

Home is where the heart is

Resort community uses hypnosis to get in touch with buyers' childhood emotions

Imagine a small resort community in the Midwest, lined with trees, rolling hills and lakes as far as the eye can see. This tranquil sanctuary offers peace and quiet, even amidst the ongoing activities: concerts, movies, fitness activities, theater performances.

Now imagine you're part of the management team for this resort. You've just purchased 1,200 acres of undeveloped land that surrounds your property. How will you develop this new space so that you'll attract new property owners, keep your existing property owners and stay true to your existing peaceful atmosphere?

That was the situation facing Innsbrook Resort, located about 50 miles west of St. Louis. To guide development plans and create a marketable community, Innsbrook wanted to understand the emotions that drive real estate purchases for a vacation-type resort community. They turned to Paul Conner, CEO of St. Louis research firm Emotive Analytics and a member of the Qualitative Research Consultants Association, to get to the bottom of those emotional drivers.

Conner led Innsbrook through a qualitative research study that went beyond the obvious, or, one might say, beyond the conscious level. He used hypnosis to help respondents dive into their true emotions.

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snapshot

Innsbrook Resort turned to hypnosis for part of its qualitative research to uncover the deep-seated needs of prospective vacation-home buyers and used the results to shape the marketing messages and Web site for a new development.

Hypnosis interviewing involves interviewing targeted respondents while they are in a hypnotic state of mind. The terminology is scary to some people, mostly because it is misunderstood, especially in a non-therapeutic context. However, we are all in a hypnotic state of mind many times per day. For example, have you ever driven somewhere and, upon arrival, had a hard time remembering parts of the trip?

When respondents are in a hypnotic state of mind, they are relaxing their analytical mind (sometimes called their critical faculty) and accessing content that otherwise lies in the unconscious or is defended by the analytical mind. People are generally more open, they remember better and their emotional content is more accessible because analytical thinking and judging brain processes are mitigated.

A better sense

As a precursor to the emotional research, Conner began with a series of telephone and in-depth interviews among current and potential property owners. He wanted to get a better sense of their general sentiments about the property – what they liked and didn't like, what they thought of the atmosphere, how they found their way to Innsbrook and what made them want to stay.

The responses were focused on rational and analytical thought processes and decision-making. Participants said that owning a resort property was something they dreamed about for the future but didn't see as a realistic option right now. They mentioned external influences such as finances, timing or the ages of their young children.

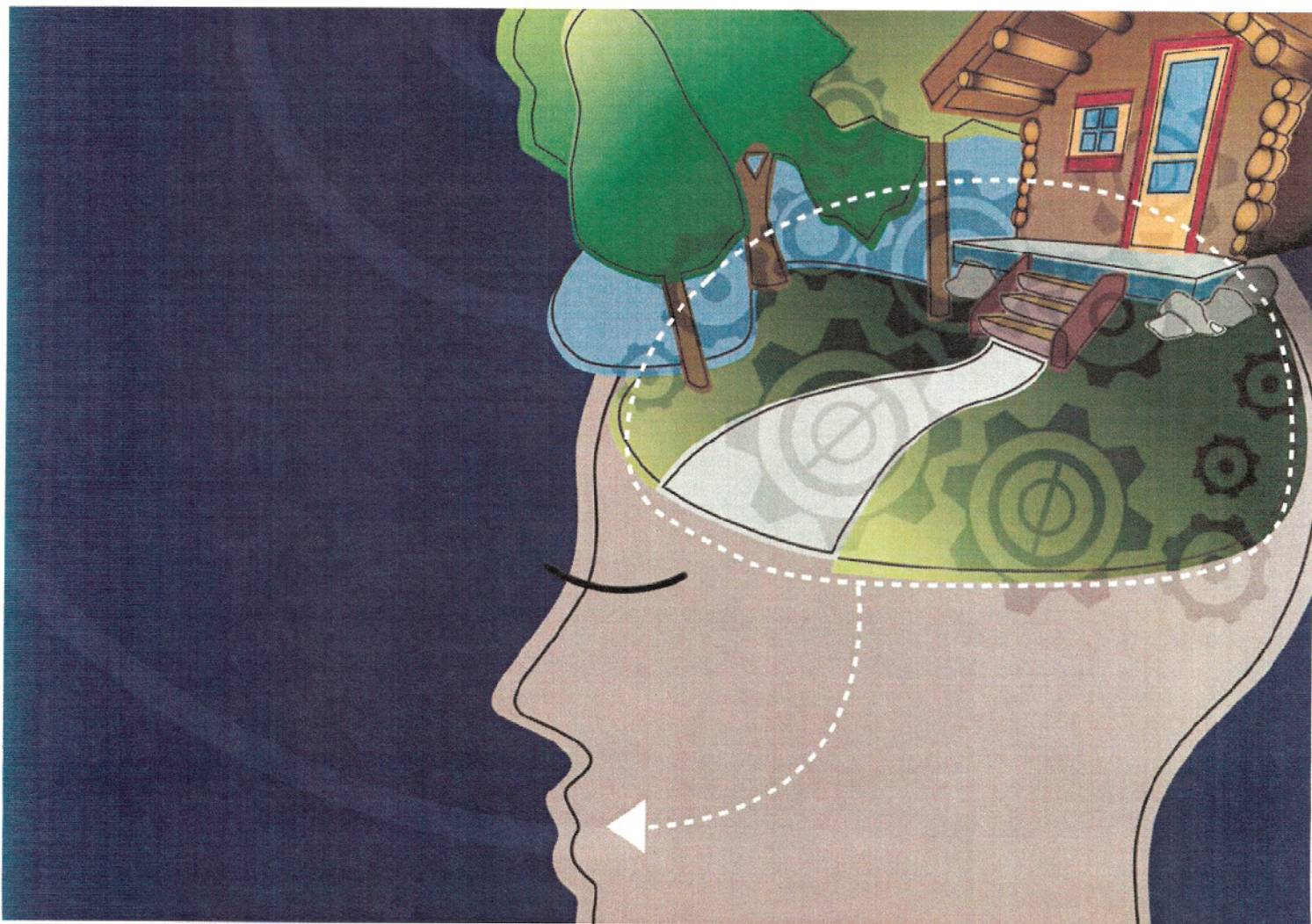
The appeal of Innsbrook, though, was clear. In the explicit

interviews, current and prospective property owners were attracted to the resort's peacefulness. Maintaining a serene, calming ambience would be very important to the development of the new acreage.

But Innsbrook and Conner wanted to know more. They wanted to get down to the implicit emotions of resort community owners. That's where the hypnosis interviewing came into play.

"People are often reluctant to share feelings. Hypnosis allows people to dig into the unconscious, non-analytical part of the brain. It taps into the implicit nature of emotions and gets under the surface to see how people actually feel. These can be things people aren't willing to share or don't realize themselves," Conner says.

Hypnosis interviewing puts respondents in a relaxed state of



mind so that their defenses are quiet and their emotional mind is freer to respond. They're fully conscious and in control, but Conner says that studies show that people talk more emotionally when hypnotized. Responses become less rationalized and less defended and more focused on their true feelings.

Get comfortable, slow down

So, what happens during a hypnosis interview? The first part is inducing a hypnotic state of mind, also referred to as trance. This involves having the respondent get comfortable, slow down, relax and become attuned to his or her external environment. Once this awareness is focused, the respondent is led to become aware of his or her internal environment, all the while continuing to slow down, relax and let go.

Hypnosis interviews usually last 90-120 minutes and cover three or four separate issues. Covering each issue first involves inducing trance, then guiding relevant dialog. Throughout a hypnosis interview, coming in and out of trance – a process called fractionation – helps deepen the experience of successive hypnotic segments.

Finally, dialog within a hypnosis interview typically explores three areas related to the targeted consumer behavior – specific experiences, cognitions (i.e., knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, etc.), and, of course, emotions or feelings.

The Innsbrook hypnosis interviews guided respondents into experiences, during any time of their lives, with resort properties or vacations. One

man, while hypnotized, went back to very specific memories, images and feelings from a family vacation when he was just six years old. He recalled an instance in an A-frame with his parents and brother, turning the family room pull-out bed into a fort. He felt liberated, as if he could do anything he wanted in his place. He enjoyed the quality time with his family, in an open space with no bedrooms or closed doors. "It's like a big sleepover," he said. "Everyone is excited, staying up late, acting silly."

In additional interviews, respondents recalled feelings of fun and carefree times. Feelings of their childhood vacations surfaced, when they would play in the water, climb trees or run free in the open fields.

Conner noted that the respondents were always taken back to childhood memories, and many responses focused on interacting with nature, but always with an element of family and security built in. The results of the interviews led to a theme he refers to as "The Childlike Emotions." The truth and richness of those emotions, he says, were more readily revealed from a hypnotic state.

"Without the hypnosis technique, we likely would have stayed with emotions revolving around peacefulness," says Conner. "With the hypnosis technique, we realized that the playful excitement and security of being a child was deep and powerful."

Directing our thinking

Neuroscientists have shown that unless the emotional processing parts of the brain are removed or dysfunctional, all decisions involve emotional

input. We don't consciously feel all of our emotions and sometimes they're less intense, but they're always there, directing our thinking toward decisions. In this way, there is really no such thing as a strictly rational decision. Emotions are always operating to tell us whether what we are thinking of doing will be to our advantage or not. You could also say that emotions provide the value that turns thinking into action – that's why they exist.

The findings of the study suggested that Innsbrook should develop the land in a way that would help owners relate back to their childhood and those feelings of play, fun and security. All areas of the development should incorporate nature and serene childlike play, such as trees, rocks and natural water.

Quieting the rational mind

Hypnosis can be used to research any product or service, because hypnosis is a technique for quieting the rational mind and exploring what "pre-filtered" associations a person has with any topic, Conner says. It becomes more useful for product categories that are more critical to our well-being, which can mean different things to different people. For instance, certain emotions are more impactful than others for parents considering children's products or services.

That's not to say that emotional processing isn't active in less-relevant product categories. The emotional mechanisms in the brain look at a product or service based on that individual's perspective and emotions are activated more strongly

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if the product or service has an impact on one's well-being.

In general, hypnosis interviewing is more successful when respondents have an existing association with the product or service. With less product awareness or experience, a person likely has not established strong emotional associations below rational processing. When respondents don't have those associations, the interview will not procure the same level of emotional insight.

Also, respondents need to be willing to let go of conscious control of their environment. All hypnosis is really self-hypnosis. The respondent decides whether or not to go into a hypnotic state of mind. The hypnotist merely facilitates that process.

Tied recommendations to sales approach

Innsbrook incorporated the themes uncovered during the research into the overall marketing and messaging for the community, focusing on simplicity, nature and family. It tied the recommendations into the resort's sales approach, communications and overall management of the customer experience.

"In the process that [Emotive Analytics] facilitated, we were able to discover the deeper emotional benefits that our customers responded to. In planning for a new community, we focused on nature, sanctuary, serenity and family. In marketing our product, we created several campaigns based on 'spending quality time together' and investing in lifestyle," says Ron James, vice president of marketing at Innsbrook.

The Innsbrook Web site, for example, incorporates the themes throughout, including references on the homepage to an "outdoor playground" and "trees, rolling hills and more than 100 lakes." Subsequent pages of the site reveal more uses of the theme: "A unique design feature of the A-frame is its wall of windows, which creates 'treehouse' views of the woods or lake beyond," "gathering places for families" and "floating a canoe across a still lake or hiking a worn path on our nature trails, you'll find time for your family and friends at Innsbrook." | Q



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