



MAKING EYE CONTACT



We all know the challenge: how do we attract the most eye balls and maintain attention long enough to deliver our message in an enticing way. In today's manic media environment, getting people to notice an online or print campaign is like getting them to spot a face in a crowd.



With search engines, media portals and social networking sites cluttered with dozens of links and banners ads and magazines brimming with inserts and advertorials, how do we break through the clutter to grab the attention of consumers? Increasingly, the long lost science of tracking eye movements is coming back in vogue as markets figure out how to make eye contact with their target customers.



It may sound like a high tech methodology created for the Internet age, but eye tracking first appeared more than 100 years ago. The technique is a useful tool for engineers, medical researchers, web usability experts and others, but it can also help advertisers, marketers and designers get messages noticed in an increasingly crowded visual landscape.



Eye tracking measures a person's gaze toward a screen or page to record what they look at (and don't look at) and for how long, providing valuable data on customer behavior and the effectiveness of online and other marketing techniques.

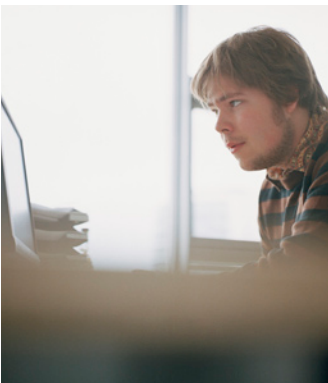


For many years the most consistent way users viewed pages, according to eye tracking tests, was in an "F" pattern (also known as the "golden triangle"). This means that viewers first looked at the upper left corner, then scanned down and over in a consistent pattern. But there's evidence that this model is changing as more advertising is shifted online.

Gord Hotchkiss, president of Enquiro and a columnist for MediaPost.com's Search Insider*, conducted some research recently on eye tracking and made some interesting and unexpected discoveries that run counter to the classic "F" conclusion.

Hotchkiss' research revealed that more people are viewing online content in an "E" pattern. They start by looking at graphics in the middle of the page first and then follow the copy up and down from





there. And though bigger images were better at grabbing attention, this rule was still true even when small thumbprint images were used.

Since conducting your own eye tracking survey can cost a lot of money and time, we'll save you a bit of both by summarizing the most important bits here. Below are tips on how to make the most of this field of study.

Headline or images? Yes! There is conflicting data on whether viewers spot headlines or graphics first, so best to hedge your bets and integrate the two smoothly by merging the headline and image. And keep in mind the "E" pattern when doing so.

Keep it simple. Online images that are too conceptual or vague are often passed over because they're confusing. Make sure the image is directly relevant to the copy, especially in the headline, as noted above.

Keep it real. Viewers are instinctively drawn to human faces in ads and there's growing evidence that "real people" rather than professional models are more likely to keep their attention.

More is not necessarily better. Though people gravitate towards imagery, too many pictures in one ad can confuse and clutter the message.

Don't get too colorful. Eye tracking research has shown that black, white, red, yellow, blue and green are the most likely to get noticed online. This doesn't mean you should ignore the rest of the rainbow, but it's best to highlight your key message with one of these six shades.

Eye tracking is a subtle science yet the minor movements it follows can have a major impact on how your ad is received. By incorporating these ideas into your ads you may be able to influence where a viewer's gaze not only begins, but where it holds, and that could make all the difference.

*Hotchkiss, Gord. "An Image Can Change Everything for the Searcher." MediaPost's Search Insider. September 6, 2007. http://blogs.mediapost.com/search_insider/?p=610

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