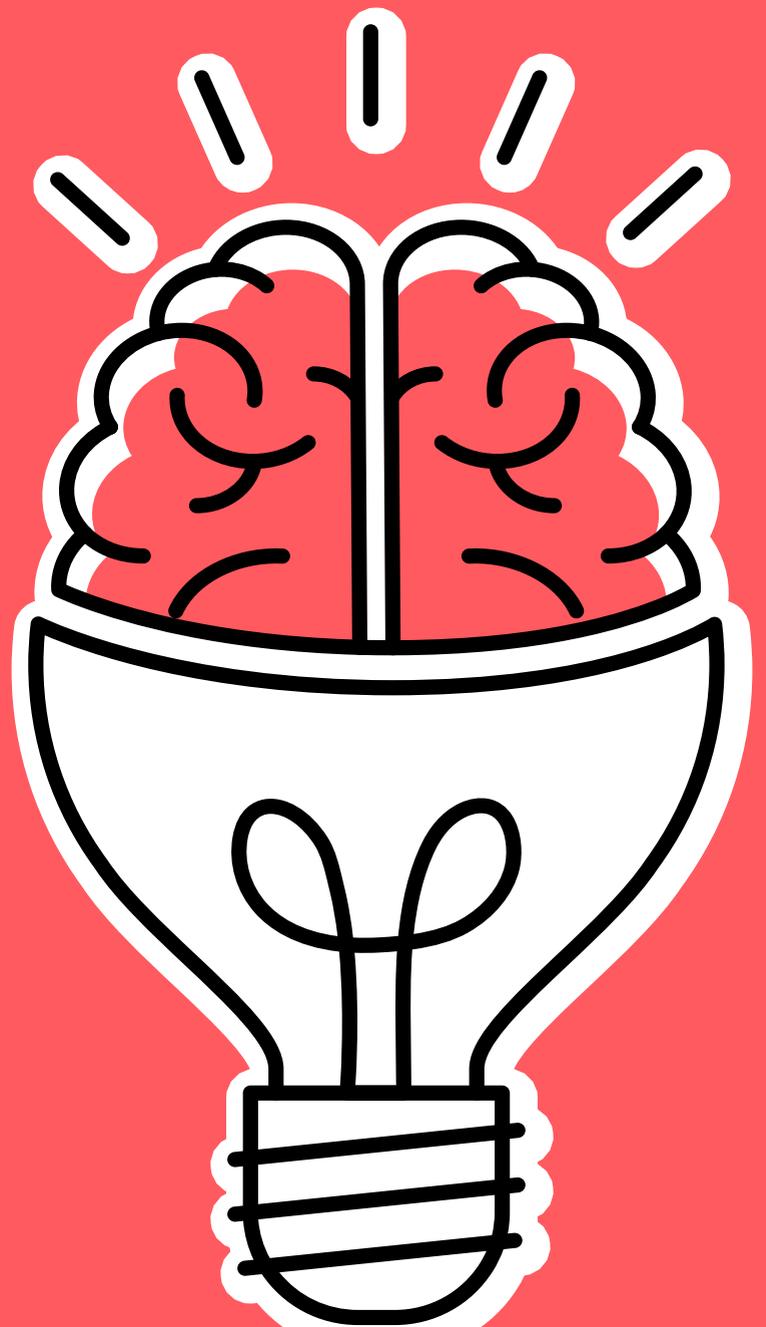


# 10 Biases in Marketing

*A mini-masterclass in the unconscious thinking errors we all make – and how to overcome them to influence customer behaviour more effectively*





# What you'll learn



Which thinking errors play a role in customer decisions, and how to spot them in your own marketing.



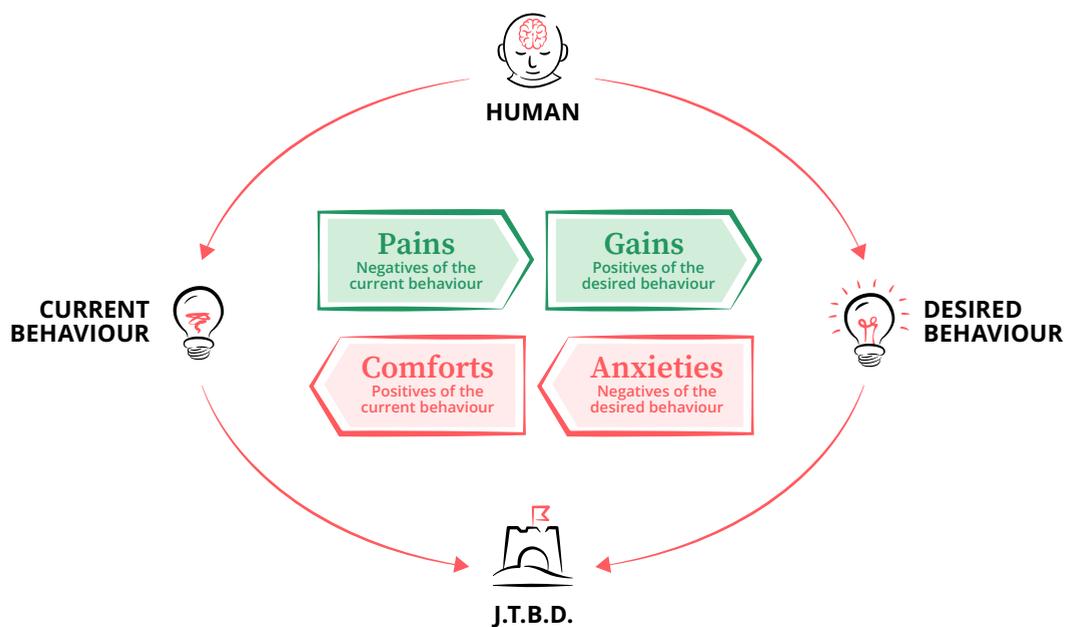
Real-world examples from financial services, retail, FMCG, healthcare, and e-commerce.



How these biases manifest in the behaviours you want to influence.



Strategies to turn these biases into an advantage.



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# Introduction

As a marketer, your goal is to spark action. You want people to click, buy, trust, or change their behaviour. And naturally, you rely on strategy, compelling offers, and persuasive communication to get there.

Often, that works just fine. But it also means people can react in unexpected, irrational ways. They might reject a good offer or stick with choices that aren't in their best interest. Why? Because no one makes decisions based solely on logic. Our brains simply don't work that way. We use mental shortcuts—so-called biases—to make quicker decisions.

Studies show that **up to 95% of our decisions happen in the subconscious.** This part of the brain recognises patterns, seeks convenience, and avoids risk. For marketers, this opens up an opportunity: to design communication and offerings that are not only more effective but also more human.

This mini masterclass outlines 10 of the most common thinking errors in marketing. You'll learn how each one works, where you'll encounter it in customer behaviour, and how to apply these insights to get better results.



*Happy reading,*

*Astrid Groenewegen*

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# 1. Confirmation Bias

We see what we already believe.



## What causes it

*Confirmation bias means we tend to notice information that aligns with our existing beliefs. Anything that contradicts those beliefs feels strange or uncomfortable, so we give it less attention. It's not intentional; it's just how the brain works.*

*It looks for confirmation so it doesn't have to re-evaluate previous choices.*

*Neurologically, confirmation releases dopamine, which makes us feel good. That's why people tend to cling to what they already believe.*



## How it affects customer behaviour

Customers often form opinions well before the moment of purchase. Once they've read something or heard a recommendation, they unconsciously seek out information that confirms that impression. They listen selectively, ignore nuance, and notice messages that make them feel "I'm on the right track." Not out of stubbornness, but because the brain prefers consistency. With thousands of marketing messages hitting them each day, the brain filters in favour of what feels familiar and confirming.



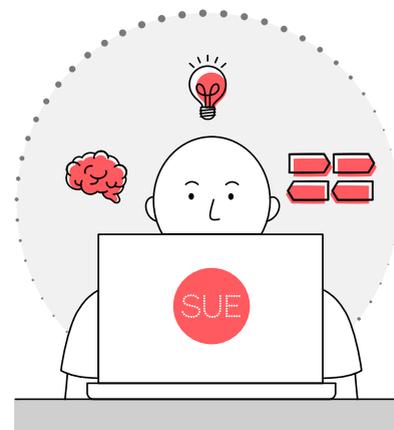
## Real-world example

A customer shopping for health insurance reads that Provider A offers "the best coverage". That idea sticks. From then on, any review or comparison that supports this belief stands out, while contradicting information is dismissed. Providers that first acknowledge the customer's concerns and existing beliefs before making their pitch perform better. This approach avoids conflict and aligns with how the brain wants to process information. Similarly, e-commerce platforms that allow users to filter reviews find that people gravitate toward reviews that confirm their initial impression—even when more critical feedback is available.



## What it means for marketing

Customers get stuck in their initial belief—even when better options exist. Trying to correct them too quickly can backfire. Instead, start by aligning with what they already believe. Build from there. It feels safer, more respectful, and less confrontational. Successful brands validate existing beliefs before introducing something new. It's not manipulation; it's psychological reality.



## 2. Status Quo Bias

We prefer what we already know.



### What causes it

*Our brains are wired to see change as risky. Even if something new is objectively better, the unfamiliar often feels uncomfortable. That's why people tend to stick with what they know—whether that's a product, brand, or routine. Familiarity feels safe. And in a psychological tug-of-war between safety and optimisation, safety usually wins. From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense. For thousands of years, the unknown often meant danger.*



### How it affects customer behaviour

Customers would rather stay put than try something new, even if the alternative is clearly better. Switching feels like effort, and effort feels like risk. The familiar offers a sense of control, which tends to outweigh logic. Even when customers know change is needed, they put it off. Change requires energy—and the brain prefers to conserve it.



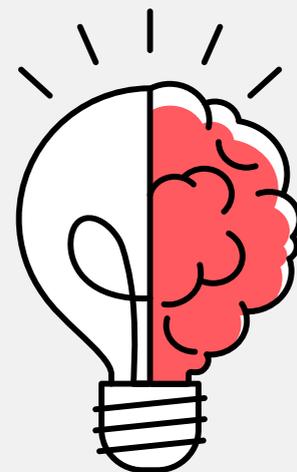
### Real-world example

Customers stick with their usual supermarket for online groceries, even when cheaper or more sustainable options exist. In investing, people continue using platforms with high fees or poor performance because they know how it works. Telecoms see the same: the average customer stays with their provider for four years, despite better deals elsewhere.



### What it means for marketing

People hold onto choices, services, or behaviours that no longer fit their needs. They stay where they are, simply because it feels known. This bias leads to missed opportunities and poor outcomes—not out of resistance, but comfort. Smart brands reduce the psychological friction of switching. Challenger banks like Bunq or Revolut, for example, let users keep their current account while testing the new one. It's a low-risk entry point that respects the status quo rather than fighting it.



### 3. Anchoring Bias

The first number colours everything that follows.



#### What causes it

*The first price, percentage or quantity a person sees becomes a reference point—an ‘anchor’—for all later comparisons. Even if that number is arbitrary, the brain uses it to judge what’s cheap, expensive, or fair. This happens quickly, unconsciously, and stubbornly. Even seasoned professionals aren’t immune.*



#### How it affects customer behaviour

Customers unknowingly let that first number shape their judgement. When they see a high price first, everything after feels cheaper—even if it’s still expensive. But if the anchor is too low, other prices suddenly seem excessive. Anchors skew how people perceive value.



#### Real-world example

On an investment platform, a customer sees a high-risk product promising 9% returns. Next, a safer product offering 5% feels underwhelming—even if it’s a better fit. In cosmetics, a moisturiser is sold for €29 next to a crossed-out price of €49. That higher anchor makes €29 feel like a bargain. Supermarkets use this too: “3 for €12” sounds like a deal, even if €4 each is the same. One retailer saw a 27% boost in sales for the product line using this approach.



#### What it means for marketing

Customer decisions become anchored to whatever they see first. This can cause a mismatch between what they choose and what suits them best. Marketers who understand this can use anchoring in pricing and product presentation to steer behaviour more effectively—but be careful. If the anchor feels misleading, it undermines trust.



## 4. Loss Aversion

Losing hurts more than winning feels good.



### What causes it

*We're naturally wired to avoid losses. Psychologically, the pain of losing something is about twice as powerful as the pleasure of gaining something of equal value. As a result, customers often become overly cautious, even when the risk is small and the potential gain is large.*



### How it affects customer behaviour

People will often stick with a suboptimal choice just to avoid the fear of loss. The status quo feels safer. Even if a switch offers a clear benefit, it can feel like giving something up—convenience, certainty, or control. This fear outweighs the perceived value of what they might gain.



### Real-world example

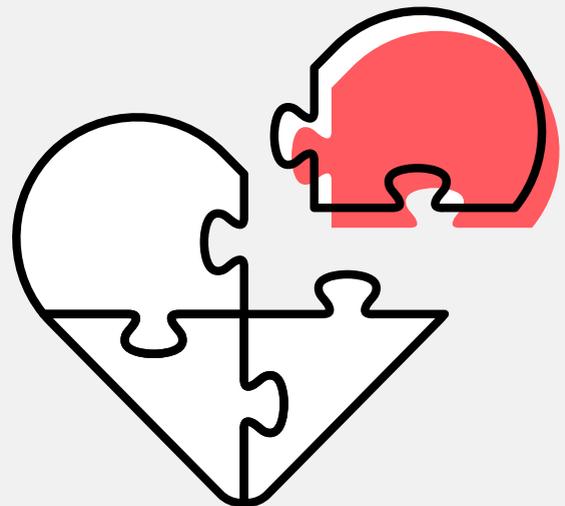
Someone hesitates to switch to a cheaper health insurance plan, afraid they'll lose cover—even if they're currently overpaying. Or an investor avoids higher-return options for fear of any

potential drop in value. Financial advisers often see better conversion rates when they frame decisions in terms of preventing loss rather than chasing gains: “Protect your money from inflation” works better than “Earn 8% returns.”



### What it means for marketing

Customers delay or avoid decisions not because they don't care, but because change feels risky. The fear of loss can outweigh logic. That's why urgency-based offers or “don't miss out” messages perform so well—they activate the loss aversion bias. Used well, this principle helps move people from hesitation to action.



## 5. Availability Bias

If it's easy to recall,  
it feels more important.



### What causes it

*Our brains prioritise vivid, emotional, or recent information. These examples are more mentally “available” and so we assign them greater weight—even if they’re not representative. It’s a survival shortcut: we learn more from striking memories than from dry data.*



### How it affects customer behaviour

One powerful story can outweigh a dozen statistics. Customers are swayed by personal anecdotes, news headlines, or recent experiences—because they’re easier to recall. As a result, their risk perception can become distorted.



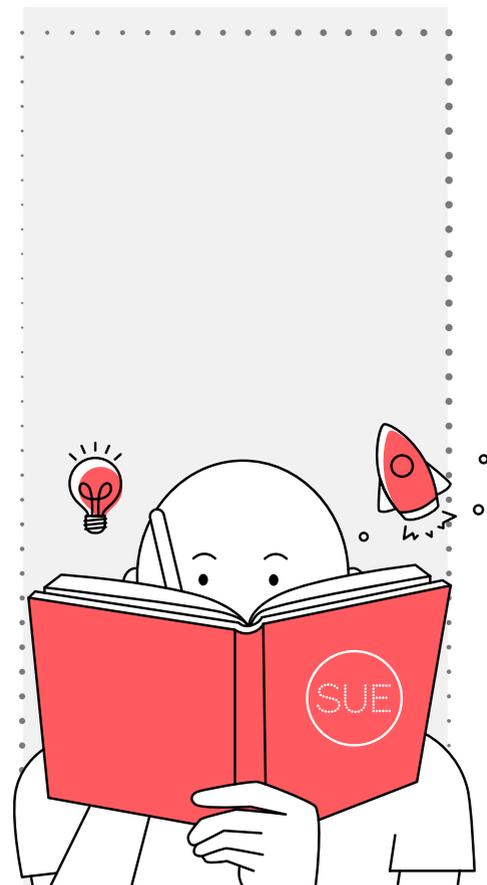
### Real-world example

After seeing a news story on cybercrime, someone rushes to buy expensive online protection—even if their personal risk is low. Or they try a detox product recommended by an influencer, despite a lack of scientific evidence. Their decision is driven by what sticks in memory, not what’s most relevant.



### What it means for marketing

People are moved by examples they can picture. That’s why storytelling is so powerful in campaigns. Abstract statistics fall flat if they’re not paired with something memorable. Use real cases, testimonials, or visuals to help customers grasp what’s truly at stake.



## 6. Social Proof

If others are doing it,  
it must be right.



### What causes it

*When we're unsure, we tend to look at what others are doing. It gives us a sense of safety and trust. This tendency is deeply rooted in our evolutionary past, where following the group increased our chances of survival.*



### How it affects customer behaviour

Customers often choose what seems popular or socially accepted. If everyone around them uses a certain product or service, they assume it must be the right choice. Reviews, ratings, and testimonials all tap into this bias—particularly when people are uncertain or overwhelmed.



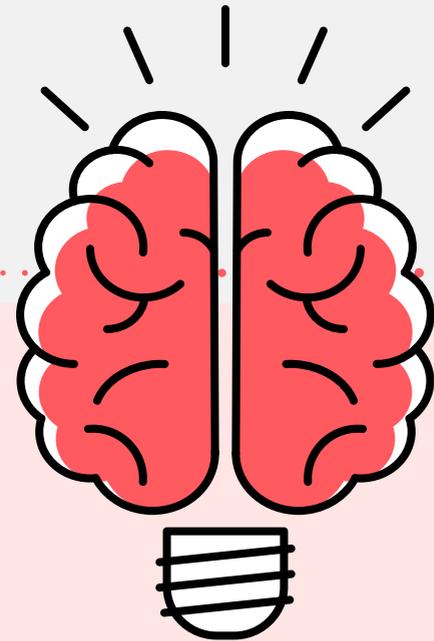
### Real-world example

Someone picks a mortgage provider because “everyone in the neighbourhood did.” Or chooses a vitamin supplement with thousands of 5-star reviews, without checking if it fits their personal needs. In supermarkets, labels like “Most chosen by other customers” often outperform “Best rated.”



### What it means for marketing

Social validation can overpower critical thinking. Use social proof to reassure and build trust—but make sure it feels authentic. Highlight numbers, user stories, or well-known clients. It's not about boasting, but about helping customers feel they're making a safe, supported choice.



## 7. Sunk Cost Fallacy

We keep investing in something just because we already have.



### What causes it

*Once we've put time, money, or effort into something, we find it hard to let go. Quitting feels like admitting failure, so we double down instead. This is tied to our need for consistency—and to avoid the discomfort of regret.*



### How it affects customer behaviour

People stick with products, services, or providers long after they stop delivering value—just because they've already invested. "I've already spent so much" becomes a reason to keep spending more, even if it's irrational.



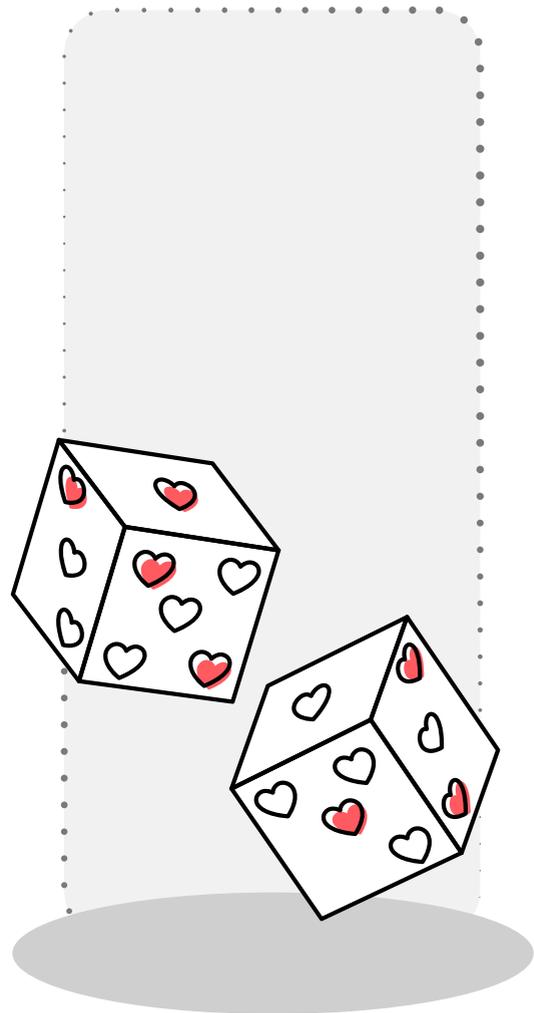
### Real-world example

Someone continues a supplement subscription, even if it doesn't help, because "they've already started." Or sticks with a financial adviser that underperforms, just to justify past fees. Subscription services benefit too: people pay for tools they no longer use because cancelling feels like giving up.



### What it means for marketing

The fear of wasting past effort keeps customers from switching—even when they'd benefit. Marketers can counter this by showing how a fresh start is not a failure, but a smarter way to build on what's already been done.



## 8. Halo Effect

If one thing looks good,  
we assume the rest is too.



### What causes it

*When one aspect of a product or brand is positive, that impression spreads. A good-looking design, familiar logo, or professional spokesperson can make the whole offer feel more credible. It's our brain taking shortcuts again—filling in the blanks based on first impressions.*



### How it affects customer behaviour

Customers often judge a product based on surface cues. A sleek website, elegant packaging, or recognisable name gives them confidence—even if they haven't checked the details. They believe “it looks right, so it must be right.”



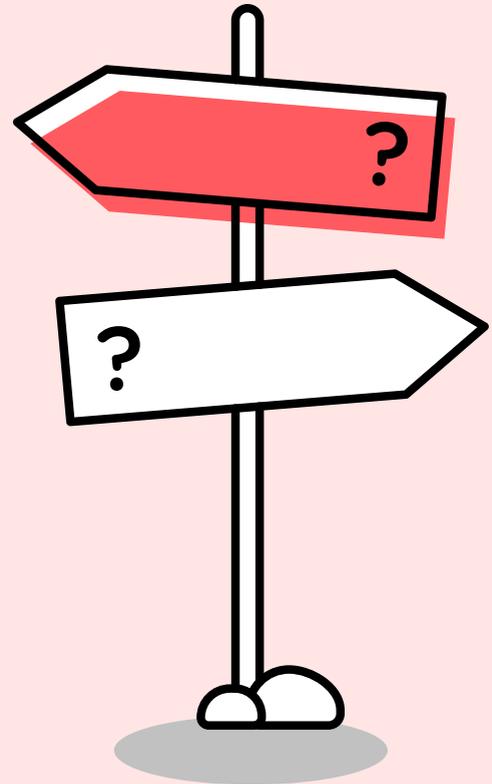
### Real-world example

A customer books an online course because the website looks professional—not necessarily because of the content. Or they trust a new tech product from a big brand without reading the specs, because the logo carries weight.



### What it means for marketing

Perception matters. Design, reputation, and consistency can carry your message further than logic alone. But be mindful: if the actual experience doesn't match the initial impression, disappointment can hit hard.



# 9. Overconfidence Bias

We think we know more than we do.



### What causes it

*When past decisions worked out well, we start trusting our instincts more. We assume we “know what we’re doing,” even if the situation is new or complex. It’s a way our brains maintain a sense of control—by downplaying uncertainty.*



### How it affects customer behaviour

Customers make confident decisions based on limited knowledge. They skip fine print, ignore expert advice, and go with gut feeling—because they assume they understand it all. This can lead to misinformed or risky choices.



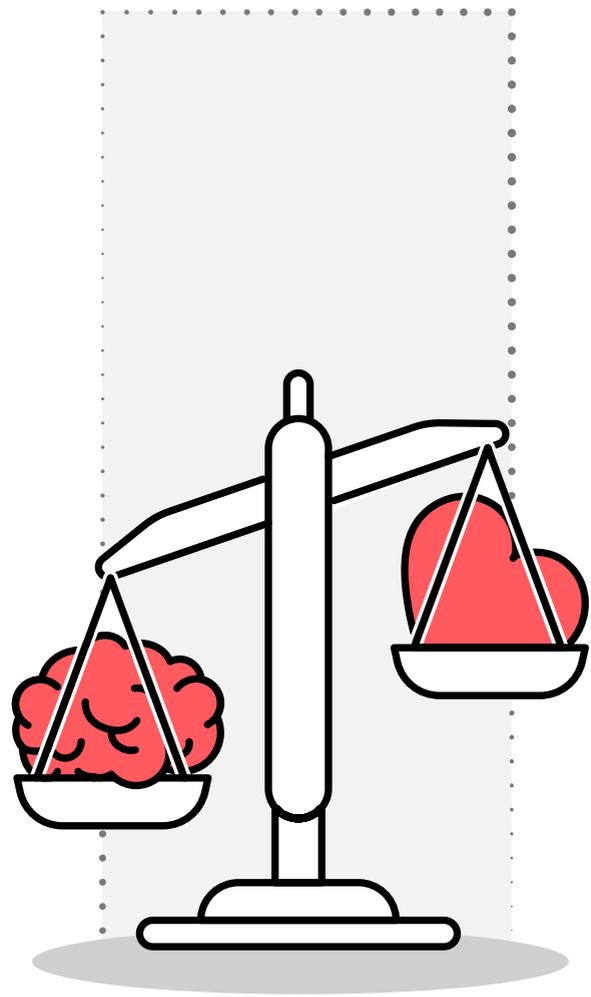
### Real-world example

Someone leases a car without reading the terms, assuming “these deals are all the same.” Or invests based on a hunch, thinking they can “feel the market.” In cybersecurity, many people say they’re good at spotting scams—but fail actual phishing tests.



### What it means for marketing

Customers may ignore your helpful content or calls to action if they feel overly confident. Challenge gently. Use quizzes, comparisons, or smart framing to show them what they might be missing—without making them feel foolish.



## 10. Present Bias

We choose what feels good now, not what's better later.



### What causes it

*Our brains prioritise immediate rewards over future ones. A treat today feels more real than a benefit next year. This is partly neurological: short-term gains light up pleasure centres, while long-term ones feel abstract.*



### How it affects customer behaviour

People delay saving, skip healthy habits, or ignore long-term planning—because today's convenience wins. Even with the best intentions, the future rarely feels urgent enough to act on now.



### Real-world example

Someone uses their holiday bonus on a weekend trip rather than topping up their pension. Or buys fast food on the way home, despite meal prepping. Credit card companies exploit this bias with “buy now, pay later” options.



### What it means for marketing

If your product or service helps customers in the future, make the benefit feel closer. Offer small, immediate rewards. Highlight what they'll feel now—not just what they'll gain later. The more tangible the benefit, the more likely they are to act.



# 10 Practical Strategies to Outsmart Biases in Marketing

1

## Speak human

Use everyday language. Avoid jargon. Say it the way you would to a friend—clear, down-to-earth, and relatable.

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2

## Offer smart comparisons

Don't force a yes-or-no decision. Present three-tiered options or relatable scenarios. It helps people choose without overwhelm.

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3

## Reward instantly

Don't delay the benefit. Let people feel something positive now. A welcome gift, small win, or fast result increases follow-through.

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4

## Show they're not alone

Social proof matters. Highlight real testimonials, usage stats, or community stories. It helps people feel safe to act.

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5

## Make outcomes visible

Visuals and scenarios work better than claims. Show the real difference between doing nothing and taking action—make it concrete.

6

## Lower the threshold

Start small. Offer a trial, demo, or “see for yourself” version. A low-risk entry point makes it easier to say yes.

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7

## Tell stories, not stats

People remember people. Use relatable, human examples that spark emotion and recognition. Stories stick.

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8

## Build in a pause

Give people time and space. A clear next step with a little breathing room often works better than high-pressure tactics.

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9

## Use familiar context

Meet people in their world. Use language, images, and settings they recognise. Relevance builds trust.

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10

## Normalise doubt

Let them know it’s okay to hesitate. Say things like, “It’s normal to weigh your options.” This lowers resistance and invites reflection.

# Want to apply Behavioural Design to your own marketing?

If you'd like to put these insights into action in your campaigns, customer journeys, or communication strategies, the **Behavioural Design Fundamentals Course** might be for you.

## You'll learn:



How customers really make decisions (spoiler: it's rarely logical)



How to identify and remove friction in behaviour



How to apply behavioural insights to marketing, UX, CX and messaging



How to use the **SUE | Influence Framework**<sup>®</sup> to systematically design behaviour

*It's practical, human-centred and ready to use.*

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## Who is this training for?

The course is designed for professionals who want to sharpen their behavioural lens:



Marketers aiming to drive conversion or behavioural change



CX specialists looking to remove friction in the customer journey



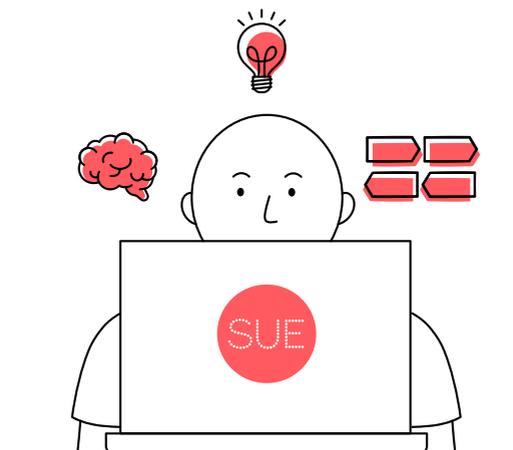
Product marketers building stronger propositions



Communication professionals who want to go beyond assumptions



UX designers who want to integrate behavioural principles into their flows





## What you'll get

- ✓ Two days of hands-on training, on-site or online
- ✓ Practical tools and templates ready to use immediately
- ✓ Certificate of completion
- ✓ Access to the exclusive **SUE | Behavioural Design Club**
- ✓ Six months of online follow-up learning

## Reviews:



Google **4,8** out of 5

**bloomville**



**Curious to see if it's a fit for you?** Get in touch or click here to **download** the brochure.



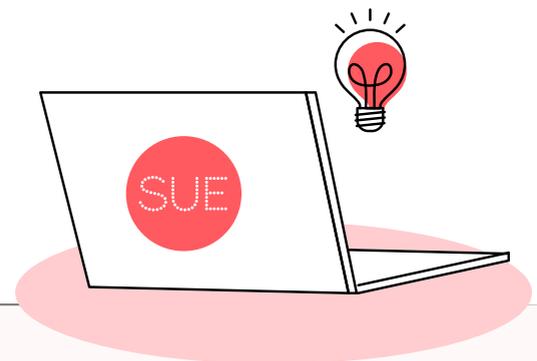
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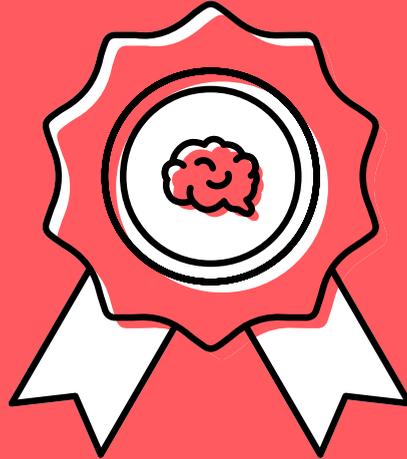


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