

Can sparking curiosity help your breakthrough product catch fire?

Marketing Insights
from 5MetaCom



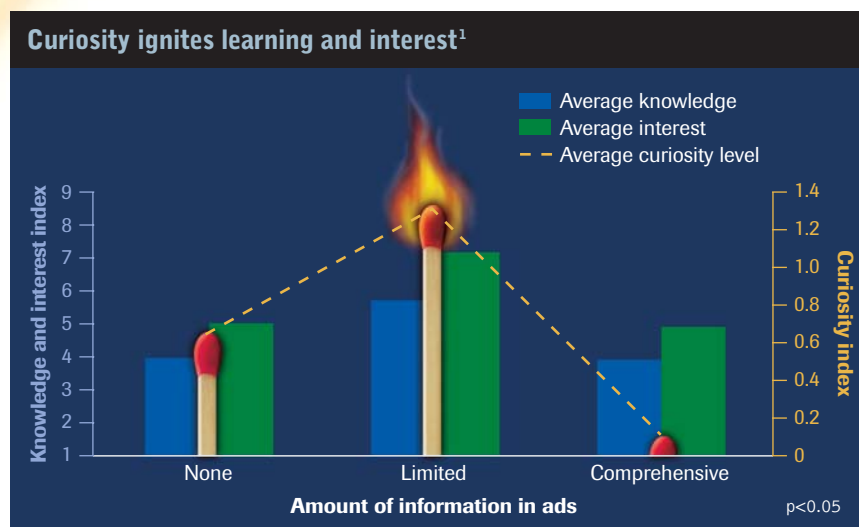
Suppose you're introducing a revolutionary new product. Once people understand what it can do for them, you believe they'll be fired up enough to buy it. But, as marketing experts have learned, educating prospective customers about your product can be as difficult as trying to start a fire by rubbing sticks together¹—especially when your sales force can't contact them.

So how can you shed just enough light on your product's complex benefits to generate interest? A university study suggests that omitting some information from your initial advertising can take advantage of the power of curiosity to motivate prospects to learn for themselves.¹



Why omit information?

Psychologists have learned that missing information creates a knowledge gap, which stimulates an intense feeling of deprivation commonly known as curiosity. By temporarily holding back detailed information from your advertising, you can give prospects time to generate hypotheses about your product and become personally invested in bridging the knowledge gap by learning more.¹



Researchers found that ads containing limited (but useful) information increased curiosity about a new product. Because their curiosity motivated them to learn about the product on their own, subjects who viewed the ads with limited information demonstrated higher levels of knowledge and interest later.

About the study¹

Researchers from the University of Chicago and the University of Colorado at Boulder compared responses from 131 consumers to ads for a digital camera (a new technological concept at the time) in an online magazine. Subjects were divided into three groups, each of which saw ads with different amounts of information. All ads provided a link to a Frequently Asked Questions page on the manufacturer's website, and the magazine contained editorial content about the product—enabling participants to find more information if they were curious enough.

Software tracked what subjects read, and, at the end of the study, the researchers analyzed answers to open-ended questions from an on-screen survey to assess each subject's curiosity about, knowledge of and interest in the product.

Executive Summary

- Marketing experts have learned that educating customers is especially important—and difficult—when launching new products.¹
- Psychologists have discovered that missing information stimulates curiosity, which can motivate people to learn about new things for themselves.¹
- In a university study, subjects who were most curious about a new product also demonstrated the most knowledge and interest.¹
- Researchers have identified several factors that can help maximize the effectiveness of curiosity-based advertising (see back for details).



How one company mistakenly made curious customers wait for an Infiniti

Nissan's 1989 launch campaign for its Infiniti luxury car brand was certainly effective at generating curiosity—but not so good at satisfying it.

Instead of showing the new Q45 car, TV and magazine ads used picturesque nature scenes and poetic copy to



emphasize how important the Infiniti brand was going to be.

Over time, people grew desperate to see the car. Unfortunately, the company broke Rule #3 by waiting so long to actually show the car that many viewers and readers became frustrated—and the campaign failed to generate enough sales to turn a profit, let alone keep up with more successful car brands such as Lexus.^{2,3}

Three rules for effective curiosity-based advertising (Hmmmmmm. What do you suppose they are?)

In today's information-overloaded world, it's not easy to generate curiosity about a new product—and it's even harder to control how, where and from whom potential customers learn about it.²

So how can you give your curiosity-based advertising campaign the best chance for success?

University researchers identified three rules that can help your advertising generate—and satisfy—curiosity.

■ Rule #1. Include a product category cue.

If you're going to omit information from an ad, don't omit the category. A *product category cue* plays a critical role by linking the advertised product to the audience's existing knowledge.

Once readers knew the product in the study was a camera, they had a frame of reference, even if they didn't know exactly how it worked. The ads without a product category cue failed to generate as much curiosity.¹

■ Rule #2. Surprise your audience with an unexpected benefit.

After you've set up your audience's expectations with a product category cue, intrigue them with an *unexpected benefit*. For example, readers who were already familiar with the limitations of film cameras were surprised to discover a camera that could display images on a screen or enable photo retouching and wanted to understand how it worked.

■ Rule #3. Provide easy access to information.

If prospects are curious about your product, you're off to a good start. But curiosity left unsatisfied leads to frustration instead of sales.

That's why your ads should direct readers to *informative resources*—such as a follow-up ad, a new website or a toll-free number—that can satisfy their curiosity and help them make a purchase decision.^{1,4}

Curiosity can heat up sales

When executed properly, curiosity-based advertising can light a fire under prospective customers—a fire that can only be quenched by learning enough about your new product to make an informed purchase decision.

¹ Menon, S. and Soman, D. Managing Consumer Motivation and Learning: Harnessing the Power of Curiosity for Effective Advertising Strategies. *Report No. 99-100*. Marketing Science Institute, 1999.

² Taflinger, R. Curiosity Killed the Cat: Curiosity and Advertising. *Taking ADvantage*. Washington State University, 1996. Available at <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~taflinge/advant.html> as of 2/7/2006.

³ Palmeri, C. Leaving Zen in the Dust. *Business Week*, 2/23/2004. Available at <http://www.businessweek.com> as of 3/21/2006.

⁴ McFarland, R., Van Dalsem, S. and Sheu, C. Developing Interactive Advertising Strategies on the Internet as a Function of Consumer Knowledge, Ability and Involvement. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*. 2004;1(3):300-315.