



Influence in Advertising: Prochaska's Stages of Change



I have spoken to a number of groups about the power of persuasion and influence. The principles behind persuasion are deeply engrained in all of us and recognized and employed by relatively few by comparison. Cults have their membership recruitment steeped in manipulation techniques, as do many con artists and hucksters.

The difference between persuasion and manipulation lies with intent. If your intent is to get folks to do things you want them to do that are widely seen as negatives, then you are manipulating. However if your intent is to arrive at a win-win then you are not manipulating but rather persuading or influencing for a positive end result.

Volumes have been written about the impact of influence and persuasion in advertising and sales and a study by James Prochaska at the University of Rhode Island (1997) even identified the stages of change that is regarded by many to identify the process we go through before we will make changes in our lives. i.e. changing from one brand of coffee to another.

Very quickly, here are Prochaska's transtheoretical steps.

1. Precontemplation – consumers have no inclination to change from Tim Horton's to Starbucks in the foreseeable future (within the next 6 months or so).

"Starbucks is expensive and it's too strong. I'll stick with Timmies thanks."

2. Contemplation – consumer becomes aware of your product and thinks they may give it a try sometime in the next 6 months.

"I hear everyone talking about Starbucks and I see their logo everywhere. Maybe I'll check it out to see what all the fuss is about."

3. Preparation – consumer intends to test the waters within the next 30 days or so.

"Everyone seems to be making the switch, it must be better. I hear they have couches and easy chairs and the "in group" at the office goes there all the time. Does it taste better? Is it worth the extra money?"

4. Action – the consumer makes a choice to change.

"Let's meet at Starbucks, it's on me."

5. Maintenance – the consumer becomes a disciple.

"I only drink Starbucks, I don't understand how people can drink Timmies. Besides the atmosphere at Starbucks really suits my style."

For a consumer to move from 1 to 2 they go through a process of "re-evaluation of their current brand or become more conscious of the new brand".

To move to action (make a switch) the consumer emphasizes "self-liberation"(I can do this and I'm going to.) which is mostly subconscious.

Once the switch is made to "disciple" the consumer goes into control mode to keep from switching back in a moment of weakness or self doubt.

OK, now that I've given you the background you're asking yourself, "how does this relate to my advertising?" In order for you to create a "will to change" you need to think in terms of a series of ads that will address prospects with persuasive reasons why they should make a change:

1. The ad might make them re-think how they think about your product and their current brand. (Give them information that they may be missing that could make them consider a switch. And play on advertising triggers that hit the emotional hot buttons like desire to belong, curiosity, envy or urgency.

2. Then continue with a series of ads that will speak to the consumer at the various stage of the change process. Each ad addressing the concern or stage that the new groups of prospect are at and eventually you will have held their hands through the switch. At this stage your job is to position self-confirming ads to keep the new customer maintained.

"Coke. The real thing." Confirms that I've made the right choice and I'm sticking with the Coke club.

The process is no walk in the park, but consider where you will find new customers if you don't rise to the challenge. Once you've convinced a prospect to switch it is much easier to keep them with re-affirming ads. Change "Join the Pepsi generation" to "Coke. The real thing"