

How to get ahead in the psychology of advertising

Ian Florance talks to Daniel Müllensiefen and Sarah Carter from advertising agency DDB

Psychology and the advertising industry have always had a close 'personal' relationship. Early psychologists were involved in the creation of pioneer US advertising agencies; psychology graduates often move into advertising, marketing and market research jobs. *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, a study of how people are persuaded to buy products or take on views, was voted one of the top business books by *Fortune* magazine; its author is Robert Cialdini, Emeritus

Professor in Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University. Economic and marketing psychology are growing areas of study.

So it's perhaps no surprise that Dr Daniel Müllensiefen, a lecturer in psychology at Goldsmiths, University of London, was appointed Scientist in Residence (SIR) last September at DDB UK, part of the largest integrated advertising and marketing network in the world.

The university of advertising

Daniel's position as SIR is, in fact, a first in the industry. And as Sarah Carter, the agency's strategy director comments: 'We see DDB as taking a more intellectual and questioning approach to our work. We invented the role of advertising planner, which has a central responsibility for writing briefs and encouraging creativity, as well as using hard research to identify audiences and messages. We've had other experts working here – at one time we worked with ethnographers. We have been described over the years as the "university of advertising" and we want to practise a creativity which is disciplined by genuine knowledge. So, this is a perfect fit.'

I interviewed Daniel and Sarah at DDB's Paddington offices. There were directions for potential graduate recruits on the front door, though I was disappointed not to be offered an interview! Inside, the workstations were piled with papers, crowned with technology, and people moved round

quickly from meeting to meeting. We installed ourselves in a tiny office, scrounged some chairs, and I eyed my watch nervously. Daniel is in great demand, as his blog on the agency's website suggests, and we only had limited time. So, is the role working out as Daniel expected?

My days are fully booked

'In some ways exactly' says Sarah. 'We specced the job up front. It involves a number of workshops; access to master's students to research specific issues; the ability to talk to specialists at Goldsmiths. What we didn't know was whether people would consult with Daniel on a day-to-day basis. And that aspect is flying...'

'I didn't know if people would accept me,' says Daniel. 'But my days are fully booked. People want to try out ideas, ask me for a different approach or request some research background on anything from pets and their owners to attitudes to lager brands. I'm learning a lot on the basis of their questions.' Are all your ideas used? 'No. Perhaps 20 per cent find their way into pitches. But sometimes I'm just confirming an idea and acting as a sounding board.'

Sarah is very open about the issues in advertising practice DDB wants to address. 'Advertising's links with academia have been weak and we need to build bridges. Behavioural economics is having a huge effect on government policy, economic theory and the finance sector: why not on us? Increasingly there's dissatisfaction with how the industry tests and creates particular adverts. It's been clear for a while that certain adverts that don't test well turn out to be highly effective and vice versa. In addition, we're the uninvited guests in people's living rooms. We'd better understand them well and create advertising which respects our peculiar status.'

Looking at the wrong thing?

Three MSc projects at Goldsmiths, which



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result from Daniel's position, address these issues in detail. Sarah and Daniel describe them with huge enthusiasm.

The first looks at the role of music in advertising, which, as will become clear, is central to Daniel's research interests. Sarah sees the second project as having huge implications. 'As an industry we're obsessed with the messages we place in an advert and how people receive them. We go to great lengths to test their effectiveness. You obviously can't test an advertisement once enormous amounts of money have been spent in creating the real thing, so we put together an animated version for testing. Once we have this we show it to people and ask them to self-report their reactions. We hold focus groups – in fact DDB pioneered the use of focus groups in developing advertising ideas. These are now used, notoriously, by many different sectors, including political parties. Based on this (and, usually, quantitative data), we create an advert which, sometimes, doesn't work as well as the testing would suggest. So, we're looking again at the whole procedure. Can we measure people's reactions to a test better using implicit measures rather than explicit reporting? Is it true that people are caught by our message or do the "incidentals" – the particular scene, the music – actually cause an advert to be successful or not? Are we, in fact, looking at the wrong thing? If I'm honest, a lot of us feel that many of the ways we pre-test nowadays have overstayed their welcome as genuinely helpful techniques. Advertising research is a multi-million dollar industry, so this is a fairly fundamental effort.'

The final MSc project addresses a contemporary issue: Why do some adverts achieve huge viral success? 'What makes people talk about particular adverts, send them around the internet, visit them on websites? What creates a buzz about this advert rather than that one? If you could predict this you could spend much more money on creating superb adverts and much less on buying space in the media. The fact is, no one knows the answers to these questions. Social networking sites, the new breed of web communications are obviously important, but nobody really understands how they work. That's what we're going to try to do.'

Daniel and Sarah have convinced me that this is an extremely exciting development. What they're addressing – the measurement of implicit judgements, the problems of self-report evidence, the effect of online environments – reflects research in other areas of psychology. UK businesses have traditionally been less eager than those in other European

FEATURED JOB



Job Title: Highly Specialist Clinical Psychologist
Employer: Royal Manchester Children's Hospital

'The burns unit has a powerful vision for the children it treats. You may look different but you can still achieve great things,' says Consultant Clinical Psychologist Dr Stewart Rust. 'We're looking for a specialist clinical psychologist who's committed to paediatrics – a real growth area in child psychology – and to burns patients specifically. The successful candidate will assess children on issues like trauma, coping with treatment, changes in mobility and appearance, and then work with children and of course their families and wider systems. Parents often feel guilty about a child who has been burnt; siblings can have difficulties adjusting to changed appearances. This is a major part of our work.'

Stewart stresses throughout how innovative the unit is. 'We use CBT and systemic models but welcome new approaches. Innovation is everywhere – we've developed an anti-bullying programme to be used in schools; our burn camp programmes have won awards, and new research is embedded in what the team does. We asked families what direction they wanted our research to take and it gave us some very new, practical ideas. The rewards of the job are that you can see a real difference – we've reduced the time it takes to get a child with a burn injury back to school, for instance.'

The role is based in the Paediatric Psychosocial Department, which works with teams across the hospital. 'It's a great team with superb supervision and CPD opportunities. Among other things, members of the team have done postgraduate training in CBT, family therapy and neuropsychology. This particular position works with the multidisciplinary burns team of nurses, play therapists, therapists and surgeons who are based in a new purpose-built centre. They're very aware of psychological issues, so psychological input is welcomed and highly valued.'

Stewart emphasised that the work can be stressful. 'You develop relationships with children who have to undergo painful surgical procedures, scar revisions, etc. However, the team are hugely supportive and understanding. Plus seeing the children and young people you have supported through a difficult process emerge the other side with hope for their future – that is the best reward!'

Stewart's enthusiasm is infectious, which is all the more impressive when he says: 'I'm actually a neuropsychologist and not part of the burns team. However, this person will share my office. We work closely together and it's so rewarding to work with such an integrated service. This role is a great opportunity for someone to learn about paediatrics in a high-profile unit, working with Dr Sarah Gaskell, a nationally recognised expert in the psychological consequences of burn injuries.'

You can find this job on p.468, and with many others on www.psychapp.co.uk. The site provides a valuable resource to Society members and employers alike.

"we've reduced the time it takes to get a child with a burn injury back to school"

companies to fund their research and development in tertiary education. This seems to be an initially successful model. How, then, did it come about?

On serendipity and earworms

Sarah answers first. 'Serendipity. I studied human sciences at Magdalen College. Last year I met one of my contemporaries, Jane Powell, who is Professor of Psychology at Goldsmiths. As it happens she's also Pro-Warden for Research and

Enterprise. We fell to talking and realised there was an amazing cultural overlap. It developed from that.'

Daniel comments, 'Jane had already come up with the idea of a link with an agency, and it quickly became apparent that there was a wonderful fit between DDB and Goldsmiths.' And why does Daniel think he fits the role? 'Well, I've had a very varied background. I studied systematic and historic musicology and journalism in Germany and Spain. My PhD was on memory for melodies.

Currently I'm researching "earworms", the structure of music pieces that stay in our heads. This has obvious applications in advertising and has resulted in some media coverage. I'm an expert in music copyright and have testified in a number of court cases. I worked in the computing department at Goldsmiths developing music-related software, and presently I'm course co-director on the Music, Mind and Brain master's at Goldsmiths.'

Daniel believes this experience provides skills that particularly suit the role, and that any psychologist needs if

they're going to take up a similar position. 'I have a range of areas where I have expert knowledge, but I'm not over-specialised in any one of them. I can research subjects quickly and have access

"I'm here both as an individual and as a bridge between the agency and academia"

to research databases. I've worked in the music industry for a number of years, so I'm used to the culture

here – there are time pressures, financial implications to every decision and there's a specialist language you have to learn and use. I'm here both as an individual and as a bridge between

the agency and a wider academic community, so I need to talk to very different kinds of people. Sarah has outlined the benefits for DDB; for Goldsmiths the arrangement obviously provides ideas and funding for research and a wide range of opportunities for consultancy and applied research for other staff, as well as valuable industry exposure for students.'

Time had passed quickly and Daniel had another meeting to get to. I asked if there had been any resistance from colleagues to this initiative. Both of them shook their heads. Whereas in previous years, academics might have seen it as an 'unholy alliance' and advertisers might

Students face career confusion

David Lurie, Managing Director of Setsights Ltd, sought insight from speakers and delegates at the 'Psychology For All' conference

Thousands of students across the country are making a tough decision: Should they be trying to get their dream job, and how do they know if they'll actually enjoy it? Whether by design or coincidence, the 2011 British Psychological Society 'Psychology For All' conference provided an opportunity for psychology students – and others – to find out how. Prior to becoming a psychologist, keynote speaker Professor Richard Wiseman followed his passion into performing magic, and as his passions evolved alongside his own emotional development and increased maturity he discovered psychology, leading him down the route that today makes him the best-known psychologist in the UK.

Professor Wiseman believes that working out what you want to do with your career requires creativity, and the first step is to answer a question: What is so special about you? 'We're typically blind', Wiseman says, 'to what makes us stand out', but there are nevertheless unique attributes to each of us. If you can work out what energises you and combine a subject area you have passion for with a method of working that suits you, you are on the right track. His philosophy of turning his spare time hobby into an income stream is how he started as a magician: 'If you think about the long tail, outside of the really big careers and companies, there is opportunity for more people to be more diverse in more niche areas'.

Even if you've decided you want to work in advertising, or management consultancy, or an art gallery, how do you decide which is the right company? Sarah Lewis, MD of organisational psychologists Jemstone Consultancy, says that out of everything that makes a company enjoyable to work for, the two key factors are Reward-rich Environments and Virtuous Behaviours. In short, the best workplaces are ones that thank you frequently and are full of 'nice' people: Lewis states that 'too many companies focus on what's wrong, not on the positives and praise'.

Yet Professor Wiseman thinks that this traditional view is a little outdated and that the flow of time will result in fewer people having offices, with careers lasting shorter durations, and with more self-employment and freelancing across all sectors. This is easier now than ever before, he says, as the rise of social media, Twitter especially, allows even the most stalwart introverts to socialise, network and connect with relevant business contacts without leaving the comfort of their own homes or offices.

The best advantage of the multiple freelancing approach, coined as 'slashing', is that it gives flexibility to try out multiple types of roles without the risk of having a CV that shows impatience. Sharon Peake, Director of Talent and Assessment at Reed Elsevier, argues that graduates shouldn't worry about trying as many as 20 jobs, and



that the most important part of the job hunt is finding if you fit with the culture: 'Do whatever you can to find out about the culture, even asking at interview. Remember that the interview is less about the interviewer and more about the fit.' Culture isn't just about the type of people you work with, but as simple as deciding how much time you want to be at a desk, whether the company has a culture of independence or collaboration, and working hours.

You can find out plenty about a company's culture informally prior to interview. As Professor Wiseman points out, social media can be used to contact people in specific companies, especially as LinkedIn helps identify who mutual contacts may be, and obtain introductions that way. Even if you're the type of person – the traditional introvert – who enjoys using social media in preference to face-to-face conversation, you should still be open to all types of careers. Amanda Gartshore, Managing Director of Chromis Consulting and a psychometric testing specialist,

have wondered what a psychologist had to contribute, now there seems to be a real acceptance of the benefits the two sides can bring to each other.

As we finish the interview, I ask Sarah how long the position will last. 'It's a year contract but we'd like to extend it. It's early days yet, but why don't you come back in a year to report on how it's going?'

When the original press release about Daniel's appointment appeared in my in-tray, it seemed an unusual move. After just under an hour's animated conversation it seems a test case for how applied psychology can influence a huge variety of human activities.

points out two careers that are unexpectedly full of introverts. 'There are a lot of introverts who are in management training; it may tire them out more than it will an extrovert but it doesn't make them any better or worse. Salesmen are in a similar position: we see them as these outgoing people who are talking and selling all day, but they have to spend huge amounts of time on their own travelling and extroverts struggle with that.'

Examples like this are why appreciating fit between candidate and client is so important, and why it's so hard to predict. Psychometrics and behavioural profiling are excellent tools for helping identify fit within a company that knows how to use them, but also lead to the uncomfortable situation of a candidate being told that they have been rejected based on a psychometric test. Ms Gartshore says that we should take this as good advice as we may well have ended up unhappy in that role, although the opportunity should still be taken – as it always should – to obtain feedback. It is also critical to remember that if told that it was purely down to fit, that you must not be any less honest when you next fill in psychometrics as it is better to be rejected from the wrong place than be miserable six months later.

This all makes choosing an initial job or career a difficult and slightly frightening situation, and perhaps it is, but the challenge involved brings its own rewards. Common to all the speakers interviewed at the event was the opinion that graduates, whether of psychology or another subject, shouldn't expect to be able to make these decisions on their own. Whether asking friends, parents, lecturers, career services or training and development professionals, even an hour can help clear your thoughts and help you with biggest decision you'll make this year.

FEATURED JOB

Job Title: Partners: Panel Members and Registration Assessors

Employer: Health Professions Council



Partners work as agents of the Health Professions Council (HPC). They provide the expertise the HPC needs for its decision making, and ensure that there is good professional and lay (public) input into HPC activities.

The term 'partners' includes a variety of roles that can be filled by people with a range of experiences and qualifications such as panel chairs, panel members, visitors, and registration assessors. Currently the HPC is looking for practitioner psychologists (forensic, sport/exercise and occupational) to fill the roles of panel members and registration assessors (forensic, sport/exercise, health, counselling and clinical).

Panel members will be trained to sit as part of the HPC committees that consider allegations made against practitioner psychologists to the effect that their fitness to practise is impaired. The purpose of the HPC's fitness to practise process is not to provide a resolution to a complaint, but rather to make a decision about whether or not a registrant is 'fit to practise'. The HPC already has a number of psychologist panel members, but more are required to ensure that cases can be heard in a timely manner.

Panel members sit in a quasi-judicial setting, hear and assess evidence, ask questions of registrants and witnesses and make a decision with other panel members as to whether any action is necessary to protect the public. Panel members need to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of upholding public interest in all that the HPC undertakes, and have experience of participating on quasi-judicial proceedings or in similar situations and a number of other competencies.

Registration Assessors assess and make recommendations on applicants for registration who are holders of non-UK qualifications or who are applying through the HPC's 'grandparenting' process for individuals without approved qualifications. Other duties may include carrying out test of competence interviews and aptitude tests.

Registration Assessors must be current HPC registrants who are (or have been) in clinical or academic practice. They should have an understanding of the importance of upholding public interest in all that the HPC undertakes, as well as an ability to devote time and commitment to support the development of the HPC. They need to be able to grasp the detail of a wide range of issues in order to make informed decisions and the ability to work with clients/stakeholders who cover the broad scope of practices that may be encountered within their psychology division.

'Partners' are paid a service fee: up to £180 per day for the Panel Member roles and £72 per application for the Registration Assessor roles. There is compulsory training for both roles for which the daily fee of £180 is payable.

Deborah Dawkins, Partner Coordinator at the Health Professions Council, says: 'We strongly encourage all HPC-registered practitioner psychologists to consider applying for the HPC's current partner positions, as these roles offer an opportunity to apply knowledge and skills to make a meaningful contribution to their profession. Even if you are not qualified in the divisions for which the HPC is currently recruiting, you can register your interest for future campaigns. Simply e-mail partners@hpc-uk.org with your name, contact details, registered division and the roles that interest you.'

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