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What's next

The eyes don't lie

How measuring saccadic eye activity can land valuable insights

by [Annette Bourdeau](#)

Sometimes, it's hard to pinpoint why we love or hate certain commercials. For instance, I adore that ridiculous Pepto-Bismol spot featuring Paul Bunyan, a Godzilla type and company doing the "Pepto-dance" set to a sped-up version of the now-infamous symptoms song. I don't know why I love it. The music? The visuals? Hard to say. And, who knows - in a focus group situation, I may even be too embarrassed to admit that I love the silly spot.

Tenafly, N.J.-based research firm PreTesting is just starting to roll out new technology, called e-Motion, that can get around such research conundrums by measuring subjects' saccadic eye activity and visual fixations to gauge what does and doesn't engage them.

"We can tell an advertiser what you as a viewer may not even know," explains Lee Weinblatt, CEO at PreTesting, whose client roster includes the likes of Pfizer, Unilever, Coke and Pepsi. "[E-Motion technology] gives us important information you may not be able to put into words."

"It's something we discovered 25 years ago," Weinblatt continues, adding that the technology at the time was very limited - the subject had to be almost shackled down, and it took his staff almost two weeks to analyze just one commercial because they had to manually sort through the reel-to-reel images. "It was so expensive and tedious to analyze, we had to give it up."

But during that brief testing period, they observed something important for client Mars. "We discovered that every time the Mars bar was shown being broken into - revealing all the good stuff inside the bar - the saccades skyrocketed," Weinblatt explains. While PreTesting had to abandon the saccadic measurement for commercials, it continued using the technology for print efforts.

Weinblatt says that e-Motion can also help advertisers get a read on whether they have "attention vampires" in their ads. For example, PreTesting recently tested popular older commercials and discovered that for a Coke commercial, "Red, White and You," viewers often got caught up in the catchy jingle of the same name, and couldn't recall the brand message. Weinblatt says that another common attention vampire is the use of celebrity endorsements. He says they tested a spot featuring a

basketball star. The viewers responded well to the star, and were very engaged in watching him make impressive shots. But, when quizzed about it afterwards, they all thought the spot was for Nike, when it was actually for a sports drink.

"I would say attention vampires are plaguing more than half the commercials out there today," says Weinblatt.

PreTesting has over 100 testing centres across the States, and Weinblatt says they're able to ship their equipment up north for Canadian clients when necessary. Standard tests - which are not focus groups, Weinblatt emphasizes, because subjects aren't initially told what to watch out for, to create a more natural viewing environment - cost anywhere from US\$15,000 to US\$65,000, depending on the complexity of the target. It costs an extra US\$2,000 to US\$3,000 to add e-Motion to your test.

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