

An Introduction to
**MARKETING
PSYCHOLOGY**



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Introduction

One key part of being a great marketer is understanding how (and why) people think and act the way they do. It's much harder to [create compelling content marketing](#), for example, if you don't know why it would be compelling to your audience in the first place.

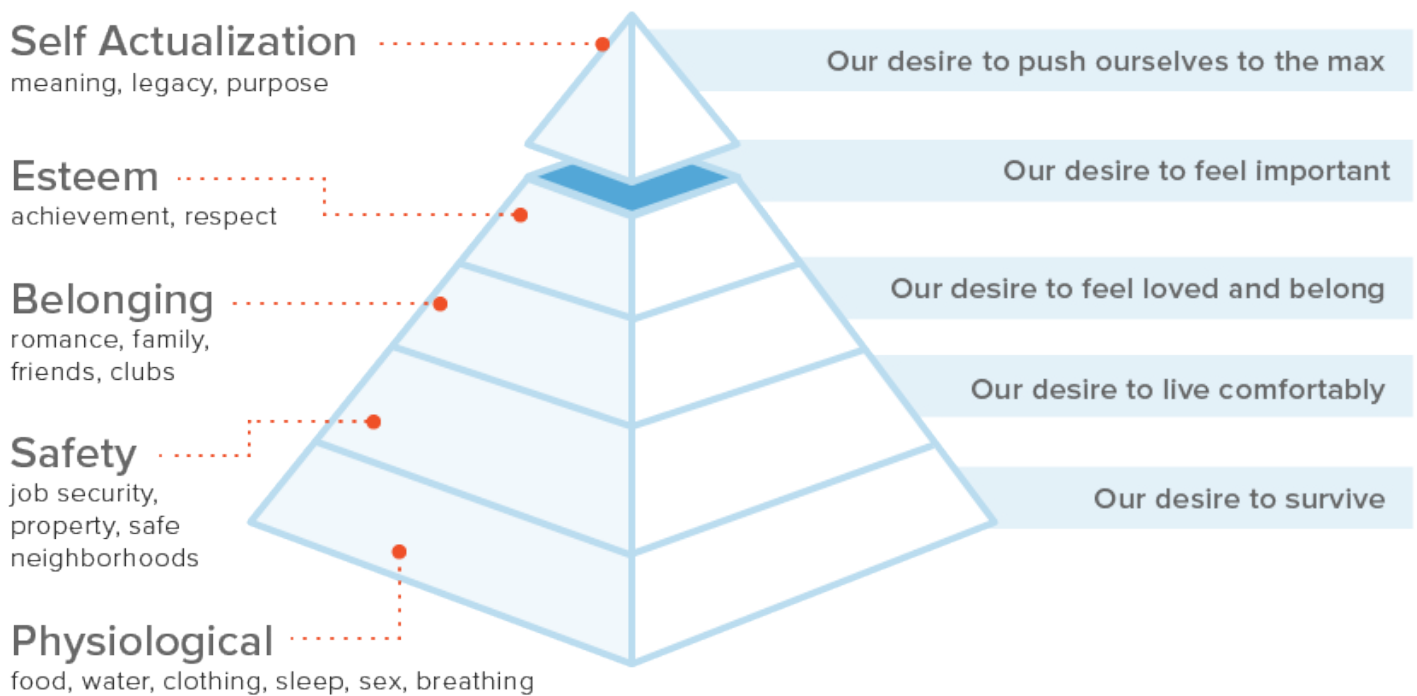
This is where looking at your marketing activities through a psychological lens can help. If you understand some of the basic elements of psychology -- and understand how those principles influence how people think, feel, and behave -- you can better connect with people, influence their behavior, and hopefully, see better business results.

So let's get started with some lessons on psychology that should help you understand basic human needs, and key principles of human behavior.

Understanding Basic Human Needs

Before we get started with key principles of human behavior, let's dig into what people truly require in order to feel happy, healthy, complete, or fulfilled. In other words, our most basic needs as humans. This section will go over the fundamental needs, both physical and emotional, that all humans seek. From there, we can better understand what motivates humans to buy products or take marketing actions.

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow introduced the world to his "Theory of Human Motivation," which later became known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This theory consists of five vital human needs, with the most basic of needs falling at the bottom. This hierarchy looks like a pyramid with physiological needs at the base. As you move up the pyramid you see safety, belonging, esteem, and finally, self-actualization at the very top.



Physiological Needs

These are the most basic human needs required to actually survive. Think about an animal in the wild, which needs to eat, drink, sleep, breathe, stay warm (or cool), and reproduce. If there's a huge snow storm coming, which products do the stores run out of? Most likely bread, water, snow shovels, and flashlights.

Safety Needs

Safety is feeling both physically safe, and also financially secure -- essentially whatever it takes to live life comfortably. For example, a person should feel safe if they are healthy, have a securely locked home in a safe neighborhood, have some type of job security with insurance and a savings plan, and they are free from stress and violence.

Example:

[Prudential - Bring Your Challenges](#)

Prudential - Bring Your Challenges
January 5 at 11:12am · ✨

See how saving just #1PercentMore could really add up in retirement.

**68% OF RETIREES WISH THEY SAVED MORE.
0% WISH THEY SAVED LESS.**

Calculate → Your 1% More For Retirement
One click could have an impact on 30 years of your life. Take the 1% More Pledge.
RACEFORRETIREMENT.COM | BY PRUDENTIAL

Like Comment Share

6,240 people like this. Top Comments -

457 shares

Prudential - Bring Your Challenges
March 19, 2015 · ✨

With Americans #LivingLonger than a generation ago, what does that mean for how we plan for a secure retirement?

100 YEAR-OLDS
(actual & projected)

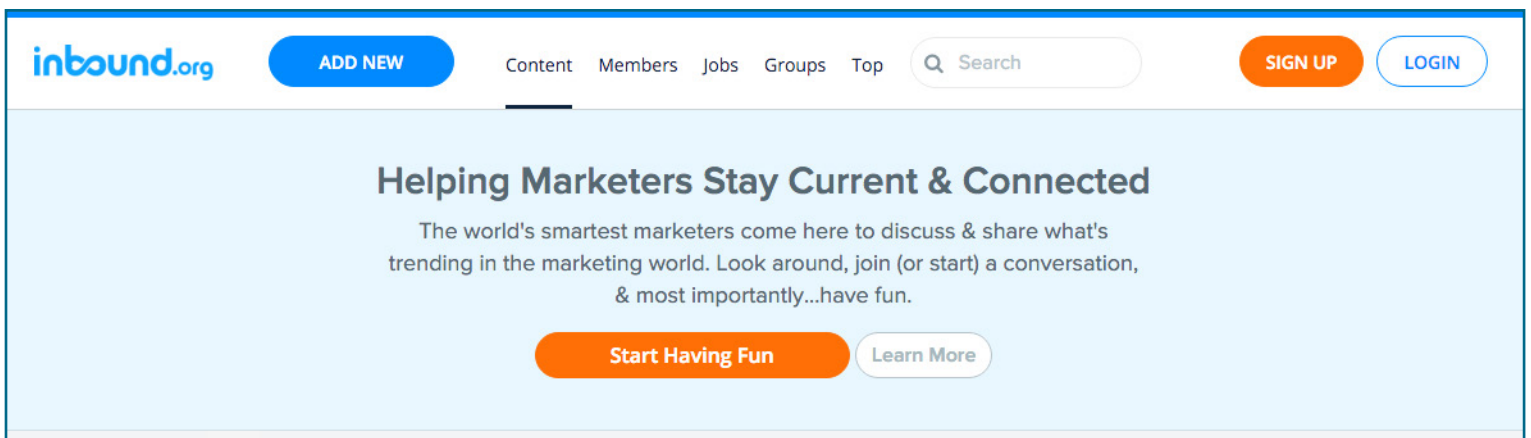
Year	Number of 100-Year-Olds
2000	54,454
2010	71,991
2020	214,000
2030	324,000
2040	447,000

Like Comment Share

Belonging (and Love)

This is where our need for community comes in. Most humans value other human interaction including family, friendship, and intimacy. We want to feel that we are loved and that we belong to a group, which many find through school, work, sports teams, religious groups, neighborhoods, or with the people you grew up with.

Example: inbound.org



Esteem

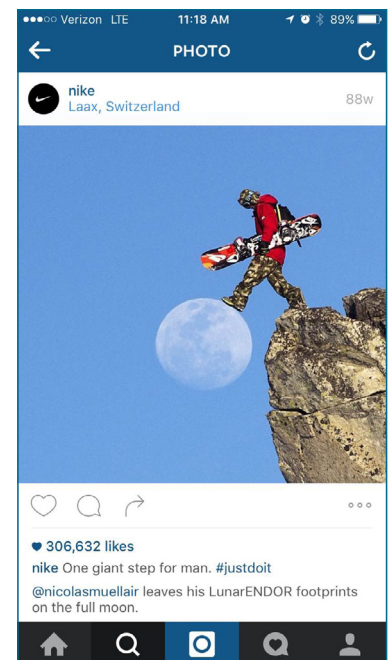
Amongst communities and society in general, you'll find there is a hierarchy of its own. Once a person feels loved and that he or she belongs to a community, the next step is to feel respected and valued within that community. We all wish to achieve so that we can feel important and adequate. For example, we might get a certain job so that we can fulfill our safety needs, but that job might also give us a sense of belonging through company culture, and esteem through promotions, raises, and recognition for great work.

Self-Actualization

Once you've reached your full potential, you've hit self-actualization. This could be finding your passion and purpose in life, finding meaning, or leaving a legacy. This is why it's not uncommon for humans to aim for fulfilling careers and/or families of their own.

This human need is also very aspirational. Maslow believed that a person must master the previous needs before achieving this final step.

Example: [Nike](#)



Whether this is the first time you've seen Maslow's needs, or this is something you studied in school, keep this diagram in your back pocket so you can revisit this theory. After all, it's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day and forget the deeper meaning behind genuine human motivation when you're putting together a marketing campaign. If you want to quiz yourself on this theory, head to a store (could be brick and mortar or online) and pick up any random product you find. Then, try to decipher which real human need(s) that product is trying to fulfill.

Now that you understand basic human needs, let's jump into some principles of human behavior.

Key Principles of Human Behavior

A big part of every marketer's job is understanding how and why our prospects behave the way they do. We do our keyword research, we develop buyer personas, and we track where people are most likely to click on our site pages.

But there's more to the story. What about the psychology behind your prospects' behaviors? How useful would it be if you could predict or inform their behavior, and then base your marketing on that information?

Armed with a few psychology lessons, you can get pretty darn close. In this section, we'll dive into some theories that can be applied to marketing to help you reach your target buyers more effectively.

Priming

Have you ever played the game where one person says a word, and the other immediately responds with the first thing that comes to mind?

That's kind of how priming works. You're exposed to one stimulus, and it affects how you respond to another stimulus. [Psychology Today](#) gives the example of two groups of people reading the word "yellow" followed by either "sky" or "banana." Because people have a semantic association between the fruit and its color, the "yellow-banana" group will recognize the word "banana" faster than the "yellow-sky" group recognizes "sky."

What's this got to do with marketing? Lots. Using subtle priming techniques, you could help your website visitors remember key information about your brand -- and maybe even influence their buying behavior

It's been tested before. In [a study by Naomi Mandel and Eric J. Johnson](#), researchers manipulated the background design of a website to see if it'd affect consumers' product choices. Participants were asked to choose between two products in one category (like a Toyota vs. a Lexus). According to [Psychology Today](#), "they found that visitors who had been primed on money (the website's background was green with pennies on it) looked at price information longer than those who had been primed on safety. Similarly, consumers who had been primed on comfort looked at comfort information longer than those primed on money."

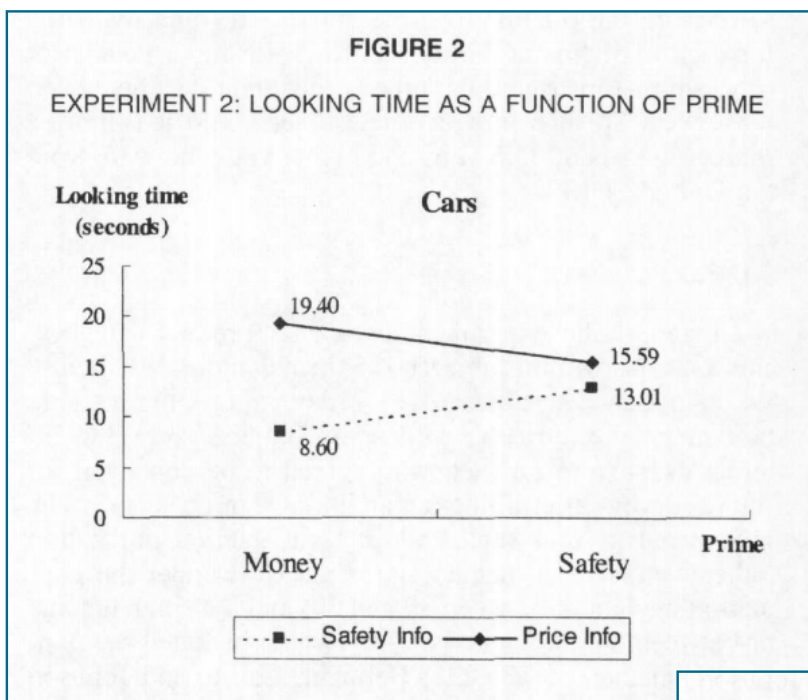
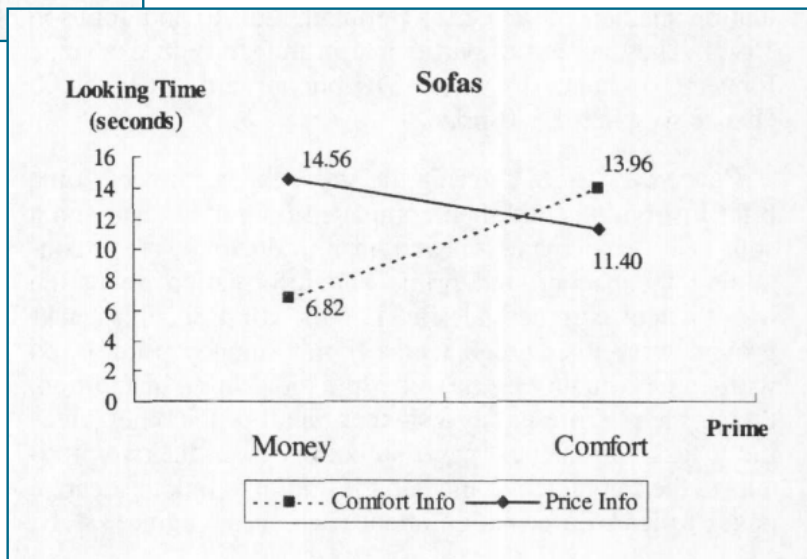


Image Source: [Journal of Consumer Research](#)



So if you're trying to make use of priming in your marketing, think about the small details. They could be the difference between someone buying your highest product price point and bouncing from your page.

Reciprocity

When a person receives a gift, she often experiences warm feelings toward the gift-giver and wants to give something back. This, in a nutshell, is the principle of reciprocity.

Introduced in Dr. Robert Cialdini's book, [*Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*](#), the concept of "reciprocity" is simple -- if someone does something for you, you'll naturally want to do something for them.

If you've ever gotten a mint with your bill at a restaurant, you've been the victim of reciprocity. [According to Cialdini](#), when servers bring a check to their patrons without a mint, the diners will tip according to their perceptions of the service given. With one mint, the tip jumps up 3.3%. Two mints? The tip jumps "through the roof" to roughly 20%.

Additionally, the UK Behavioural Insights Team found that [11% of people](#) were willing to donate an amount worth one day's salary when they were given a small gift of candy while being asked for a donation, compared to 5% of those that were just asked for the donation.

In your marketing, there are a lot of ways to take advantage of reciprocity. Before asking something of your audience, provide them with a "gift" first -- something for free. You don't have to be rolling in dough to give something away; it can be anything from a branded sweatshirt, to an exclusive ebook, to a free desktop background, to your expertise on a difficult subject matter. Even something as simple as a hand-written note can go a long way in establishing reciprocity.

Just be sure you're giving away the free thing before you ask for something in return. Not only will people be more willing to follow through with your request, but you'll be portraying your company in a positive light, establishing brand loyalty, and building a community of brand evangelists.

Peer Comparison and Social Proof

When utility software company [Opower](#) wanted to encourage people to reduce energy consumption at home, it told people, “your neighbors are reducing their energy use” and compared energy usage numbers within neighborhoods. This tactic led to a 4% reduction in household usage, as opposed to simply using the slogan “save energy to save money,” which did not produce a reduction in household usage.

Peer comparison is connected to the theory of [social proof](#), which is the positive influence created by finding out that other people are doing something. This influence can lead someone to believe that they should be doing that same thing.

Most marketers are aware of this concept already, but it was too important to leave out from this list. If you’re not familiar with it, [social proof](#) is the theory that people will adopt the beliefs or actions of a group of people they like or trust. In other words, it’s the “me too” effect. Think of this like an awkward middle school dance -- few people want to be the first one on the dance floor, but once a few people are there, everyone else wants to join in. (This desire to conform doesn’t go away when you get older and less bashful about your dance moves.)

One easy way to make the most of social proof is on your blog. If you’re not already, use social sharing and follow buttons that display the number of followers your accounts have or the number of shares a piece of content has. If those numbers are front and center and you already have a few people sharing your post, people who stumble on your post later will be much more likely to share.



Image Source: [HubSpot](#)

OVER 100,000 COMPANIES ARE ALREADY USING THESE TEMPLATES TO PLAN BLOGGING EFFORTS.

GET YOURS TODAY

Image Source: [HubSpot](#)

If you want to apply this to your emails and landing pages, show prospects how many people with the same profession have downloaded this certain ebook or template. For example, you could place a ticker beside your social sharing icons showing how many of their colleagues have shared this post to their networks. This peer comparison should encourage both the downloading of the offer but also social sharing. ([Check out this post for more ideas on how to use social proof on your landing pages.](#))

Decoy Effect

You'll often see this effect in pricing models -- one price point is intentionally included to entice you to choose the most expensive option.

In Dan Airley's famous TED talk, "[Are we in control of our own decisions?](#)", he describes an ad from The Economist outlining their latest subscription packages. Here's what they offered:

- Online subscription: \$59
- Print subscription: \$125
- Online and print subscription: \$125

Crazy, right? You could get the print only subscription and the online and print subscription for the same price. Why would they offer that?

That's what Airley thought, too. He reached out to the folks at The Economist, but he never got a straight answer from them.

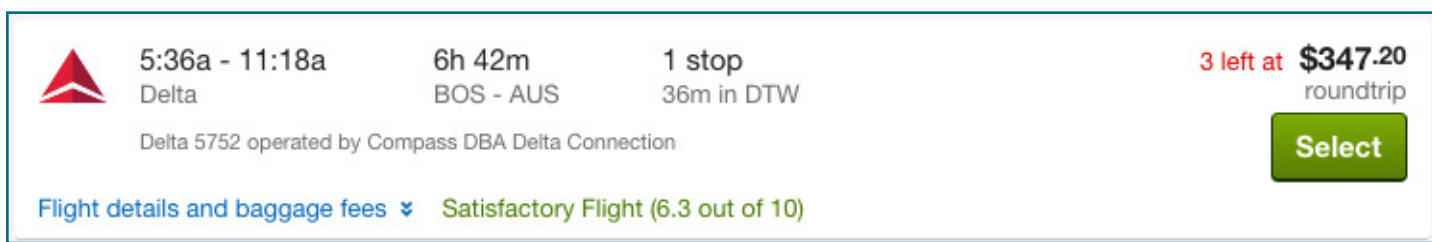
So he decided to run his own study with 100 MIT students. He gave them the pricing packages outlined above and asked which one they'd want to buy. When all three options were there, students chose the combo subscription -- it was the best deal, right? But when he removed the "useless" option (the print subscription for \$125), the students preferred the cheapest option.

Turns out that middle option wasn't that useless after all -- it gave students a frame of reference for how "good" the combo deal was and enticed them to pay more for that deal.

So if you're looking to increase conversions on a landing page with two options, you might want to add a third. It could help increase the conversion rate of the option you'd really like people to take.

Scarcity

Ever gone to buy airline tickets and seen a tagline that says "Only 3 seats left at this price!" Yup, that's [scarcity](#) (another Cialdini concept). This psychology principle goes back to the simple formula of supply and demand: The more rare the opportunity, content, or product is, the more valuable it is.



The screenshot shows a flight booking card for a Delta flight. On the left is the Delta logo. The flight details are: 5:36a - 11:18a, Delta, 6h 42m, BOS - AUS, 1 stop, 36m in DTW. Below this, it says "Delta 5752 operated by Compass DBA Delta Connection". On the right, it says "3 left at \$347.20 roundtrip" and a green "Select" button. At the bottom left, there is a link for "Flight details and baggage fees" and a "Satisfactory Flight (6.3 out of 10)" rating.

Image Source: [Travelocity](#)

The scarcity principle goes back to the simple formula of supply and demand: The rarer the opportunity, content, or product, the more valuable it is to a consumer. In 1975, Worchel, Lee, and Adewole conducted a study to see how scarcity affected people's perception. At the start of the study, [they asked people](#) to rate chocolate chip cookies. They put ten cookies in one jar, and two of the same cookies in another jar. The cookies from the two-cookie jar received ratings twice as high as the 10 cookie jar even though the cookies were exactly the same.

But if you want to properly use this principle, you need to be careful how you word it. If you approach the scarcity concept as if there used to be a ton of a product or service, but due to popular demand there's a few left, people will be very receptive. On the other hand, if you approach it from the angle that there are only a few products total, so get it now, the principle won't be as effective. The study also showed that "a product can decrease in perceived value if it starts off as scarce then becomes abundant," according to [Nir and Far](#).

Scarcity is especially powerful for event marketing. If you're looking to increase ticket sales, it might be worth sending a personalized email to people who haven't registered yet to remind them that there are only X number of tickets left since so many people have registered. The same could be done for a webinar, or anything that has a limit on the number of registrants.

Anchoring

Ever wonder why it's so hard to resist a sale at your favorite clothing store?

Often, it has to do with [anchoring](#) -- people base decisions on the first piece of information they receive. So if my favorite store typically retails jeans for \$50, but I find them on sale for \$35, I'll be ecstatic. "I just got a crazy deal on these jeans," I'll think. But if my friend typically shops for jeans that are \$20, she won't be nearly as impressed.

For marketers, anchoring is important to know -- especially if you're ever running a sale. You'll want to clearly state the initial price of the product (this is "setting" the anchor), and then display the sale price right next to it. You might even explain how much of a percentage off your customers will receive with the sale.

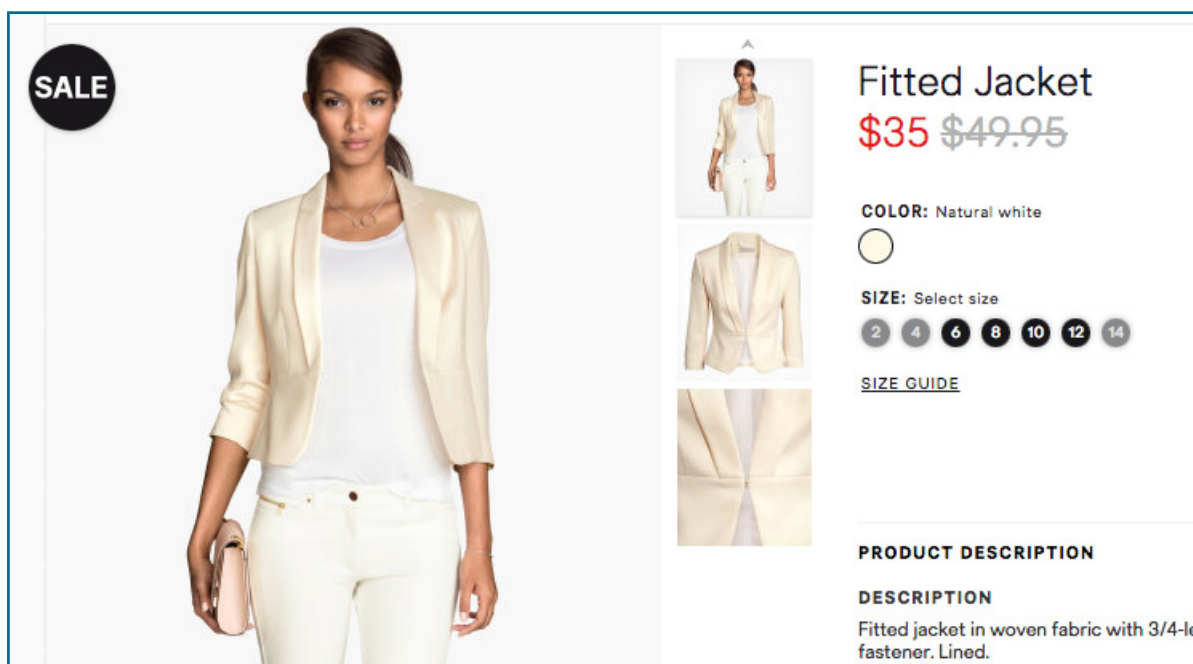


Image Source: [Express](#)

The Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon

Ever heard about a product and then start seeing it everywhere you look? You can thank [The Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon](#). It starts happening after you encounter something for the first time, and then you start noticing it cropping up in everyday life. Suddenly you see ads for the product every time you watch TV. And when you go to the grocery store, you happen to walk down the aisle and spot it. Not to mention all of your friends all have the product.

It's weird, right? Here's why you're suddenly seeing this new thing everywhere.

[According to PS Mag](#), this phenomenon (also called “the frequency illusion”) is caused by two processes. “The first, selective attention, kicks in when you're struck by a new word, thing, or idea; after that, you unconsciously keep an eye out for it, and as a result find it surprisingly often. The second process, confirmation bias, reassures you that each sighting is further proof of your impression that the thing has gained overnight omnipresence.”

The theory behind this mere exposure effect is that you are more likely to have good feelings toward something that you're exposed to often. In 2000, Zajonc conducted a [study](#) in which it showed participants a series of foreign words, which they were asked to rate based on each word's connotation. The words that were shown repeatedly were rated, on average, one point higher in positivity than words that were only shown once.

For marketers, this phenomenon is precisely why nurturing is incredibly important. Once someone starts noticing your brand -- clicking around on your website, engaging with you on social platforms, reading your blog -- you'll want to help them start seeing you “everywhere.” If you, for example, send them targeted nurturing emails and retargeting ads based on their behavior, you could increase the possibility of them converting.

You can also expose your marketing content to your buyer personas regularly by [making sure they rank well in search](#). To succeed, you'll need to get to know your buyer personas like your best friends so your content ranks for a variety of topics they're searching for. The more exposure to your brand's content, the more likely they will feel positively toward your brand.

Loss Aversion

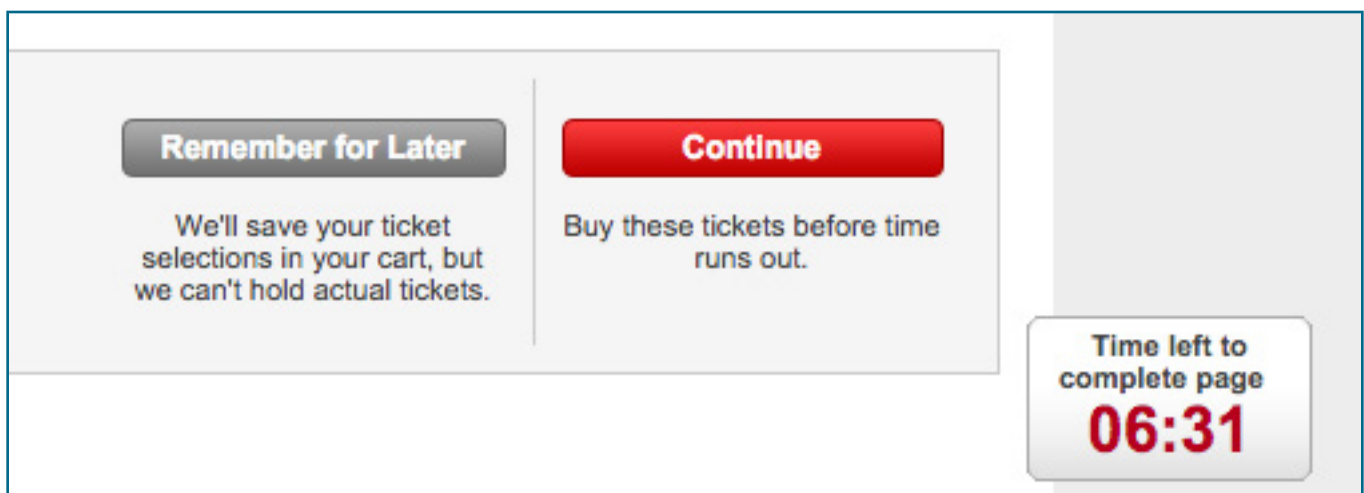
Loss aversion means pretty much exactly what it sounds like: Once someone has something, they *really* don't like to lose it.

When [Daniel Kahneman studied this concept](#), participants were given mugs, chocolate, or nothing. Then, they were asked to make a choice between two options: If they were given an object, they could trade their objects, or if they were given nothing, they could choose one of the two items. The result? Roughly half of the participants who started with no items chose mugs, but 86% of those given mugs to begin with stuck with that item.

Moral of the story? People don't like to lose what they've already gained.

Though this could open up some semi-sketchy doors for certain types of marketers, loss aversion could be a significant factor in marketing freemium products and product adoption. For example, you could ungate a feature for the free version of your product for a certain amount of time. After that time period is up, that feature could be removed unless you upgrade to become a paying customer.

[Ticketmaster](#) uses a loss aversion technique when purchasing tickets. If you have a ticket in your shopping cart and you're on your way to checking out, you'll see a ticker that counts down how much time you have left before you lose your ticket -- implying the ticket is already secure in your hands. See here:



Foot-in-the-door Technique

In their [famous 1966 experiment](#), Freedman and Fraser send someone around to ask people to place a small card in a window of their home supporting safe driving. Two weeks later, the same people were asked by a different person to put a large sign in their front yard advocating safe driving. The result: 76% of people who agreed to the first request now complied with the more intrusive request, compared to only 20% of people who were never asked to put a sign in their windows and were just asked to put up a large sign in their yards.

The lesson here is that you're more likely to get a big "yes" from someone if you get a small "yes" from them first. A bond forms between the requester and the requestee during the small request, which makes them more likely to comply with a bigger request. Also, people tend to want to act consistently based on how they acted in response to the first request.

This means you shouldn't ask someone to buy your product or set up an hour-long demo call when they visit your site for the first time. Make a smaller request instead. For example, ask to set up a quick 15-minute call to discuss something indirectly related to your product or service, like a consulting session. Small asks lay the groundwork for bigger asks.

Environment Effect

Meredith and Wheeler (2008) [found](#) that different polling environments impacted how people voted. For example, 56% of voters voted for a pro-school budget increase when voting in a school, compared to 53% of voters who voted in a location that wasn't a school. These results were found to be statistically significant when reproduced in a lab (64% versus 56%).

Our decisions are influenced by subconscious environmental cues. And at times, these activated cues are strong enough to influence the decisions we make by recalling past memories, attitudes, and predispositions to a certain topic.

When setting up sales calls for a product demo or price negotiation, schedule the call when the potential buyer is in an environment that he or she would be using the product -- usually the office, and not at home.

Additionally, the temperature of your physical environment actually makes a big difference. The theory called the [temperature premium effect](#) is that physical warmth elicits positive emotions (or “emotional warmth”). A study published by The Journal of Consumer Psychology found that warm temperatures, which activate positive emotions, can actually increase a consumer’s product valuation. Participants in a warm condition were willing to pay more for a pen (\$8.72) than those in the cool condition (\$7.20).

This is relevant to companies that have storefronts or offer in-person experiences. When choosing your atmosphere, it may be better to set the ambient temperature on the warmer side (although an optimal temperature has not been recorded in a study to date).

Expected vs. Surprise Rewards

Rewards might seem like a great idea, but sometimes they can backfire. Psychologists Mark R. Lepper and David Greene from Stanford [ran an experiment](#) to test their theory that rewards aren’t always great motivators. They recruited 51 preschool children who had an interest in drawing and randomly placed them into three different experimental conditions: regular rewards, surprise rewards, and no rewards. It was crucial that these children already had an interest in drawing to see if the rewards had an effect on children who were already keen on the activity. Each child was placed in a room and was told to draw alone for 6 minutes. After the 6 minutes were up, the child was given an expected reward, a surprise reward, or nothing, depending on which condition they were randomly placed in.

This experiment continued over a few days, and the children were observed through one-way mirrors in order to measure the percentage of time they spent drawing after receiving their rewards (or lack thereof). Children in the surprise and no rewards groups ended up spontaneously drawing for 15-20% of their time in the room, whereas children in the expected reward group ended up spontaneously drawing for half that time -- around 5-10% of their time in the room.

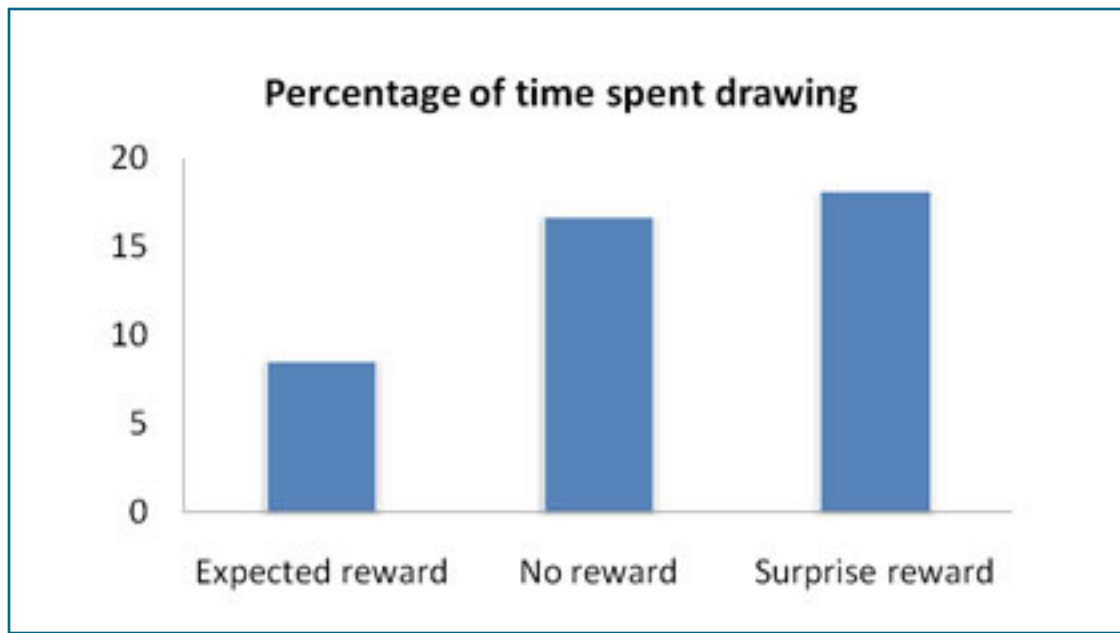


Image Source: [PSYBLOG](#)

The study concluded that expected rewards reduce motivation on a task, but surprise rewards increase motivation on the same task. Expected rewards decrease intrinsic motivation, and surprise rewards maintain intrinsic motivation while also boosting mood.

To use this in your marketing, try providing your potential customers with surprise coupons or deals, rather than a promotion that exists weekly and at the same time each week.

Clustering

People have a limited amount of space in their short-term memory. In fact, [most people](#) can only remember seven pieces of information (plus or minus two pieces in any given situation) at a time.

To cope, most people tend to [cluster](#) similar pieces of information together. For example, if you had a whole grocery list of random items, most people would tend to mentally group items into certain categories (dairy, grain, meat, etc.) to be able to better remember what exactly was on the list.

So when you're creating content, keep clustering in mind. How can you design and lay out your content to increase memory retention? One way to do it is by grouping similar topics together -- either under numbered bullet points or with different header sizes. Besides being much easier to scan, your writing will be much easier to remember and recall down the road -- especially if you're creating long lists of content.

Verbatim Effect

According to a study by Poppenk, Joannis, Danckert, and Köhler, people are more likely to remember the gist of what someone said, not the specific details. For example, if you attend a presentation on how to blog for your business, you're most likely going to remember details like "Have another person edit your work," not "Send a Google Doc three business days ahead of time to a peer so they can edit your work. Don't forget to use Track Changes so you know what you missed!"

They called this the "verbatim effect." And it can have a huge effect on how your content performs.

To begin with, people are spending less and less time actually reading online. According to data from Chartbeat, more than half of your visitors will spend less than 15 seconds on your site. So if people aren't reading your content and are not likely to remember specific details, what's your recourse?

I'd recommend spending even more time than you already are on perfecting your headline. Not only should it be search- and share-friendly, but it should also accurately describe what's in your article. This way, when people are looking for more information on a given topic, they'll think of that one helpful article they read a while ago and Google the topic to find it again. If you've done the work, you should appear in the search results. If you need some help writing compelling headline copy, check out this post on our blog.

Conclusion

Thanks for reading HubSpot's *Introduction to Marketing Psychology*! Now that you understand a bit more about human behavior and motivation, let's recap what you've learned and how you can use it in your marketing. Jump over to the next page to go over what you learned in this guide and write down some takeaway notes for yourself.



Takeaway Notes:

An Introduction to Marketing Psychology

What five basic needs are included in Maslow's Hierarchy?

Give an example of a product that solves for esteem.

What is priming? Give an example of this in marketing.

What is the Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon? Why does it work?

List the key principle(s) of human behavior that you'll use in your job immediately after reading this guide.

The HubSpot logo, featuring the word "HubSpot" in a white sans-serif font with an orange icon of three connected nodes to the right of the "o".

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