



By George Van Antwerp

OVER THE PAST few years, marketing has rapidly evolved with technology, social media, and neurosciences. As consumers are taking a more active role in their health care (both willingly and unwillingly), healthcare entities are scrambling to understand how they think, how they make decisions, and how to develop programs that effectively communicate with consumers to drive appropriate and cost-effective behaviors.

“The task of neural science is to explain behavior in terms of the activities of the brain. How does the brain marshal its millions of individual nerve cells to produce behavior, and how are these cells influenced by the environment...?”¹

To accomplish this, companies are integrating different data sources, leveraging behavior science methodologies like champion/challenger tests, and stepping outside of health care for best practices. Financial services (e.g. credit card companies) have been deploying these marketing sciences for years to improve yield, but healthcare companies are just beginning to realize that in order to influence the 50 to 70 percent of healthcare costs that are lifestyle related, they will need to think differently. This new approach to

marketing and healthcare communications blends the qualitative and quantitative aspects of marketing and looks to areas like linguistics and behavioral economics for insights.

“Genetics influence how a person makes a decision based on whether their options are presented to them in a positive or negative way (framing effect)—such as being told there is an 80 percent chance of surviving or a 20 percent chance of dying during an operation.”²

One of the leading researchers in this area of neuromarketing is Martin Lindstrom, who recently authored a book called *Buy·ology*. In the book, Lindstrom walks through research where he uses functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and steady-state typography (SST) to study the brain activity during multiple marketing experiments. This analysis reveals a series of insights, including:

- ▶ Cigarette warning labels have the opposite effect on smokers.
- ▶ Logos have lost their importance, but branding matters immensely.
- ▶ The reason people chose Coke over Pepsi is because of their branding not because of taste.

“Our irrational minds, flooded with cultural biases rooted in our tradition, upbringing, and a whole lot of other subconscious factors, assert a powerful but hidden influence over the choices we make.”³

Given the challenges that we all face in terms of branding and allocation of marketing dollars, these are important things to understand. We want to make sure that as consumers increasingly control their healthcare

decisions that they choose our facilities, buy their health insurance from us, and/or view us as a trusted source of information. To achieve this, we have to get into consumers’ heads and understand how they make decisions and what will compel them to act. Since—as Martin Lindstrom points out—almost 90 percent of our buying behavior is subconscious, we have to better understand our consumers and provide them with value-added content that is tailored to their needs.

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Have you read an interesting marketing-focused book lately? We would love to hear about it. Contact CPR managing editor Jim Casey at jim.casey@truenorthcustom.com to learn how you can submit a review.

1 Eric Kandel, *Principles of Neural Science*, fourth edition

2 *Wellcome Trust*, news release, May 5, 2009

3 Martin Lindstrom, *Buy·ology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 18