

Social Proof

Based on research by Professor Robert Cialdini

"Tell me what to think and feel... PLEASE!"

Many people look to others to help them decide how to act and to determine whether something is right or wrong. This is especially true when we're uncertain about something. We ask, *"What do others think about this? What do others feel? What do others do in this situation?"*

We do it on the roads, following others when traffic lights are broken, in the office we conform to the values and behaviours of the company culture, and the fashion industry relies on unthinking people supposedly 'choosing' to dress like everyone else!



Social Proof convinces us that if others are doing it, it must be the right thing to do, and the more people that do something, and the more that those people they do it, the more likely it is to be correct. However, some people are 'lame sheep', they follow the flock unthinkingly, sometimes stupidly - that's how Social Proof works, and you can make it work for you.

How to make Social Proof work for you

If you want someone to do something, show others doing it, particularly 'significant others'. Marketers and salespeople list testimonials of satisfied customers, show pictures of people using their product or service, particularly celebrities or other influential people, talk about their market leadership, display a recognised seal of approval, favourable online reviews, satisfied customer's comments and recommendations...etc. Social Proof works best when a person sees people similar to them, who've faced similar issues and opportunities, using the product or service or taking action.

Popularity and enthusiasm are unbeatable emotional pulls. Who wants to be left out, who wants to miss out? Psychological research shows that people are far more driven to take action to avoid a loss than to achieve a gain.

Social Proof also works when someone is uncertain about you, your offer, your ideas, product, service, company etc, because they will tend to want to do the 'safe' thing, even if they are not sure if it's the 'best' thing. The safe thing is often what they see most other people doing.

Social Proof also links to the laws of 'similarity' and 'liking', discussed elsewhere in this series of solutions. It's human nature to follow the crowd, and whenever a person thinks or acts differently from what most other people are thinking or doing, they potentially expose themselves or risk making an avoidable mistake.