



SIX DEGREES

Learning the language of
NON-VERBAL communication

by Frank Schab

85% of communication is non-verbal—do you know what your communications are really saying?

Most of the information we process is not verbal, but sensory—sight, sound, feel and smell.

Clients often tell us that their previous advertising and brand communications looked great—but did not have the kind of impact they expected. Assuming they had a sound brand strategy in place, what could have gone wrong? Often, the simple answer is that the non-verbal message being presented was just not resonating with their intended target audience.

Research has shown that about 85% of human communication is non-verbal. Most of the information we process is not verbal, but sensory—sight, sound, feel and smell. So it's not hard to see why the typical process used to develop brand communications so often misses the target. Marketing and communications departments spend considerable resources defining the verbal information (i.e. positioning and messaging) but generally leave the sensory information (the other 85%) up to the creative team to develop. These creative professionals may or may not be able to put themselves in the “shoes” of the target customers and identify the right non-verbal message to actually reach their target customers. In addition, even though creative concepts are subsequently compared to each other in research, that

step only determines which of the concepts is better than the others—not how effective the piece will be in the customer's mind.

If marketers and communicators need further evidence that they should be more focused and systematic about the non-verbal side of communications, consider this:

Psychological studies have confirmed that:

- *Over 90% of emotional meaning is carried through non-verbal channels*
- *Non-verbal information is believed over verbal information*
- *Most consumer purchases are based on emotional, not rational, factors.*

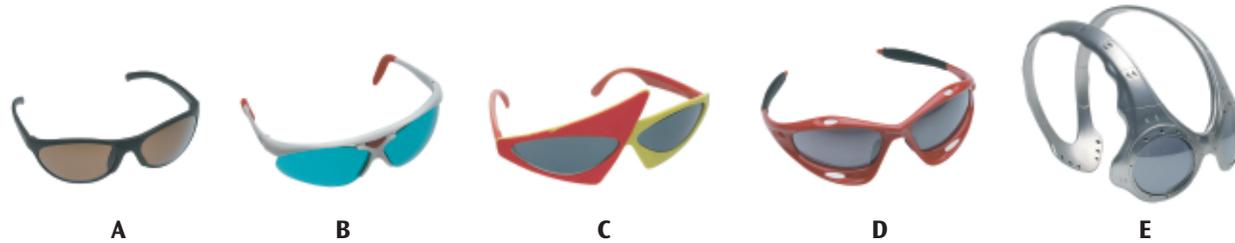
Okay, so how do you effectively use sensory information? In our experience, it's actually not that complicated. **We recommend inserting a sensory research step** between developing your brand/communications strategy and your communications. The purpose of this research is to uncover what your verbal strategy looks, feels, sounds and smells like, and what non-verbal messages will resonate with your target audience.



In a simple example of how this can be done, let's say you want your brand to stand for **POWERFUL**, *dynamic*, and

unconventional.

The same basic process can be applied for other senses like sound, touch or smell depending on the relevance in the sector or product category.



How do we determine what this looks like to our target audience? We show respondents many different designs within a separate, yet unrelated category—say sunglasses, for instance. We ask them to choose the one design that feels powerful, dynamic and unconventional to them. Let's assume that respondents most often chose option D from above out of 50 different pairs. This choice, along with the selection rationale, gives us insights into the visual cues that trigger the perception of powerful, dynamic and unconventional in this group. By repeating this process with other categories (e.g., packaging, people, architecture, activities, fonts, colors, etc) **we can build a complete visual model** of what powerful, dynamic and unconventional looks like to this group of people.

The same basic process can be applied to other senses like sound, touch or smell, depending on their relevance in the sector or product category. The resulting sensory cues may then be used to develop communications materials and to guide product design. We tailor this research process to the project objectives and the category, and find the process to work equally well with consumers and professional audiences. Typically, respondents are told neither the brand nor the product category because we are interested in understanding what sensory cues they associate with powerful, dynamic and unconventional (or whatever the brand is to stand for), independent of their existing impressions of the brand or category.



The benefits of the **sensory process.**

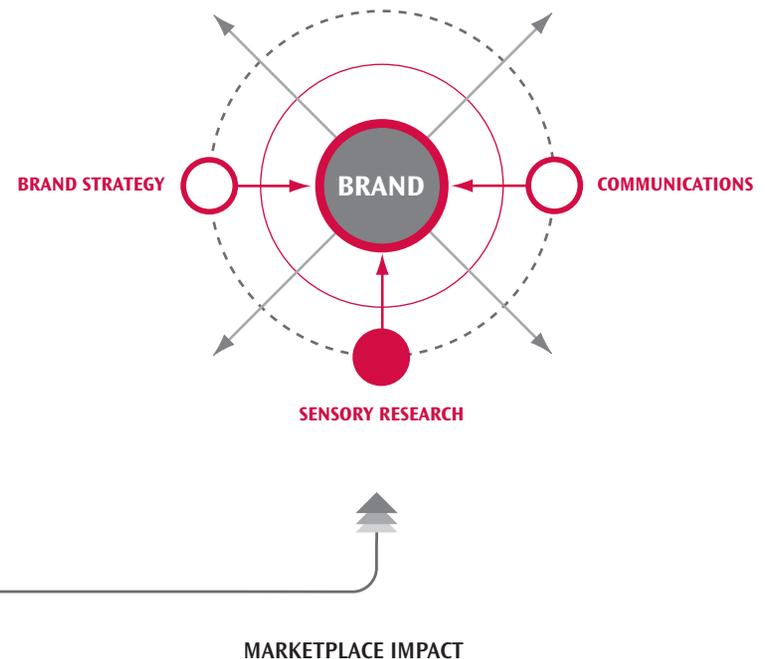
This process helps inform your creative team on which sensory cues will resonate with the target customers.

Why should you take this extra step? Actually, there are a number of reasons to take advantage of this valuable process. We are all bombarded with images and advertising pitches every day—with some estimates ranging in the thousands. Because products and services are increasingly viewed as commodities with few functional differences, it becomes even more crucial to separate your brand from the competition.

In addition, the sensory model that is developed from this process helps inform your creative team on which sensory cues will resonate with the target customers. This can be very helpful in reducing the time needed to develop creative concepts, and in reducing the extent of concept development needed to hit the target. We all know the impact this can have on budgets.

And finally, it simplifies the process of choosing a final creative concept—while focusing on what the target audience needs to see, hear and feel in order to prefer your brand.

At Six Degrees, **we have seen sensory research turn around unsuccessful advertising campaigns, increase sales well beyond expectations, and give both strategists and creative teams confidence that their communications are on track.** Imagine how much harder your communications will work for you when you actively manage the other 85% of information your target audience receives.



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