Secrets To Eye Tracking Success

Contributed by Eye Faster
Wednesday, 20 January 2016
Last Updated Wednesday, 20 January 2016

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While we once believed the buying process to be rational, recent research has proved it to be quite haphazard. Some products receive careful consideration, others little thought. What does this behavior mean for marketers? Understanding the insights to be mined is where eye tracking can play a key role.
Eye tracking can be used in simulated or actual retail environments, combined with biometric measurements or questionnaires. The technique generates a flood of data about what consumers fixate on, consider buying and purchase. The key to productive eye tracking lies in how one interprets the data and applies the uncovered insights.

After years of performing eye-tracking studies, I developed best practices, which improve the understanding of shopper behavior, and help brand managers fine-tune their marketing efforts. Allow me to present six useful ways to examine findings:

1.Â Â Â Focus on fixations
The human eye cycles between abrupt movements, or â€œsaccades,â€• lasting 20 to 40 milliseconds, and still periods, â€œfixations,â€• of 100 to 400 milliseconds. However, the brain processes information only after a fixation of 200 milliseconds.

This means brands have less than one second to convey a message. In an eye-tracking study we conducted in a music store, one subject fixated on products and signs 245 different times in five minutes. Another subject fixated 1,569 different times in 15 minutes. In a half-hour shopping trip, a customerâ€™s eyes may fixate 1,800 times.

2.Â Â Â Follow where shoppers look
Humans have a limited range of vision, typically around 30 degrees below eye level to 10 degrees above. Since shoppers tend to walk upright with their heads level, items near eye level get our attention.
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Heat maps demonstrate that end-aisle and eye level shelves receive the most attention. But customers will also notice products outside the usual visual range. Whatâ€™s special about these items? Bright colors? Brand status? You can gather important insights about attention-grabbing strategies by examining these product attributes.Â Â Â

3.Â Â Â How shoppers read packages
There is a consistent pattern to how shoppers survey labels starting with messages in the middle of the package and radiating to upper and lower pack elements.

Therefore, key package elements should be located as close to the brand mark as possible. Place important content in concentric circles around the brand mark while less important content can be placed further away.

If an important element goes unnoticed, check its placement. Since we read left to right, up to down, if the design incorporates vertical lettering or presents a confusing text order, shoppers must work harder to get the message.

4.Â Â Â Observe which product categories warrant consideration
Shoppers give certain products thoughtful consideration while others are thrown seemingly willy-nilly into their carts.

In one study, shoppers picked up an average of three bags of prepackaged salad mix before selecting one; in another that they spent 62 seconds looking at salad dressing and noticed but seven percent of the choices. Meanwhile at the snack aisle shoppers spent 168 seconds on salty snacks, noticing 42 percent of the options. However, a study of standalone store displays showed that single snack packs produced very fast purchase times, with 98 percent of products picked up being purchase with each decision lasting an average of four seconds.

When looking at eye tracking results, consider how product type may affect how consumers interact. If they carefully read the packaging, providing extra information could sway the purchase decision. If they grab it without stopping, a distinctive design will make it fly.

5.Â Â Â Packaging strategy
Many marketing managers want their products to stand out so shoppers will see it. This is a good bet for well-known products, but, however counter-intuitive, this strategy can backfire for new products.

Consider the cereal aisle. Shoppers looking for Cheerios will scan the aisle for its\ bright-yellow box, filtering out

everything that doesnâ€™t match their mental image of their cereal. If a competing oat cereal is in a green or orange box, it will be completely overlooked. But put it in a box in a similar shade of yellow, and placed near Cheerios, shoppers will see it and possibly consider switching.

If the data shows that a product with an attention-grabbing design is being overlooked, think about whether you might do better by taking a page from the competitorâ€™s playbook.

6.Â Â Â Consider shoppersâ€™ feelings
Consumers think they make rational decisions, and many brands operate on this assumption that shoppers think about what they need, evaluate their choices, and select the best options. But when we observe how people actually shop, we see a different pattern of behavior.

Most purchase decisions are made subconsciously, before conscious considerations like value and quality enter the mental conversation. Perhaps 10 percent of sensory information makes it to consciousness; the rest lies submerged in the subconscious where emotional triggers â€“ color, memory associations, and package design â€“ hold sway.

While eye tracking studies alone produce valuable insights, marketers who want to get the most from their research budgets should consider combining eye tracking with biometric measurement to more fully uncover the emotions that motivate purchase decisions.