



# Fascinate

Your 7 Triggers to Persuasion and Captivation

by Sally Hogshead

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## Take-Aways

- Fascination affects how people think and act – and what they buy.
- To make consumers fascinated by your product, use “seven triggers” that act together or independently to powerfully influence the primitive limbic brain. They are:
  - Trigger 1: “Lust” – Sparks a craving for sensory pleasure or experience.
  - Trigger 2: “Mystique” – Provokes curiosity with unanswered questions.
  - Trigger 3: “Alarm” – Creates urgency with a threat of negative consequences.
  - Trigger 4: “Prestige” – Increases respect within a group.
  - Trigger 5: “Power” – Uses authority to command and control.
  - Trigger 6: “Vice” – Encourages a creative approach or rebellion against rules.
  - Trigger 7: “Trust” – Builds loyalty with stability and predictability.
- A product, person or brand that sets off these triggers can captivate others and influence their behavior.

## Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
8	8	7	8

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## Relevance

### What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) How to use seven triggers to make your product, your service or yourself fascinating to others; 2) How the brain responds to these triggers; 3) What fascination can accomplish commercially and 4) Why and how it makes your brand and its message compelling.

### Recommendation

Becoming fascinating is the best way for your product to stand out from the crowd. You can create a brand identity so interesting and distinctive that consumers will be irresistibly attracted to it, as they are to Apple, Tiffany, Coca-Cola and Google. Brand consultant Sally Hogshead shines a marketing spotlight on the potential power of fascination, details its seven triggers and explains how to use them to increase your product's attractiveness. A clear, strong writer, Hogshead provides a compelling report on how fascination shoots a desire like an arrow directly to the primitive limbic brain, bypassing rational processing and evaluating. *getAbstract* believes marketing professionals will learn a lot from Hogshead's insightful report. Their challenge will be applying her branding magic to make their companies and products truly fascinating to consumers. Of course, Apple's Steve Jobs and Amazon's Jeff Bezos do it, but they are authentic marketing geniuses. Indeed, that is what makes them so fascinating.

## Abstract

### The Curse of Fascination

In Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, the village elders put Giles Corey to death in gruesome fashion – he was cruelly crushed with large stones – for the crime of “fascination.” During his trial, the jury ruled that he had mesmerized the villagers, causing them to think irrationally. If the charge of fascination sounds like witchcraft, it should: The word derives from the Latin, *fascinare*, “to bewitch.” Throughout history, fascination has been a compelling subject. The Romans saw it as a dangerous curse. To protect themselves, they worshiped Fascinus, the ancient deity of fascination. The Renaissance book *De Fascino* described fascination as “an open covenant with Satan.” In 1921, Sigmund Freud compared fascination to hypnosis. People, places, things – and brands – all can become fascinating.

The trait of fascination, defined as “intense captivation,” now makes markets go 'round. The world has moved from a “goods-based” economy” through a “service-based” economy and an “information economy” to its present manifestation – a “fascination economy.” Now marketers use fascination to sell more goods at higher prices, influence more buyers and build more connections. This magnetic appeal can propel a brand out of the clutter of ordinary ad messages. Marketers who harness this power can “make the uninteresting interesting” and increase consumers' attachment to their products. A fascinating ad message has six “gold hallmarks.” It:

1. **“Provokes strong and immediate emotional reactions”** – The response is visceral, not rational.
2. **“Creates advocates”** – A select group of followers becomes passionately dedicated.

*“Marketers used to control the message, but today, the market controls the message.”*

*“A competitive environment demands a more captivating message.”*

*“Ancient cultures were fascinated with fascination.”*

*“At its most extreme, fascination short-circuits the logical evaluation process.”*

*“Root causes for our fascinations are hardwired into us long before we have any say in the matter.”*

*“Nothing is, in itself, fascinating. When something activates a trigger, we’re compelled to focus – whether we want to or not.”*

*“Women will spend more to be fascinating than they spend on food and clothes combined.”*

3. **“Becomes ‘cultural shorthand’ for a specific set of actions or values”** – The brand becomes a huge touchstone, such as Ikea or Louis Vuitton. “Its set of values becomes a reference point for how people identify themselves and their world.”
4. **“Incites conversation”** – It sparks spirited discussion and debate.
5. **“Forces competitors to realign around it”** – It represents a paradigm shift in the marketplace, like Wal-Mart and Microsoft.
6. **“Triggers social revolutions”** – It disrupts the status quo and public perceptions.

### Personal Appeal

Most folks want to be fascinating, but they often don’t feel that they are. They find captivating people more interesting to talk to than attractive people. Many would rather “be fascinating on a job interview than a first date.” Most 18- to 29-year-olds prefer a fascinating career to “a fascinating personal life,” but that changes with age. Are you fascinating? Ask yourself these questions to find out:

- **“How much do people naturally talk about you or gravitate to you?”** – If no one wants to connect with you, you probably aren’t all that fascinating.
- **“How much appetite is there for your ideas and opinions?”** – Would an author write a book about your life?
- **“Do you prompt others to think in new ways?”** – Fascinating people change the terms of reference people use to conceptualize issues.
- **“How often do others imitate you in their behavior, ideas or techniques?”** – Fascinating people always have followers.

### The “Force of Attraction”

Fascination works on human beings’ perceptions and attitudes at a subconscious level. Because people can’t resist it, fascination can make them act irrationally. It distorts their decision making and depletes their freedom of choice. This force of attraction controls its adherents, who cannot govern or resist what compels them anymore than they can help feeling hungry or thirsty. This powerful magnet is at work when people feel they must buy a certain article of clothing, eat a special flavor of ice cream or drive a certain car. This sense of allure emerges in degrees, from “avoidance” (its opposite), to “disinterest,” “neutrality, mild affinity, interest, engagement, immersion” and then “compulsion” – which is fascination run amok.

The Kelton Study, a national research survey, found that fascination matters to people. A majority of respondents even said that becoming fascinating would be worth “a week’s salary.” People who captivate others, consciously or unconsciously, activate seven instinctual triggers that entice the primordial limbic brain, the locus of “rage, ecstasy, sadness, desire, sexual arousal and fight-or-flight,” into action. These triggers are:

1. **“Lust”** – This biological trigger involves all the physical senses. Lust is an itch you cannot scratch away, a craving you can’t ignore. The day is hot and you are thirsty, and all you want is an icy glass of root beer. That’s lust, but is it an appropriate trigger for a business? Yes. Lust powerfully pushes consumers’ buttons. It makes them passionately desire what you are selling. To add lust to your marketing mix, find a way to exploit the senses, such as with beautiful design and unusual experiences.

*“Most triggers lie outside your awareness, and many, outside your control.”*

*“Most marketers set out to create messages that offend the fewest people.”*

*“If you’re not generating a negative reaction from someone, you’re probably not fascinating anyone.”*

*“In the face of increased risk, you must increase evidence and payoff.”*

2. **“Mystique”** – Jägermeister, a herb-based liqueur, has a pungent flavor. Clearly it’s an acquired taste. Yet young people line up at bars to pay premium prices for shots of Jägermeister, dubbed the “most popular product nobody likes.” This strong German liqueur has developed a mystique. Supposedly, says a now-famous article from the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, Jägermeister is “jacked up with opium, Quaaludes and aphrodisiacs.” When Jägermeister importer Sidney Frank read the article, he did not sue for libel. Instead, he had the story posted in college-area watering holes across America. Students immediately took to the liqueur, anointing it as the drink to consume when dancing “naked on the bar.” Products with a little mystique seduce consumers. In this information overkill age, building a little mystery into your products compounds their appeal. Since Coca-Cola debuted in 1886, its ads have cloaked its “secret ingredient,” called “Merchandise 7X,” in mystery.
3. **“Alarm”** – The ancient, inbred fight-or-flight response is the physiological alarm bell that immediately sounds in people who face sudden danger. If you can deftly incorporate an alarm in your marketing, you’ll draw customers’ rapt attention. Alarms warn of dire consequences that will unfold quickly if you don’t take action – action that usually involves buying a product. Late-night TV marketers routinely use the alarm technique to warn potential customers to buy their merchandise before it is gone.
4. **“Prestige”** – This “values and beliefs” trigger involves assigning a high value to a certain class of people, places, products or brands. Prestige taps into our hardwired need to compare ourselves to others in a hierarchy. Luxury brands such as Dior and Gucci evoke prestige, but so do difficult achievements such as completing the Boston marathon, and anti-status emblems, such as a Toyota Prius. It’s in our nature to prove worth and value, so adding prestige to your brand can increase a product’s perceived value.
5. **“Power”** – In one form or another, power is a routine dynamic in the life of nearly every person. Power can range from subtle to crushing, yet always involves absolutely primal emotions. In Los Angeles, the top-rated Sushi Nozawa restaurant exercises the power trigger daily. It serves fine food in the “*omakase* tradition, which means ‘trust the chef.’” Diners empower the chef to decide what to make – and then they pay to eat it. Marketers use the power trigger to exploit consumers’ insecurities in many areas, including “sexual prowess, intellect and financial savvy.” People want to appear in control. Just take Dry Idea deodorant’s simple charge: “Never let them see you sweat.”
6. **“Vice”** – People want what they cannot have, and sometimes, they want to do what they shouldn’t do. (Just consider Eve and that apple.) The urge to bend the rules is instinctive, and when you make something forbidden, it can become even more desirable. For instance, during Prohibition in the U.S., the rate of drinking alcohol actually increased. How to apply vice in your marketing? Consider this trigger if you’re marketing a small business, niche product, emerging category, or tired message that needs new energy. A subtle application of vice as “one ingredient in an overall strategy” works best.
7. **“Trust”** – The promise of dependability is powerfully reassuring. People base many of their purchase decisions on those they can rely upon. To build a trustworthy brand, make it familiar (the “exposure effect”). Be authentic and predictable in all your messages. Avoid fads and “flavor-of-the-month”-type merchandising. Communicate stability. And at all costs, avoid contradicting your core message.

*“Meaningless things fascinate consumers all the time.”*

*“We think of celebrities as fascinating, however 78% of Americans are more fascinated with their own families.”*

*“By a landslide the most fascinating entity in people’s lives is their own children.”*

*“Anything, and anyone, can become fascinating.”*

## “The Fascination Plan of Attack”

To help your brand pull more triggers and become more fascinating, follow a three-tier marketing strategy:

### 1. Evaluating Consumers’ Current Degree of Fascination

Is your brand fascinating? You won’t find the answer in your TV commercials. Instead, find out what consumers say about your company. How does its message measure up against the six gold hallmarks? Do customers react viscerally to your ads? Many firms fear that bold messages will offend some market segments, but bland, syrupy ads just don’t provoke emotional reactions. What triggers fit your marketing? For example, Coke and Olive Garden rely on “lust and trust.” Find ways to make your brand different. Which of the seven touchstones work for you? Which ones can you strengthen? Think of the triggers as “beakers,” each filled to a certain point. Maybe vice is almost empty, but prestige is nearly overflowing. Will combining the material in each beaker increase your appeal? What recipe would work best? Which beakers should be fuller?

### 2. Developing New Messages to Attract Consumers

Once you have an idea of how robust your fascination quotient is, increase it. Every organization possesses the primary ingredients (“fascination badges”) to become more appealing. Your firm’s seven potential fascination badges include purpose, core beliefs, heritage, products, benefits, actions and culture. Delineate the factors that make your company special. Consider all the associations consumers make with your individual badges and then develop some new badges that will intrigue them. For instance, Ritz-Carlton reportedly authorizes staffers to spend up to \$2,000 on the spot to solve a guest’s problem (evoking the triggers of trust and prestige). Such instant frontline response exemplifies compelling customer service.

### 3. Executing a Marketing Program to Build Fascination

Now that you have assessed your current fascination quotient and considered ways to increase it, the time has come to create and execute your plan. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, there are universal principles. First, build internal support. To achieve this degree of engagement and, eventually, to help consumers connect with each other in more meaningful ways, you must first ensure that your colleagues and everyone else in your workforce can readily connect with each other. The best way to fascinate others is to create a “culture of fascination” within your company.

As you proceed with your plan, provide hard evidence to support the marketing actions you want to take. Don’t deal in mushy abstractions, like promising to increase word-of-mouth advertising. Instead, outline your plan using concrete dates and figures, including timelines, costs, and so on. Use case studies to demonstrate what you hope to achieve. Your goal is to deliver a sound business case, not a dream. Support your ideas with solid research.

## About the Author

**Sally Hogshead** is a keynote speaker, brand expert and award-winning writer. After starting as an advertising writer, she’s now a brand consultant for world-class companies. She has been interviewed in various media such as *The New York Times* and the *Today* show.