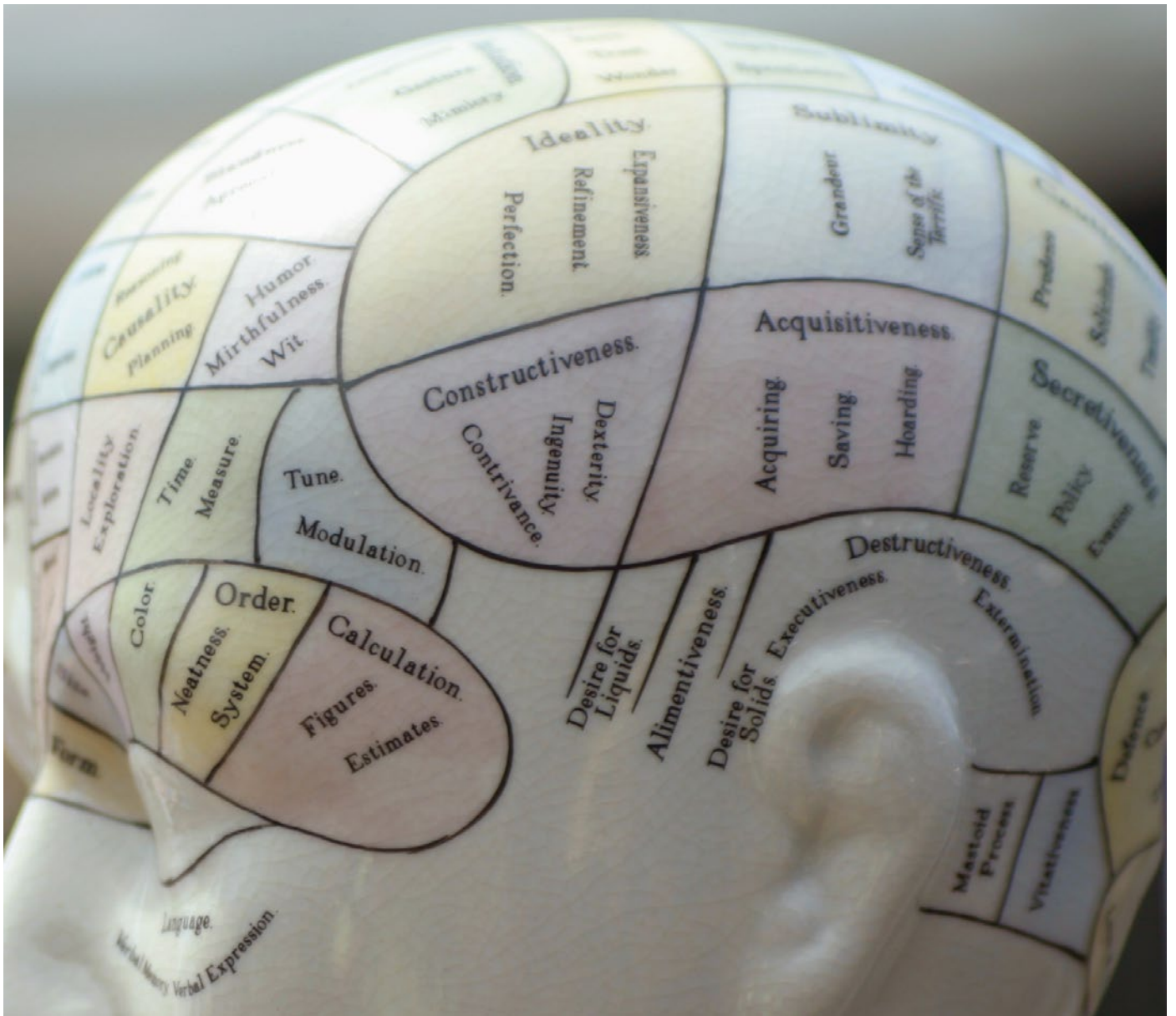# HOW TO CATCH AND KEEP CUSTOMER ATTENTION

Understanding What Consumers See (and Don't See):
10 Key Findings in Eye Tracking Research

PART 1: TEN KEY FINDINGS IN EYE TRACKING RESEARCH

Welcome to RRD Marketing Solutions' series on how to catch and keep customer attention, which reviews several elements of human behavior and common visual responses to new information.

Developed over years of eye tracking research studies conducted by our research and customer experience team, these insights have helped brands deliver messages effectively and, ultimately, connect with more customers.

Eye tracking research gathers quantitative and qualitative data on what users see (and, more importantly, don't see). With technology that noninvasively tracks pupillary movement, the direction of the gaze is determined and mapped to display results.

Often used in addition to traditional user experience testing, eye tracking adds a layer of physical response measurement to validate and further explain participant behavior.

Eye tracking research is used to understand:

- What is drawing attention and why
- How long are items viewed
- What copy is being read versus scanned
- Which buttons, options or calls-to-action are seen or missed
- What are the sequential viewing patterns and time spent
- How many times are items viewed
- How decisions are made

BUILDING THE CASE FOR EYE TRACKING RESEARCH

When elements are optimally designed or revised according to the detailed results of an eye tracking study, improvements are realized immediately, including:

- Increased response to primary offers and promotions
- Better conversion rates on critical CTAs
- Removal of "blind spots" with optimal layouts
- Higher comprehension from optimized format design
- Improved brand awareness and information recall

After conducting hundreds of tests over the past several years, we've learned quite a bit about what works and what doesn't. Even with the understanding of how effectual these findings can be, finding the resources, time and budget to engage in an eye tracking study may be a challenge.

With that in mind, RRD Marketing Solutions compiled a list of some of the most common design issues we've seen to offer a head start in helping you build the business case to deploy an eye tracking study.

COMMON MISTAKES YOU COULD BE MAKING

Our findings were gathered from eye tracking studies conducted across multiple industries and disciplines. We interviewed several hundred research participants in our state-of-the-art Precision Experience Lab℠ and even deployed studies at customer locations to gain deeper insights into the overall customer experience.

Each study was customized based on defined research goals and evaluated a wide range of stimuli including consumer-facing websites, direct mail and email campaigns from the ecommerce, healthcare, hospitality, financial services, retail and travel sectors.

Regardless of channel, industry or application, several key findings are consistently present in our tracking research:

1. First impressions are made in the first 8 seconds.
2. Material is browsed in an F-shaped pattern.
3. Every design has a visual hierarchy.
4. Ads that look like traditional ads are disregarded.
5. Large text blocks are avoided.
6. Images can help... and hurt.
7. Directional cues are influential.
8. Numerals get more attention than words.
9. Hard-to-read text is overlooked.
10. Information below the call-to-action (CTA) is missed.

While this is not an exhaustive list of what will always be found in an eye tracking study, it does serve as an excellent baseline for design professionals looking to optimize conversions and consumption.

INTERPRETING EYE TRACKING OUTPUTS

Heat Maps are color-coded representations of the areas seen most often. Highest concentrations are displayed in red, followed by yellow and green. Areas without color were not viewed.

Focus Maps are an inverted view of the data. Areas users did not see remain black (see Finding 8).

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) overlay statistics for specific content areas. The following four measurements are included on all KPI outputs.

Sequence shows the order in which users look at identified areas, on average. Unidentified areas are described as white space.

Dwell Time identifies how long users looked at specific area, in microseconds.

Dwell Time Percentage displays the portion of the overall viewing time spent on the area.

Hit Ratio includes how many users who focused on each area, out of the total number of users.

1

FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE MADE IN THE FIRST 8 SECONDS.

Did you know your first impression is made up of two parts?

In 3 seconds, the piece is quickly scanned for credibility and relevance.

- Who's it addressed to?
- Who's it from?
- What's it about?

In 8 seconds, the decision is made to either stop or continue reviewing the piece.

- The first visually engaging elements will greatly impact this decision.
- Headlines, bold text, images, and call outs grab attention initially.

Heat map after 8 seconds.

2

KEY INFORMATION SHOULD ACCOMMODATE AN F-SHAPED BROWSING PATTERN.

We're creatures of habit and our content browsing patterns are proof. Use that to your advantage.

- While Nielsen Norman Group identified the F-shaped browsing pattern in a study back in 2006, our recent research further validates its relevance.
- When information is reviewed for the first time, content at the top-left is seen most often. Content in the bottom-right is rarely noticed.
- Because most users focus primarily on the left side, establish a design that caters the most important information to this pattern.
- As the gaze trends downward, less and less is seen, read and retained.

Our gaze moves top to bottom and left to right, typically with decreasing intensity.

3

EVERY DESIGN HAS A VISUAL HIERARCHY.

How is the visual hierarchy hurting or helping your user experience?

- Our research confirms what's long been understood: design elements with the most visual weight attract attention.
- The visual hierarchy of each design element will impact what users see:

    - Size (larger objects have more weight)
    - Color (warm colors have more weight)
    - Position (higher elements have more weight)
    - Contrast (increased contrast levels increase visual weight)
    - Emphasis (bold, outline, italic, font)
   - Shape (objects that differ will stand out)
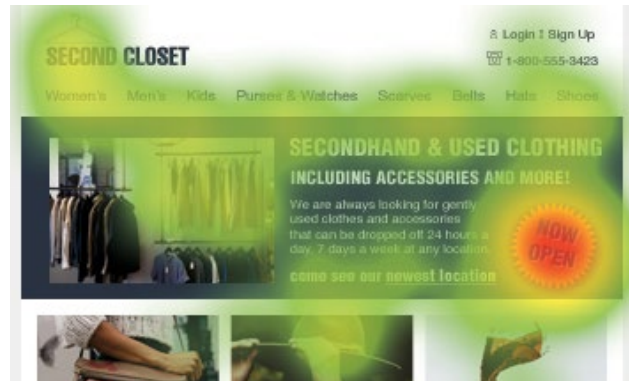
The non-clickable "NOW OPEN" graphic draws attention away from the intended CTA.

4

ADS THAT LOOK LIKE TRADITIONAL ADS ARE DISREGARDED.

Design wisely. Content resembling an advertisement will most likely be overlooked.

- Our research supports the claim that legitimate content (both imagery and text) that's visually similar to sponsored content is overlooked.
- Because ads typically appear in the right sidebar, the contents of that space are often interpreted as promotional and quickly disregarded.
- Likewise, horizontal graphics that look like banner ads tend to be ignored.
- Users disregarded the relevancy of every special offer in the right column of this email, because the design was styled similarly to ads on Facebook, Google and other frequently visited sites.
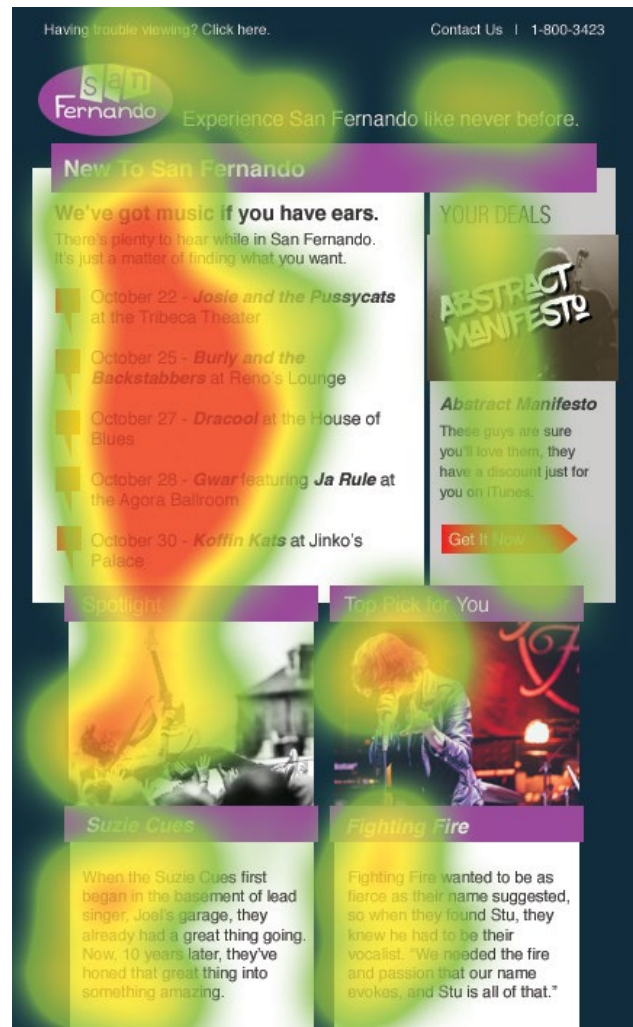
Content in the right column resembled advertising, so the content was overlooked.

5

LARGE TEXT BLOCKS ARE AVOIDED.

Today's users are prone to scanning content, not studying it.

- Our research confirms this substantial industry finding: text blocks are rarely read in their entirety.
- Scannable content, with short paragraphs, charts and bulleted text, is better understood than paragraphs.
- It's not uncommon for users to read only the first few words of a sentence.
- Headers and bolded text that summarize and organize content are appreciated by most users.

Users scanned the headline and read the first few sentences of the initial paragraphs in each section. The rest of the pages were scanned, stopping to focus on headers and bullets.

6

IMAGES CAN HELP AND HURT.

Choosing the wrong image can negatively impact your call-to-action to users.

- Imagery that isn't relatable, doesn't match the content, or is overly decorative can be confusing and sometimes irritating to viewers.
- While large images tend to draw more attention, they can also distract from key messaging and calls-to-action.
- Rotating image carousels, animated GIFs, and images that move automatically on webpages are distracting and often ignored.
- Thumbnail images and icons are typically interpreted as links or calls-to-action online. When these images are not hyperlinked to a destination, users will click them (sometimes repeatedly) in frustration.
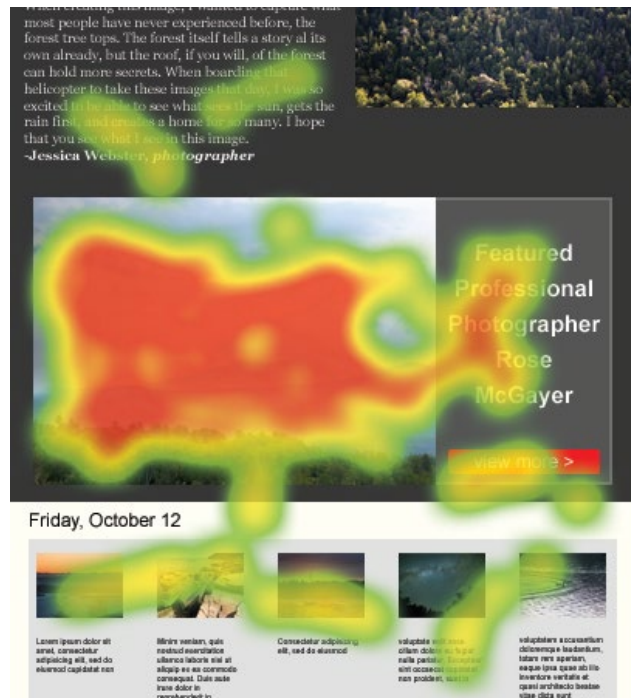
Users were drawn to the large image beneath the introductory text. Once drawn to the image, users continued to look down the page, rather than looking back up to the important text above.

7

DIRECTIONAL CUES ARE INFLUENTIAL.

An image's non-verbal cues can be a persuasive tool in guiding the user's attention.

- Imagery can be used to guide customer attention.
- People are naturally drawn to look at faces and human features.
- Visual connections are so strong that users will almost always follow the gaze of people in images.
- Copy that's in the line-of-sight of an image within the piece will almost always be seen.

When staring ahead, most of the attention is on the child's face and not the messaging.

When staring at the text, more attention is drawn to the messaging, in addition to the baby's face.

8

NUMERALS GET MORE ATTENTION THAN WORDS.

Spelling out a number? Our research suggests that you may want to rethink that.

- Using "x2" will be seen more often than "Double."
- Numerals that are larger than the copy increases retention and visibility.

All three sections of the postcard were seen, but not all of the text was read. Users were drawn to the numbers and large bold font text.

9

HARD-TO-READ TEXT IS OVERLOOKED.

The position of your call-to-action can cut a user's experience short, which may not be your intention.

- Newsletters and emails are typically read for less than a minute.
- Users tend to act on email offers as soon as a compelling CTA is found. As a result, content below the first CTA is frequently missed.
- Additionally, users have the tendency to abandon a piece if a compelling reason to act isn't seen before the CTA is presented.
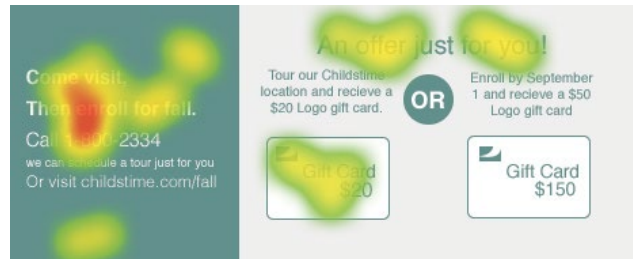
Recipients didn't see the gift cards were associated with different CTAs. The small font was overlooked in favor of the dollar amounts and large headline on the piece.

10

INFORMATION BELOW THE CTA IS MISSED.

Legibility is king, especially if you want your message to read accurately.

- The most readable minimum text size is 10–12 points and left justified, with high visual contrast between the text and background colors.
- When information is critical, users prefer larger fonts and organized copy over decorative imagery.
- The fine print is rarely read.
- Monochromatic elements are overlooked.

Many users decided to pass on the offer by the time they got to the offer CTA button, and they did not see the videos that were located below the CTA.

Stay In Front Of Your Customer With Eye Tracking Research

Follow these general guidelines and you will have a jump on creating visually compelling content that users can easily consume. Of course, each scenario varies greatly. The best way to learn what's working and what isn't is to conduct a customized eye tracking study tailored to your specific application.

About RRD Marketing Solutions

It's the age of the customer. More than ever before, consumers are at the heart of marketing strategies and messaging. They're informed and empowered, and they have high expectations for a personalized experience.

RRD Marketing Solutions helps brands optimize engagement with their customers across all touchpoints—online, offline and onsite. The group activates marketing resources in the most impactful way, through a combination of predictive insights, inspired content and meaningful interactions.

With a fully-customizable suite of research and usability testing services, our seasoned research and customer experience team offers an unparalleled first look into the customer's decision-making process and behavioral patterns.

Our **services** include: customer journey mapping, emotional testing, ethnographic research, eye tracking, focus groups, heuristic evaluations and usability testing.

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