find? Many great examples of being used, but that is a massive opportunity. So a bias that could be used far more [00:34:00] often. And this is an idea called the But you are free. Technique. And I think especially in one-to-one communications sales conversations, direct marketing, this is a really big opportunity that we can apply much more.

So the experiment comes from. Nicholas again, who was at South Brittany University and back in 2000. He does a slightly strange experiment and we can discuss that later. Bizarrely psychologists seem to love dressing up as beggars. I just dunno what's going on here. There are quite a few studies where psychologists dress up as beggars and then they test what techniques they can use to generate as much cash as possible.

So what Kaga does is he goes out into the street and he tries to get people to give him money. So the control language, he says, excuse me sir, would you have some coins? So I can take the bus and [00:35:00] 10% of people give him cash, and on average he gets 48 cents. Next group of people, and this is the, but you are free.

Technique. He says, excuse me sir. Would you have some coins to take the, so I can take the bus please, but you are free to accept or to refuse. So it's exactly the same language at the beginning, but he adds on at the end this key phrase, but you are free to accept or refuse. And when he does that. There is a very large change.

This is one of the largest change we've talked about. Compliance goes from 10% in the control to 48% when he uses the free technique. And average money that people give goes from 48 cents to one. I guess it's one Euro. One Euro, and 4 cents. So you've got nearly a fivefold increase of people handing over money, and they give twice as much.

So you combine it, you've got this tenfold increase. Now the argument here. [00:36:00] The, one of the really big drives of human behavior is this desire to retain a sense of control. Psychologists might say, desire to retain a sense of agency. We like to feel that we are in charge of our lives. Now, the interesting thing is when again, emphasizes people have the freedom to say no.

In reality, he's not changing the setup because of course, if a bagger comes to you, you can say whatever you want. You're not obliged to give them money. So all Gagan is doing is drawing attention to that freedom. Freedom order exists. It's whether or not the requester reminds the potential donor and he's experiment suggests if you explicitly, proactively draw attention to his autonomy, it increases compliance.

MichaelAaron Flicker: It's interesting [00:37:00] you were making light of using the beggar as the example, and it occurs to me, maybe it's trying to get at like your natural human behavior. Outside of a commercial setting, like you're trying to say like, how do humans actually behave when no one's watching?

When there is no, when there is no money. There's money on the line, but there's no calculus of a benefit in exchange for the money. It's trying to get at something maybe more natural, maybe.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. I, so I think it's simple for the. Experimenter you can put on some shabby clothes and then go and stop people straight away.

I think that low level of cost and effort probably appeals to busy psychologists. And then the other thing is the data is more robust than if you've asked some students to imagine a s. It's [00:38:00] really powerful when you're getting people to hand over actual cash, yeah. This isn't them speculating.

Would they donate? They're looking at actual donations. So I think it's a mix of ease to do as long as you're you're not, don't get too embarrassed easily, but there's an element if it's easy to do, and it's a reasonably naturally setting that people won't think means that they're taking part in the psychology experiment.

So I, I think that and you've got real. Cash being involved. So those three things, natural, easy and cash involved, make it a powerful experiment.

MichaelAaron Flicker: But we didn't stop there. We pushed ourselves to say, yeah, is it, is this provable beyond

Richard Shotton: oh

MichaelAaron Flicker: a, a very compelling academic study?

Richard Shotton: No. So that's fine. I think.

The, those three criteria are important, but you're absolutely right. If you find a single study, especially a single study that sees a massive result, you want to query it both in terms of does this [00:39:00] replicate and is that massive result gonna be seen elsewhere? So what you really want is. Other psychologists to have waited a few years and then analyzed all the different experiments on a particular technique to see if the findings hold.

So Gga does this study in 2020 12. Christopher Carpenter at Westin Law University decides there's enough papers now that he can. Run this meta-analysis. He looks at 42 studies, which have tested the, but you are free technique. And he finds absolutely and not the same scale that was found in the original experiment.

It does drop back slightly, but he finds in a variety of settings, a variety of requests. If you emphasize someone's freedom, they are more likely to do what you want. Yes, first study done this like bizarre setting, but we've got enough studies now that we know this can work in [00:40:00] commercial settings too.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And as you're sharing this, I'm thinking about all of the, all of the different ways this is used, even in the charity sector when asking for donations. But even indeed, a c e-commerce when you are when you're at a bakery and they offer you a free sample you're free to accept it or not, but it's it gives you that, that better sense.

Or when you go to a D two c e-commerce site. And they say, sign up for our newsletter or you're free not to. Or the other one that comes to mind is when you go to a local news website all across America. Yeah. They say, we see you have your ad blocker on please turn it off. Or you're free not to support us a little bit more, a little bit more of a push.

But in all these instances, they're just [00:41:00] reminding you. You have a choice and let's see what you do. They're reminding you of that choice, which of course you had. Anyway,

Richard Shotton: so the, there's a local coffee shop quite close to me, and the guy that works in it is just like a genius salesperson.

So there's a, it is a brand called Cafe Niro, and they do a regular thing of you go in and you order your cappuccino are flat white, and they say it's three pound 40th flat white. Or for an extra 30 pence, you can have the Brazilian beans now straight away. That is a really well behaviorally science informed.

Business principle because they do it in every single shop. There's an idea called price differentials. Now, if you say to someone flat white is three pound 40, you can have a fancy bean for three pound 70. You'll get few acceptances. If you say three 40. Or an extra 30 pence for the fancier beans, you get much better acceptance.

So talking about price differentials [00:42:00] rather than price totals encourages premiumization, but what the barista at the local coffee shop does, he's, he always says, look completely up to you, you're free to. Except or not so I think often people that work in a customer facing environment, they're paying attention to what they're doing, the front lines, they notice these things work through trial and error.

They might never have heard of the academic study, but through trial and error, they've worked out what gets that extra extra spend. So yeah, CAFE is, I think is a lovely example of someone applying it.

MichaelAaron Flicker: There's a slightly different set of studies that come to mind a lot in the 1990s and early two thousands.

In America, you would receive a letter from a nonprofit, and in it would have a penny or it would have stickers with your [00:43:00] return address on. This was a very common technique. This is a little different than what we're talking about here. But it's got a similar insight about gifting with the exp expect that then creates an expectation of return.

Maybe you could explain that a little bit. Yeah. And we can talk about how they're different. 'cause they're similar in their execution, but they're a little bit of a different insight, right?

Richard Shotton: Yeah, you are. So I think the principle they're applying there is reciprocity. So that is the idea that if we receive a gift.

This is true across the world. Whatever culture people are in, if you receive a gift, there is an obligation to return the favor at lay state. Cini wrote influence back in 1984 and originally had six key principles of persuasion. Later issues.

Now have a seventh, but one of those six was reciproc. And what you've just described, I think is a powerful way of charities to, to harness that.

You give people the [00:44:00] gift of the penny and then you think that you will recoup more cash in more generous donations in response. There are experiments that back that up. I'm struggling from with the academic's name. I think it might be Kesler, but we'll put it in the show notes and we'll see if I'm right or not.

But what the basic setup does, I can remember. So they send out thousands, one thousands of direct mail pieces asking people to donate. Some people get a letter talking about sexual third world poverty. Other people get the same letter, but a free postcard. And it's positioned as being a gift from the children of daca.

Other people get same letter and five postcards, and what they see is absolutely, there is a nice, big statistical significant uplift in donations. One postcard, even bigger one if you get five. So that, and they far offset the cost of including the postcard. So their [00:45:00] argument was, this is reciproc prostate work.

If you actively give someone a a generous gift, that person then feel was obliged to return the favor. So charities couldn't apply this very powerfully.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I think it's just so helpful to hear that difference and to think about there's so much in our power when we're trying to get to effective promotions and these differences.

There's related, or at least similar insights that you can choose from about what's gonna be most effective in your situation.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. You could say they are linked by a generosity of spirit. You are giving. Something in both occasions on the, but you are free principle. You are giving people an easy get out.

In the reciprocity example, you are giving them a physical gift. Now both of these gifts of either freedom or [00:46:00] physical products, they create almost counterintuitive, slightly paradoxes rate, greater income. So I really like these, sometimes I don't like hard sales and I feel a bit awkward, especially for my own kind of consultancy or business.

So knowing that you can be true to your own characteristics of maybe being a little bit more introverted, a little bit. Less hard and pushy and emphasize

freedom. Now I like this both as a a technique for its effectiveness, but also I feel it fits with the style of how I'd like to behave.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah, I think that's lovely because there's different tools that support different styles as well.

And it's not only just about. Do I know enough of the case studies, enough of the academics, enough of the examples to apply to the business case. It's actually, do I have the right style that matches the brand tone? Yes. Do I have the right style? Yeah, please,

Richard Shotton: yes. Yeah, because you're absolutely [00:47:00] right.

The academics will try and hold everything equal. They'll do a test and then they'll use respiratory or not use, but you're free. Or not use humor or not. But of course let's say you're a person, I'd be particularly good at this. Let's say I read a study, which is all about making a joke encourages people to give you more money.

That might be great. In principle, but if you're not particularly humorous or you don't like fucking jokes, then it's gonna fall flat. It, you've got to pick the experiments that either match the features and context of your business or brand or on that one-to-one. Aspect that reflects your kind of inner self.

And I would think about all these behavioral science experiments as this giant range of tools that you can pick up. You don't have to use all of them. You've gotta have that insight and knowledge about your own self to make sure you pick the right one.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. It cre it, it just reminds me where, with the episodes all [00:48:00] about promotion and how we can communicate with others to persuade them to buy more of our brand or believe more in our in our product.

And that consistency matters. Having a tone, having a, having, being consistent, being true to the brand gives you that consistency in market. It, there's a lot of knock on benefits. We've talked about the mirror exposure effect. We've talked about other things where just being consistent, being reliably the same has a lot of benefit at the end of the day.

And so being it's so easy as a marketer or as an agency to wanna. Keep trying new things, keep changing things up, but finding that one right tone, finding that

one right set of tactics and reliably using them, I think just makes your brand more powerful in the market.

Richard Shotton: Great. Agree.

MichaelAaron Flicker: So we wrap up our big, our big discussion today.

Richard Shotton: Yes. So what have we covered? We've covered [00:49:00] three big things. We have talked about the power of language, how that can often be underestimated, and we talked about the Lofter and Palmer car crash study, which show that people do not interpret reality neutrally. They interpret it through a lens of the language that's used to describe it.

So if you change the language of how you describe your products, you'll change people's perception. You'll change their actual experience. So we talked about. Commonplace examples of being able to apply that, say vintage, not secondhand, say, sold out, not out of stock. That was the first experiment and that was related to the story of the Patagonian two fish.

We then talked about the idea of the pratfall effect. So the idea from Elliot Aronson 1966, if you admit a flaw, you become more appealing. But we really focused in, not on that study that we've covered a few times, but one we talk about far less frequently, which is the GERD Bonner study, which says it's really important [00:50:00] to identify the right floor that you admit you need to be picking a floor that mirrors.

The core strength you wanna convey. So in the case of Buckley's, which we've talked about are length. If you admit that you are foul tasting people assume you must be pretty potent. You admit foul taste, you benefit in terms of perceived efficacy. So be very careful. I spend a lot of time thinking about what's your core strength, and then go out and look for that mirror weakness.

And then finally we talked about an underused principle. The but you are free technique. This is the idea that people want to retain a sense of agency, a sense of control. So if you are ever offering. Product to someone or an opportunity to upgrade. Remind them they don't have to buy it. Remind them that they have the freedom to say no and paradoxically remind 'em of that freedom and they're more likely to say yes 'cause they don't push back against [00:51:00] your overly aggressive approach.

So three big opportunities. I think listeners should spend a bit of time thinking how they can apply for their particular brand.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Thank you, Richard, and thanks for the great conversation today.

If you found this episode in this miniseries helpful, please share it with others that are excited to learn more about marketing and the way behavioral science can help make better marketing today. We'd like to thank you for listening, and please share or comment and follow our pages so that we can reach more listeners just like you.

Until next time, I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

Richard Shotton: And I'm Richard Shelton.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Thanks for listening.

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