
This online resource presents the complete reports of Ernest Dichter; the era’s foremost consumer analyst and market research pioneer.

The collection is a treasure trove of information on some of America’s best known brands, containing thousands of reports commissioned by global businesses and ‘Madison Avenue’ advertising agencies in a booming era for consumerism.

Introduction

“This resource provides multiple and intriguing entries into American consumer culture, the history of advertising, and American life in the middle third of the 20th century.”

Daniel Horowitz
Mary Huggins Gamble
Professor of American Studies, Smith College Emeritus

About Ernest Dichter

Ernest Dichter (1907-1991), known as the ‘father of motivational research’, was one of the most astute marketing moguls of the 20th century.

The work of Dichter provided the building blocks for many of the great campaigns of advertising’s golden age – including Exxon’s famous ‘put a tiger in your tank’ campaign and the slogan ‘bet you can’t just eat one’ for Frito-Lays – as well as facilitating the successful introduction of Mattel’s Barbie Doll.

After leaving Vienna for a new life in the United States in 1938, Ernest Dichter, a trained psychologist, established himself in New York. After setting up his own consulting firm (The Institute for Motivational Research) in 1946, his pioneering methods soon made him a household name.

Immensely influential, Dichter’s Freud-inspired studies put the consumer “on the couch” and emphasised the unconscious motives behind consumer behaviour. The Institute of Motivational Research employed trained social scientists and used established methodologies to conduct psychological research.

Dichter’s career reached its peak after Vance Packard’s bestselling exposé The Hidden Persuaders (1957) presented Dichter as a mastermind manipulator who could exploit the emotions of consumers for the benefit of any advertising agency or big brand.
The Documents
This online resource presents the complete research proposals and studies of Ernest Dichter and his Institute for Motivational Research. Containing thousands of reports that are unpublished elsewhere, this collection offers unparalleled opportunities for research into consumer culture in the 20th century.

The collection has broad interdisciplinary appeal, providing unique documentation for a range of academic subject areas, including:

- Consumer Culture
- History
- Business
- Advertising
- Marketing
- Psychology
- Gender Studies

Example titles include:
- Why women buy
- How to get more people to go to the movies
- Cigarette advertising: the untapped possibilities – a creative memorandum on the psychology of smoking
- Attitudes and motivations of the American voter
- Cigarette smoking among women
- Creative research memorandum on the psychology of hot dogs
- Sexual attitudes in the United Kingdom – today
- Marketing Chrysler automobiles in a rapidly-changing society
- A creative memorandum on psychological advertising of toys to parents
- The role of supermarkets in our modern culture
- A pilot study on the Bird's Eye logo

Featured Brands
Over 350 different companies or brands are represented in the collection, including:

- Mattel Toys
- AT&T
- American Airlines
- American Tobacco Company
- Esso
- Disney
- Ford
- Nestlé
- Kraft Foods
- CBS
- Heinz
- Playtex
- Mattel Toys
- AT&T
- American Airlines
- American Tobacco Company
- Esso
- Disney
- Ford
- Nestlé
- Kraft Foods
- CBS
- Heinz
- Playtex

Industries
This wide-ranging project offers valuable insight into a range of different consumer industries:

- Advertising
- Animal and Agriculture
- Arts and Crafts
- Automotive
- Broadcasting
- Cleaning Products
- Clothing and Accessories
- Construction and Real Estate
- DIY and Gardening
- Education
- Electronics and Technology
- Energy and Utilities
- Financial Services
- Food and Drink
- General Politics
- Hair and Beauty
- Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals
- Household Goods
- Manufacturing
- Media and Publishing
- Motion Picture
- Non-Profit
- Office and Stationery
- Personal Products
- Public Services
- Retail and Wholesale
- Sport and Leisure
- Tobacco
- Toy and Game
- Travel and Tourism
Key Features

- Thousands of fully-searchable market research reports from 1937-1989 (the majority covering 1935-1965)
- A visual gallery of hundreds of adverts from the era
- Specially-commissioned supporting essays by leading academics in a range of disciplines
- Case studies by Stefan Schwarzkopf provide guidance on how Dichter’s reports can be used in academic study and teaching
- Business biographies offer background information on key brands and companies represented within the collection
- Pop-up glossaries provide useful definitions of business, marketing and psychology terminology
- An interactive chronology offers historic context; Dichter’s own personal timeline; and a history of American consumer culture
- Including Betty Friedan’s remarkable feminist treatise, ‘The Sexual Sell’, on women and advertising, from her ground-breaking manifesto The Feminine Mystique (1963)

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The Hagley Museum and Library

This collection has been digitised from the holdings of the Hagley Museum and Library.

The library and archives at Hagley hold a wealth of material specializing in the study of business and technology in America.

Ernest Dichter’s papers, including his reports, business correspondence, and notes, were donated to the Hagley Museum and Library by the Dichter family in 2007.

"Ernest Dichter’s motivational research richly illustrates the subtle and selective recruitment of science for the ends of corporate strategy. Dichter honed both Freudian theory and empirical practice to encourage yet also measure individual hedonism in the service of self-liberation through consumption. He is both shaper and product of his era."

Erik P. Rau, PhD, Director, Library Services, Hagley Museum and Library