

# Marketing science

This extract from *Peter Fisk's* bestseller *Marketing Genius* explores neuro marketing

As you pause in the supermarket aisle, or sign-off purchase orders between meetings, when it comes to the moment of decision, does all that marketing science really work?

Most purchase decisions are made in 2.6 seconds, according to the latest neurological studies. Indeed Malcolm Gladwell, author of *Blink*, says that the quicker we make decisions, the better they often are, arguing that more information often confuses rather than enhances our judgements. Rapid cognition is both intelligent and imaginative.

As you pause in the supermarket aisle, or sign-off purchase orders between meetings, when it comes to the moment of decision, does all that marketing science really work? Yes, most of it has an impact, but long before that moment of truth. The secret is to ensure that your brand is already lodged firmly in the decision-maker's mind, in their 'ROM' if you like. The challenge is to get it there, ensure that it is sticky enough to stay there, quick to recall and powerful to persuade when the moment comes.

Nike's Phil Knight explained his passion for the endorsement of sporting icons by explaining 'You can't explain much in 60 seconds, but when you show Michael Jordan, you don't have to. It's that simple.'

Insightful propositions and carefully constructed narratives are only useful if they work in the 2.6 seconds when preferences are formed and purchases made. This is where memetics matters.

Richard Dawkins first coined the phrase 'meme' in his book *The Selfish Gene*, to describe a 'unit of cultural evolution analogous to the gene', arguing that replication and mutation happens within our culture – in the language we use, the symbols we use, the behaviours we adopt – in a similar

way to genetic evolution. He considers memes as the units of information that reside in the brain.

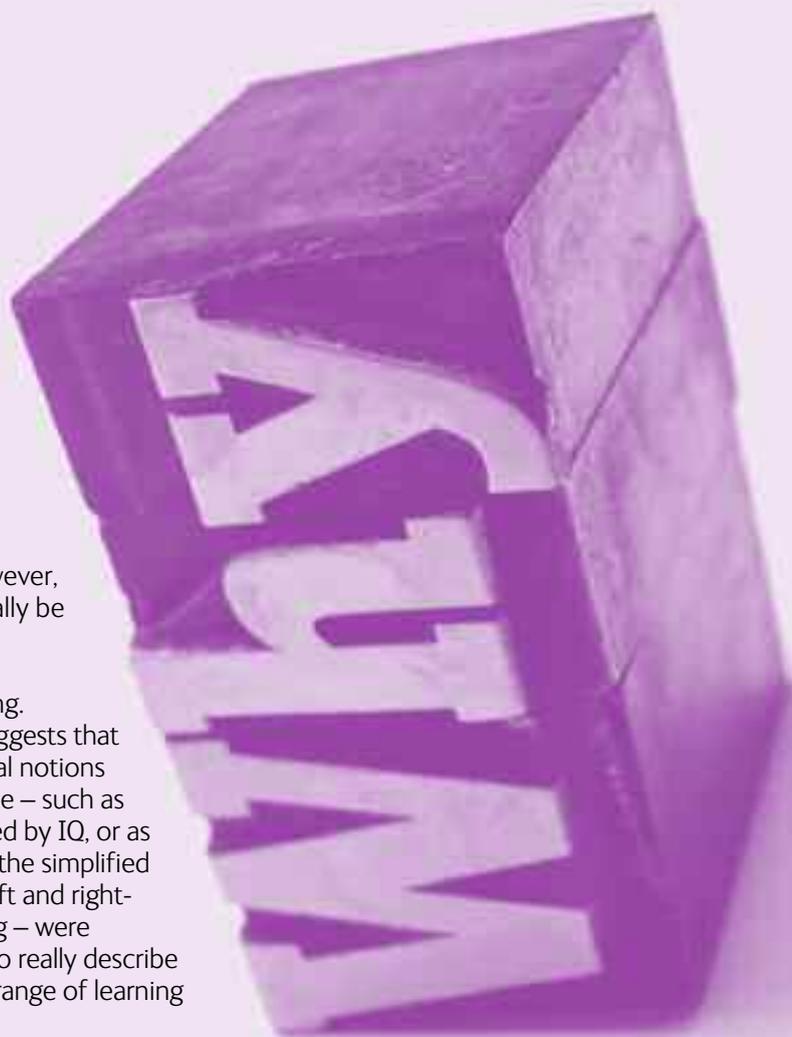
Indeed we see memes in everything from folk stories to pop songs, moral values to the latest fashions. Memes have patterns and forms that are easy to catch, to remember and to pass on. They are the basis of the songs that win the Eurovision Song Contest, or the e-mail jokes that spread rapidly over the Internet, or the latest fashions from the catwalks that everybody suddenly needs to have.

Memes are therefore important to marketers, to create brands and symbols, propositions and messages that catch people's attention, that stick in their minds, that quickly spread virally, by observation or experience, by word of mouth, e-mail or text. In order to reach out to target audiences, to leverage the power of virtual or physical networks, and to be there in people's minds at the point of purchase, value propositions and communications need to embrace memetics.

Memes stick in your mind, and can be quickly accessed. They are constructs of memory that are more memorable, recognisable and contagious.

## Examples of memes in the wider world

- Characters in children's stories, as so effectively exploited by Disney
- Folk tales, with meaning and memorable messages, passed down through generations, and evolved over time
- Melodies sung by Kylie Minogue, which you just can't get 'out of your head'
- Smells of freshly baked bread, or cut grass, or coffee, or strawberries



**In the marketing world, memes target each of our senses**

- Slogans such as Nike’s Just do it
- Colours such as the FT’s pink paper
- Music such as Intel’s five-note jingle
- ‘Nokia tune’ as played by every Nokia phone
- Designs such as Apple’s colourful iMacs
- Numbers, such as Peugeot’s trademarked central ‘0’
- Packaging such as Gateway’s cow print boxes
- Smell such as Singapore Airlines who bottle it
- E-mail offers that are quickly forwarded to wide networks
- Typography such as the script of Coca Cola’s name
- Endorsements such as Tiger Woods and Nike

**A meme should**

- Be catchy, memorable, easy to say and recall
- Include a key benefit, something to describe it by
- Be different, original and easy to distinguish
- Have emotional impact, imparting positive feelings
- Be reflective, do something personal
- Have shape, perhaps in terms of rhythm or rhyme
- Be simple, short and easy to understand
- Be contagious, so it spreads like a virus or fashion

Some of the most ground-breaking work in recent years on how people think has come from Harvard professor, Dr. Howard Gardner and his Multiple Intelligence Theory which has particularly focused on learning

methods in schools; however, it could equally be applied to consumers and marketing.

Gardner suggests that the traditional notions of intelligence – such as that measured by IQ, or as described in the simplified manner of left and right-brain thinking – were insufficient to really describe the broader range of learning processes.

In 1983 he proposed eight different types of intelligence – linguistic, logical, spatial, physical, musical, interpersonal, personal and environmental.

He argued that society puts too much emphasis on structured logical intelligence, and not enough on the more artistic aspects. If we look back at the ‘attributes of genius’ we see a strong correlation with Gardner’s eight categories, as when we consider the nature of memes.

Could it be that these memes are one of the things responsible for the way in which the public reacts to arts and culture? Do they have something to do with the way that someone chooses to take part in a particular arts activity while someone else decides not to? The AMA conference this year will focus on helping delegates to understand the complexity of audiences / visitors / participants in 2008, how audience behaviour is changing, and how the industry might start to respond. The challenge is that many people attend for a mix of

different reasons; conscious or unconscious, rational or emotional. Investigate these at **WHY? – discovering the secrets of public behaviour and the arts**, [www.a-m-a.co.uk](http://www.a-m-a.co.uk) ■



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Peter Fisk is an international business advisor, speaker and author of the bestselling *Marketing Genius* which has been translated into 25 different languages. His new book *Business Genius* about entrepreneurial growth and leadership is published in March 2008. See [www.thegeniusworks.com](http://www.thegeniusworks.com) for more details and free downloads.