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Our marketing rules are stuck in Henry Ford's era

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IN 1898, US advertising and sales pioneer E. St Elmo Lewis invented the marketing model AIDA, standing for awareness, interest, desire, action. This model assumes we need to talk to many to convince a few to change behaviour. A television campaign, for example, reaches a lot of people with the intention of getting a few to buy.

It accepts there will be wastage

along the way. It is unbelievable that despite our advances in the past 113 years many advertising and marketing decisions today are based on the AIDA model. It is time to turn that on its head.

Continuing to base marketing decisions on this model is crazy considering how the relationships between consumers and brands have changed. In our digital world, consumers own brands. Consumers say what a brand stands for. They generate awareness.

Look at how some not-for-profit organisations have done it. Movember started small and targeted and not everyone understood it. Today, tens of thousands of men take part and there are few

who don't know about it. Red Nose Day is another example.

In 1898, we were getting our information primarily from newspapers. Radio was just emerging. The Wright Brothers were still five years away from their first flight and Henry Ford still had two years before he built his first car. How cars, planes and marketing strategy have taken very different paths since then.

While AIDA has served marketers for many years, it hasn't taken into account consumer generated word of mouth, which is now huge thanks to mobile phones, the internet and social media.

We need to change. According to a global study by the Fournaise

Marketing Group, customer engagement rates with advertising dropped 19 per cent worldwide in the first half of this year.

The decline was steepest in Australia, at 23 per cent. Online advertising was, on average, 25 per cent less effective than traditional media. Fournaise deduced the drop was due to less effective campaigns and focus on creativity rather than customer benefits.

In today's world, where consumers are bombarded with advertising, a brand's actions speak louder than words and a consumer advocate is far more powerful than a brand one.

As Plato said, "good decisions are based on knowledge, not on

numbers". But many marketers base their marketing decisions on longstanding media metrics such as reach, frequency and penetration in the belief these will create awareness and ultimately sales (the classic AIDA approach).

Awareness does not have to come first. It makes more sense to create targeted behaviour change first and then let your consumer advocates create awareness for you at no extra charge. The AIDA model needs to be replaced with the ADIA model: action, desire, interest and awareness. This is an inverse funnel that starts with action and filters out to awareness through positive word of mouth. A small group of people interact with

the brand; their positive experience creates word of mouth that leads to desire among a wider circle. Word of mouth eventually spreads to a mass market to create awareness.

The world has changed since Henry Ford and the Wright Brothers. Yet a lot of marketers have not adapted. Marketers need to think strategy first, media and marketing channels second. TV is not dead in the 21st century. Advertising is not dead. But traditional media metrics are increasingly irrelevant. AIDA should be replaced by the new ADIA model.

Peter Cleary is founder of brand promotional agency Zinc