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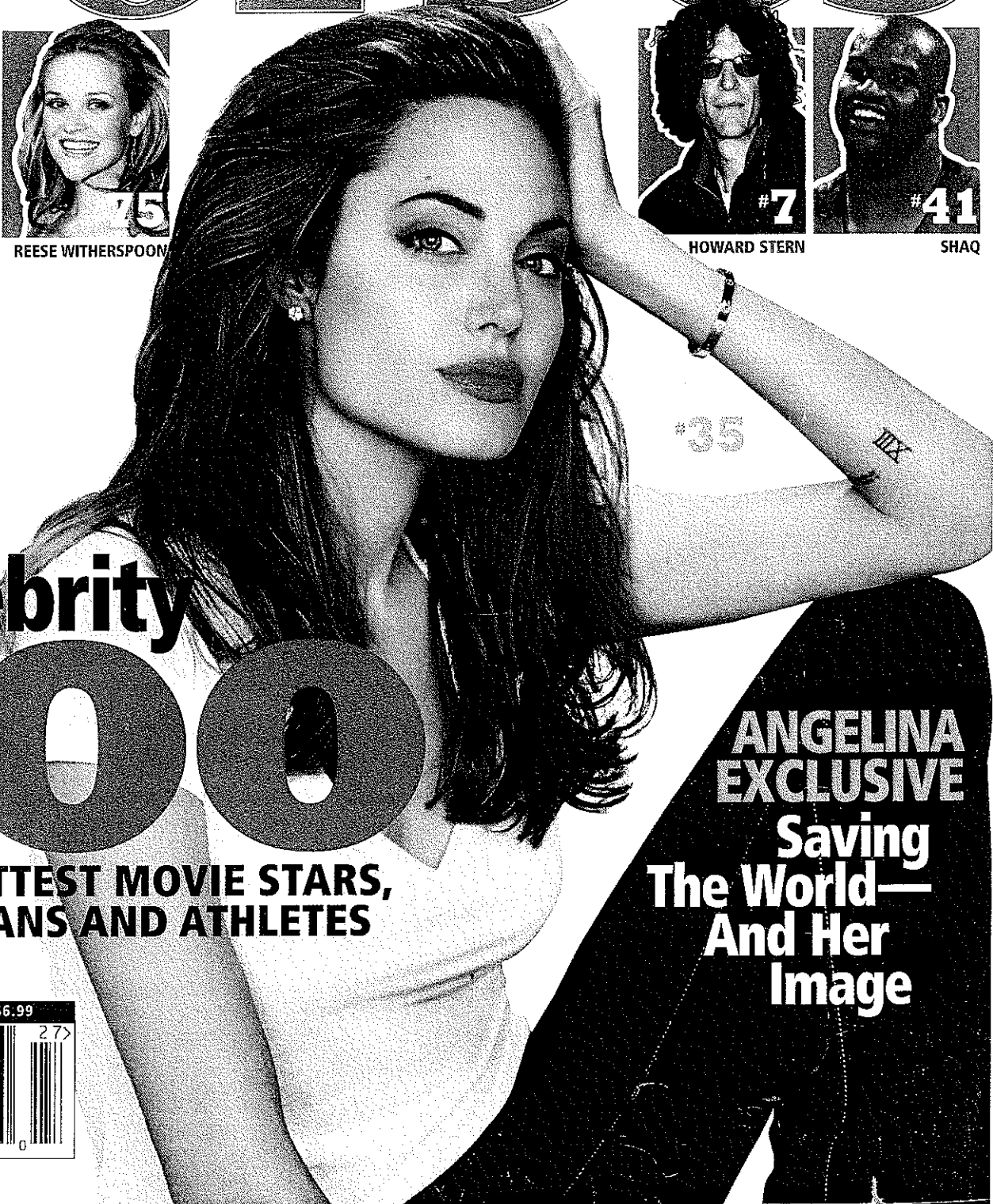
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By **Clotire Rapaille**, CHAIRMAN OF ARCHETYPE DISCOVERIES WORLDWIDE AND AUTHOR OF *THE CULTURE CODE*, PUBLISHED THIS MONTH BY BROADWAY BOOKS

Marketing to the Reptilian Brain

Pry away the slick answers of a focus group and get to the instincts buried beneath.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST PROBLEM with traditional market research? You can't believe what people say.

It's not that people intentionally lie during surveys and focus groups; it's that they try too hard to please. When asked about their interests and preferences, they tend to give answers they believe the questioner wants to hear. This is because people respond with their cerebral cortexes, the part of the brain that controls intelligence, rather than emotion or instinct. Their answers are the product of deliberation. In most cases, however, they aren't saying what they feel. One of the greatest focus-group flops of all time: New Coke, the overly sweet beverage Coca-Cola introduced in 1985. General Motors' late-'90s Cadillac line is another example. Relying on traditional market research, GM introduced a series of plain Caddies with improved gas mileage and high safety ratings. They barely sold.

When Chrysler decided to offer a new sedan model to the American market, it had already done a great deal of research that suggested American consumers wanted high gas mileage, excellent safety ratings and good prices.

The problem was that those sedans were designed with the cortex in mind, when buying decisions are strongly influenced by the reptilian brain, which is made up of the brain stem and the cerebellum. Only accessible via the subconscious, the reptilian brain is the home of our instincts. It programs us for two major things: survival and reproduction. In a three-way battle between the cortical, the limbic (home of emotion) and the reptilian areas, the reptilian always wins, because survival comes first. When you tap into the reptilian brain, you learn what a product means to a consumer at its most fundamental level.

I have learned to do this through extended, decidedly nontraditional sessions designed to glean what I call a "Code," the unconscious meaning people give to a particular product, service or relationship. In the first hour participants engage their cortexes



People respond to surveys by deliberating intelligently, but buying decisions are governed by instinct.

when an interviewer takes the role of a "visitor from another planet," asking participants to help the visitor understand the product in question. In the second hour participants use their limbic systems to tell stories about the products. In the third hour they tap their reptilian inner selves. Lying on pillows with the lights dimmed, they first go through a relaxation exercise. Then they write about their first experiences with the product, expressing what was imprinted into their subconscious.

For Chrysler, this process demonstrated that cookie-cutter sedans are "off-Code." This information led to the creation of the PT Cruiser, introduced in 2000. The car's highly distinctive design made it one of the most successful American car launches in recent memory. For the first 12 months U.S. unit sales totaled 132,000. (The car is still popular, with sales of 135,000 in the last year.)

Of course, sometimes companies just go on gut instinct and come up with a hit. Witness the popularity of Apple's sleek white iPod. That device's design and function fit perfectly within the American Code for technology—magic.

Discovering Codes can lead to marketing success with all sorts of products. In the realm of food, Americans view their bodies as machines. Food serves as fuel to keep that machine running smoothly. Thus Taco Bell's marketing campaign for its 99-cent menu, in which delighted patrons announce, "I'm full!" worked beautifully. As does Red Bull's advertising, which claims that its drink "gives you wings." Think of the success of PowerBars, which are directly on-Code.

For food companies selling dinner products, it helps to recognize that Americans see dinner as a time to form a circle around a plate set in the middle of the table. Kraft has successfully exploited this Code with the catchphrase "Gather around" and an animated Kraft logo that morphs into a family surrounding a dinner table. It takes much more than a standard focus group to crack these Codes.