



Why  
your brand  
should do  
a shot of  
Jägermeister.



HOW TO **fascinate**

SALLY HOGSHEAD

**T**he bittersweetly harsh taste is unmistakable: black licorice laced with Robitussin and battery acid. As the bartender pours the liqueur, it seems heavy enough to plop into the shotglass—glub-glub-glub—and concentrated enough to make permanent stains on an asphalt highway.

Partiers order it eagerly and repeatedly, paying a premium price for this particular brand. Yet watch closely. Once the shot actually arrives, they often hesitate imperceptibly, bracing themselves, jaw clenched, suddenly faced with the reality of actually drinking it. Afterwards, they're smiling once again, this time with pride. Despite the corrosive throat burn, their empty shotglass has become a medal of valor.

Have you ever **consumed** Jägermeister?      Yes  No   
Do you **like the taste** of Jägermeister?      Yes  No

If you're under age 45 or so, there's a good chance that you've tried Jägermeister. However the odds are low—quite low—that you actually enjoy the taste. And that's okay. Few people do. Very, very few. I'll wager that most of the people who make Jägermeister don't like the taste of Jägermeister. Yet the brand continues to grow at an astonishing rate. If so many people actively dislike the taste, how does the company manage to sell 83 million bottles a year?

**With sales increasing up to 40% per year since 1985, Jägermeister is the most popular drink nobody likes.**

Many companies successfully advertise products and services that consumers don't necessarily *need* (bottled water, luxury cars) or even *enjoy* (backache pills, oil changes, burial plots). But here's a brand that manages to sell an extraordinary volume—at a premium price point, no less—of a product that people don't even want, and more to the point, actively dislike.

Before 1985, Jägermeister was a modest seller among blue-collar German immigrants, an after-dinner digestif. It served as a field anesthetic in World War II. But after marketing genius Sidney Frank bought the importing rights to Jäger, he came across a story published in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* describing his liqueur as a cult drink. The article claimed it was hopped up with opium, Quaaludes, and aphrodisiacs. Did Frank suppress the article? Nope. He copied it and posted it in college bars all around the country. College students visiting New Orleans clutched bottles of the potion back to schools, spreading the mystique. And boom, Jägermeister was anointed the drink of “dance naked on the bar” wild partying.

Jägermeister succeeds because it doesn't follow the usual “get attention and awareness” model of marketing. (If Jäger had been put through consumer focus groups before it went on the market... is it possible to even describe how desperately it would fail?) Instead of fretting about gaining awareness, as most brands do, this one outperforms with a different model: fascination.

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## JÄGERMEISTER IS LIQUID FASCINATION

All this doesn't make sense, of course, on a rational level. It doesn't have to. If the brand made sense intellectually, it wouldn't work.

**Jäger doesn't succeed *despite its taste, but because of it.***

With this drink, repellant flavor isn't a barrier to trial; it's a reason for it. An overall toxic experience is part of the brand promise.

We all have certain behaviors that don't exactly make sense, even to ourselves. We make certain choices, and take certain actions, without understanding exactly *why*. Here's why: In a state of fascination, we don't think and act quite logically. We do things we don't understand, we believe messages we don't agree with, and we buy things we don't even want. The attraction short-circuits our logical evaluation process.

Fascination explains why people join suicidal cults, or develop bizarre fetishes, or willingly obey tyrannical dictators. More commonly (but just as irrationally), they buy sports cars they can't afford, procrastinate on major deadlines, or fall in love with the "wrong" person. Our preferences are often driven by deeper, more primal forces. Our best friends and favorite foods, our pets and pet peeves, the movies we see, the cereal we buy, the politicians we vote for—we often don't *choose* to be fascinated by these things any more than we *choose* to feel thirsty or fall asleep.

Often, in fact, our choices are actually not "choices" at all. In reality, the seven fascination triggers are controlling our decision-making.

And what are the seven triggers?

## THE SEVEN FASCINATION TRIGGERS

**MYSTIQUE** - Why we're intrigued by unanswered questions

**LUST** - Why we're seduced by the anticipation of pleasure

**ALARM** - Why we take action at the threat of negative consequences

**POWER** - Why we focus on people and things that control us

**VICE** - Why we're tempted by novelty and "forbidden fruit"

**PRESTIGE** - Why we fixate on rank and respect

**TRUST** - Why we're loyal to reliable options

Each trigger adds a different type of attraction. Mystique, as we know, adds curiosity. Trust adds stability and comfort. Lust adds warmth and humanity. Power adds respect, or fear. Alarm adds a sense of adventure, or immediacy, or even danger. Vice adds irreverence.

By understanding the attraction behind each trigger, you can more precisely explain and predict why otherwise meaningless things can become intensely desirable.

Jäger doesn't succeed despite its horrific taste,  
but because of it ... an overall toxic experience is  
part of the brand promise.

## IT'S NOT THE **THING**, IT'S THE **TRIGGER**

Let me explain. Nothing is, in itself, fascinating. But triggers are. Triggers turn otherwise ordinary objects into fascinations. When one of your triggers is activated, you are compelled to focus, whether you want to or not. Triggers can take something that's relatively meaningless (e.g. a swoosh symbol) and give it meaning (e.g. the Nike logo).

The strongest brands create triggers around things that would otherwise be meaningless. Even parity goods, ones that generally have fairly universal value, become more valuable by adding a little meaning: Morton salt is more meaningful than plain salt, and Clorox bleach is more meaningful than plain bottled bleach.

When consumers buy a certain brand, they're often not paying for the *utility* of the item—they're paying for the *trigger*. When someone pays for a shot of Jäger, they aren't buying a drink—they're buying mystique.

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## YOUR F SCORE

Every day, in your own life, you're already using the seven fascination triggers. You might attract others with the *trust* trigger, through a consistent and stable relationships. Or you might use *prestige*, earning respect within your group. Perhaps you use *lust*, with warm and generous relationships, or *vice*, creating an excitement around new experiences.



**Which triggers are you already using to persuade others? The F Score test will help you uncover your natural fascination talents: [SallyHogshead.com/FScore](https://SallyHogshead.com/FScore).**

Since we only have so much time today, let's focus on one trigger: Mystique. Many people don't think of their company, or their own personality, as inherently "mysterious." Yet anything, and anyone, can increase their F Score by activating the mystique trigger.

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## WHAT IS “MYSTIQUE”?

Eye-catching enough to get noticed, yet complex enough to stay interesting. Revealing enough to pique curiosity, yet shadowy enough to prompt questions. Mystique flirts with us, provoking our imagination—hinting at the possibilities yet eluding our grasp. Topics that spark our curiosity become discussed, debated, and dissected, often without ever being understood.

From an evolutionary perspective, mystique plays an important role in survival. Research proves that the human brain seeks patterns, because patterns allow us to understand and predict our environment. When a pattern is interrupted—such as when a puzzle has a missing piece—we’re hardwired to focus on filling in the missing information. That’s why cliffhangers and unsolved murders grip our attention: our brains crave the security of knowing what happens next. If there’s a question, we want an answer; the greater the mystique, the more irresistible the fixation.

So what, exactly, is Jäger’s mystery?

In German, Jägermeister translates to “master hunter,” though the real hunt is for a definitive explanation of the precise recipe. While Jäger is known to contain 56 ingredients, urban myths abound on just what exactly they are. Some claim it has elk’s blood, while others insist it has opiates, or Valium, or dissolved Quaaludes.

This legend makes the drink’s taste nigh irrelevant. In fact, if Jäger actually tasted good, would it even be popular?

Think back to the Pepsi Challenge: One category leader going head-to-head with another in a blind taste test, brazenly stripping away all marketing hype in a bare-knuckle battle of taste. How might Jäger fare in a blind taste test? (“We’ve secretly replaced Mary’s usual cup of coffee with a shot of Jägermeister...”) It’s an absurd premise, because Jäger isn’t competing on anything resembling rational product benefits.



Mystique is the opposite of a blind taste test. It elevates a product beyond rational benefits, adding value and defining a brand through layers of meaning.

Here's proof of what unique meaning Jäger has created around its brand. If the company did a blind taste test, what drink would it even compete against? Kahlua? Not really. Peppermint schnaps? Hmm. Black crayons soaked in formaldehyde? Yeah, maybe.

**Jäger has no competition. This brand is irrationally, irresistibly irreplaceable. A category of one.**

The *raison d'être* of this brand is to broadcast a partier's intentions to the world, just as socialite might flaunt her Jimmy Choos. It says you're a little more adventurous, willing to stick your toe over the line if not hurl your body across it.

How many brands can actually induce that kind of placebo effect?

That's why Jäger is so popular among groups at bars. It's a team-building exercise, of sorts. Can you imagine someone at home, alone, on a Tuesday evening, pouring a JägerBomb? Sure, maybe it's happened before, but it makes about as much sense as sitting on your own lap.

Consumers can dislike a product, but love its message—and when they use that product, they love what it says *about them*.

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It elevates a product beyond rational benefits.

## GREEN M&MS, BULL TESTICLES, AND SECRET RECIPES

Lots of companies pour a jigger of mystique into their brands. By staying hush-hush about the details, they allow consumers to participate in the mystery.

Pop Rocks are lethal if mixed with Coke, and green M&M's are an aphrodisiac. Vox vodka won't give a hangover, and Zima can't be detected in a Breathalyzer test. Red Bull (the other half of the JägerBomb) lists "taurine" as an ingredient, which is made with bull urine, or bull testicles, depending on which urban myth you believe. The Big Mac has "secret sauce," which sounds far more tantalizing than its typical name: Thousand Island dressing. And what's that "33" on Rolling Rock's green bottle, anyway?

For KFC chicken, Colonel Sanders mixes its "eleven secret herbs and spices" separately, in two different factories, to minimize the number of people who know the exact measurements. Then, just to be sure, the company combines all eleven ingredients at a third location.

Coca-Cola's secret ingredient, the cryptically dubbed "Merchandise 7X," has remained a secret since the soda's invention in 1886. The company has kept its prized list of ingredients in a vault inside the Trust Company's Bank since 1925.\*

Jäger fascinates consumers to the extent that they'll not only gulp down something they despise, but pay extra for the pleasure of doing so. What about you? How might you fascinate others by telling them *less*, rather than *more*?

**\*Spoiler Alert:** *In the book For God, Country and Coca-Cola, Mark Pendergrast outs what many believe to be the classic Coke recipe. Coca-Cola inventor, John S. Pemberton, kept it in a collection of formulas:*

### Ingredients:

1 oz caffeine citrate

3 oz citric acid

1 fl oz vanilla extract

1 qt lime juice

2.5 oz flavoring (no further clarification here ... could this be the mysterious 7X?)

30 lb sugar

## HOW TO ACTIVATE MYSTIQUE

Intriguing people make us curious to learn more. We think about them. We talk with our friends about them. We research them. We want to be close to them emotionally, intellectually, or physically. Products affect us the same way.

How to increase this rare fascination trigger? It doesn't require adding anything new to a brand; rather, you need to shift from marketing, and into fascination. We'll take a look at 7 potential strategies. Even applying one or two of these strategies can elevate your audience's curiosity, and draw them closer to learn more.

1. **Withhold Information.**
2. **Spark Curiosity.**
3. **Raise the Reward.**
4. **Build Mythology.**
5. **Limit Access.**
6. **Stories, Not Facts.**
7. **Ask Questions (rather than giving answers).**

Above all, remember: Information is the death of mystique. The magic trick ends if you find out how the white rabbit appears from the black hat. Rather than relying on data and specificity, consider how you might strategically withhold some of the details.

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Information is the death of mystique.

## 1. Withhold Information.

These days, mystique has become, alas, too rare. Confidentiality is all but extinct, because we have *too much* information. We're living in a time in which we can Google anything at any time. A time when starlets race the tabloids to announce their own exposé. When companies confess to problems before the bloggers expose them. When Larry Flynt offers a \$1 million bounty for any proof of a sexual encounter with a high-ranking government official. We're surrounded by kiss-and-tell-alls. And then there's YouTube, the ultimate mystique killer. Yet this dearth of privacy makes mystique all the more mesmerizing, because it sparks curiosity.

To achieve lasting mystique, a brand with mystique can never give away so much information that we feel certain enough to turn away and focus elsewhere.

If Jägermeister publically announced its list of ingredients, would it still be as popular? Information kills mystique as surely as flipping on fluorescent lights in a candlelit restaurant and watching cockroaches scurry from view.

## 2. Spark Curiosity.

Topics that spark our curiosity become discussed, debated, and dissected, often without ever being understood: The Shroud of Turin. The Bavarian Illuminati. Area 51. From the Bermuda Triangle to crop circles, we're obsessed with certain phenomena specifically because we *can't* explain them. Kids, especially, love mystique: Birthday presents, the Tooth Fairy, and limited-edition Webkinz.

Once you spark curiosity, you've increased energy and conversation around your message. Next, increase the interest by raising the reward.

### 3. Raise the Reward

The more valued the prize, the more others will vie for the information required to win it. In the grips of high-stake guessing games, people become gripped with irrational fascination: The higher the lottery, the more people try to guess the number.

The relationship between high reward and high participation plays out in everyday life. A tech company might regularly scour public records on Apple's patent files, trying to predict its next innovation. A suspicious wife might try to confirm whether her husband is having an affair by counting the number of her husband's Viagra pills.

In the case of Jägermeister, what's the "reward?" Not better taste, or lower price. Instead, one might say, it's a form of street cred. These drinkers aren't just consumers, they're participants. And as with any colossal feat of human endurance (say, climbing Mount Everest or completing the Iditarod), they must confirm and validate their accomplishment by reiterating the difficulty of overcoming the challenge. If you've ever done a shot of Jägermeister, and want credit for doing so, you share a vested interest in perpetuating the myth.

**If the legend is *false*—if there aren't actually forbidden ingredients—well, then you're just some random guy drinking a plain old nasty German digestif.**

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#### 4. Build Mythology

“Mythology” is the collection of stories, traditions, and beliefs belonging to a particular group or event. People that fascinate the media, such as Steve Jobs, Lady Gaga, Tiger Woods—they all cultivate mythology.

Jäger’s mythology writes a permission slip to unleash. After all, who can be held responsible once they’ve consumed legal opiate? As one bartender said, “There’s drunk. And then, there’s Jägermeister drunk.”

**Is Jäger really is made with Quaaludes and elk’s blood? Probably not. But that’s not the point. The genius of the brand is that people *believe* it’s made with that stuff. Or more specifically, people *want* to believe it is.**

Drinkers semi-suspend skepticism about the ingredients, thereby allowing tales of their exploits to grow ever larger and more epic upon retelling the morning after.

#### 5. Limit Access

Successfully mysterious people and groups limit access. They maintain control by making people feel special being “on the inside.” When people feel that they’re part of the select chosen few, they’re more committed. And they make all those people on the *outside* want to get *inside* to see what all the fuss is about.

With Jäger, the taste itself limits access: only a limited number of people will tolerate it. Other brands limit access more literally.

## 6. Stories, Not Facts

Today, most facts are a commodity. Most information is available via some iPhone app or PowerPoint chart. Facts alone can help with other triggers such as power and alarm, but not this one. Stories allow others to draw their own conclusions, and retell in their own way. Religions use stories to bind people together, as do Disney, many support groups, and even our own families.

Creating new stories is an integral part of the consumer's expectation of their Jägermeister experience. As so tidily described in "The Jägermeister Song:" *Woke up on the kitchen floor / Breath smells just like cow manure / What I did last night I'm not sure / Thank you Jägermeister.*

## 7. Ask questions, rather than giving answers.

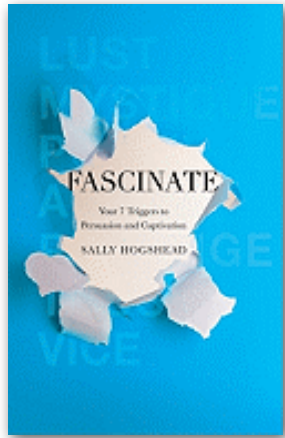
Earlier, we saw how humans are hardwired to solve questions. In everyday life, we invest a great deal of energy into trying to figure out the answers to questions big and small. When will the economy recover? Will Obama overhaul health care? And more importantly, are Brad and Angelina splitting up, or having another baby?

After a night of drinking Jäger, people often have a few unanswered questions the next morning. Whatever floats inside those green-tinted bottles, one thing's for sure: After a few shots, your memory of the evening's events could well be an unsolved mystery.

Mystique, while powerful, is only one trigger. An overall F Score also includes six other fascination triggers to leverage: lust, power, alarm, prestige, vice, and trust. Whether we realize it or not—whether we intend to or not—we're already using the seven triggers in our own lives.

Unanswered questions keep us fascinated. And here might just be the most fascinating question of all: Are you using the right trigger, in the right way, to persuade the people around you?👤

# info



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Get more details or buy a copy of Sally Hogshead's [\*Fascinate\*](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Growing up with the last name Hogshead would give anyone an unconventional point of view. Today, after surviving years of harassment on the playground, Sally is a speaker, author, and brand innovation consultant, helping companies develop messages that persuade and captivate. Clients past and present include Nike, MINI Cooper, Aflac, Cole Haan, Target, Coca-Cola and Godiva. Her new book is *Fascinate: Your 7 Triggers to Persuasion and Captivation*. Find out more about creating fascinating messages at [SallyHogshead.com](http://SallyHogshead.com). Sally hopes that one day, you'll be able to meet and talk about your answers in person. Perhaps over a cup of coffee, or glass of wine, or... well, anything except a shot of Jägermeister.

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