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# **CONSUMERS VIEWED LIKE HOOLIGANS AND RIOTERS**

## **Account Planning Conference Told to Focus on Power of 'Herdability'**

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By [Claire Atkinson](#)

BOCA RATON, Fla. (AdAge.com) -- Comparing consumers to soccer hooligans, the executive planning director at Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide, London, said account planners need to start thinking of consumers not as individuals but as part of a herd.

The executive, Mark Earls, speaking on the first day of the American Association of Advertising Agencies' Account Planning Conference, in Boca Raton, Fla., suggested that "mushy clinical psychology" and reports are useless if you can't simply observe people in their context.

### **Observing the herd**

"Let's spend our time observing the herd," Mr. Earls said on Monday.

Account planning is a somewhat esoteric discipline not well understood by outsiders. Its members do not create ads. They don't buy media and they don't handhold clients. They are the devisers of brand strategy. They research and analyze, they write marketing plans and they apply the findings of disciplines as wide-ranging as semiotics, quantum forensic mechanics and method acting to the task of determining a brand's essence.

The three-day conference is a chance for ad executives to bring the rarified world of account planning into a more practical realm. Mr. Earls said that just as cats only swim when they have to, most people only think when they have to. Survival as part of the herd is a question of "keeping up, not bumping into people and going vaguely in the same direction as everyone else."

Illustrating his speech with clips of soldiers in war, soccer hooligans and street riots, Mr. Earls described the exhilaration of being part of a crowd and how quickly things such as soccer chants catch on during games. "We are herd animals, we live in herds," he said. "We don't need psychology. You can explain behavior without it."

### **'Superconnectors'**

From a marketing standpoint, Mr. Earls said the most important consumer isn't necessarily the one that buys the most stuff, but the "superconnectors," those individuals who influence the herd. When asked whether these superconnectors weren't the very individuals Mr. Earls was aiming to demote, he said superconnectors weren't aware of their power and influence on the group and that the group response to these individuals is the most significant factor.

"It is the people around you, not the corporation with the perfect TV commercial," he said as to why people make certain purchasing decisions. "It's all local and it's mostly out of our control. Eighty-five percent of influence on a purchase is other people, the other 15% is marketing."

### **An ad's 'herdability'**

Mr. Earls summed up his theories by saying marketers should not target a particular group but market "between" its members. Whether consumers like an ad, he said, was much less important than whether the ad had "herdability," or the power to move the group.