



STRATEGY

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## Preface

We humans really could have used a few hundred thousand more years in the evolutionary oven.

Because while we're the smartest species on the planet (no offense dolphins), in a lot of ways we're kind of dumb.

We like to believe we are rational, but a huge percentage of our decisions are made subconsciously—driven by emotion and cognitive biases we don't even know we have.

Which is actually why marketing exists. After all, if humans were so smart why would we need a talking lizard to get us to buy car insurance?

So if your job is to make humans want to buy things, you need to understand how they think—or more importantly—how they don't.



**You, my friend, are a caveman with an iPhone. So are your customers.**

For the last thousand years or so, society, technology and culture have evolved exponentially faster than our brains. As a result, we are still hard-wired with the biases and instincts that helped us survive sabertooth tigers and ice ages. So when you set out to sell your tomato sauce or decongestant or electric scooter or whatever – it is essential to remember that the person on the other end of that transaction is, biopsychologically, a caveman.





## **Relax, advertising is much harder than you think.**

At this very moment, there are thousands of people just as smart and talented as you and me working diligently to make these customers/cave-people interested in their brand or product or service.

And it's not just that they don't care—it's that their Paleolithic brains literally won't let them care.

But if you think about it, this is oddly freeing. If all those other marketers you are competing with are banging against the same locked door, maybe stop battling with them and just go look for a window?





## **Your competition isn't your competition. It's apathy.**

It is an important and humbling exercise to remind yourself that even the biggest fan of your brand probably cares about it a millionth as much as you do and a billionth as much as they care about, say, what they're going to have for lunch.

Getting someone's attention is hard. Getting someone's interest borders on impossible. I mean holy cow, I can't believe you're still reading this.



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**NOPE**

**Our brains are carefully designed  
not to think.**

There is so much of everything. Netflix shows, asthma medications, K-pop bands, mascara colors, podcasts, ice cream flavors, Kardashians. And our brains hate it. All that choice demands cognitive energy to process.

As our brains evolved on the hardscrabble, pre-historic savannah, they became hardwired to conserve energy. As a result, 98% of our thinking is unconscious and automatic. Essentially, 98% of our thinking is not thinking at all.





## Did you ever notice how much you don't notice?

As a self-preservation mechanism, our brain is constantly and unconsciously filtering out stimuli that it deems irrelevant or unimportant.

And at the top of the very long lists of things our brains decide to ignore are things like your advertising.





**There are only two ways past the wrinkly, gelatinous gatekeeper.**

1. Storm the gates: spend a fortune on media to surround it and wear it down and eventually your message will get through.

2. Get invited in: come bearing a gift that is interesting enough to lower the drawbridge and get you and your message invited inside.

But there are countless throngs outside the gates with messages they'd like delivered. For yours to earn that magic moment of attention, it must be unlike all the others—it has to be more interesting, more funny, more beautiful, more something.





Umm... OK, so what does a “more something” idea look like exactly?



# THE BREAKERS

NEWPORT MANSIONS

LIVETHEDRAMA.ORG

## The Preservation Society of Newport County (Live the Drama)

The Newport Mansions excite the imagination with their gargantuan excess. So much so, they are not really a museum for learning, but a stage for imagining. We gave people a small but potent taste of the high drama of its storied occupants and turned the Newport Mansions’s advertising into ENTERTAINMENT.

## HopeHealth Hospice (Today is everything.)

No one likes thinking about death. It’s a fact that makes advertising the end-of-life services at HopeHealth Hospice seem near impossible. And yet we discovered something hugely valuable at HopeHealth: enlightenment. Working with the dying has given their employees tremendous wisdom about living. We harnessed that wisdom to turn HopeHealth’s brand communication into something that was USEFUL and INTERESTING.

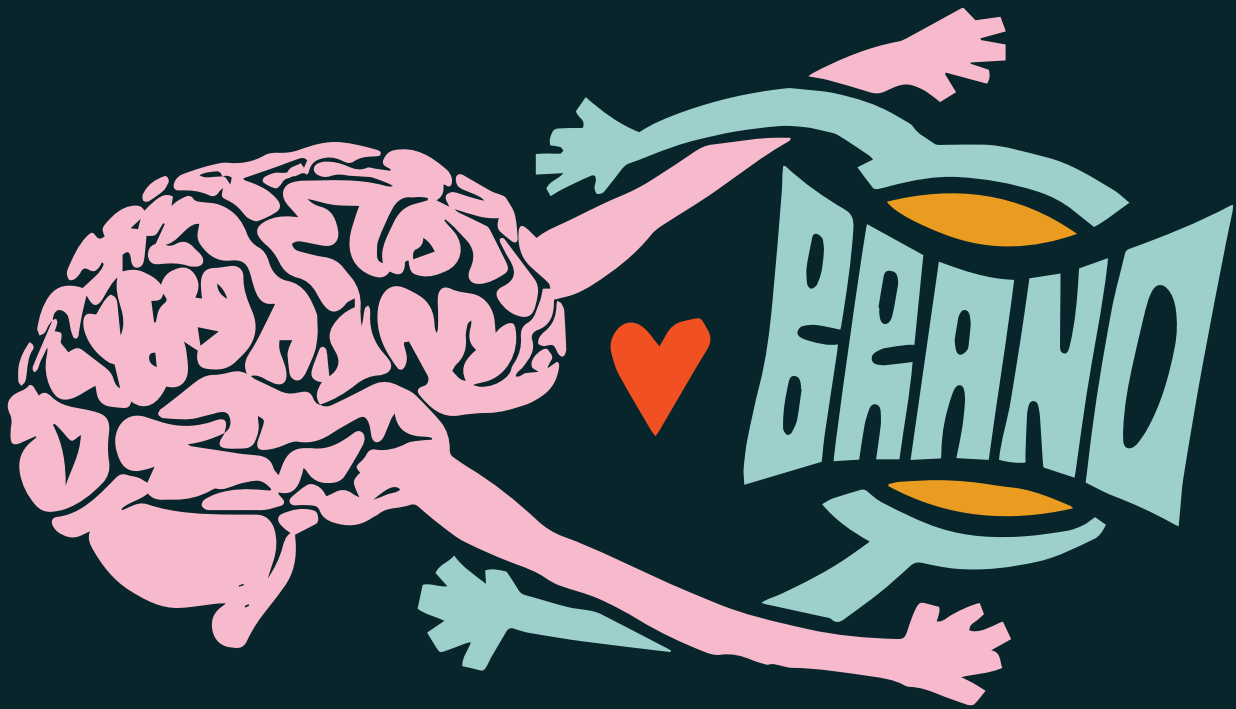


**TODAY IS EVERYTHING**

## Rhode Island Community Food Bank (Nothing Can)

Hunger is an easy issue for the brain to dismiss as irrelevant. It just seems too big to ever be solved. And yet turning it into a humble empty soup can sold in grocery stores as a \$3.99 donation made it feel different, solvable, and above all, UNEXPECTED.





**Brains hate advertising.  
Brains love brands.**

If some of your messages are clever or lovely or hysterical or something enough to slip past the caveman gatekeeper, huzzah!

But savvy marketers understand that the long game is turning once-in-a-while invitations into a meaningful long-term relationship—a brand.

Something amazing happens in a person's brain when they experience enough positive marketing messages, product experiences, customer service interactions, etc. from your company—a new neural pathway opens up that changes their decision making process. It's called a brand. And brains love them.





## **A brand is a cognitive shortcut.**

Brains love brands because they stop them from wasting precious mental energy.

A brand makes companies and products easy to recall, easy to understand, and most important of all, easy to choose.

Because what brains like even less than processing information is making choices.





## **We do a lot of thinking so consumers can do less thinking.**

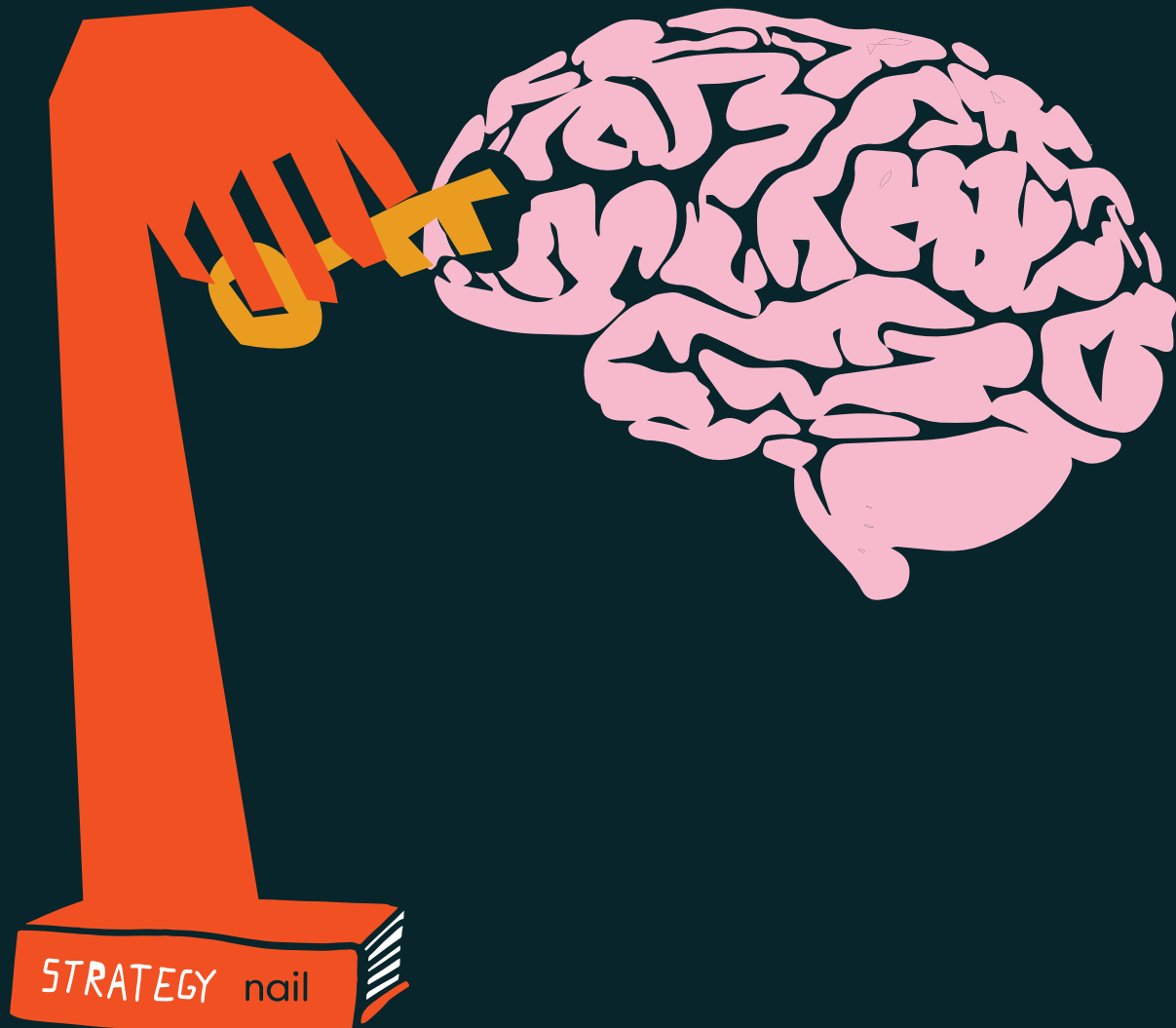
So how DO you build a brand shortcut? This is where strategy comes in. Using an alchemy of art and science, we try to find that magic overlap between what is important to a company with what is motivating to a person.

You, Mr. or Ms. or Mx. Business owner; you're the easy part. We know what you want: for sales to be higher after the campaign than before it. We get you.

People are the complicated bit. So much of what matters to them is hidden in the mess of everyday life—the thoughts that keep them up at night, the reason they say one thing but do another. In that mess is the raw material for building a bridge back to your product or service.

When we start with what people already know, care about, and are moved by, we make it infinitely easier for their genetically lazy, energy-conserving cavemen brains to think. And by extension, to see, accept, and desire your brand.





**Markets are different.  
Humans are the same.**

Pet food and large-scale B2B electrical grid systems couldn't be more different. But they have one big thing in common: people. And that's why we believe that understanding a category can be useful. But understanding humans is essential.

Sure, industries have different ways of doing things and making money. But the gates of all those kingdoms have a common sentry—human craniums filled with a squishy, grey pre-historic biomass. And once you understand its quirks and its needs, you have the keys.





## Who We Are

We are Nail Strategy—a small team in a small agency. We approach strategy with our own peculiar home-brew of data analysis, behavioral psychology, artificial intelligence and, you know, actual intelligence.

# nail

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