

# Advertising Savings

Nonsense syllable memory test and suggested reading.  
10 April 2009

**Instructions:** Study the nonsense syllables shown below for 3 minutes. After 3 minutes, turn the paper over and walk away for 2 minutes. After 2 minutes, write on the back of this paper (no peeking please) as many syllables as you can recall.

Please read the adjacent column of text when you're ready to see how you compare to others who have taken the test.

BOJ

DEG

GUQ

BAJ

FAJ

GER

BUP

DOY

CEH

FUY

FEC

GOQ

BIW

CUQ

CAJ

GIC

COJ

FIH

GAH

DIJ

BEQ

DUC

TEJ

DAW

FOM

**Manna Groups, Inc.**  
**[www.mannanosh.com](http://www.mannanosh.com)**  
**[comments@mannanosh.com](mailto:comments@mannanosh.com)**  
**972.490.1520**

## Nonsense Syllable Test Results

Manna Groups, Inc. have been using some form of this nonsense syllable test in seminars and presentations for more than 30 years. The results show a consistent pattern. All respondents get the first two or three. About half get the next two or three. Between syllables 7 and 10 there is a marked drop off of correct answers. In general, most people fade after syllable 8.

When queried down the rest of the list, an individual person will indicate a "hit" for a particular syllable. In nearly all cases this is because the respondent has used a mnemonic to aid their memory.

When preparing this test for a known audience Manna Groups works carefully to control these chance "hits" by eliminating syllables that are known to be used within that audience's environment.

When used in an open presentation there is no way of knowing, other than in a generic sense, what syllables to eliminate. Nonetheless, the "hit" numbers come out about the same.

Another important common finding is the significant number of correct answers to the last and next to last syllable. Just as most human's memory fades after 6 to 8 syllables, so do most have the bias of remembering well what was learned last.

This 6-fact and first/last memory facility gives rise to 2 general rules that apply to public speaking. The rules are known as the "Six-fact Law" and "The Law of Primacy and Recency". (See Manna Groups document, "How To Make An Effective Presentation" <http://www.mannavault.com/media/005F4EE7.pdf>)

We hope you enjoyed the experience and that you will find this information valuable when engaged in your next advertising effort.

**Suggested Reading**  
**Ebbinghaus, Hermann. Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology. Basic Books, 2005.**  
**ISBN: 0-486-25555-7**

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Manna Nosh transcript.  
10 April 2009  
Voices: Bob Manna, Matt Manna

**Matt Manna:** It's time for Manna Nosh.

From Dallas Texas this is Matt Manna welcoming you to this edition of Manna Nosh.

Should I advertise and If so, how much and for how long?

Is it necessary to increase my advertising budget over time or is there a savings associated with longevity? And what exactly is meant by advertising savings?

Bob will be along in a minute to answer these questions but first let me say that the answer to all communication questions, including questions about advertising, are rooted in an understanding of how the mind processes information.

That's what communication is - it's what occurs when our mind makes meaning out of the information that comes through our senses.

The only way to understand how to communicate effectively, is to understand how the mind turns information into meaning.

When it comes to advertising it pays to start with the story of a German psychologist named Hermann Ebbinghaus, who, as it happens, is the subject of today's Manna Nosh entitled, Advertising Savings.

**Bob Manna:** How do we know our advertising is worth it? Sound familiar?

Agreement is seldom reached on the return on investment of the annual advertising budget.

There is a famous quote attributed to John Wannamaker, proprietor of the highly innovative early 20th century Wannamaker department stores in Philadelphia and New York. He is reported to have said this about his advertising, "I know that half my advertising budget is wasted. I just don't know which half."

Nonetheless, after all arguments are heard and the hassling subsidies, companies not only approve but generally increase their advertising budget. Why do they do so? Because each year it cost more to support the

holy grail of advertising - frequency and reach.

Frequency and reach, the theorem that states that for an advertising message to be effective it must be repeated frequently enough to reach its target.

As with most theorems, I find it useful to investigate the basis for their acceptance. I believe it's important to know why things work and not accept them just because that's what everyone else does. So spare me a few minutes to tell you what I believe is the origin of frequency and reach.

About 125 years ago Hermann Ebbinghaus, a psychologist, undertook research into human memory.

He created a set of 3 letter syllables consisting of a consonant followed by a vowel followed by a non-repeated consonant. An example would be the letters H U J; a consonant, vowel, non-repeating consonant.

He rejected syllables that related to any recognizable word or object such as D-O-T because dot is a recognizable word.

He referred to his 3-letter creations as nonsense syllables.

He prepared on small pieces of paper more than 2000 of these then used them to test himself and I might add in a most ingenious way. His goal was to determine the maximum number of nonsense syllables a person could remember over a measured period of time.

He would randomly extract from his 2000+ nonsense syllables a small sample. One by one he would write down each sequentially into a notebook being careful to stack each paper piece on a table in the order in which they had been recorded.

When finished with the selection, recording and stacking process he had a syllable list in his notebook that exactly matched the stack of paper pieces resting on the table

Now he began his test.

Selecting from the stacked pieces of paper he would, in order, and to the rhythm of a metronome, thereby

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insuring that no syllable was given a longer study time, read aloud to himself each syllable until the stack was exhausted.

Then he would write down in another notebook the syllables in the order read as many as he could remember. By comparing the lists from the two separate notebooks he computed his recall ability. He repeated this process, reportedly, during the course of his research, some say more than 50,000 times.

In 1885 he published his findings. The most notable among these is the now famous Ebbinghaus forgetting curve. This is a graph that illustrates how quickly the mind forgets. He discovered that after 20 minutes 40% of what was learned was lost. After an hour 55% was lost and after 9 hours 60%. After 10 hours about 80% was lost at which point memory loss tended to level out.

The Ebbinghaus forgetting curve has been tested many times over the century or more since it's origin and it's findings have been sustained.

His research gave rise to several other memory phenomena among them what he called the "savings" effect. In this experiment he studied and restudied a list until he had total recall. Then he ignored the list until he could not recall it and then began to study it again. He measured the amount of time it took him to re-learn the list as compared to the first time he learned it and called this difference in time "savings". He discovered the savings were easily identifiable with each re-learning and the savings were substantial by the 3rd repetition.

So to Ebbinghaus we may be indebted for the origin of the theorem of frequency and reach. While not a rule, it is probable that a target audience is going to have to make contact with an ad more than once for that ad to be remembered. And that ad will have to be recycled periodically to keep it remembered just as Ebbinghaus had to learn and re-learn before he uncovered his savings factor.

It comes as no mystery then as to the significant cost of advertising considering the numerous ways by which an ad can be presented and the numerous conditions under which it can be received. Considerable thought had to

be given to ad placement if an ad is to make contact at least three times with a target. That's why demographics play such a significant role in influencing media choice and time selection. And why ad effectiveness schemes remain a hotly debated subject and a huge industry in it's own right.

But having your product remembered is one thing. Having it purchased is another. This is the essence of John Wannamker's famous statement. If frequency and reach was the deciding factor in generating sales, then it might be concluded that the product with the largest advertising budget would be the sales leader.

But that's not always the case.

How often do you see or hear an ad for the # 1 selling magazine with 80 million readers – The Readers Digest? The Hershey Company founded in 1900 had a hit with the Hershey bar long before 1969 when it began to advertise.

Exceptions? Yes. But not the research that informs us that 90% of advertised new supermarket products fail!

To be sure advertising is essential. At Manna Groups we express it like this. If you want to get applause, you have to go on stage and sing. But as any entertainer will tell you, there's more to being a hit than making an appearance. Ah, that's a topic for another time.

For now you might find it interesting to test your memory. Make yourself a list of a dozen or so nonsense syllables and follow the Ebbinghaus procedure. I believe you will find it not only entertaining but worth your time and effort.

The more advertising knowledgeable you become the less uncertain you will be about which half of your ad budget is wasted.

This is Bob Manna. Thanks for listening.

**Matt Manna:** Well ladies and gentlemen that just about concludes this edition of Manna Nosh.

The program returns next time via the internet at [www.mannanosh.com](http://www.mannanosh.com) that's [www.mannanosh.com](http://www.mannanosh.com) were you can find show notes and transcripts of each and every Manna Nosh. Included in the show notes for

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this edition of Manna Nosh is a sample test very similar to the one devised by Hermann Ebbinghaus.

Give it a try and let us know how you do. You can contact us via our eMail address: [comments@mannanosh.com](mailto:comments@mannanosh.com)

This program is also available as a free podcast via iTunes. You can find us in the iTunes store by searching for Manna Nosh.

Manna Nosh is a production of Manna Groups, Inc. and is recorded and produced at the Manna Groups studio located in Dallas Texas.

This is Matt Manna saying thanks for listening and we'll talk to you again next time right here on Manna Nosh.