

People who ignite their world: three steps to understanding Wildfire marketing

Issued by [Research Surveys](#)

29 Jun 2006

Seventeen percent of the population (24% in metropolitan areas) can be classified as "Igniters" - people who can have a radical effect (either positive or negative) on a brand. This is one finding of a recent study of 3500 adults across South Africa to investigate people's overall levels of well-being and social interactions and what this means for brands and for advertising.

The study, conducted by Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd (RS) in conjunction with the Unilever Institute for Strategic Marketing at UCT, has led to the development of a world first: the new Wildfire Index™. This index allows us to -

- understand what an "Igniter" is;
- look at four different kinds of people along what is termed the "Wildfire" spectrum (*Igniters*, *Smoulderers*, *Damp squibs* and *Burnt-outs*) and understand what kind of advertising works best with each;
- profile brands using this Wildfire segmentation and derive for any brand its "Wildfire Index™"; and, thereby
- learn how to harness the "Wildfire effect" to grow brands and drive opinion.

It also allows us to understand media profiles in a new and potentially more useful way. So, for example, Radio Highveld has a somewhat lower Igniter profile than its demographic base would suggest (Wildfire Index = 83), whereas the Sowetan has a well-above average Wildfire Index of 137.

Some background

In the marketing, advertising and research world, the role of psychographics as an essential addition to demographics has long been recognised. But how we run our lives (and, hence, evaluate marketing activities and advertising, and make buying decisions) has a fundamental effect beyond that simply of demographics and psychographics. Marketers need to understand people more holistically - as people, not as "consumers" or "customers" - but "people".

There are four key dimensions to consider

1. The overall **state of mind** of a person is a key starting point: happier people with a better sense of well-being deal with everyday life in a different way from people with lower levels of happiness and poorer levels of perceived well-being. Do marketers know the state of mind of their brand's users? As many as 30% of South Africans are in the "less happy" category - they agonise more over decisions and make more use of cognitive information and processes - but 42% are in a happier area where they make decisions fast and confidently, relying on their instincts more - they use shortcuts that they know work because they have worked before (heuristics). This means that happier people with a better state of mind will be more efficiently approached by an ad style that allows for quick absorption and just reminds them of their brand - iconographic, visceral, emotive and instinctive. People with a poorer state of mind need more rational reassurance and an ad style that reduces the agony of a decision.
2. Partly linked to this is a person's personal sense of how positive the future will be - her or his levels of **optimism**: optimism drives much in how we plan our lives and hence, the rise in interest worldwide in "consumer" confidence measures. We classify 60% of people as generally positive but only 26% are true optimists - people who will make greater use of credit, buy more durables, plan holidays differently, view their investments in a different light. In contrast, more pessimistic people are more cautious financially - but, for example, will buy "comfort" brands and indulgent snacks and sweets.
3. We are social beings whose interactions with each other fundamentally affect how we view ads, brands and marketing

activities and which modify our decisions. This is much more than conventional "word of mouth" - it is all about our networks, our roles in those networks and our levels of self-esteem, recognition and respect within those networks. The Wildfire model recognises that two levels of network analysis are needed to unpack this effect:

- a. Issues of network size, strength of linkage with one's networks and activity levels (a person's relative *reach*)
- b. Credibility, self-respect, self-esteem leading to esteem and respect in one's networks as well as visibility in one's networks (*credibility*)

Combining these four influences

If one combines optimism, state of mind, network reach and network credibility, we identify people who can drive a brand to new heights (or kill it if they do not like it!). So, we find that 17% of the population (24% in metropolitan areas) can be classified as "Igniters" - people who can have a radical effect (either way) on a brand because they have a dramatic effect on those around them. The other three components of the Wildfire spectrum are *Smoulderers*, *Damp squibs* and *Burnt-outs*, determined by how people score on the RS Wildfire algorithm. We also use the Wildfire Index™, a number that tells you the extent to which your brand or a medium attracts more or fewer Igniters than might be expected from its demographic profile - a process called "benchmarking" is used to adjust for the effect of demographics.

Who are "Igniters"?

To a very great extent, they have a varied life with lots of different activities (81% compared with the average of 31%). They feel alive and energetic and happy (95%), as well as physically fit and in good health. They are happy with where they have got to so far and feel their lives have meaning and purpose. Their support systems are well in evidence in the form of family and friends. Virtually none of them have negative thoughts or doubts about themselves. They know and interact with lots of people, their opinions are frequently sought by people, they are held in high regard in their communities and across their networks and they are visible.

Other characteristics show that they get the most exercise, are quite likely to see themselves as spiritual people, have the most leisure time, and are able to be calm and serene quite often. Having said that, four out of ten like excitement and extremes whilst the others prefer a calmer, more ordered life. Four out of ten drive themselves hard because they want to be the best. They have relatively quite high anxieties about the challenges they face at work but they are the most likely group to experience "flow" - that balance between interesting challenges with the skills to tackle those challenges. Clearly, they are a "work-hard, play-hard" type of group, but it does seem as if there are two broad types of Igniter: the calmer, more ordered person, and the more vigorous type of person. What is even more interesting is that almost all Igniters put themselves into one of these two categories, suggesting that they have made a very deliberate choice in how they run their lives.

Smoulderers

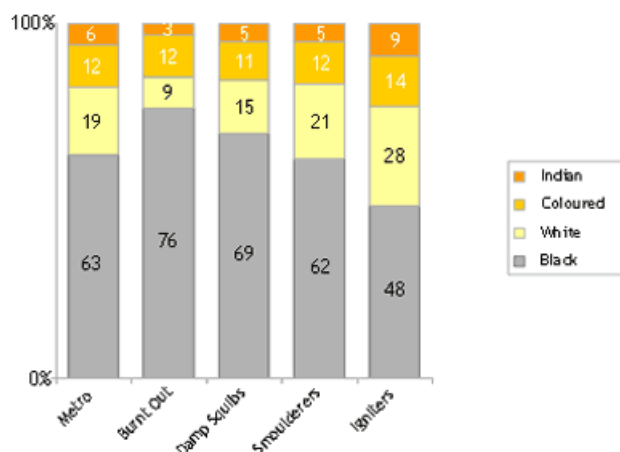
These are happy, healthy people who are great people but not yet on fire: they are less driven than Igniters. They have good support systems, fulfilling and fairly busy lives. They "go with the flow" more than Igniters and have somewhat less structured lives.

Damp Squibs and Burnt-Outs

For these two groups, health, nutrition, happiness and fitness levels decline - well-being overall is lower (very low for the Burnt-outs). They are more stressed with less leisure time and, at the bottom end of the Wildfire spectrum, will be quite negative about themselves. Network size and influence declines, and, if it is there, it may be negative.

Demographic effects

Inevitably, wealthier people (and, hence, whites) tend to the upper end of the Wildfire spectrum, as do younger people. However, it is important to note that all four Wildfire categories contain all races in significant proportions as well as all age groups. So, for example, in metro areas, 48% of Igniters are black.



What is the effect of "Igniters" on a brand?

For brands that are consumed quite visibly, the more Igniters the better - this is a clear sign of future brand growth. Even for brands less visible, having more Igniters is good if the brand has "buzz". Similarly, having more people in the Damp squib or Burnt out category is a sure sign of a brand's likely demise. These are people who are quite negative about themselves and their lives. Luckily, those we classify as "Burnt out" are not very visible, having small networks, but the Damp Squibs can be bad news as they may still have quite active networks - but they are a negative force in them generally.

Three steps to understanding Wildfire marketing

1. Determine your brand's Wildfire profile (the proportion of people falling into each of the four Wildfire groups) and Wildfire Index™. There are two reasons for this:
 - a. This will enable you to understand your most efficient -
 - i. ad style:
 1. the more Igniters and Smoulderers you have, the more iconographic, emotive and instinctive advertising you need, with less use of detail and rational argument unless it is very simple and single-minded - these people will bother less with detail unless you stop them in their tracks and make them re-think their current heuristic for a brand; and
 2. the more Damp squibs and Burnt-outs you have, the more use you need to make of simple, rational arguments; and
 - ii. media choice: align your profile with suitable media using the Wildfire Index™ for two reasons:
 1. use the preferred media for your Wildfire profile, as you would using conventional demographic criteria (what media does each Wildfire category use?); and
 2. decide if you want to attract more Igniters and Smoulderers to your brand and then use appropriate media to do so.
 - b. Understand who your Igniters and Smoulderers are and use Wildfire marketing tactics (see 3 below) to reach them and get them to spread the news about your brand *like wildfire* (but see 2a below first!).

2. Understand how each Wildfire category feels about your brand - overall levels of commitment or availability (or even just closeness to your brand), and imagery of your brand, to determine where your brand might be going:
 - a. If Igniters and Smoulderers are -
 - i. positive about your brand, your brand is likely to grow; but if they are
 - ii. negative about your brand, it could well haemorrhage.
 - b. If your brand is one that is visible to others in its consumption occasions (such as beverages, for example) and if your brand has a high proportion particularly of Damp Squibs, you may be in for a slow decline.
3. Wildfire marketing has three broad considerations:
 - a. Brand strategy:
 - i. If you have more Igniters and Smoulderers, brand loyalty will be good unless there is dissonance in the category or the network; people might be more susceptible to competitor innovation especially if it becomes "buzz-worthy" so there is a need either to keep dissonance down or your brand's "buzz-worthiness" (via variety and challenge and the brand experience (defined as widely and as innovatively as you like)) up. Price may be less of an issue unless it becomes a talking-point. Use broad-stroke advertising.
 - ii. If you have more Damp squibs and Burnt-outs, consistency, reliability and trust are key. Innovation is less of an issue (it may even be threatening). Use more detail and rationality in arguments. Brand loyalty could be high but price may be more of an issue.
 - b. Communication planning:
 - i. Igniters/Smoulderers: use influence marketing, unconventional/ alternative approaches. Seeding programmes will be effective but remember that both good and bad news will be spread just as fast. Reach these people and both reach and frequency go up.
 - ii. Damp squibs/Burnt-outs: traditional and broadcast media will be effective, with a more rational approach. Stories stay with the individual unless discontent levels become very high.
 - c. Creative strategy: using Igniters and Smoulderers effectively
 - i. Contagious creativity - use "sticky" stories that are worth re-telling or passing along.
 - ii. Active ambassadors - find Igniters/Smoulderers who genuinely like your brand and excite them to talk about it - make your brand buzzy - use brand experiences, for example (Castle 9644 campaign).
 - iii. Infectious design - innovative design that people see and talk about (white iPod headphones).
 - iv. Viral marketing - chain letter thinking: use technology with highly entertaining creative that has relevance, for example (Burger King's subservient chicken).
 - v. Ambient marketing - surprise people with the innovative use of highly unconventional media (Virgin's runway billboard).
 - vi. Buzz marketing - once-off high-profile events or activities (Pepsi Concorde).
 - vii. Involvement - form niche communities or get people involved in creating brand experiences of their own.
 - viii. Impactful experiences - people immerse themselves in a brand via either a once-off experience or everyday experiences involving a brand - fun and humour are key (Hershey's).
 - ix. Sticky relationships - loyalty programmes that have "edge" and people involvement, not just rules (twin-edged sword).

- x. Extending usefulness - keeping the brand in people's lives through adding on-going visible functionality that is useful to modern-day living (Kodak personalized galleries on the web).

Summary

Modern marketing needs to move up from conventional thinking and word-of-mouth ideas to embrace a wider concept that acknowledges that we are social beings who influence each other in a myriad of ways. The Wildfire concept identifies the people who have the most influence by adding non-verbal influence and the type of influence people have. It links this with brand and media profiles to enable the use of new approaches to media and marketing that will enable allow a brand to grow *like wildfire*.

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