

Making eye Contact

Body language may tell you something about prospects' response to your sales pitch, but eye language will tell you a lot more.

by Dr. Allen Konopacki

It's a classic sales cliché: The more eye contact you have with a prospect, the higher his or her interest. But the truth is more complex. New research in neuro-linguistic psychology has found it's not the quantity but the quality of eye contact that matters.

Researchers have found, for example, that too much of the wrong type of eye contact between you and a buyer may mean trouble. In some cases, the buyer may actually be resisting the sale or may have little interest in the product. The reverse is also true. Lack of eye contact may lead you to believe interest is low, when the prospect is actually concentrating quite hard on what you are saying.

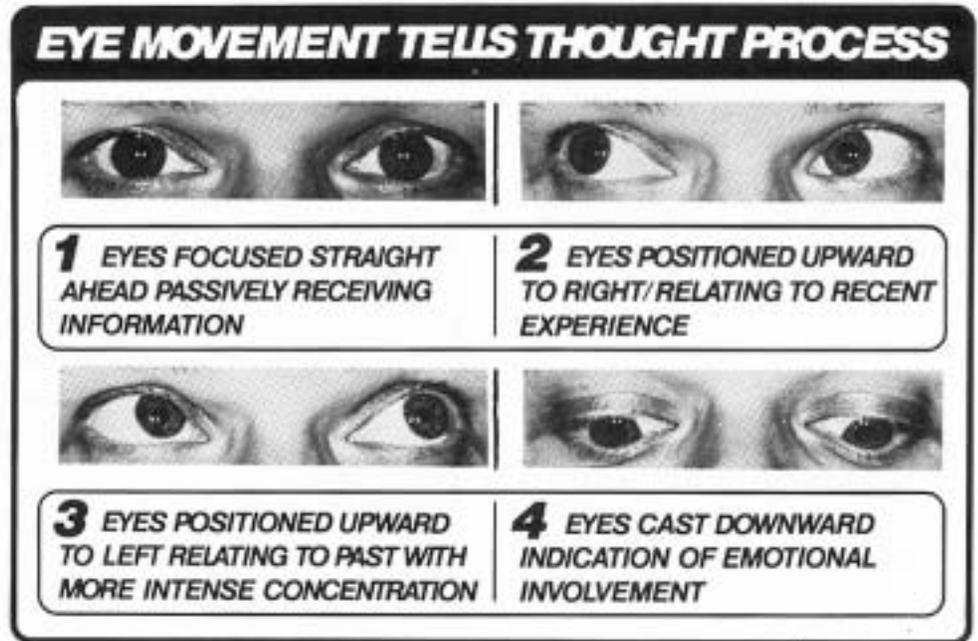
The findings in essence show a relationship between how people move their eyes and what they are thinking and feeling. Armed with the results of these studies, you can become a better judge of how people react to your ideas at shows.

Reading the Signs

We picture things with our brains, not our eyes. Light rays bounce off the object being viewed and hit the optic nerves, which electro-chemically transmit the information to the brain. As this occurs, the eyes themselves are free to wander.

That's the marketing link: The direction in which a prospect's eyes wander reveals his or her logical or emotional reactions to what has just been presented. Variations in eye movement also show

Allen Konopacki is president of the Incomm Center for Research & Sales Training in Chicago, Illinois. He can be reached at (312) 642-9377 or visit his website at tradeshowsresearch.com



how intensely he or she is analyzing the sales message. Understanding eye contact is not difficult; it's just a matter of keeping an eye out for certain cues.

Eyes Focused Straight Ahead



You're in trouble if your prospect is looking straight ahead. He or she is receiving information passively, making little effort to analyze the content or meaning of what you are saying. The look is daydreaming, unfocused, and uninvolved with the surrounding physical environment.

Watch for this frequently; human beings have an innate ability to remove themselves psychologically in less than 10 seconds. That means you can easily

lose a prospect before you've had time to deliver your pitch. Put yourself in the prospect's shoes: Single out an object straight ahead of you and gaze at it for 30 seconds. Within 10 seconds, you'll begin to experience a trance-like condition. Such a state resembles self-hypnosis, although you can instantly snap back to another thought at any time.

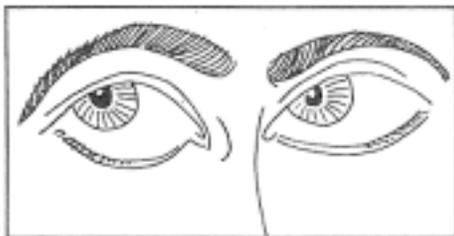
If your prospect remains too focused for too long, he or she is probably trying, consciously or not, to shut you out. Try another way to get this person's attention, or look for another prospect.

Prolonged Eye Contact

A stare usually defined as intense eye contact for more than three seconds indicates coldness, rudeness, anger, or dislike. Socially we have virtually outlawed stares, except to force momentary eye contact, for example in elevators. Egotistical people stare in order to intimidate. Sometimes naive salespeople stare in order to show interest in a prospect, unaware that they are actually making the prospect uncomfortable.

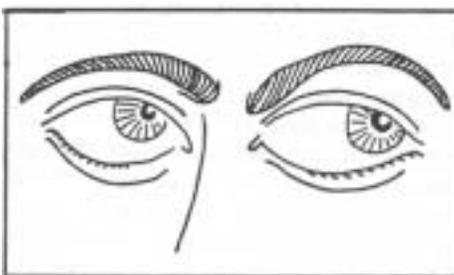
At a trade show, staring directly at anyone who is walking toward your booth is a sure way to keep even someone who needs your product from stopping by. When selling to someone, don't stare; take fleeting glances every few seconds to size up how he or she is responding to your pitch. Become adept at these almost imperceptible information-gathering glances—it's a subtle skill that you can improve with practice.

Eyes Positioned Upward To The Right



Even though your prospect is looking away from you, you've got his or her attention. Someone whose eyes travel to the right is either relating your information to a recent experience or analyzing the logic of your statements. This reflex is conditioned by the fact that body movements toward the right side are controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain—the fact-filled, logical side.

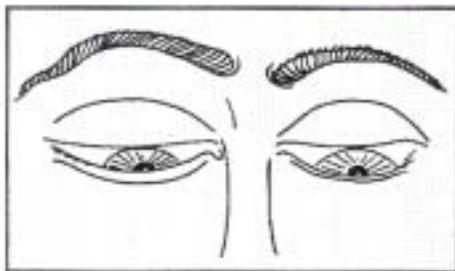
Eyes Positioned Upward To The Left



This is another great sign for a salesperson. This look indicates that your buyer is relating your presentation to an experience farther in the past, which generally requires more intense concentration and deliberation. A person looking to the left is analyzing your information on an emotional basis rather than logical; it is being reviewed in the right hemisphere of the brain, the emotional side.

Take note of when a prospect glances upward to the right or left. Recall quickly what you have just said—you have hit some hot button, and that person is now calculating the value of your proposition.

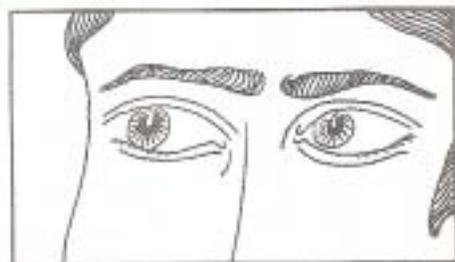
Eyes Cast Downward



This is a tough call. Your prospect is definitely concentrating, but he or she may be thinking either, "How do I get my boss to approve this great purchase?" or else "How do I end this discussion?"

If a prospect looks downward with arms folded across the chest and a finger laid beside the lips, that person is thinking intensely. Remain quiet and wait for the prospect to re-enter the conversation.

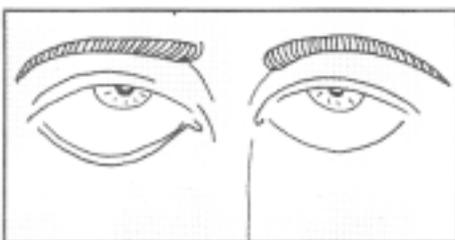
Extended Looks Away



Your prospect isn't much of a prospect at this point—he or she is looking to break off the conversation. This often occurs when the person believes they have the time to listen. Frequent avoidance of eye contact may also denote fear of involvement, distrust, doubt, lying, or a combination of these reactions.

When a prospect avoids eye contact for prolonged periods, it is nearly impossible to motivate that person to consider your offer seriously. If you need to sell to this company, you'd better find another buyer—you've lost this one.

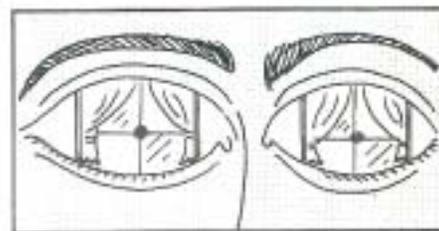
Eyes Focused Upward At The Ceiling



When your prospect does this with arms behind the head or across the chest, he or she is conscientiously analyzing what

you've said. Rather than tuning you out, the person is assessing the credibility of what you have presented—an unusual occurrence at a trade show. Give the ceiling-watcher a chance to form an opinion, for most people do not believe in facts—they need to relate your facts to their experiences.

Windows Of The Soul



The eyes, more than any other part of the body, function subconsciously and involuntarily, revealing hidden attitudes to those who know eye language. Say "Have you got the picture?"—a prospect may look away to visualize that image. But say "Do you see what I mean?" and he'll probably look directly at you, reading your facial expression to try to discern what you want as an answer.

Getting somebody to say "yes" is a ploy taught by many sales consultants, but it can waste a lot of effort in trying to close a sale if the prospect's eye language is saying "no." Ask a person in your booth, "Are you familiar with our widgets?" If he or she answers "yes" and then looks straight at you with no eye movement, you can tell that he or she probably has a hidden agenda or your question has not struck a hot button.

Recall your own experiences at retail stores. A clerk asks, "May I help you?" You answer, "No, I'm just looking," and you probably look straight ahead, then dart your eyes away in a moment or two. But if you do want help, you might say, "Yes, would you..." Meanwhile your eyes move up and to the right for a moment, or off to one side, as you phrase your request.

Behavioral scientists find that eye language is more accurate than body language when it comes to understanding how people respond to information. Lack of control makes eye language; eye movements are often involuntary and are, therefore, much more apt to reflect an individual's thought process. Knowing this may help both you and your prospect to negotiate a better deal.

Do you see what I mean?