

Words that Sell Brick

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Semantic research has developed methods for the measurement of meaning (Osgood, 1957). The technique can provide a vocabulary useful to brick salespersons in describing their products to prospective customers. Nearly all observers will describe the connotative meaning of a particular surface in the same general terms. The odds are seven and a half to one that an individual's reaction to a particular brick masonry surface will not differ more than slightly from the average response of a group of people, (Burnham and Grimm, 1973).

CONNOTATIVE MEANING

Very early in life we learn that words are sound symbols for ideas, that certain sounds denote specific meanings. However, it takes most of us a long time to learn that a word means much more than just the thing it denotes. For example, *home* denotes a place where a family lives, but *home* means much more than that to all of us. *Home* connotes something pleasant rather than unpleasant, soft rather than hard, and relaxed rather than tense and so on. It is these connotative meanings, which all words have, that salesmen can use to motivate people to buy.

Over the last decades there has been a considerable amount of research in semantics and specifically in the measurement of connotative meaning. Since a word may have many connotations, it is useful to group them into a few categories of meaning. The major types of connotative meaning are value, strength, and action. If one says how good a thing is, how strong and how active, they have conveyed more than 75% of the connotative meaning of any word in any context.

Value does not mean exclusively cash worth. That is the denotative meaning. Value connotes judgements of good or bad, beautiful or ugly, graceful or awkward, cheerful or sad, precise or vague, and the like.

Strength denotes the physical property of resistance to force, but strength connotes rugged or delicate, hard or soft, tough or tender, heavy or light, strong or weak, large or small, and the like.

Action denotes motion, but it connotes tense or relaxed, dynamic or static, warm or cold, energetic or inert, active or

passive, vibrant or still, varied or repetitive, complex or simple, and the like.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMINOLOGY

In selling brick to a housewife, builder, or architect, the use of these connotative descriptions can be applied to specific brick colors, textures, and sizes. Doing so provides much more effective communication with the prospect.

When a dark grayish brown, scratch textured, Norman economy brick is referred to as being *potent*, the prospect will understand and agree that a wall of such brick conveys the impression of strength. That it is rugged, tough, hard, and heavy. Such a wall might therefore be used in a prison, warehouse, courthouse, or industrial research laboratory, which building types are also thought of as being *potent*. See Table 6.

Similarly, psychological research shows that a light pale yellow, smooth faced, Roman brick is generally thought of as inactive or passive. A wall of that brick may have a calming affect on a building, which is thought of as being dynamic and energetic, such as a hotel or shopping center.

Of course, there are gradations of meaning between these extremes. Everything is not good or bad, strong or weak, and active or passive. In addition to value, strength, and action, there are four degrees of connotative meaning, that is very, moderately, slightly, and neutral. A brick color may be very strong or weak, moderately active or passive, slightly good or bad, or none of these, that is neutral. *Home* may be moderately good, slightly active and neither strong nor weak. *Warehouse* may be slightly bad, moderately strong, and slightly inactive.

BRICK COLOR, TEXTURE AND SIZE

Most brick colors are neither good nor bad. On the evaluative scale most are neutral or nearly so. In general with regard to brick colors, yellows are valued more highly than reds. Reds, browns, and oranges are stronger than pinks or yellows. Moderate orange and light yellowish browns are more active than other brick colors. The connotative meanings of thirteen brick colors are given in Table 1. Grimm (1999) describes brick color selection and specification.

Concerning textures, rock face brick are considered a little better than other textures. Velours, scratches, and rock-

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Table 1. Brick Color Connotations

Color ^a	Semantic Category		
	Value	Strength	Action
Grayish Red	Neutral	Slightly Strong	Neutral
Pale Yellowish Pink	Neutral	Moderately Weak	Slightly Passive
Brownish Pink	-	Slightly Weak	Slightly Passive
Grayish Reddish Brown	-	Slightly Strong	Neutral
Moderate Orange	Neutral	Slightly Strong	Moderately Active
Light Brown	-	Slightly Strong	Neutral
Light Grayish Brown	Neutral	Slightly Strong	Slightly Passive
Grayish Brown	Neutral	Slightly Strong	Neutral
Light Yellowish Brown	Slightly Good	Neutral	Slightly Active
Pale Yellow	Slightly Good	Slightly Weak	Neutral
Dark Grayish Yellow	Neutral	Slightly Strong	Neutral
Grayish Yellow	Slightly Good	Slightly Weak	Neutral
Dark Gray	-	Moderately Strong	Slightly Passive

^a These color names are the Inter-Society Color Council - National Institute for Standards and Technology color terms recommended by the American Institute of Architects.

faceted units are slightly stronger than either smooth or dent faceted units. Smooth faces are slightly passive, and dent faces are slightly active. Other textures are neutral on the activity scale. Very rough and very smooth surfaces are weaker than moderately rough textures. Extremes of smooth and rough are more passive than moderately textured surfaces. The connotative meanings of five brick textures are given in Table 2.

The face dimensions of standard modular and economy Norman are considered a little better than Roman or economy size units. Economy and economy Norman units are slightly stronger than either standard modular or roman brick. Larger brick sizes are more passive than the smaller face areas. Strength increases with the height of a unit. The height to length ratio affects value judgment. Brick faces which tend

to be squarish or very slender are not considered as good as those having height to length ratios in between these extremes. That is, standard modular brick face dimensions are usually thought of as being better than either economy or roman brick face proportions. The connotative meanings of four brick sizes are given in Table 3.

Table 4 gives several synonyms for the extremes of the three dimensions of connotative meaning. Wherever good or bad, strong or weak, and active or passive are used in Tables 1, 2, and 3 any of the synonyms listed in Table 4 may be substituted. Wherever *very*, *moderately*, *slightly*, or *neutral* are used in Table 1, synonyms given in Table 5 may be substituted. For example, the following statements could properly be made about a light yellowish brown, rock face, standard modular brick:

Table 2. Brick Texture Connotations

Texture	Value	Strength	Action
Rock	Slightly Good	Slightly Strong	Neutral
Scratch	Neutral	Slightly Strong	Neutral
Dent	Neutral	Neutral	Slightly Active
Velour	Neutral	Slightly Strong	Neutral
Smooth	Neutral	Neutral	Slightly Passive

Table 3. Brick Size Connotations



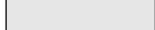
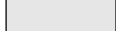
Name	Nominal Face Dimensions, in. (mm)	Face Proportions	Value	Strength	Action
Roman	2 x 12 (50 x 300)		Neutral	Slightly weak	Neutral
Standard Modular	2.67 x 8 (68 x 200)		Slightly Good	Neutral	Neutral
Economy Norman	4 x 12 (100 x 300)		Slightly Good	Slightly strong	Neutral
Economy	4 x 8 (100 x 200)		Neutral	Slightly strong	Neutral

Table 4. Connotative Synonyms

Value		Strength		Action	
good	bad	strong	weak	active	passive
beautiful	ugly	rugged	delicate	tense	relaxed
graceful	awkward	hard	soft	dynamic	static
cheerful	sad	tough	tender	cold	warm
precise	vague	permanent	temporary	energetic	inert
spacious	constricted	profound	superficial	vibrant	still
delightful	dreadful	bold	timid	complex	simple
open	closed	-	-	ordered	disordered
pleasing	annoying	-	-	-	-
comfortable	uncomfortable	-	-	clear	ambiguous
interesting	boring	-	-	busy	-

Table 5. Degree Synonyms

Very	Moderately	Slightly	Neutral
quite	appreciably	a little	neither-nor
extremely	rather	to small degree	indecisive
entirely	to some degree	faintly	indifferent
completely	somewhat	faintly	indifferent
wholly	fairly	modestly	-
fully	-	barely	-
greatly	-	-	-
exceedingly	-	-	-

Table 6. Building Type Connotations

Building Type	Value	Strength	Action
Courthouse	Slightly Good	Moderately Strong	Slightly Active
Elementary School	Slightly Good	Neutral	Neutral
Home	Moderately Good	Neutral	Slightly Active
Hospital	Slightly Good	Neutral	Neutral
Hotel	Moderately Good	Neutral	Slightly Active
Industrial Research Laboratory	Slightly Good	Slightly Strong	Slightly Active
Office Building	Slightly Good	Slightly Strong	Slightly Active
Prison	Slightly Bad	Moderately Strong	Neutral
Shopping Center	Slightly Good	Neutral	Slightly Active
Warehouse	Slightly Bad	Moderately Strong	Slightly Passive

The color, texture, and size of this brick are a little cheerful, modestly interesting, to some degree precise, and are active rather neutral. However, the color is slightly active, faintly vibrant, barely busy, and modestly complex. The texture is slightly strong, a little rugged, and faintly bold. The color and size are neither strong nor weak.

CONCLUSION

Similar psychologically sound sales descriptions can be prepared for any one of the 260 combinations of colors, sizes, textures for which data are presented herein, but be careful not to exaggerate. For some salesmen everything is always extremely, completely, wholly, and exceedingly. And if it is their product they are talking about, it is always good, strong, and active. Throwing words around promiscuously is bombast. It induces a loss of confidence and a

lowering of reputation. Accurate statements are always highly regarded. Remember the actual odds are heavily in favor that the customer will agree with these psychological descriptions of brick.

REFERENCES:

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