

I can hear you, but I don't understand you

We communicate with our environment continuously. But do we really connect? It seems as if, when we communicate, more is less.

We are communicating more than ever before. Every day, we speak about 16,000 words. We are in contact with others 24/7 via email, SMS, MSN, Hyves, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter. More than 50% of young people say that they cannot imagine their lives without MSN, on which they spend 6 hours every week. In the Netherlands, every month, 2.5 billion conversations are held through Messenger, on about 6 million accounts, which have an average of 83 listed contacts.

Also, our communication has become more rational, almost mechanical. First of all, the way we communicate has become more digital, with an emphasis on transmitting information long-distance – as quickly as possible, with the minimum number of characters or words. In addition to this, our fast-paced way of life also makes our communication when we meet in person more superficial, less in-depth. More and more people are complaining that they do not really connect to their loved ones enough. Our communication goes mostly from brain to brain. While research has shown that our bodies often have much more to tell than our heads. It was found that, in a conversation, 30% of the signals are transferred verbally, and 70% through body language. We all know that quarrels between spouses are not caused by what *is* said, but rather by what is *not* said. Alternatively, not saying anything can also be a message unto itself. Bodies almost always betray a worded lie. But in our culture, we seem to have forgotten how to listen to your bodies' language. The emphasis on rational communication has switched off the body-language component, which makes the communication less-than-whole. It is a shallow kind of non-communication. From person to person. You could even go so far as to call it miscommunication.

Writing in Mirror Image

More and more people are beginning to realize that we are missing real contact in the way we communicate. This topic is at the heart of the epistolary novel *Spiegelschrift* ("Writing in Mirror Image") by Bart Demyttenaere and Wim Geysen. They talk about the non-communication in families. Emoticons were created for a reason, and the list of "body-language options" is increasing rapidly.

There is a growing need for physical contact. This is evidenced by the rise of healing methods such as haptonomy, which rely on the fact that your body knows all and tells all. The most-heard wish for 2008 is more physical contact, sex and romance. And Silent Dating is the newest dating method, based on the principle that a person's body language says more than a

thousand words. In a nutshell, we crave communication from person to person, in which the brain *and* the body play a part. Communication that gives us real contact.

Bill Bernbach, one of the founders of DDB, once said, and with good reason, *“You can say the right thing about a product and nobody will listen. You’ve got to say it in such a way that people will feel it in their gut. Because if they don’t feel it, nothing will happen.”*

In a word: communication from person to person. The difference between hearing and understanding.

Jacqueline Wolfs
(jacqueline.wolfs@nl.ddb.com)
DDB Amsterdam

This article was based on the findings of DDB SignBank. DDB Sign Bank gathers and orders signs in a sociological framework. It is used in 60 DDB offices worldwide.

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