When to go with your gut feeling: An insider's view on trusting your instinct

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Despite what you might think – there's no such thing as an "entirely logical" decision.

We love to tell ourselves that we make choices based on the facts. For instance, you might say that you pay for services from a specific electrical company because of their low charges, or that you get your insurance from a certain vendor because they offer the widest coverage. However, the truth is that your brain uses a combination of emotion, and logic to make decisions.

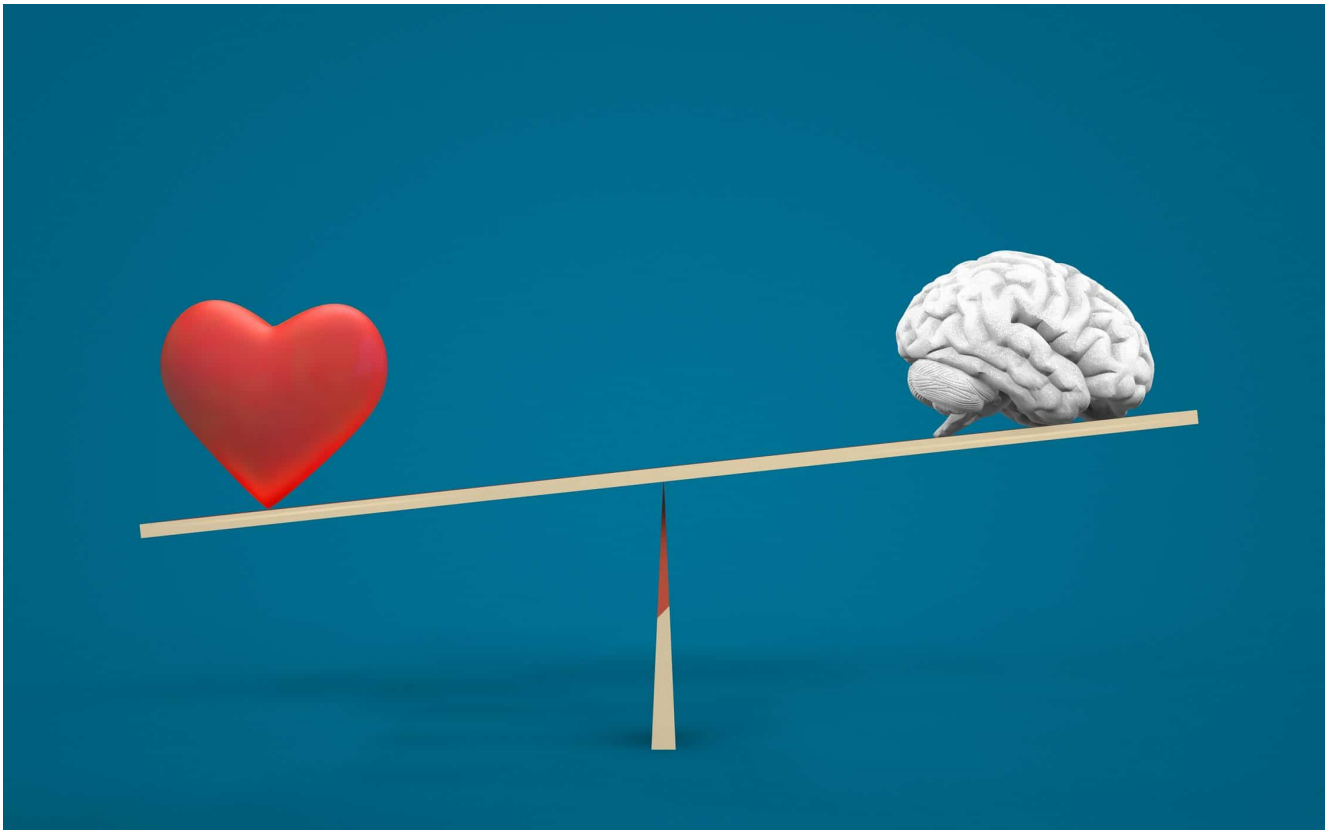
The most important emotion in the buyer journey is "intuition". It helps us to consider our options quickly and efficiently so that we're naturally drawn to a product that just "feels" right.

The concept of "gut feel" is something that we generally accept in our personal lives but forget about when it comes to business development. However, if you consider some of the most successful people in history, like Steve Jobs and Richard Branson, you'll find that many credit "instinct" for their life-changing choices.

In fact, according to one psychologist called Gerd Gigerenzer, about 50% of the decisions international organisations make are influenced by "gut feeling". What's more, trusting your gut feeling can lead to better results than logic-based decisions.

The question is, how do you know when to trust your instinct,

and when to go with the facts when building your brand? Gut feel can be powerful, but just like any other business resource, it's important that you know how to use it correctly.



What is a gut feeling? How do our instincts inspire us?

When you're shopping as an everyday consumer, what prompts you to choose one brand over another?

Sure, the USP, the quality of the product, and even the price probably play a part in your decision. However, as the market grows more crowded, many companies seem to showcase the same features as their competitors. So, what do you do when all the options are similar?

More of your choices than you might think are made based on the brand who you "resonate" with most. You select products based on how a company can make you feel, rather than what

they do for you. In fact, our feelings around affinity are so strong, that even when the cards are stacked in another direction when it comes to logic, we'll still choose the brand that we feel more strongly about.

On the other side of the coin, when you ignore your gut feel, or choose not to trust your instinct, how many times have you found yourself saying "I should have trusted myself!". There's a reason why it's so difficult to ignore your gut feeling and the reason is that most of the time, your instincts are right.

Intuition isn't just a random collection of feelings that happen when you're exposed to a particular product or brand. People who explore the question "what is a gut feeling?" often find that these emotional responses are informed by previous experiences, ideas, and memories.

Trusting your gut feeling might seem like you're leaving your decision entirely to chance. However, science proves that your "gut feel" comes from a sort of second brain called the enteric nervous system – otherwise known as the ENS for short. This system is made up of lots of different neurons that line the stomach, and those systems can recommend feelings of excitement and stress – regardless of if you're aware of them or not. Pretty clever right?

Conversations happen between your brain, and your gut all the time without you noticing. The ENS translates both subconscious, and unconscious data from your mind, and transmits positive or negative responses through your stomach using sensations called "somatic markers". In other words, your tummy tells you what you should do through tingling, clenching, and even that common "butterfly" feeling.

The internal cues that happen within our bodies tell you to "trust your instinct" and make decisions based on how you feel quickly – regardless of whether you currently have all the facts in front of you. While it's always hard to know whether

to go with your gut feeling, if you can pick up on the sensations that attempt to push you in a certain direction, you can end up seeing better results in your business.

In fact, one study into stock traders found that high sensitivity to sensations within the body could be correlated directly with greater performance in a decision-making environment.



When should you go with your gut feeling?

Many people make decisions on their gut feeling in everyday life. If you're simply making a choice of where you should go for lunch, then it's easy to trust your gut instinct, because you know that the repercussions of making the wrong decision aren't life-altering.

Of course, when it comes to making business decisions, one slip could mean consequences on your livelihood and the

disruption of your brand. Given how quickly most of us make gut decisions, it's important to make sure that you know when to trust your instinct, and when you need to re-evaluate the facts.

While you might need to address more rational problems, like how you're going to roll out your new brand, or which software you're going to rely on to run your business with an evaluation based in logic, open-ended and subjective decisions can be driven largely by gut feeling. For instance, you might trust your gut instinct when:

- Naming your brand.
- Choosing a logo.
- Approving a website design.
- Selecting a font.
- Creating marketing materials.

The following steps will help to ensure that you cultivate your intuition correctly and know when to trust your instinct.

1. Keep your vision in mind

When making decisions about your brand, it's crucial to ensure that every element of your design and personality is consistent with your vision statement. Your vision is your purpose, and your "why" as a company. When you have this in front of you, it's easier to make smaller choices about the appearance and tone of your brand, based on what you want to achieve.

Keeping your vision in mind will help you to achieve alignment in your decisions when you decide that it's time to go with your gut feeling.

2. Combine feelings with facts

While gut feelings can help you to be more creative about your branding choices, it's also helpful to use the odd set of

facts to give you a more “holistic” approach to decision making. Ultimately, it’s about finding a balance between making every decision based on statistics and case studies and knowing when you can trust your gut instinct to drive you towards the right results.

For instance, if you’re making a decision about typography, it might be useful to have a competitor analysis in your mind, as well as an idea of your brand voice, vision, and identity. This will help you to avoid any unnecessary mistakes that other people in your industry have made before you.

3. Always remember the customer

Ultimately, while gut feel can help you to avoid the complexity of analytics overwhelm and data confusion, it’s important to remember that you should always be aligning your instinctual decisions to the needs and expectations of your customer. After all, the choices that you make in branding, marketing, and business development are all intended to give you a better relationship with your client.

When it comes to trusting your gut feeling, it might be helpful to make a decision from the perspective of your user persona. Step into your customer’s shoes and go from there.

4. Don’t be too emotional

Companies use emotion in a host of different ways, and the way your customer feels has a huge impact on the decisions you should make with gut feeling. For instance, Coca-Cola created an ad around the concept of “opening happiness”, to align their brand with a specific feeling.

However, if you want to be successful in branding with gut feel, it’s important to make sure that you don’t become too laser focused on one specific emotion. Coca-Cola didn’t become a worldwide brand because they owned a single emotion.

Instead, they created a rich framework of subconscious associations that gave customers a “good” feeling about the brand.



Trusting your gut feeling: Intuition and branding

Using “gut feeling” in the branding world isn’t just about learning how to trust your instinct with business decisions. Since a brand is all about creating “perceptions” and feelings for your audience, it’s also important to know how you can use your decisions to develop the right gut feel for your audience.

Putting your brand together from scratch can be an exciting experience – but it’s important to remember that each element you choose is emotionally powerful. Your logo, colour pallet, and even the right selection of fonts are all elements you can use to convey your unique style and personality. While trusting your gut feeling is important in making these

decisions, you also need to think about how your customers feel too.

Remember, making the most of intuition isn't just about standing for an emotion, or making your clients feel something. Instead, it's about building the right associations with your brand that guide your customers unconsciously towards your business, product or service.

Before you go with your gut feeling, make sure you ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are you passionate about your choice?

Your brand is your reputation and identity within the business world. Every choice you make, from which social media channels to use, to how you should change your logo, all contribute to your legacy as a company. If you only feel "okay" about a decision, then you're never going to be confident with your choices.

However, if you really love every element of your brand's identity, then you'll always go the extra mile to make sure that it has the right impact. Ask yourself if you'd be proud of every factor in your brand legacy, and if you're not completely smitten, then think about what you need to do to change the component.

2. Does it fit with your plan?

Trusting your gut feeling is complicated in the business world because there's always a chance that your personal preferences could overwhelm your corporate knowledge. For instance, you might run a banking company and have a strong preference for the colour red. However, since red is often considered to be a more "dangerous" shade, it might not have the right impact on your audience.

Whenever you're making an important decision, ask yourself

whether it fits with the strategy you've developed for your brand. Does the choice you're making fit well with your existing plan of action for long-term influence and success, or is it going to detract from the image you've already started building?

3. How will it make your customers feel?

Knowing when to trust your gut instinct is sometimes about making difficult decisions that go against the status quo. However, in the world of brand building, it's crucial to ensure that you're always making choices that align with the needs and preferences of your target audience. After all, no matter how much you love a specific website design or marketing strategy, it won't do your company much good if it doesn't resonate with your user personas.

Consider narrowing choices down based on your personal feelings, then re-assessing each of the elements you've chosen with gut feel using a list of buyer demographics. This way, you'll be able to generate a good balance between something that you like, and something that you know will work well with your user base too.

4. Are you still achieving your goals?

Finally, while it's important to make sure that you appreciate the design elements that you choose for your brand, every aspect, from your tone of voice to your logo, needs to serve a purpose. Whether you're hoping to increase brand awareness, give yourself a different personality, or simply generate more attention from your customers, it's crucial to make sure that you measure the impact of each creative decision to see how well your gut feel is serving you.

If you begin to realise that trusting your gut feeling is causing more disruption than growth, then this could be a sign that your choices aren't aligned properly with the

expectations of your audience.

Why trust your instincts when defining your brand?

Gut feel is a complicated thing and a resource that most of us don't fully understand.

While it's easy to say that we should trust our gut feeling more often, it can be difficult to make business decisions confidently based on instinct and intuition alone. After all, as much as you want to trust your instinct, you probably know that the gut can't always be trusted when it comes to making logical choices.

The important thing to remember is that a brand is more than just a set of elements bundled together to give customers the right "impression" of a business. Your brand is a feeling, an idea, and emotion that cultivates loyalty and helps you to stay ahead of your competitors. It's more than just an interesting name and a fantastic graphic.

In fact, a man known as the "father of advertising" David Ogilvy, said that a brand is an intangible sum of a company's attributes. On the other hand, Marty Neumeier, professional speaker on all-things brand-able, linked the concept of branding to today's topic, by saying that a brand is a person's gut feeling about an organisation, service, or product.

As comforting as it might be to make decisions on your brand based on statistics and research alone, the fact that brands themselves are representations of "gut feel" means that you really can't create a fantastic company without trusting your gut feeling.

Here are just some of the reasons why you need to trust your instinct when designing a brand:

1. Brands mean different things to different people

A brand is like a person, it forms different relationships with each customer, depending on where they are in the consumer lifecycle. For instance, when a customer is just getting to know your company, your brand could be a novel idea to a common problem or a reliable answer to a persisting issue. When clients begin to learn more about your personality and approach to business, your brand becomes a friend and a reliable source of industry knowledge.

Working with gut feel allows you to make decisions about the continued progression of your brand identity from a more human perspective. This means that you have the "empathy" to increase trust, loyalty, and engagement among your audience.

2. Brands are amorphous

You don't have to go through a rebrand to see a change in your identity. While a great brand image should always be timeless, it's worth noting that any amazing company knows when they need to evolve on the behalf of their customer. Knowing when to trust your instinct also means that you can sense when it's time to do something different or embrace a new idea.

Trusting your gut feeling in branding gives you access to an instinct that most companies overlook and can mean that you don't have to wait until you're seeing profits drop and engagement dwindle before you act. This can be incredibly important when it comes to staying ahead of the game.

3. Brands are based on feeling, and feeling is complicated

Ultimately, when you ask the average person why they love a particular brand, they might not be able to give you an

obvious answer straight away. While you could end up with a list of practical and logical reasons, most of the time, the decisions made by your customers come down to the way they feel about you, and your personality.

The way you make your customer feel is what keeps them coming back for more in the long run. However, it's difficult to successfully infuse your brand with emotion when you struggle to trust your gut feeling. Knowing how to manage your instincts in the context of customer experience could be what makes your company respected and loved.



How to create gut feel: The importance of brand resonance

For many businesses, the concept of trusting your gut feeling in business decisions comes down to the respect of a single universal law: The Rules of Attraction.

The law of attraction states that "like" energy attracts

“like”. This means that if you put a specific feeling out into the world, you should get that feeling back in a sort of ripple response. In other words, if you invest energy and gut feel into developing a sense of joy and satisfaction surrounding your product, then you increase your chances that that’s what your customers will feel when they interact with you.

Learning when to go with your gut feeling about business and branding decisions can be a complex process, as there’s always the risk that you could make the wrong decision. However, the same could be said when it comes to logic too – as no matter how well we plan, there’s always a chance that something can go wrong in this complex professional world.

Since the definition of “brand” revolves around the gut feeling that your customers have, and the way they develop relationships with your organisation, it makes sense that the best brands would devote more time to gut feel when making branding choices.

While you might not want to trust your gut instinct on every decision, knowing how to assess the gut feel that you have about creative choices like which logo design to choose, or which colours are right for your company, could mean that you better exude a more “human” vibe that resonates naturally with the clients you want to attract. Eventually, gut feeling can help to develop “brand resonance” that ensures that you naturally and organically connect with your audience, no matter how you choose to interact with them.

Intuition is a powerful tool for your business, make sure you know when to trust your instinct.

How often do you go with your gut feeling? Share your thoughts on the power of instinct in branding with us in the comments below! We’d love to hear from you!

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