



A PUBLICATION OF THE FORBES CONSULTING GROUP

# TIME OUT OF MIND

## USING BREATHING SPACE TO MAXIMIZE INSPIRATION

By Ric Dube, Ph.D.

It's true that top-of-mind ideas can be important ideas. Focus group interviews and team ideation sessions are extremely useful tools that capitalize on teamwork and quick thinking to generate lists of ideas. These approaches use *high energy* and *cooperation* to cast a wide net to catch as many different ideas as possible.

Focus groups and ideations are very effective toward generating a *breadth* of ideas, however, these approaches are less effective in producing the *depth* needed for breakthrough insights. Despite the virtues of cooperation, there are often richer rewards in *rumination*, i.e., letting the mind wander and daydream, which permits the brain to create new connections and associations. According to legend, the Greek scholar Archimedes was obsessed with the problem of how to calculate volume until one day he stepped into his bath and saw the water rise. As the story goes, he cried "Eureka! I've got it!" as he ran naked through the streets of Sicily.

Cognitive neuroscientists studying the brain with fMRI have recently recorded electrical activity in the right hemisphere that signals impending "Eureka moments." These scientists have discovered that certain conditions promote these kinds of insights:

positive mood, absence of stress, and quiet, unfocused time spent alone, much like Archimedes' bath.

We've all had the experience of solving a problem or having a great idea at an unusual moment: while driving, exercising, reading – or even upon waking in the morning. This is a common occurrence and the reason voice recorders and memo pads are kept at the ready by scientists, CEOs, stand-up comedians and songwriters.

Much of the work that contributes to deep insights is performed by our brains outside of our conscious awareness.

There is good reason for "sleeping on it" before making a major decision.

When we are not consciously thinking about a problem, regions of the brain devoted to complex problem solving work together to form new neural connections, giving rise to new insights and perspectives.

Incorporating periods of quiet reflection into the research process can enhance the depth and quality of consumer research and the ideation outputs of marketing teams.

### RUMINATING WITH YOUR TEAM TO ENHANCE IDEATION

Marketing teams can generate deeper insights by keeping an idea journal in the weeks leading up to, and following, an ideation session. Prior to ideation the journal is used to record thoughts and ideas whenever and wherever they happen to occur. This can help draw ideas to the

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**10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL INTERCOMPANY  
LTCI CONFERENCE**

Sheraton New Orleans  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
March 14-17, 2010

**"THE EFFECT OF RECESSION &  
RECOVERY ON LTCI SALES"**

Conventional wisdom has it that recessionary conditions cause consumers to defer large or long-term purchases. Another school of thought holds that during times of weak stock market performance, sales of "guaranteed" insurance products take off. Dr. Jeremy Pincus will present a time-series analysis of LTCi sales over the past 20 years, accounting for broad economic indices and other major events to determine how much of the current downturn in sales is attributable to the general economy vs. other factors. The historical trajectory of LTCi sales will be contrasted against the history of Medicare Supplement plans and 401(k) plans within the framework of a technological diffusion model.

**FORBES PRINCIPAL IN RUNNING  
FOR PMRG DIRECTOR-AT-LARGE**

Dr. Jeremy Pincus has been recommended to the Nominating Committee for Director-at-Large of the Pharmaceutical Marketing Research Group, a position on the organization's Board of Directors. Voting by PMRG members will take place at the upcoming PMRG Institute on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009.



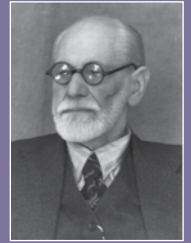
Sig,

I am a 41 year-old market researcher working for a large financial services company based in the Northeast. My weekend hobby is photography, and the walls of my office are filled with framed enlargements I have shot all over the country.

It is fascinating how different people walking into my office for the first time might react to the scenes in the photos, yet others point out the way they brighten up the office, still others see technical aspects of the photography and of course some people don't notice at all.

Dr. Freud, while it has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words, isn't it true that these words correspond to a thousand interpretations?

Trying to Focus



Dear Trying to Focus,

Ah, reader. Not only is one thousand words too limited, words are simply another form of data! Emotions are the pure states you want to understand – not just in the people enjoying your artwork, but in the consumers served by your company.

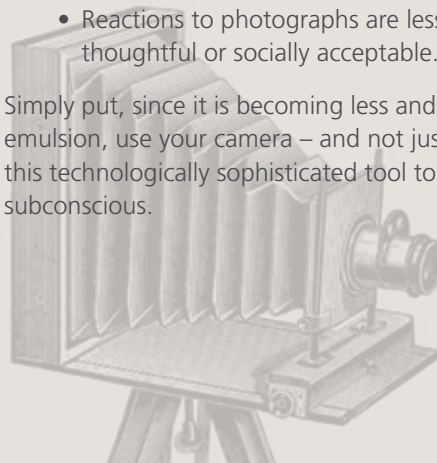
Your letter came to me by way of Henri, the postal carrier in my neighborhood and a skeptic of this new technology you mention: photography. For a few years now, images have been burned on glass, though I have read in *Die Kronen Zeitung* of this fellow in England, Eastman, who can achieve this feat more efficiently, and one would hope it involves a good deal less explosive powder.

Henri never stops speaking of Gustav, who lives down the street, owns a camera and takes many pictures. It is Gustav's habit to show large stacks of his photographs whether or not one is interested. In fact, he has been known to attract guests with the promise of wine and cheese only to gather them in a small room and pass around an endless parade of vacation photographs. "How breathtaking," the guests feel they must comment on each, "It is as if we are there."

This said, there are three excellent reasons to use photographic images in market research:

- Photographs are better able than words to elicit emotional responses because reading is inherently analytical.
- These emotional responses are more primitive and better able to tap the subconscious than what we get questioning solely with words because emotional responses to images are largely innate.
- Reactions to photographs are less likely to be "self-edited" to seem more thoughtful or socially acceptable. This is particularly unfortunate for Gustav.

Simply put, since it is becoming less and less necessary to coat a glass plate with a liquid emulsion, use your camera – and not just on weekends! Do not discount the value of this technologically sophisticated tool to probe the depths of your consumers' emotional subconscious.



Regards,

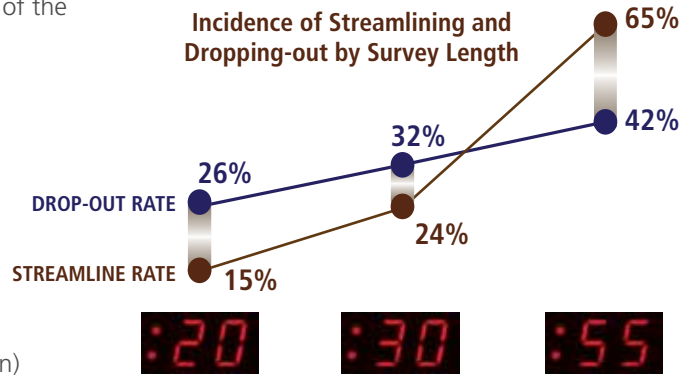
*Sig*

# WHEN QUESTIONNAIRE LENGTH THREATENS DATA QUALITY

**BACKGROUND:** When surveys go on too long, respondents can get tired of answering them. They may quit part-way through or just become lazy and speed through without thinking about what is being asked. We discard data from both “drop-outs” and “streamliners,” respectively, but this adds time and money to data collection because many more quality respondents will be needed to make up the difference. The longer the questionnaire, the more drop-outs and streamliners (a.k.a. “straightliners”) result.

**RESEARCH METHOD:** We analyzed data collected from three questionnaires to measure the incidence of *dropping-out* and *streamlining*. *Drop-out rate* was defined as the percentage of respondents who didn’t complete the questionnaire. *Streamline rate* was defined as the percentage of respondents who engaged in any of the following:

- Gave the same answer (for example, checking a “3” on a 7 point scale) to more than 90% of the items in a multi-item attitude battery
- Completed the questionnaire too quickly (i.e., faster than a minimum amount of time that the questionnaire could reasonably be mentally processed)
- Did not respond as directed when asked to fill in a particular scale point (as a check that the respondent is paying attention)



**FINDINGS:** The figure shows how drop-outs and streamliners increase as the length of a questionnaire increases. Showing results of a selection of questionnaires, when length is 20 minutes, drop-outs and streamliners are at 26% and 15% respectively. Increasing time by 50% to 30 minutes, drop-out levels increase slightly, though streamline levels increase more steeply to 24%. Massive change happens without quite doubling time from 30 minutes to 55 minutes when streamliners almost triple from 24% to 65%, while drop-outs increase steadily from their level at the 30 minute mark.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION:** It is important to emphasize that the weak data provided by streamliners is disqualified and replaced by respondent data that meets quality standards. However, because drop-outs and streamliners add significant time and processing costs to the data collection process, a succinct questionnaire is a top priority in research design.

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surface of consciousness that otherwise would have stayed buried. After the ideation session, the idea journal is used to record thoughts that emerge over time.

Members of the team may also be assigned to “walk in the shoes of the consumer,” taking time to reflect and record thoughts and ideas and then report back to the group. The experience could include a shopping outing to gather details about purchase choice or instead involve usage of the product. These first-hand experiences are likely to provide essential details; the non-directed time during and following immersion is essential to develop thoughts and ideas.

### ALLOWING RESPONDENTS TO RUMINATE TO ENHANCE INSIGHT

Having consumer respondents keep written or video diaries in days leading up to a focus group or in-depth interview is a technique that uses time to add significant perspective. These diaries capture in-the-moment details that

are difficult to recall on the spot during an interview or group discussion. Video diaries capture consumers in their most natural state, capture usage occasion in the most unvarnished way possible and provide an excellent platform for deep probing as they are reviewed.

Online discussion groups are similar to focus groups but with key differences that leverage the benefits of time. Instead of a few hours, participants may log in and out at their convenience over a multi-day period, typically three to seven days. Once the topic is introduced and initial questions are posed, participants are encouraged to consider the topic offline. Responses benefit from offline thought.

For example, an online discussion about snack foods that takes place over several days could allow a participant to consider and recount one or more between-meal snacks, a dessert treat eaten with a bag lunch, and a snack food grabbed in a hurry one morning that substituted for breakfast.

Meanwhile, the online moderator has the ability to direct the discussion and base follow-up questions on the responses of participants, just as it is done in a focus group. However, the moderator’s decisions about follow-up questions do not occur in real time and, like the participants’ responses, may benefit from consideration.

## CONCLUSION

We have all been invited to corporate brainstorming sessions where we are expected to be spontaneously creative. Since deep insights flow from different conditions, we recommend combining methods that leverage quick thinking and teamwork to spark inspiration with methods that provide both consumers and marketing teams time to ruminate on key topics. But be prepared - someone just might cry out “Eureka!” and run naked through the halls of your marketing department.

# ASTROLOGY BELIEVERS SKEPTICAL OF MARKETING RESEARCH!

According to author Susan Jacoby in *The Age of American Unreason*, up to one-third of Americans believe in ghosts, UFOs, reincarnation, witches and the validity of astrology. Remarkably, this strong belief in the supernatural does not parallel faith in commercial research, such as market research. Those who believe in astrology are significantly more likely to question the credibility of our work as market researchers. Perhaps if we added tarot card readings to our volumetric projections...

Percent Agreement:  
"Industry scientists are less reliable than university scientists?"



"...ASTROLOGY IS VERY SCIENTIFIC"

"...ASTROLOGY IS NOT AT ALL SCIENTIFIC"

Source: ICPSR,  
General Social Survey, 2006



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BEYOND RESEARCH AS USUAL