

Think Smart

INTEGRATING PSYCHOLOGY AND MARKETING

Peacocks, Superyachts and the Road to Recovery

'It is not the strong, nor the intelligent who survive,' wrote Charles Darwin, 'but those who are quickest to adapt'.

Take your average peacock. Why has he evolved to make such extravagant displays when all it seems to do is to make him more conspicuous and hence more vulnerable to predators? While that's true, it ignores the perspective of the peahen. A peacock's display is the means through which males compete with each other for female attention. This is a game with the biggest prize of all at stake: genetic survival. The winners will mate and pass their genes on to future generations, the losers won't. The more ostentatious the display, the more attractive it is to the peahen. After all, to take such risks and survive, means a peacock's genes must be very strong and the peahen can feel confident that that her offspring who have these genes will have a greater chance of passing them on to future generations. This classic example of male mating behaviour shows why Freud got it so wrong when he attributed penis envy, the preserve of the defeated male, to women – size and status is the means through which men fight for the right to mate and in the world of peacocks the currency of male power is the plume. In human terms, just think about men who buy products at the top end of the luxury market. A superyacht, for instance. We are accustomed to seeing it as wasteful. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is, just like a peacock's tail, a giant advertisement. Despite the competition of countless other men and the risks to personal safety, the big boat owner has won his breeding rights. That's why in a typical superyacht ad there will be an average of three young, scantily clad young women to one middle aged man.

It is in this behaviour that we can see the biological basis of hope when economic times get tough. We are driven to consume and to make a display of it. We are not built to stop. Of course, we can hesitate, falter, even delay consumption for a time but we cannot stop. Part of the reason for this is that the typical brain has about 30% more circuits for stimulating desire than for liking and accepting what we've got. Consumption and growth are necessary in evolutionary terms, which is why the worst thing a business can do in the current climate is to believe human nature has suddenly changed and the end of the world is nigh. Adaptation is what is important and the fearless, those not driven to distraction by anxiety about the future, will emerge from the recession stronger than before. The Great Depression with its 15,000 bank failures and 25% unemployment in the US saw the emergence of world-leading brands like Kraft, La-Z-Boy, HP and The New York Times. What made these companies resilient in the face of rapid, destructive change is exactly what gives individuals the power to adapt and survive, while others die – the ability to hold their nerve, be flexible in their behaviour and to create new, imaginative displays to get themselves noticed.

NEW BUSINESS

New Business at the 'Qlik' of a Button

Cognition has been engaged by Swedish company QlikTech. QlikTech is a global leader in next-generation business intelligence solutions - its flagship technology is QlikView. [MORE>](#)

Cognition Continues to Ride the Waves

Cognition will also be working with SELEX Communications, a Finmeccanica Company. Selex is a global supplier of advanced communication, navigation and identification solutions to protect communities and critical national infrastructure. [MORE>](#)

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Our brand new website includes useful guides on a range of marketing topics, video testimonials from our clients, examples of our recent work and further information on the services we offer. Take a moment to look around to find out what we could do for you.

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DIARY DATE

15th May 2009 – 'How to Survive and Thrive During A Recession' seminar – Warwick Innovation Centre, 0900-1100.

Dr Peter Hughes from Cognition is one of three speakers at the Business Forum which looks at the problems and solutions facing the business community during the economic downturn. He will offer practical and psychological solutions on how to survive and thrive in a recession.

For more information on Cognition, visit Cognition's website or call 01926 330800.