



Dr Lynda Shaw

Why Businesses Fail When Concentrating On The Negative

“Motivation to buy or invest is far more effective when positive, as opposed to negative, stimuli are used because areas of our brain seek out to approach reward,” according to Dr Shaw.

Businesses are using fear too much as a sales technique because once our brains realise that the stimulus is not an immediate threat we are likely to ignore it, according to cognitive neuroscientist and business improvement psychologist Dr Lynda Shaw, who believes positive messaging is the key to doing good business.

Every decision, whether it is personal or business, is based on an emotional response. Our perspective is strongly influenced by emotion and this includes our attitudes, health and finances.

For many years psychologists have studied negative emotion such as anger, fear and anxiety, because our flight or fight response to negative stimuli is essential for survival. In turn business has used fear to persuade in terms of marketing, sales and HR, but Dr Shaw argues it has gone too far.

“Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt (FUD) does work but it is not effective for a large part of the collective audience. Whilst our attention automatically zaps to negative messages and many think this means that this is an overriding factor in persuading people to buy etc. it is in fact a misconception. Just because our attention automatically goes to something, doesn't mean we will take action because of it. Once the brain realises that the stimulus

is not an immediate threat, it is likely to ignore it so the process can be highly ineffectual if reliant on people taking action. So whilst businesses for years have used people's vulnerabilities to cajole and sell to, there are many prospective clients who are not being 'captured'. The retail industry understands this more, for example than the financial industry, but there is much room for improvement across the spectrum.”

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In recent years, partly due to the advent of modern neuroimaging techniques, research has also embraced studying positive emotion, finding positive emotional messages help us feel good, which in turn attracts us and we want more. Positivity generates hope, resilience and a sense of control and we are more likely to actually do something when we are attracted to the idea according to Dr Shaw.

“Think of writing a will”, says Dr Shaw. “We all know we should do it, but we avoid it because it makes us think of our own mortality. But if we consider leaving money in trust to help our grandchildren go through university, this is a positive feeling and we are more likely to embrace the idea and action it.

“The same phenomenon is seen in business on an individual level. We all choose the more interesting piece of work to do first, or work a bit harder on our favorite clients, and fulfil the jobs first and with gusto that offers us the most rewards. Positivity works and that is why it is more crucial to the success of business than focusing on fear-inducing tactics. We are simply more galvanized when positive rather than negative and businesses need to strive to take this into account if they want to become or remain leaders.”

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About the Author

Dr Lynda Shaw is cognitive neuroscientist and chartered psychologist, a Forbes contributor, an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, a Fellow of the Professional Speakers Association as well as an entrepreneur and author of adult and children's books.

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