

# WHAT IS RECENCY?

**It's an Idea That Says Media Planning's Job Is to Intercept the Next Purchase With a Brand Message.**

By Erwin Ephron



Recency isn't about radio or television or reach and frequency. It's the simple idea that advertising influences the brand-choice of consumers who are in the market for the product. It's about how we think advertising works. That's why it has been able to transform our thinking about how to plan advertising media.

Let's step back thirty years. When I started at BBDO, I learned advertising worked by repetition, leaving "tiny footprints on the mind." Frequency generated awareness, created interest, aroused desire and triggered action. Advertising was deemed so effective that public policy debated whether it "makes people buy things they don't need." The issue wasn't advertising's deception. It was advertising's power.

That concern seems quaint today. We think of advertising as a relatively weak marketing force, among many forces that affect consumers. Its strength is it can be applied continuously, because it does what it does at a very small cost compared to alternatives like sampling or price promotion.

We have also gone through a reevaluation of what makes consumers buy. We now appreciate it is events in their lives -- *the empty cereal box, the high telephone bill, the broken dishwasher, the expiring car lease, the wedding anniversary* -- that gets them to make a purchase, not the advertising.

Recency planning grows from the sound idea that consumer needs drive advertising effects. The critical variable is whether a consumer is "in the market," which means the *timing* as well as the targeting of the message is important. Visualize a window of advertising opportunity in front of each purchase. Advertising's job is to influence the purchase. Recency planning's job is to place the message in that window.