

Reach Out And Touch Someone

By **Bob McCurdy** - October 29, 2017



(By Bob McCurdy) The power of the spoken word — amazing and often under-appreciated. Every now and then, it is important for us to remind our clients about its impact, as it is easy to take for granted.

Our habit of suppressing sound has meant our relationship with what we hear has become somewhat blurred, as our brain typically expends only 2 percent of its energy on conscious activity. If we were to compare our conscious mind and our non-conscious mind to the processor of a computer, our non-conscious “processor” would be about a million times more powerful than our conscious “processor.”

Because most of what we hear is absorbed non-consciously, meaning its impact largely falls outside our ability to verbalize, quantify and understand, its impact is often under-valued. But neuroscience is coming to the rescue.

More than 80 percent of consumer decision-making is subconscious, according to Pranav Yadav, CEO of Neuro-Insight U.S., a neuroscience-based market research company. “For marketers there is a growing realization that the power of audio runs deeper than previously imagined.”

Dr. Bradley Vines, director of Nielsen Consumer Neuroscience, Europe, recently stated, “Unlike video, which consumers can look away from, sound can have an influence whether consumers are fully paying attention or not. This is ideal for connecting with non-conscious emotional associations and makes audio a powerful vehicle for developing brands in the mind of the consumer.”

It is interesting to note that while advertisers tend to overlook radio’s ability to implicitly (non-consciously) communicate, they often attempt to do the same thing via their creative and commercial placement practices. The reason? Commercials processed implicitly (non-consciously) seep into the consumer’s mind uncontested. When processed explicitly (consciously) the messaging is often “contested.”

Pictures convey information. The spoken word, and sound in general, convey emotion. If you see a picture of someone laughing, you might smile. If you hear someone laugh, you might start to laugh. If you see a picture of a raging battle, you might cringe. Hear the actual sounds and you will likely have a more intense reaction.

A baby develops the ability to hear sounds at about 18 weeks into the pregnancy, so the womb is our first connection with the outside world via heartbeats and voices.

How powerful is a human voice? A University of Wisconsin study that placed children in stressful situations — public speaking and solving math problems in front of an audience — found that the sound of a mother’s voice was as physiologically soothing as a physical hug by the mother.

The spoken word is powerful. Helen Keller wrote, “The problems of deafness are deeper and more complex, if not more important than those of blindness. Deafness is a much worse misfortune than blindness for it means the loss of the most vital stimulus...the sound of the voice that brings language, sets thoughts astir and keeps us in the intellectual company of man.”

Words start and stop wars and, unlike the childhood rhyme “Sticks and Stones,” words can hurt — a lot, for a long time. And once they leave our mouths, they can’t be deleted, recalled, or edited. The old Irish proverb “Don’t let your tongue cut your throat” speaks to the power of the spoken word.

Can words influence behavior? What do you do when you hear, "Duck!" "Help!" or "Fire!"

The old AT&T commercials from the 1980s came to mind the other day, the ones with the "Reach out and touch someone" theme. I went to YouTube to check them out. The word "touch" intrigued me.

Some of the definitions of "touch," according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, are:

- To leave a mark or impression on
- To have an influence on
- To affect with some feeling or emotion.

What advertiser doesn't want to achieve any of these?

AT&T's message in these commercials was clear, the sound of the human voice impacts people quickly, deeply, and emotionally.

You can check the ads out [here](#).

While advertising has evolved tremendously with all of the new technologies, its goal today is much the same as it's always been — to elicit feelings, emotions, perceptions, and actions that ultimately increase sales. The spoken word done right accomplishes that. Radio accomplishes that.

Reach out and touch **millions** with radio.

Bob McCurdy is The Vice President of Sales for The Beasley Media Group and can be reached at bob.mccurdy@bbgi.com

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