

Gut Knowledge, compared to Gut Feeling.

(The Creativity Suite, Episode 16)

Interview with Benjamin Braun

Chief Marketing Officer, Samsung Europe

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With Fredrik Haren, The Creativity Explorer



Innovation experts learning from innovation experts.

"Trust your gut." So goes a common advice. Most of us would agree that the phrase has some merit. This idea that we can have the answer without knowing why is, I would say, universal. Many human decisions have been made because someone's gut told them to do something. People will happily make decisions, even for quite important crossroads in their life, without being able to clearly describe why they went a specific way or how they came to that conclusion.

It's like we humans have accepted that some of our decisions are born from within a fog that we have no understanding of, nor any control over. We just happily jump off a cliff in the dark and hope for the best because we *"trust our gut"*.

But I am here to tell you that there is not just one category of gut decisions. There are two. And when you understand the difference between the two you will not only have a better understanding of how your decisions get made, you will also be braver in the decisions you make, more creative in the ideas that you develop and more sure about what you are supposed to do.

I am talking about the difference between *"gut feelings"* and *"gut knowledge"*.

"Gut feeling", according to the dictionary, is *"an instinct or intuition; an immediate or basic feeling or reaction without a logical rationale."* (My underlining).

"Gut knowledge" is something I learned about from Benjamin Braun, Chief Marketing Officer for Europe for Samsung, and I will explain what that is in a second.

But let's start with **Gut Feeling**.

Gut feeling could be a Yahtzee player saying *"I think I will get a six!"* or a roulette player shouting: *"I know it will land on red."*

There is no way for your gut - or your brain - to know what the next number of a roulette wheel will be, yet many roulette players can attest to getting very strong gut feelings about what number will come up. Some might think that they base it on logic - *"There have been ten red numbers in a row, so next one has to be black!"*, or *"There have been ten red numbers in a row, so the next one has to be red."* depending on if you think that the wheel will have to change its pattern, or if it is locked into pattern of showing the same color. (My first real job in my life was as a croupier so I have seen both types of *"illogical logic"* from players who get so sure about what number will come next even though it is just pure chance that dictates where the tiny ball will land.)

Gut feeling is being used not only in gambling but in many situations where people make up their mind about something without any logic or fact to back it up.

While gut feeling has no logical rationale, gut knowledge does. So what is gut knowledge? Let's learn about it from the man who taught it to me: Benjamin Braun: *"The Trust Your Gut Guy."*

I gave him that moniker after interviewing him about his approach to creativity. Benjamin is a very creative marketer. Now head of Marketing for Europe for Samsung he used to run marketing for Audi in the United Kingdom, be head digital for comparethemarket.com, British Gas amongst other companies.

At British Gas he introduced a new way of presenting the energy usage on the bill by showing how the customers' usage compared to other users in similar houses in similar areas. By gamifying the gas and electricity usage he got people to care about their usage and their bill. Today this way of showing the bill is common around the world, but when he introduced the idea many people thought he was nuts.

When Benjamin was at price comparison site comparethemarket.com he was part of a team that ran a very different advertising campaign that starred cute puppet meerkats (!) running the fake website “comparetheMEERKAT.com”. As part of the proposition customers would get a soft-toy meerkat sent home to them if they bought their products via the website.

Meerkats to sell car insurance? A seemingly crazy idea that worked.

In a few years comparethemarket.com went from £0 in revenue to market-leader. And by the time Benjamin left they were also the second largest toy distributor in the UK after Disney (!).

Benjamin joined Audi UK and quickly got tired of all car commercials that looked the same (car driving up a curvy road in a beautiful landscape...) so instead he commissioned an ad showing a bunch of crazy clowns driving dangerously around in traffic while an Audi kept its driver safe using smart technology - all to the tune of “Bring in the clowns”. (Google the ad, or see the comments where I link to it.)

The idea to do things differently runs like a red thread through what Benjamin Braun does. (He says he might have gotten that trait from his mother who kept telling young Benjamin “Remember, there are enough square people in the world, my son, so be round.”)

So what is it that makes Benjamin take such drastically different marketing decisions? Gut Knowledge!

Gut knowledge is the ability to take a creative decision based on having a lot of facts and information, but letting your subconscious filter all that data and, in the words of Benjamin Braun, “See through the information.”

Benjamin told me: “Trusting your gut is not the opposite of trusting facts or information - it’s about having valuable data so that you can think beyond your mind. The more information you have more informed your gut becomes.”

To make a crazy ad with crazy clowns was not taken from thin air. By looking at data Benjamin knew things like:

- Technology is the fourth most important thing when consumers decide on a car (after colour, model and price).

- The second thing people do after getting their new car is to set up Bluetooth.

- Consumer interest in new car technology was increasing with the hype of more autonomous driving and electric cars being introduced.

and on and on and on with consumer data and insights.

So Benjamin had so much data about what customers valued around buying a new car. But he also knew what all other car companies were doing, and by trusting in his gut he knew that an ad showing a driver being saved from the crazy driving clowns would be a hit with consumers. He did not even consumer test the ad before he ran it.

In the case of the cute meerkats in an ad he knew from market research that the customers could not differentiate between all the different price-comparison sites because, to them, they were all the same. They needed something that stood out. Meerkats stand out...

Benjamin said: “It might sound crazy, but it’s not crazy. These creative solutions solved the problem and just happened to look crazy. But if it solves the problem it’s not.”

Listening to Benjamin Braun’ stories I realised that many times when people TALK about gut feeling, they are actually using gut knowledge.

An old store manager who can recognise a shoplifter he has never seen before is not using gut feeling - as in: “an instinct without a logical rationale” she is instead using years of experience of catching shoplifters to take advantage of a pattern she might not actually consciously recognise.

So use your gut feeling when you go to the casino to play roulette, but use your gut knowledge when you have to take important decisions and feed that process by feeding your gut with huge amounts of information, data, and facts. Then relax and see what seemingly crazy, yet surprisingly logical ideas will come out.



THECREATIVITY SUITE

WITH FREDRIK HAREN, THE CREATIVITY EXPLORER

The Creativity Suite consists of a series of interviews with innovative C-suite managers and innovation leaders from around the world on how they develop their own creativity and the creativity of others. It’s all about innovation experts learning from innovation experts. The Creativity Suite is a project by Fredrik Haren - The Creativity Explorer.

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