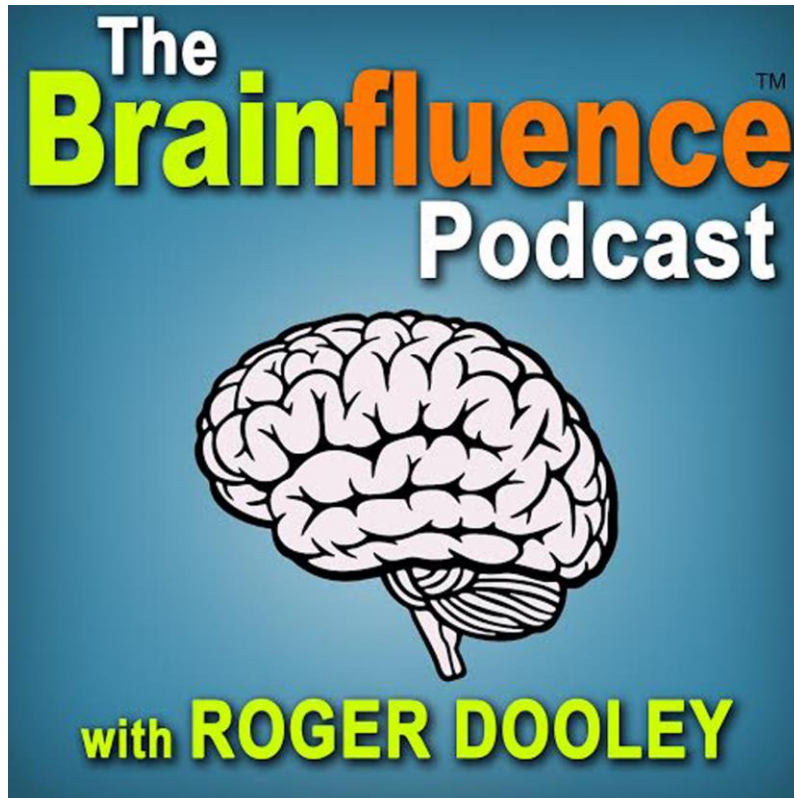


Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host



Roger Dooley

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast. This is Roger Dooley, and today we're going to do things a little bit differently. There's no guest, just me. What I'm going to try and do is answer the question that is probably the one by far the most asked of me. That is, how do I start a career in neuromarketing? How do I get into it, what courses should I take, and so on? There are variations on it but I get that question asked from college undergrads, from college grads who are starting a career, from other college grads who are trying to choose a graduate program, and even mature job changers who'd like to break into the industry. I'll tell you we're going to try and cover all of those variations on the question and come up with some answers and some useful advice.

Now, the first thing is I guess you have to ask is there actually a career opportunity in neuromarketing. Is this a field? We've started by looking at some data, search data for instance. Overall, globally, we see a rising tide of interest in neuromarketing. In the last ten years or so, Google searches for the term have about doubled. The interest in the field is definitely growing.

There are regional variations. Surprisingly, Latin American countries and Spain are some of the hotter spots, at least from a Google search standpoint, for neuromarketing. The countries with the highest search activity were Columbia, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Spain, and then Brazilian-speaking Portugal. That's really interesting because we associate the industry with high tech in the US, but a lot of the activity is actually happening in other places. That's one reason, as an aside, why I'm so happy that my book Brainfluence has now been released in Spanish. Even as we speak, it should finally be available in Latin American countries. It's been out in Spain for a month or two now.

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

One interesting aside, while we're talking about Spanish, is that there's a general identity issue. We see both references to la neuromarketing and el neuromarketing. My Spanish speaking friends tell me that la is correct since marketing itself tends to be feminine.

One other interesting factoid from my study of Google searches is that interest in the US has actually been flat or declining in that same time period. We see a gentle flat trend maybe skewing down a little bit like most data. There's a lot of noise in the data. It's hard to say what this means: either that there was an initial burst of enthusiasm that's now become normalized, or also the other possibility is that in the US we're seeing a little bit more use of the term consumer neuroscience, particularly in academia, rather than the term neuromarketing.

One of the first questions that I often get asked is what do I study or where do I study if I want to get into neuromarketing. The quick answer is there aren't a lot of places that have neuromarketing programs. Colleges and universities tend to shy away from new fields, and in particular, neuromarketing has been a little bit controversial because of some early claims in the industry. There are some academics who view it as a snake oil salesman kind of place. Other schools may have a focus on it, at least in a course or two, but call it something else like consumer behavior, neuroeconomics, decision science. Of course all of these are separate fields that can be expanded greatly beyond the specific neuromarketing area.

There are a few schools that have fairly specific programs in neuromarketing, or at least the ability to do research in these areas. Temple University, University of Akron, and Iowa State in the United States all have some kind of a neuromarketing program. Part of the neuromarketing divide in academia has to do with a general disdain of professors, or at least some professors, for business in general.

Way back in 2007 an article quoted George Loewenstein of Carnegie Mellon, who has done some absolutely brilliant research in the area of neuroeconomics, as saying, "If a graduate student in neuroeconomics

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

ended up in industry, that would be a disappointment. The reality is that when you do marketing, you are a slave to economy interests, to people who want to promote certain goods and services."

To most of us that may not sound all that terrible, but that's not an uncommon attitude in academia. Actually, Loewenstein isn't quite as Marxist as that sounds. I've interviewed him and he actually has really made a lot of great contributions, notably his research on the pain of pain, really important work.

It's a little bit broader than that. Some of the claims made by neuromarketing companies have really gotten under the skin of academics because they see it as a perversion of their science. Just a few years ago in 2011 there was a big brouhaha when Martin Lindstrom, who's written a couple of bestselling books on neuromarketing, and has really served to advance the field not just in its technology but in its renown, and spread the word about the industry, published an editorial in the New York Times about people's love for their iPhone and using brain scan data comparing it to romantic love.

There were a whole bunch of neuroscientists who took great exception to this, and 50 of them wrote a letter expressing their outrage to the New York Times editorial staff. This is the kind of thing that we see in the neuromarketing field where there's been ongoing tension. The good news is we're starting to see those walls break down a little bit.

Just a few months ago, the very first serious neuromarketing study ... they called it consumer neuroscience but ... came out of Temple University, where researchers there evaluated six different neuromarketing technologies and published their conclusions.

The interesting thing about that study, and I interviewed the primary researchers on that in a previous podcast so certainly if you want to learn more about that study, go back and check, they found that fMRI in their study was the best predictor. To me the significant thing about that entire study and paper wasn't its conclusions, because I think that those experts

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

in other technologies like EEG or biometrics have some questions about the way the study was conducted. It's very difficult for any one lab to reproduce the absolute best practices across many technologies.

What was really important to me is the fact that you have a reputable university doing a major study that talks about neuromarketing technologies. The key conclusion was that, yes, using consumer neuroscience tools can predict the performance of ad campaigns better than simply asking people through surveys or questionnaires. All in all that was a significant step forward for the industry.

Let's talk about neuromarketing jobs. Are there really jobs in the neuromarketing field? Back when I first wrote about this topic seven or eight years ago, I searched Monster.com and found absolutely zero references to neuromarketing. That would argue that at least at that point in time there wasn't too much happening. I replicated that search, and here in 2015 still there is not much activity, at least that's called neuromarketing. The keyword came up in three jobs but they weren't really neuromarketing jobs. It was more a passing reference that the job applications should be familiar with or have some knowledge of this area. The actual titles were things like director of conversion rate optimization, marketing analyst, marketing science manager, web analytics. None of these jobs really relate directly to what most people would consider neuromarketing activities.

I think a word of caution there for folks who think that they can get some neuromarketing expertise and immediately find a wealth of jobs open to them, this is still not a mainstream activity yet. Not that there aren't neuromarketing firms out there who are hiring people. Not that there aren't good startups too that may provide explosive growth at some point in the not too distance future, but at the moment there are not a lot of large established corporations who are advertising for specific neuromarketing positions.

The next question is what is the best path to a neuromarketing career. How do you get into that field, particularly when there are relatively few universities that offer specific coursework in it? I think there's not a

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

simple answer to that question. There are certainly science-based careers. The idea of majoring in neuroscience and behavior is not a bad one. Having those scientific underpinnings in order to get into the neuromarketing field makes a lot of sense.

An undergrad degree would be a good start, although really I think if you want to get into the more serious neuromarketing technology space, most of that work is going to be actually happening in the universities at the graduate level, and as a result, pursuing at least some level of graduate studies is probably almost essential.

The technologies, though, are not all specifically neuroscience. For instance, there are other technologies: high tracking for example, implicit testing. All of these fields can fall into the neuromarketing space, but don't specifically relate to neuroscience per se.

Then beyond the science-based approach, there are certainly other approaches like pursuing marketing or business. Not every job is going to require neuroscience knowledge. Particularly as the technologies get more and more developed, I think that the need for neuroscience knowledge will probably actually decline in the same way that people now use high tracking equipment quite routinely. These are not people who have a high level of expertise in human vision or how to convert data into something meaningful. This work is already being done for them by the hardware and software, and really understanding how to interpret that polished data is now the important piece. I think going forward you don't necessarily have to have a science background to participate in the neuromarketing field.

I think another area that is kind of related is data. This is pretty hot topic right now. Big data is in the news constantly and there is a tremendous need for data scientists to turn this mass of behavior data that's being collected by digital technologies into meaningful information. To some degree there's a little bit of a similar issue in the neuromarketing space.

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

Certainly some of that big data related to behavior will be able to enhance neuromarketing data and also even just crunching a lot of neuromarketing data. Especially as we get into more disperse technologies, once every owner of an Apple Watch is a potential neuromarketing subject you're not going to be looking at the ten or 15 or 20 subjects that you see in an FMRI study. You could be aggregating the data from millions of people in very different circumstances, maybe using geographic data, using activity data, what they're engaged in. There is I think going to be an increasing need for people with data science knowledge in the neuromarketing field.

Another example of how emotion and psychology of an individual customer can be combined with broad digital tools is the area of gaming. I'm an advisor to a company called MediaBrix that delivers targeted brand impressions based on the consumer's predicted state of mind at a particular point in a game. I think that this combination of data and behavior and perhaps neuroscience are all going to play a role in the new career space.

One thing I'd advise against in planning a neuromarketing career is focusing too heavily on any particular technology. For instance, FMRI right now is the academic gold standard for neuromarketing studies, but we see in industry a lot of use of EEG, implicit testing, and really a variety of other approaches. The future to me in fact looks like it may well be a blend of technologies where a neuromarketing or even a big brand conducting its own neuromarketing studies would use several tools. Depending on what they were trying to show, if they're trying to environmental an advertisement they might use one approach. If they wanted to look at package design or a website, they might use a very different type of technology or use them in combination.

In fact, we see quite a bit of that where, for instance, EEG is being used at the same time as eye motion is being monitored with eye tracking equipment and biometrics are being recorded. I'd avoid that very specific technology focus and try and become as familiar with as many as possible.

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

The overall advice I'd offer, particularly for a student starting an undergraduate career, is about the same for neuromarketing as I would really offer to any other student. That is take a diverse range of courses and try and get as solid a base as possible. Certainly focus on coursework and activities that you enjoy and perhaps have some degree of passion about. Because whatever you're planning for your career is probably not going to end up happening exactly, particularly just the lag between starting an undergraduate education and finishing it is huge.

Something else I would advise is if at all possible try and find some internships or perhaps part-time work opportunities either in university labs or, even better, in commercial companies during the course of one's education, be it graduate or undergraduate. This is probably the best preparation possible because you're getting the hands-on exposure for one, and also you're developing valuable contacts for the future.

I guess I'd wrap that bit up with trying to guess what career is really going to be hot four years or more in the future is a fool's errand. If you focus on what you like and enjoy and really build a solid base, you'll be setting yourself up for the future.

Now as we saw at Monster.com, there weren't a lot of neuromarketing jobs. If you want to try hunting down some companies to contact directly either about an internship or the possibility of full-time employment, one place to start is my list of neuromarketing companies on my neuromarketing blog. That's at neurosciencemarketing.com. I'll publish a direct link to the company listing in the show notes.

This isn't necessarily completely exhaustive but it's a free listing for companies, so we do get just about everybody who contacts us in there. If you're aware of a neuromarketing company that isn't in there, feel free to suggest them or encourage them to send me an email and we'll definitely get them in. We have contact information for the company there and you can gauge whether they might perhaps have an opportunity by visiting their website and learning more about the company.

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

One other resource I'll point you to is the new master's program in neuromarketing at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain. I'm a professor in this program and it's just getting off the ground. It's worth checking out. One nice thing perhaps is that this program is not shying away from the word neuromarketing. If you're interested in that topic, this is certainly one that is embracing it as opposed to shying away from the word.

Now let me do one more thing here before we close and offer a few predictions for the future. Whenever you put on your prognosticator hat it's a little bit dicey, but I'm going to suggest a few directions that I think will be changing and affecting the direction of neuromarketing careers.

First of all, one is that lower cost tools are going to enable startups and smaller players to offer neuromarketing services. Before, if you wanted to go out and build a neuromarketing company, you would have to buy really expensive equipment, plus you'd probably have to hire your own scientist to crunch the data, figure out how to interpret it, develop your methodologies and so on. Now at least some of this is becoming more standardized, more available as an over the counter product. As a result, you're going to see many smaller companies jumping into the field.

I think that another mega trend is that the greater acceptance and lower costs are going to really expand the market for neuromarketing services. It's not going to be just the province of the Coca Colas of the world and so on, but even smaller companies will be able to afford studies. They will be more aware of them, too.

Another trend I think will start happening is that because of these same drivers, more companies will bring neuromarketing technologies in-house rather than using outside specialized contractors. At least some of the larger brands will bring this kind of activity in-house where they can control it, and hopefully develop their own secret sauce.

Something that's pretty hard to predict now but I think is going to be really important is mobile technology, and wearables in particular. Before, you had to have rather specialized equipment to get biometric data from

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

people. Now practically everybody is going to be wearing some kind of biometric monitoring device, whether it's a FitBit or a smart watch or some other kind of equipment. Now that doesn't mean that people will all be constantly the subject of neuromarketing studies, but it does offer the potential for much larger sample sizes and collection of data in a variety of circumstances in a very natural way.

Compare, for instance, putting somebody in an FMRI tube to monitor their brain activity where they're immobilized, they're in this claustrophobic little tube, and so on. It's very hard to get a natural reaction that way compared to somebody who's being passively monitored by their watch, where really after the first few seconds they're probably completely unaware of it.

Another development that I see perhaps already beginning now is the requirement for new skill sets. We talked about those biometric apps, for example. Somebody's going to have to develop those. This was something that was not at all on the neuromarketing radar even just a few years ago. Undoubtedly in the coming years we're going to see other areas like that emerge, totally new technologies requiring new skill sets and new combinations of skills.

Finally, I think one surprising trend, perhaps surprising for some, is that I see a lot of the innovation and growth in neuromarketing taking place outside the US. We can see it in the Google search statistics for one, and it's borne out by social media interest as well. I would not restrict my thinking to the United States. I would look at this on a global basis, because I think we're going to see really great stuff happening all over the world, in the EU in particular. In Latin Americas there's a lot of interest. So far we haven't heard a lot from Asia, but I think that sooner or later that market will come along strong, too.

What I'd encourage you to do is think about your neuromarketing career. If you have any questions, please stop by the show notes page and leave a question there, or if you have some comments or advice to offer people who are seeking a career in the neuromarketing field, stop by and

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley

Ep #59: Careers in Neuromarketing: Jobs and Schools

do that, too. Remember, you can find the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast. We always appreciate your reviews on iTunes and other services. With that, we'll close. Next week we'll be talking to another great guest. Thanks for tuning in, and we'll see you next week.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.