

Why we shop differently on mobile phones

True Impact provides services that help track what consumers are visually attracted to. (The Toronto Star)

By [Francine Kopun](#) Business reporter

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Tucked into a commercial park in Mississauga, the consumer research lab at The Central Group marketing agency is where retailers come to test new ideas.

It looks like someone took a slice out of a grocery or drug store and transported it on a pallet into a warehouse, except all is not as it seems.

The cash register and shelves are on wheels, so the 4,000 square-foot space can be shaped and reshaped. This is to test things such as what impact a narrow aisle has on shoppers and which packaging draws their gaze.

The walls are magnetized so the life-sized images affixed to them can be swapped out to transform the space into different kinds of stores. The room can be used to test scents and music. The freezer section hides a one-way mirror.

It's in this lab that neuromarketer Diana Lucaci, founder and CEO of True Impact, conducts studies for retailers bent on discovering as much as they can about why people buy and don't buy.

Paid participants wear electroencephalography (EEG) headsets and eye tracking glasses that measure their level of interest and how persuaded they are by what they are seeing.



Vuk Pavlovic of marketing research firm True Impact, demonstrates a neural sensor headset while wearing eye tracking glasses. (Chris So / Toronto Star) | [Order this photo](#)

Increased activity in the frontal left sphere of the brain indicates that shoppers like what they see. Involvement of the frontal right hemisphere means they want to avoid whatever it is they're looking at.

"It's not dissimilar to the fight-or-flight response," says Lucaci.

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Focus groups used to be the go-to tool for measuring what people think of products, but the problem with focus groups is that people very often don't say what they are thinking.

"People act on how they feel, not on what they say," Lucaci says.

Many retailers are shifting their marketing spending from traditional places like television ads, to in-store pitches, including packaging, displays and product placement, says Domenic Cecol, chief design officer at The Central Group.

They want to know as much as possible about what works and doesn't work.

"There is this whole other behavioural level — how are you actually interacting with the store environment when you're in the store," says Cecol.

While focus groups can still be useful, big retailers like Procter and Gamble and Kraft are increasingly looking to neuroscience to uncover what is going on in the minds of consumers when they shop, says Denise Lee Yohn, author

of the book *What Great Brands Do*.

“We are not even aware of the influences that shape our decisions. Neuroscience gives everyone a peek behind the curtain,” says Yohn.

The headsets used by Lucaci’s team measure cognitive load — how hard the brain is working to process what is happening. For example, says Lucaci, the brain experiences pain when it has to think about numbers, especially at the end of the day.

“We’ve had to make so many decisions throughout the day that at the end of the day, you’re done with decisions,” says Lucaci.

Consumers presented with too many options at the end of the day take longer to choose what they buy, which translates into a smaller basket size for retailers, says Lucaci.

Lucaci’s research on mobile phone purchases will be reported at the [Digital Media Summit](#) in Toronto on Thursday, at the Sheraton Centre.

Among the findings she will present:

A mobile app experience is like a first date, Lucaci says. “You don’t build trust by bombarding customers with 1,000 questions at the beginning.” Retailers should ask for a bare minimum of information during the check-out sequence, to prevent consumers from ditching their shopping carts.

The last steps in a mobile-shop should be memorable for customers — in a good way. “If the end is not impactful on the brain, it won’t be as memorable,” says Lucaci. An app interaction that ends well resonates more positively with consumers.

A poor app experience can leave consumers with a lower opinion of the brand overall. In the case of a hotel chain with a complicated mobile app, Lucaci found that customers who originally identified the brand with the words “classy, comfort and luxury,” identified the brand with the words “luxury, expensive, complicated and pretentious,” after using the app.