

# The Three Percent Club

BY JASON SORLEY

MARKETING DRIVE

**W**ith apologies to the members of Augusta, the Skull and Bones and other organizations of discerning membership, the most exclusive club in the U.S. is not found in a clubhouse in Georgia, or in the shadowy chambers of an Ivy League campus, but within the aisles of your neighborhood supermarket.

Only three percent of in-store marketing communications is currently passed and seen by shoppers, according to POPAI's MARI project, conducted by SheridanGlobal Consulting. So, the biggest barrier facing a brand's point-of-sale is simply to get noticed.

To look at the problem another way, consider that 97 percent of in-store communication is completely missed by shoppers. While 80 percent of this situation can be explained by shoppers' discriminating pathways at retail, 17 percent of in-store marketing elements are simply ignored.

Why are shoppers so quick to snub? One need look no further than crowded store shelves and upwards of 5,000-plus unique marketing elements in some larger store formats competing for shopper attention. Clutter and continued proliferation in virtually every category is causing shoppers to divorce themselves from the messages we work so hard to put in front of them.

Further compounding the problem are the messages themselves. Rife with product features rather than shopper benefits, in-store messaging typically serves as reformatted print ads which assume a shopper is willing to spend substantially more time engaged with our brands than the two seconds they actually allow themselves, on average.

Past industry efforts to increase the visibility of in-store marketing have been largely focused on understanding and capitalizing on shopper traffic flow within the store. Nielsen's now-suspended PRISM initiative, concluded that "audience" was the number one causal reason for sales lift. Unseen is unsold.

With all due respect, they got half of the story right. A mediocre marketing message applied in a high traffic location within the store may generate a measurable lift. But a message that's visually optimized for the shopper in the same place has been shown in tests to generate up to 75 percent more lift, depending on the category.

**Brands  
that empathize both  
rationally and visually  
get more attention  
at the shelf.**

To achieve maximum effectiveness and increase the rate at which shoppers engage with their communication, brands need to focus just as much on increasing the visual appeal of their in-store elements as they do on the element location.

Those who own the shopping experience — namely the retailers themselves — are realizing that simplifying the in-store experience requires a shift in the way that brands and branded communications currently vie for shoppers' attention.

Efforts such as increases in total store-themed group-events, from Safeway and Kroger to Walmart's

recent dismantling of Action Alley, are just a few examples of the scale by which retailers continue to take more control of marketing stimuli within their stores.

Rather than fear this change, brands should embrace it. It's true that this shift represents an overall reduction in the scale of potential shopper touch-points available. But by reducing "the noise" that brands typically compete against, they enable a greater opportunity to increase the amount of in-store communication that gets noticed by shoppers.

Those who make the most of this opportunity by optimizing the principles of "the three-percent club" stand to gain substantially in the long run. The good news is that this club has a selection committee of one: The shopper... and she only has a few rules.

#### RULE #1: ENGAGE ME VISUALLY

Though none of us would like to admit it, at some point in our careers most of us have performed a "desktop review" of creative elements. This involves a very unscientific selection process by which upwards of three creative layouts are placed side-by-side on a desk as we perform a judgment analysis based on which layout we think best captures our stated objective.

We scrutinize the size and placement of key visuals. We agonize over the language of the offer. And we usually dress the layout in the look and feel

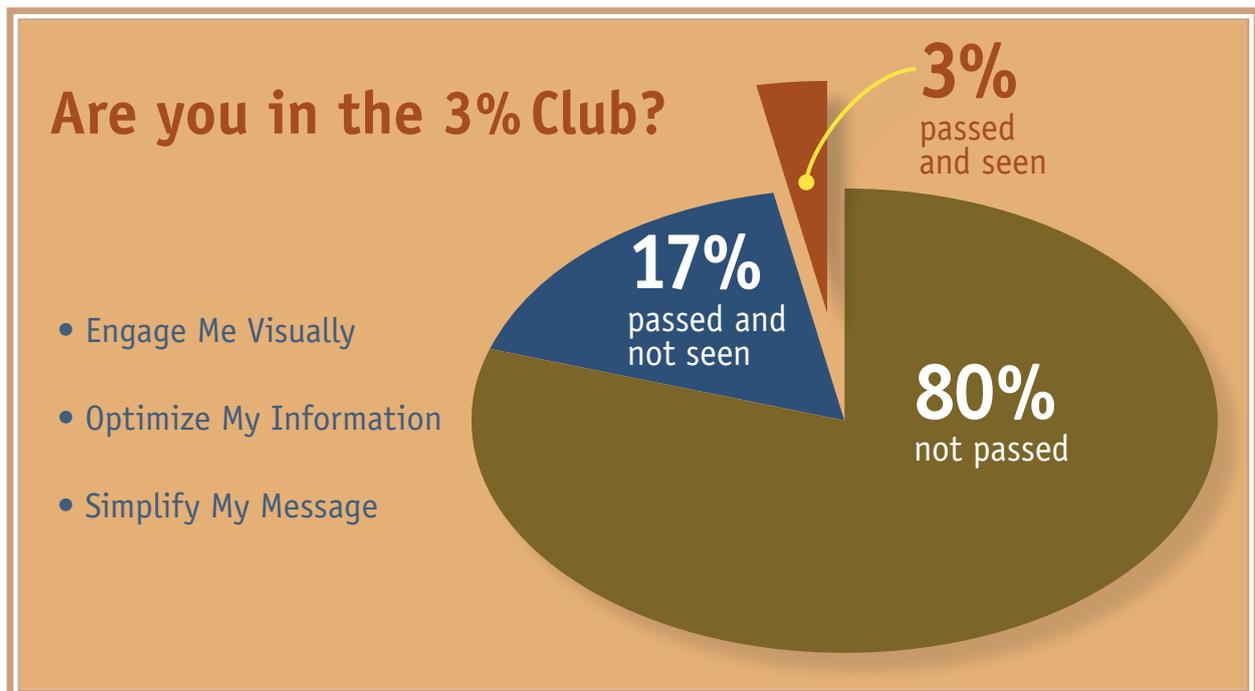
of the brand by selecting a color palette that closely resembles the packaging itself. This is a great formula for completely camouflaging our point-of-sale at the shelf. It's no wonder that our shoppers are missing most of the communications we put up in store.

Increasing the visibility of our communication at the shelf requires creating points of visual dissonance. Eye-tracking studies from Perception Research Services show that a shopper's eye will gravitate towards points of contrast, be they contrast of color or shape.

With this in mind, in-store creative elements should be designed from the perspective of a shopper approaching an end-cap display, or an in-aisle environment. What looks good to us on our desk after hours of scrutiny may be completely wrong for in-store presentation.

**Who's doing this well:** On a trip to Walmart's Marketside format in Phoenix, what immediately jumped out at me as I walked through the doors was not only the extensive selection of prepared foods expertly merchandised, but the prices!

Printed in bright and bold, red and white, with circles located at eye-level above Marketside's "Corner Deli" section, the retailer used a simple, standardized, price-point device of "\$2, \$4, \$6, \$8 ... 100 ways to fill your plate" to capture the shopper's attention in a way that clearly presented its value message.



SOURCE: POPAI

Additionally, shoppers used the point-of-sale as a navigational element, both from across the store and within the section, to find entrees, sides and salads matching each price point.

#### **RULE #2: OPTIMIZE MY INFORMATION**

To define and optimize a communication hierarchy for in-store stimuli, brands must take the time to understand what information the shopper is looking for at the point-of-sale—few do. The three percent of point-of-sale that cuts through the clutter and captures a shopper's attention must also communicate a relevant message rooted in a shopper benefit.

Not surprisingly, "value" is the predominant benefit that shoppers seek today, but they are also looking for the benefit of a "brand they trust." Understanding how to bring these seemingly disparate emotional and rational benefits to life in communications to drive relevance for your shopper sounds simple, but will often vary based on category, channel, trip mission, and time of year.

**Who's doing this well:** To state that Stew Leonard's shopping experience elicits an emotional response from shoppers is something of an understatement. The retailer, with four locations in the Northeast, uses petting zoos, costumed cows, and an almost endless supply of product samples to create a vastly unique shopping destination. It's no wonder Stew's is known as the "Disney World of Grocery Stores."

On a recent trip to Stew Leonard's, as I took in the Easter signage, while noshing on samples of cookie crumbs and chicken pot pie, I stopped to take stock of a produce display. As an animatronic Carmen Miranda crooned about the nutritional value of Chiquita bananas to passers-by, a woman in her mid-forties stood humming along to the song while she compared her bunch to a chart atop the display.

The emotional connection created by the nostalgia of the song, juxtaposed with signage offering information about the color and ripeness of the bananas, both entertained and educated the shopper. Though an extreme example, and one not easily replicated on a national scale, the experience created by Stew Leonard's is one that helps keep shoppers coming back to its stores in droves.

#### **RULE #3: SIMPLIFY MY MESSAGE**

A shopper who is engaged with your marketing stimuli will typically absorb a maximum of two to three elements. It's vital to limit the number of

elements to ensure that the emotional and rational benefits most relevant to your shopper are effectively communicated in your point-of-sale.

**Who's doing this well:** Supervalu's "Simply Good Meals" program, which launched recently across 1300 stores nationwide, provides branded meal solutions to shoppers in different locations throughout the store. With a stated goal of helping their shoppers simplify the meal shopping and preparation experience, Supervalu's "4:15" station features a selection of products that a shopper would need to prepare a meal for a family of four in 15 minutes or less, for under \$15.

To help support the "simple" message, Supervalu employed a visual focus on clean and uncluttered communication. On the header card, the "4:15" iconography is the dominant graphic, supported by a simple line of explanation underneath that reads, "Dinner for 4. Under \$15." The front of the station carries a sign that clearly shows the shopper how to put together a complete meal with the food items in the particular display—all for under \$15.

In the end, the rules of creative optimization are not static. Over time, what stands out from the crowd at first will eventually become part of the scenery as competitors identify and adopt the factors that drive your success at shelf.

As brands innovate with packaging and point-of-sale, what creates contrast one day will be considered camouflage the next. To stay ahead it's essential to have a real-time investment in what is happening in stores from the shopper's perspective.

Spending time every week in stores observing what your shoppers are engaging with, which elements cause them to pause and take notice, and which they stroll by without a glance, can lead to valuable insight regarding how to drive share of attention in the aisle.

By visually engaging the shopper, optimizing the information and simplifying message points, you can seize your rightful place among "the three-percent club." ■



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