

In the blink of an eye: Distracted consumers are most likely to remember ads with subtle variations

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Consumers are more likely to remember an ad they've seen repeatedly if one element in the ad changes location from one exposure to the next, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Consumers are bombarded with thousands of advertisements daily, are increasingly multitasking, and are preoccupied with [everyday activities](#). The likelihood that they will devote their [full attention](#) to any one specific message is getting smaller every day. What impact can an ad have if consumers pay virtually no attention to it?" write authors Stewart Shapiro (University of Delaware) and Jesper H. [Nielsen](#) (University of Arizona).

Even when consumers pay very limited attention, [advertising](#) can succeed through [repetition](#). When consumers are exposed to a print ad, an image of the ad is stored in their memory and this image becomes clearer with each exposure to the ad. As this memory becomes clearer, preference for the ad increases. Notably, this occurs even if prior exposures to the ad are extremely brief and a consumer devotes much of their attention to something other than the ad.

In a series of experiments, the authors found that this effect may actually be enhanced if one ad element such as the brand logo or product depiction changes location within an ad from one exposure to the next. Under conditions of limited attention, making subtle changes to an ad

over repeated exposures may in fact be better than repeating the exact same ad or altering more ad elements from one exposure to the next. For instance, a company could create a more effective ad by placing their brand logo in the bottom left corner the first time it is shown, and then placing it in the bottom right corner of the otherwise unchanged ad the next time it is shown.

"Companies are still learning how to make the most of advertisements that are viewed quickly as a consumer searches for something else on a web page or in a magazine. Subtle changes to ads viewed repeatedly can boost advertising effectiveness in increasingly cluttered environments visited by increasingly unfocused consumers," the authors conclude.

More information: Stewart Shapiro and Jesper H. Nielsen. "What the Blind Eye Sees: Incidental Change Detection as a Source of Perceptual Fluency." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2013.

Provided by University of Chicago

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