

POINT 47 DANGER, FOOD, SEX, MOVEMENT, FACES, AND STORIES GET THE MOST ATTENTION.

Here's what grabs attention the most:

- Anything that moves (for example video or blinking)
- Pictures of human faces, especially if they are looking right at you
- Pictures of food, sex, or danger
- Stories
- Loud noises (covered in number 48)

## Why people can't resist paying attention to food, sex, and danger

Have you ever wondered why traffic always slows when people are driving by an accident? Do you moan about the fact that people are attracted by the gruesome, and yet find that you glanced over too as you drive by? Well, it's not really your fault that you (and everyone else) can't resist looking at scenes of danger. It's your old brain telling you to pay attention.

### You have three brains

In Neuro Web Design: "What makes them click?" I talked about the idea that you really don't have one brain, you have three. The new brain is the conscious, reasoning, logical brain that you think you know best; the midbrain is the part that processes emotions, and the old brain is the part that is most interested in your survival. From an evolutionary perspective, the old brain developed first. In fact, that part of our brain is very similar to that of the reptile, which is why some people call it the "Reptilian Brain."

### Can I eat it? Can I have sex with it? Will it kill me?

The job of your old brain is to constantly scan the environment and answer the questions: "Can I eat it? Can I have sex with it? Will it kill me?" That's really all the old brain cares about (Figure 47.1). When you think about it, this is important. Without food you'll die, without sex the species won't survive, and if you're killed the other questions don't matter. So animal brains developed early on to care intensely about three topics. As animals evolved they developed other capacities (emotions, logical thoughts), but they retained a part of their brain to always be scanning for these critical things.

### So you can't resist

What this means is that you just can't resist noticing food, sex, or danger, no matter how hard you try not to. It's the old brain working. You don't necessarily have to do anything once you notice; For example, you don't have to eat the chocolate cake when you see it, you don't have to

flirt with the attractive woman who walked into the room, and you don't have to run away from the big, scary guy who walked in the room with the good-looking woman. But you will notice all of those things whether you want to or not.

Your attention is riveted by pictures of people

People are hardwired to pay attention to faces. Read the chapter on “How we see” for more details on the parts of the brain that process faces.

## Takeaways

- It may not always be appropriate to use food, sex, or danger in your webpage or software application, but if you do they'll get a lot of attention.
- Use images of up close faces.
- Use stories as much as you can, even for what you think is factual information.