

Bringing Research to LIFE

In brief

Genomics on the Hill

Researchers David Levin (biosystems engineering) and Richard Sparling (microbiology) were recently highlighted at Genomics on the Hill. Their \$10.5 million Genome Canada funded research program was one of 12 projects highlighted at the event. Their research is focused on ways to convert waste materials (like wood chips and straw) into fuels (biofuels) and other products.

The "Celebrating 10 years of achievement and discovery" themed event was sponsored by Senator Kelvin K. Ogilvie, past Genome Canada Board Member and a valued champion of health research in Canada as well as Genome Canada's new President and CEO, Dr. Pierre Meulien.

The purpose of Genomics on the Hill is to demonstrate the excellence of the research being carried out in genomics and proteomics in Canada to Members of Parliament, senators, their staff as well as key government officials.

Upcoming event

Bringing Research to LIFE Speaker Series

Chemical Contamination & Climate Change: Two battles on One Front

With Dr. Feiyue Wang

Wednesday, January 19, 2011

7:00 PM

Robert B. Schultz Lecture Theatre
St. John's College, Fort Garry
Campus

**FREE ADMISSION & PARKING
EVERYONE WELCOME**

More info:
umanitoba.ca/research/brtl.html



Warm Holiday Wishes & All The Best In The New Year!

Office of the
Vice-President (Research)

Maximizing your shopping dollars

Can we avoid the influence of 'subtle' product placements?

BY MELNI GHATTORA

The alarm-clock sounds; you get up, wash your face with your Lancôme facial cleanser and brush your teeth with your Oral-B Triumph. The Tassimo beeps from the kitchen telling you your morning brew is ready, with a glance at your Tissot you realize you better get going. You grab your Samsonite briefcase, keys to your Volvo and you're off. Sounds like a narrative from a book or scene in a movie. In the marketing world the term is "product placement" and in the world of psychology it's a research topic.

Psychology professor Jason Leboe and PhD student Tamara Ansons are studying product placements in the media and their effect on both memory and a person's preference for buying the product. "Billions of dollars get spent every year for the insertion of a product in movies and literature but the actual principals that might actually influence buying behaviour aren't well understood," says Leboe. "What is the effect on the viewer when they see a brand being used?"

Their findings indicate that the mere exposure of that brand gives it a boost over its competitors. Leboe and Ansons ran a study where one brand was featured in a positive light and the other in a negative; presenting one brand of coffee to have a superior taste and the other as bitter in taste. "We tested peoples' buying preference afterwards, and we didn't find any evidence of an effect whether it was presented positively or negatively," explains Leboe. However when they would simply show a brand within a storyline, versus not showing it at all, this increased the person's preference for that brand.

Further to their study, Leboe and Ansons are investigating the long-term effects product placement can have on our memory. We don't watch a movie and immediately encounter a context in which we are exposed to that brand. It may be a day or a month before we are faced with the exact mobile device we saw in the hands of the lead character in a Hollywood blockbuster. "We know it boosts the preference for a brand but one thing we're interested in is how long does it last," says Leboe.

According to the researchers, product placement is most effective by being virtually unnoticeable. While this may sound odd, it has most of its influence at an unconscious preference level; people will encounter a brand in a movie they are watching but they won't have the mental capacity to ask themselves "Is that a Fendi handbag? Do I need a Fendi Handbag?" When you're engaging in something you enjoy, like reading a book, the fact that a character is hammering out a report on their iMac will likely go unnoticed. You read this at an unconscious level but you unknowingly may have a



Photo by Tamara Nathaniel

Faculty of Arts researchers Jason Leboe and Tamara Ansons want to better understand product placement and its long-term effects on our memory.

preference for an iMac over a Dell PC down the road.

You may have a big ticket purchase on your list this holiday season and if you don't know the difference in quality or the features of one item versus the other you may gravitate to a brand that you feel good about but not necessarily a product that meets your needs. "For a consumer who isn't very educated on the purchase they're making, these influences may come into play more so than somebody that is more educated and would be able to rely on more specific information about the product, whereas a novice consumer may be biased by these non-analytic influences," says Ansons, who is wrapping up her dissertation which is titled: "Cognitive Determinants of Product Placement Consequences."

How do we realize this is happening

or clue in to the ever so subtle placement of goods in our everyday lives? It's not as simple as avoiding all forms of media, but one way to armor ourselves is to be aware. The best tool to ensure you are buying a product suited to your needs and within your budget is research. Forget what you think you know about Sony or Panasonic, get online and research credible reviews on the various makes and models that are in the marketplace.

With the barrage of advertisements and product placements, it is difficult to locate the origins of our opinions and assumptions of a brand. "I am worried that people are at the mercy of billions of dollars that companies have to spend to push them toward that brand just because it will make them feel better or it will be associated with a luxurious lifestyle," says Leboe.