

## Why Eskimos Hunt Whales and Other Secrets of Persuasion

For thousands of years, Eskimos have hunted whales as their primary source of food. They go out into the ocean in small boats, and pound on drums and the sides of their boats to drive the whales toward shore (whales, of course, having very sensitive hearing). Then, when the whales are in shallow water, they attack and kill them. Now they use harpoon guns and more advanced weapons, but they used to do it with little more than spears.



Now why on earth would they do that? There are much simpler and less dangerous game they could hunt - geese, rabbits, seals, walruses even. Why go after the largest, most powerful mammal on earth?

For that matter, why did primitive humans hunt mastodons? We've all seen the "artists' recreations" of a tribe of scantily clad Neanderthals surrounding a woolly mammoth the size of a beachfront condo, attacking it with little more than sharpened sticks.

Okay. So why? Why not pick on something your own size?

A team of cognitive psychologists based at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin and at the University of Chicago has come up with an answer. Their research indicates that human beings have an innate ability to calculate the "rate of return" for their efforts, particularly as they pertain to the group as a whole. In other words, hunting a whale or a woolly mammoth has a bigger ROI for the tribe than hunting a rabbit does.

These researchers even went so far as to calculate the calories required to kill a whale compared to the calories the community will get from that animal, then calculated the calories expended vs. the calories obtained for other prey. The result: the whale was by far the best investment of the tribe's energies. Drawing a parallel

with our industry, this is why we pursue frameworks and larger capital programmes; not only do they give a good return, but also they provide for growth.

Apparently, all of us have hard-wired into our brains the capability to make a quick but accurate estimate of the rate of return to be derived from one course of action vs. another. In evolutionary terms, it probably helped our ancestors survive.

What does this mean for us, as we attempt to sell our solutions or services? Simply this: if we don't help the decision makers figure out the rate of return from our recommended solution, they may go elsewhere.

People instinctively want to make the decision that gives them the best ROI for their effort. They'll even buy something more expensive and complex if they're convinced it's the best choice for their company.



How can we help them use that built-in capability to estimate to our advantage? By including calculations and graphic displays of ROI, total life costs of a building, payback period, productivity improvements for their end-client, or other measures of advantage. By including case studies that show how other groups got big rewards from selecting our products or services. By stressing positive outcomes right up front in our proposal. By emphasising our differentiators and how they add value for the customer.

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