



## **Sound and Brand**

### **The Impact of Sound on the Web**

**A joint research project by  
Cheskin Research and Beatnik, Inc.**

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## **Research Background**

As Internet technologies develop, sound will be easily accessible over the Web. It will become a critical component in website design, and will be a differentiating element in the success of websites and brands online. Headspace, a leader in music and sound technology on the Internet, and Cheskin Research, a premiere market research firm, sought to understand how sound impacts brand perception and identity in the Web environment.

### **What is Brand?**

We commonly refer to brand as the essence or personality of a product or service. Brand extends to the entire product experience including all points of interaction. Through a combination of both tangible and intangible elements, brand implies a promise and expectation, and to be successful, must fulfill that expectation.

Audio is one important part of the brand experience.

Cheskin Research, a leader in new media, positioning, and identity research, has conducted consumer research to address these issues.

### **Objectives**

The objective of the research was to measure the impact of sound on the perception of brand identity.

Specific objectives included the following:

- Measure the unaided identification of sound identity elements for NBC , Intel, and HeadSpace\*
- Explore how sound impacts brand perception of NBC , Intel, and HeadSpace\*

*\*While both of these were measured in the context of a computer, the results were generalized to TV and other video/sound media venues.*

## **Methodology**

### **Sample Composition**

A total of 225 quantitative one-on-one interviews were conducted between December 10 - December 19, 1998, across five US cities. Respondents were intercepted at the mall and asked to participate in interviews at a central interviewing facility.

Respondent qualifications included the following:

- Must have understood English
- Must have a computer with an internet connection
- No participation in marketing research studies within the previous three months, and
- All met standard security requirements.

### **Markets**

The interviews were conducted in five geographically dispersed locations:

- San Francisco, California
- Salt Lake City, Utah
- Cleveland, Ohio
- Tampa, Florida
- New York, New York

**Methodology (continued)**

**Cell Description**

The study employed a three-cell design. The cells differed only by the stimuli being presented to respondents. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three cells where they were exposed to a computer monitor that either projected the brand sound, the brand logo, or the brand logo with sound (i.e., no one saw more than one type of brand version –audio, visual or combination). Respondents saw one of the following exhibit sets:

<b>Cell 1</b> <b>Audio Only</b> (n= 75)	<b>Cell 2</b> <b>Visual Only</b> (n=75)	<b>Cell 3</b> <b>Combo (Both Audio &amp; Visual)</b> (n=75)
Intel sound only	Intel logo only	Intel sound with logo
NBC sound only	NBC logo only	NBC sound with logo
HeadSpace sound only	HeadSpace logo only	HeadSpace sound with logo
The brands were rotated.		

Each cell consisted of the same series of tests and utilized the same questionnaire structure. The interview lasted approximately 10 minutes. The questionnaire was divided into four distinct sections that are briefly described below.

## **Methodology (continued)**

### **Test Procedure**

Respondents were presented each brand one at a time. After each brand was shown, respondents answered the following questions:

- Recognition and Identification: Respondents identified what brand the exhibit represented.
- Imagery Communication. Respondents then rated each brand on 11 attributes. Responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”
- Decade Association. Respondents were then asked to associate the company with a specific decade, ranging from the 1960’s to the next century.
- Impact of Sound in the Office. Finally, after all the brands were shown, respondents evaluated the sounds in their own office environment.

## Conclusions

An audio signature can have a positive impact on a brand:

- The effective use of audio alone can equal the impact of the visual (logo) on brand imagery

*Therefore, those who want to develop a brand presence on the web should be concerned with audio*

However, while an audio representation of a brand is important, it is not a “silver bullet.”

- Brands are more easily identified through visual stimuli
- Audio can have a negative impact on brand imagery

## Intel

- Audio is at parity with visual and combo on imagery attributes

*This shows the potential impact of audio alone on brand imagery*

## HeadSpace

- Adding audio to visual (combo) pulls down positive imagery associations with visual representation of the brand

*Sometimes sound is not the right thing -it can buy you something but it can also hurt a brand*

## **Key Findings**

In an internet environment, the use of audio alone can be as important as a brand's visual mark in communicating brand attributes. Brand recognition is significant with sound alone. In the future, web developers must consider audio as a part of the entire brand experience.

When designing the audio brand signature, it's critical that existing brand attributes be understood and that sound express these attributes. Sound can just as easily have a negative impact on brand as a positive impact.



## **Detailed Findings**

## **Detailed Findings**

### **Brand Recognition**

- For Intel and NBC, respondents more easily identified the visual and combo representations than the audio version.
- For Headspace, respondents more easily identified the visual representation than the audio version.

### **Imagery Association**

#### *Intel*

- For Intel, brand imagery was communicated equally through all three versions: audio-only, visual-only, and combination.

*Again, this shows the potential positive impact of audio alone on brand imagery.*

- All three versions of the Intel brand were strongly associated with “Is distinctive” and “Is a leading brand.”

### *NBC*

- All three versions of the NBC brand communicated “fun,” “friendly,” and “high quality” equally well.

*As with the Intel results above, this shows the potential impact of audio alone on brand imagery*

- The visual-only and combination versions produced richer imagery for the brand, especially in communicating “cool,” “distinctive,” and “a leading brand.”

### *HeadSpace*

- While the HeadSpace visual representation better communicated “Is cool” and “Is energetic” than both the audio and combo versions, it is significant that the visual outscored the combo version on three measures; “Is cool,” “Is fun,” and “Is energetic.”

*This demonstrates the potential negative impact that sound can have on brand imagery.*

## **Decade association**

### *Intel*

- For Intel, the visual and combo versions were significantly more associated with the future (the year 2000) than audio-only version.
- All three representations were equally associated with the present (the 90’s).

### *NBC*

- 51% associate the NBC audio representation with the past (80’s, 70’s, and 60’s).
- Very few respondents associated NBC with the future with either of the three brand representations (audio, visual or combo).

### **Decade Association (cont.)**

#### *HeadSpace*

- Respondents associated the visual-only and combination version with the future (year 2000) significantly more often than the audio-only version.
- The audio-only version was closely associated with the 1980's and the 1990's.

### **Impact of Sound in the Office**

- Of the people who worked in an office, two out of three played music in the office.
- Most described their offices as “somewhat quiet.”
- Half the office workers muted the sound on their computers; the other half turned the sound on.
- Of those who have their computers muted, they did so because they “don't like the sound” and find it “a distraction.”
- The ones that do have the sound on typically set the volume at the midway point or lower.

# **Brand Recognition**

**Brand Recognition**

<b>Total Sample</b>									
	<b>Percent Stating*</b>								
	<b>NBC</b>			<b>INTEL</b>			<b>HEADSPACE</b>		
	<b>(A) <u>Audio</u></b>	<b>(B) <u>Visual</u></b>	<b>(C) <u>Combo</u></b>	<b>(D) <u>Audio</u></b>	<b>(E) <u>Visual</u></b>	<b>(F) <u>Combo</u></b>	<b>(G) <u>Audio</u></b>	<b>(H) <u>Visual</u></b>	<b>(I) <u>Combo</u></b>
<b>(Sample Sizes)</b>	<b>(68)</b>	<b>(75)</b>	<b>(73)</b>	<b>(66)</b>	<b>(75)</b>	<b>(73)</b>	<b>(68)</b>	<b>(75)</b>	<b>(73)</b>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Have you heard/seen this before?</u>									
Yes, I have	87	92	97 Ab	92 e	85	97 E	37 HI	19	16
No, I haven't	13 C	8 c	3	8	15 dF	3	63	81 G	84 G
	<b>(68)</b>	<b>(72)</b>	<b>(73)</b>	<b>(66)</b>	<b>(74)</b>	<b>(72)</b>	<b>(66)</b>	<b>(73)</b>	<b>(73)</b>
<u>What brand or company does this sound/image represent?</u>									
Brand correctly identified	56	76 A	86 Ab	46	69 D	81 De	8	23 G	15 g
Brand incorrectly identified	44 BC	24 c	14	54 EF	31 f	19	92 Hi	77	85

\* UPPERCASE LETTERS indicate a significant difference at the 90% level. lowercase letters indicate a directional difference at the 80% level.

**Brand Recognition**

<b>Total Sample - All Brands Combined</b>			
	<b>Percent Stating*</b>		
	<b>(A) <u>Audio</u></b>	<b>(B) <u>Visual</u></b>	<b>(C) <u>Combo</u></b>
<b>(Sample Sizes)</b>	<b>(72)</b>	<b>(75)</b>	<b>(75)</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<u>Have you heard/seen this before?</u>			
Yes, I have	100	100	99
No, I haven't	-	-	1
	<b>(68)</b>	<b>(74)</b>	<b>(75)</b>
<u>What brand or company does this sound/image represent?</u>			
Brand correctly identified	72	93 A	93 A
Brand incorrectly identified	28 BC	7	7
* <u>UPPERCASE LETTERS</u> indicate a significant difference at the 90% level. <u>lowercase letters</u> indicate a directional difference at the 80% level.			

# **Attribute Communication**



**Attribute Communication**

<b>Total Sample - Intel</b>			
	<u>Percent Stating “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree”*</u>		
	<u>(A)</u> <u>Audio</u>	<u>(B)</u> <u>Visual</u>	<u>(C)</u> <u>Combo</u>
(Sample Sizes)	(74)	(75)	(73)
	%	%	%
Is cool	68	73	71
Is distinctive	87	85	89
Is a leading brand	85	91	86
Is appealing	81	83	78
Is fun	70	67	73
Is for me	67	67	70
Is energetic	76	73	73
Is friendly	82	76	74
Is entertaining	73	68	74
Is high quality	78	79	89 AB
Is a company I would expect great sound from	76	81	80

\* UPPERCASE LETTERS indicate a significant difference at the 90% level. lowercase letters indicate a directional difference at the 80% level.

**Attribute Communication**

<b>Total Sample - NBC</b>			
	<u>Percent Stating “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree”*</u>		
	<u>(A)</u> <u>Audio</u>	<u>(B)</u> <u>Visual</u>	<u>(C)</u> <u>Combo</u>
(Sample Sizes)	(74)	(75)	(73)
	%	%	%
Is cool	61	80 A	73 a
Is distinctive	74	87 A	88 A
Is a leading brand	70	89 A	86 A
Is appealing	70	79	77
Is fun	64	64	73
Is for me	51	60	59
Is energetic	55	59	69 A
Is friendly	75	81	82
Is entertaining	64	71	77 A
Is high quality	72	76	81
Is a company I would expect great sound from	66	76 a	80 A

\* UPPERCASE LETTERS indicate a significant difference at the 90% level. lowercase letters indicate a directional difference at the 80% level.

**Attribute Communication**

<b>Total Sample - HeadSpace</b>			
	<u>Percent Stating “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree”*</u>		
	<u>(A)</u> <u>Audio</u>	<u>(B)</u> <u>Visual</u>	<u>(C)</u> <u>Combo</u>
(Sample Sizes)	(74)	(75)	(73)
	%	%	%
Is cool	50	69 AC	52
Is distinctive	70	72	66
Is a leading brand	38	35	30
Is appealing	61	71	63
Is fun	50	60 C	44
Is for me	38	44 c	33
Is energetic	50	65 AC	48
Is friendly	68 b	57	63
Is entertaining	60	56	52
Is high quality	68	61	66
Is a company I would expect great sound from	62	59	56

\* UPPERCASE LETTERS indicate a significant difference at the 90% level. lowercase letters indicate a directional difference at the 80% level.

**Attribute Communication**

<b>Total Sample - All Brands Combined</b>			
	<u>Percent Stating “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree”*</u>		
	<u>(A)</u> <u>Audio</u>	<u>(B)</u> <u>Visual</u>	<u>(C)</u> <u>Combo</u>
(Sample Sizes)	(75)	(75)	(75)
	%	%	%
Is cool	84	97 AC	89
Is distinctive	91	100 Ac	97 A
Is a leading brand	92	99 Ac	95
Is appealing	92	97 a	95
Is fun	89	88	91
Is for me	79	89 A	85
Is energetic	89	92	93
Is friendly	93	96	95
Is entertaining	87	92	91
Is high quality	88	97 A	97 A
Is a company I would expect great sound from	87	96 A	95 A

\* UPPERCASE LETTERS indicate a significant difference at the 90% level. lowercase letters indicate a directional difference at the 80% level.

## **Decade Association**

**Decade Association**

<b>Total Sample</b>									
	<b>Percent Stating*</b>								
	<b>NBC</b>			<b>INTEL</b>			<b>HEADSPACE</b>		
	<b>(A) Audio</b>	<b>(B) Visual</b>	<b>(C) Combo</b>	<b>(D) Audio</b>	<b>(E) Visual</b>	<b>(F) Combo</b>	<b>(G) Audio</b>	<b>(H) Visual</b>	<b>(I) Combo</b>
<b>(Sample Sizes)</b>	(74)	(75)	(73)	(74)	(75)	(73)	(74)	(75)	(73)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The 1960's	11	8	6	3	1	1	5	-	3
The 1970's	18	11	11	3	-	1	5 h	1	4
The 1980's	22	20	18	19 F	13 f	7	27 HI	4	6
The 1990's	47	52	63 Ab	64	64	62	46	59 g	58 g
The year 2000	1	8 Ac	3	10	21 D	26 D	15	33 G	26 G
The year 2010	1	1	-	3	-	3	1	3	4

\* UPPERCASE LETTERS indicate a significant difference at the 90% level. lowercase letters indicate a directional difference at the 80% level.

# **Impact of Sound in the Office**

**Sound in the Office**

<b>Noise Level in the Office</b>	
<b>(Sample Size = 72)*</b>	<b>Percent Stating</b>
	<b>%</b>
<u>Do you play music in the office?</u>	
Yes, I do	78
No, I don't	22
<u>How would you describe the noise level on a typical day at your office?</u>	
Very noisy	11
Somewhat noisy	36
Somewhat quiet	43
Very quiet	10
* Based to those who work in an office.	



**Sound in the Office**

<b>Sound on the Computer</b>	
<b>(Sample Size = 72)*</b>	<b>Percent Stating*</b>
	%
<u>Is the audio on your computer at work muted or turned on?</u>	
Yes, it's muted	49
No, it's not muted	51
<b>(Sample Size = 34)<sup>†</sup></b>	
<u>Reasons for having computer muted</u>	
Distracting/try to keep noise down/courtesy to others	44
Don't use sound/don't like it	29
Don't know/not my decision/set up that way	18
Company policy	9
<b>(Sample Size = 36)<sup>††</sup></b>	
<u>What is the volume set at your computer?</u>	
As loud as possible	6
About the ¾ level	11
About the midway point	47
Very low	36
* Based to those who work in an office.	
† Based to those who have the audio on their computers muted at work.	
†† Based to those who have the audio on their computers on at work.	

## **Demographics**

**Demographics**

<b>Gender, Age, and Income</b>	
<b>(Sample Size = 225)</b>	<b>Percent Stating</b>
	<b>%</b>
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	50
Female	50
<u>Age</u>	
Under 18	10
18 to 24	37
25 to 34	18
35 to 54	28
Over 54	6
<u>Income</u>	
Less than \$25,000	10
\$25,000 to \$34,999	22
\$35,000 to \$44,999	15
\$45,000 to \$54,999	18
\$55,000 to \$74,999	18
More than \$75,000	17