

The 3 Levels of Information Processing Hierarchy

by Steve Multer | Sales & Marketing Strategies

“Our marketing message is so strong and we’ve invested so much to build and deliver it. Why isn’t that message netting results?”

The answer may not be what your brand has to say, but the level at which you say it, and in what order. Success or failure of any corporate story relies on a proven hierarchy in how humans hear, interpret, and accept any message that arrives as part of a daily input of 10,000+ bits of stimuli, all screaming and jostling for attention.



Understanding that hierarchy, then crafting brand messaging that honors and follows it, is key to assuring reliable marketing impact for you, your company, and your product. This hierarchy is:

1. Human first
2. Consumer second
3. Employee third

While your message may be the one most worth hearing, your audience won’t recognize or accept that possibility if your story doesn’t follow this neurological hierarchy of assessment, based on established scientific behavioral levels of processing.

Human First

We all make endless subconscious snap decisions around meaning and value each time a new nugget of information is encountered. Visual, auditory, or tactile, most stimuli are simply ignored or instantly discarded; only the tiniest percentage worm their way in for further consideration.

For your message to reach that tiny pool it has to create an immediate perception of personal and moral worth. When your audience instantly recognizes a clear, compellingly alignment between your message and their perceived moral values, you're in. When they don't, you're out.

Our personal moral value traits evolve over a lifetime, always growing and changing to fit the "here's who I am and here's what I believe" persona we create or hope to create. This is the first target of your successful market messaging, proof that your story is the one that checks their moral, ethical, and existential boxes.

Does your message play to the person or to the pitch? Is your fundamental focus on their wallet or their value center? Adapt your sales story to first align the beating heart of your brand with the beating heart of your buyer. Create this opening human connection with your audience to elevate your message above others. That connection opens the door to the next level of the hierarchy.

Consumer Second

Once you've successfully built a human bridge from your product to your potential buyer, you can introduce the consumer element of your marketing. Consumer means both buyer and investor: *Now that I'm aligned with the moral, ethical, and value aspects of this message, is it worth investing my time and energy into? Should I buy this concept and eventually this service?*

But be careful. If your consumer marketing only plays to data, metrics, and KPIs, you're likely to blow up the human first bridge. Your competitor has their own data, metrics, and KPIs that sound a lot like yours, leaving the human you first connected with a confused and skeptical consumer. Caught between equally qualified brands without clear differentiation, their investment in your message fades and your message loses momentum.

Strong consumer marketing is *personal* consumer marketing. Offer story and personality that give your numbers dimension. Continue speaking to the human as you add in the buyer. Successful blending of these two message strategies allow you to reach the third hierarchy level.

Employee Third

Every employee, from the new intern to the veteran C-suite, evaluates each aspect of your market messaging through their own moral human lens first, then applies that internal judgment to their personal consumer buying habits. If you successfully appeal to their human first level, then get approval from their consumer second level, you get the opportunity to connect with their third psychological level as an employee. This is the level where we're finally ready to process your information in terms of our jobs, our positions, and our companies.

Unfortunately, most sales messages begin rather than end at this level, which is why most sales messaging falls flat. It's likely this is your answer to that opening question.

Whatever product, service, or solution you represent, your audience will always process, prioritize, and internalize your marketing content in the same fundamental psychological order: Human first, consumer second, employee third. This is just as true for Tim Cook, Sundar Pichai, or Jamie Dimon as it is for you or me. Before we hear the value of your message for our business, we first have to hear it for ourselves. Jump straight to level three and you're already at a disadvantage.

Bottom Line

Even if your brand pitch makes sense in a B2B interaction, remember that the C always controls the B. Ignore the Consumer and you lose the Business.

Successful brand messaging recognizes how an individual, not an entire marketplace, "experiences" data, information, and sales strategy. Adapt your story to this innate hierarchy in the way information is consumed and you'll begin to experience the success and proactive audience engagement you've been searching for.

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