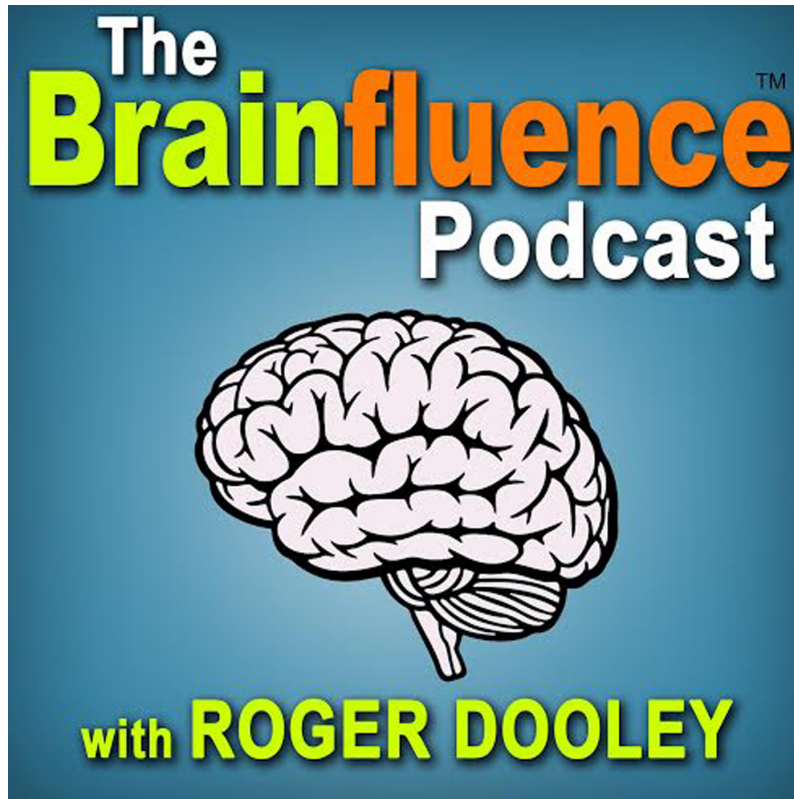


How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host



Roger Dooley

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

Welcome to Brainfluence, where author and international keynote speaker Roger Dooley has weekly conversations with thought leaders and world class experts. Every episode shows you how to improve your business with advice based on science or data.

Roger's new book, *Friction*, is published by McGraw Hill and is now available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and bookstores everywhere. Dr Robert Cialdini described the book as, "Blinding insight," and Nobel winner Dr. Richard Claimer said, "Reading Friction will arm any manager with a mental can of WD40."

To learn more, go to [RogerDooley.com/Friction](https://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction), or just visit the book seller of your choice.

Now, here's Roger.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast. I'm Roger Dooley. I'm excited to have today's guest, not just because he's a really smart behavioral scientist, but because his current job shows how corporations around the world are recognizing the importance of behavioral science.

Jason Hreha is a sought after expert in Silicon Valley where he's founded two companies, Dopamine, and Kite.io, as well as advised companies ranging from startups, to tech giants like Google, and Intuit. Today, Jason heads the behavioral science unit at Walmart, and also helps companies start their own units.

He got his start by studying neuroscience at Stanford where he became lead researcher in the University's famous Persuasive Technology Lab. Jason, welcome to the show.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

Jason Hreha: Thanks for having me, Roger. I appreciate it.

Roger Dooley: So Jason, you started off studying neuroscience. What was your original career plan before you got involved in persuasion and behavior design?

Jason Hreha: Yeah, that's a great question. I actually, I came to neuroscience from kind of a bizarre angle. So, I discovered neuroscience from taking a literature class in high school. So, I went to kind of a strange high school where you could actually pick your English course your junior year, and I picked an Ancient Eastern Literature course, and that was right when Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin was doing all the brain scans of monks.

National Geographic came out with an issue just showing, kind of had this picture of a monk with all these electrodes over the monk's head, and the whole issue talked about how, 'We're realizing today how plastic the brain is. You could change your brain', and that just blew my mind.

So, I decided then that I was going to do neuroscience, and I was most interested in practical applications of neuroscience. So you know, from this article, and from that research, I just started getting the idea of 'Oh my gosh, if you could measure the brain when people are kind of watching a movie, or listening to music, you could make better movies, or better music, or you could build better apps, or better products.'

So, I was always interested in using neuroscience for practical purposes, but it was actually in college when I

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

was taking this stuff when I realized probably by my junior year that really there were two main paths for kind of neuroscience, which was kind of the medical side, and the more academic research side.

So, I actually did explore going down either the medical path, maybe doing something like neurosurgery, and then was also really interested in maybe going into academia as kind of a just a classic kind of neuroscience researcher focusing on behavior. So, this field called neuroethology was originally what I was fascinated in.

Roger Dooley: It seems like maybe a lot of folks have had that journey. When I started writing about neuro marketing, it was really about sort of using the hard tools of neuroscience to measure how people responded to ads, or packaging, or that sort of thing, but I know my own evolution went much more in the behavioral science direction too, and I think in part, because that is a lot more actionable it seems.

You know, it seems like neuroscience often provides some insight into the underlying mechanism of why people behave in a certain way, at least they can suggest what's going on, but it seems like it's the behavioral scientists that sort of have all the tools for changing behavior.

Jason Hreha: Yeah, no, exactly. I mean, it was junior year, I was really interested in just kind of figuring out what am I going to do next after I leave Stanford? You know, where will my life take me, what career will I embark, kind of what journey will I embark on. That's when I just started looking around and just seeing like, okay, cool. Like you know, who is

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

thinking about the brain and who's thinking about behavior in a way that's actually applied. That's when I saw the people in the psychology department at Stanford. So I saw, I was really interested in let's say cognitive linguistics. Like would that stuff be useful? Like could you actually take kind of an understanding of how language shapes people's perceptions or how it frames the issues?

Could that be used in an applied way or social psychology? So, you know, I remember actually my freshman year, or no, actually it wasn't freshman year, it was sophomore year, took a course from Lee Ross who's a famous social psychologist, kind of lectured there. And so I remembered back to kind of the year before when I'd heard Lee Ross talk about the environment and how it really, of course can be modified to shape the behavior of individuals. And so I started thinking back to, you know, kind of the people in the psychology department and thinking about, "Oh man, well actually is this the direction I should go in order to actually kind of build an applied toolset?" And I really actually started to double down on going the medical route using the neuroscience and biology knowledge to go down a medical route.

And it wasn't until actually I graduated when I actually discovered BJ's work. So right after I'd graduated-

Roger Dooley: That being BJ Fogg.

Jason Hreha: BJ Fogg. Exactly.

Roger Dooley: Ask after the show.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

Jason Hreha: Yeah, so, he's absolutely incredible. And I actually think I discovered him ... I think I was reading, my memory's a little fuzzy on this point, but I'm pretty sure I was just reading just in the blogosphere. I mean I remember right when, so I graduated in 2009 and right around this time there's all these wonderful blogs kind of popping up in the life hacking kind of domain. And there's a blog called I believe Zen Habits and then, or you know, of course, Tim Ferriss who's writing about life hacking at the time. And I was reading some blog in the life hacking space and they mentioned BJ Fogg at Stanford University as a persuasive technology guy.

And I was like 'persuasive technology. Like what's this thing, like wow'. I was just at school, I was just at Stanford for four years just looking around for applied behavioral stuff. And I didn't find a ton but oh, interesting. Like there's a whole person who's just dedicated himself to kind of understanding technology, human behavior and how to, you know, kind of modify human behavior using technology. And so that's where I found his work and that was, my life changed after that. I just became utterly fascinated by his way of thinking. I thought that when I first discovered his behavior model, the Fogg behavior model, it was like all the, just for the first time in my life, like a light bulb went off inside of my head. Because in neuroscience it's very complicated, right? You're learning about all these dozens of different kinds of neurochemicals, right?

You're learning about neuro transmitters and you know, kind of other molecules that are bouncing around inside of the brain. You're learning about this brain region or that

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

brain region. You're learning about genes and which genes are turned on at different parts of the development of the brain. Right? So you're, there's so many variables involved in neuroscience. In social psychology and these other areas of behavioral science. It's the same thing. It just in general, the picture that is painted is very complex, right? So it's like, you know, you have the person in a room with other people. So there's all the other people are variables that can modify the behavior of an individual. Then there's kind of the, you know, at the time, primary research is really big. And so, all this primary research was saying, 'oh well the colors of the room could also have a subtle influence on the behavior of the individual, the temperature of the room, et cetera'.

And so that's the social psychological studies, painted this complex picture. And so whenever I would kind of, whenever you think about human behavior from a neuroscience point of view or from a social psychology point of view, at least this is the case for me at the time, I just was always kind of overwhelmed. Like, 'oh my gosh, there's so many things influencing behavior. How could you even begin to troubleshoot behavior problems?' But then I encountered DJ's model and it was like, okay, behavior equals motivation possibility plus trigger.

And of course you can dig, you can break motivation down into subcomponents. Of course you can break ability down into subcomponents and there are different types of triggers as well, but it was the first time ever where I actually felt like I had control over my thinking, over my problem solving when it came to human behavior, I just realized, 'oh actually you can simplify your

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

thinking about human behavior and this is actually a very simple checklist. A simple framework that I can use to actually just break down what seem like overwhelming problems into just yeah, bite size nuggets' and so I discovered his stuff. It was life changing for me. I emailed him and just pretty much begged him to let me work with him and the rest is history.

Roger Dooley: That's great. I think I had almost a similar epiphany because BJ and I were speaking at a conference in San Francisco and I attended his lecture or his session. He was actually wearing a magician's robe at the time, which was kind of unusual, but he's an interesting guy and it was really the same kind of experience you described.

When I saw the model, I had not seen it early processed at least before that point, but as he was explaining it in his presentation, suddenly it's sort of clicked and said, 'well yeah, this is, this seems obvious. This actually makes sense.' And it's been the basis for so much too, it's a part of Nir Eyal's Hook model. It's the basis for my persuasion slide and yeah, it's really a very powerful tool and I'd encourage any of our listeners who aren't familiar with it to check that out because it will probably change the way you think about your persuasive processes.

Although now Jason, do you think it's sort of like the folks who were working on particle physics and the atom bomb evolved out of it where it turns out the technology can be persuasive and seemingly addictive? At least it's changed the behavior of a lot of people and now I know BJ is really quite cautious about what he says. It's The Behavior

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

Design Lab. It's not the Persuasive Design of Persuasive Technology Lab anymore. What's your take on that?

Jason Hreha: Yeah, I mean, it's such a tricky issue. To be honest, I'm still making my mind up about everything because you know, I do think a lot of the, in particular the behavioral economics nudge style stuff, I just find that the, in general people think that that stuff is way more powerful than it really is. I think that the efficacy of just subtle behavioral kind of nudges is just, yeah, just been dramatically overstated. I think behavioral economists in general have done a great job of marketing themselves and so I think that-

Roger Dooley: Don't talk yourself out of a job here yet, Jason.

Jason Hreha: Yeah, seriously. Seriously. I don't consider myself a behavioral economist, I know a lot about it, but I don't really consider myself to fall into that camp. But I definitely do think that, I think a lot of the science has been oversold. And so this picture that's painted by journalists who just don't really have a background in the field or haven't applied this stuff, they, I think they paint a little bit too apocalyptic of a picture. Like I really don't like okay, if we behavioral scientists had a perfect understanding of human behavior and could modify it just absolutely flawlessly we would all be billionaires. We're not, right. Like we do well, I definitely have a dramatic, I can have a dramatic impact on any product I work on. The way that I look at it, I look at it in terms of just probabilities, right?

Like I'd say that if you were just to take a random product manager and give them, tell them to come up with a

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

product idea and to design a product, they would have maybe a 20% chance of finding success. I think I probably have a 40% chance of finding success based upon my understanding of how humans think about or of human behavior, et cetera. But you're just, I'm just doubling your hit rate. I'm not perfect every time. I don't think any behavioral scientist is.

Roger Dooley: All of these things are kind of tendencies. Thaler's nudge strategy. Yeah. More people sign up retirement plans, but 100% don't. You know, and there there's so many factors involved.

Jason Hreha: Totally. But like, I guess what I'm trying to say is I think that the efficacy of some of these behavioral kind of interventions is just dramatically overstated. And I think that the most powerful thing, this is something I've actually talked about in the past with them, a few different people, but I don't, I should probably write more about it, but if you look at what all the quote unquote addictive products have in common, there's, it's not that they use the addictive products are better at writing better algorithms or they're better at, like, I'm sure that the Facebook's feed algorithm has some marginal impact on how addictive or retentive the product is, I don't think it's huge. I think that if they're just to do a, like a reverse chronological feed, it'd be probably nearly as good.

I don't think that the algorithms they're generating are the key to their success. I don't think that these tiny little tactics of creating these little loops and or creating investment or this or that. I don't think any of that has a huge impact. I think that the reason Facebook and these

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

other products are so addictive is because they're social. You just, when you ever, you throw a bunch of people together in a digital or physical space, people like to go to the spaces and spend time in those spaces. Like evolutionarily we are social creatures and so just, I'm, when I was growing up, we had this thing, AOL instant messenger. It was a horrible product. It's just pretty much just a bunch of chat windows, right? You have like a list of your friends with their screen names and chat windows and you just text.

It's like modern texting on cell phones. Right. Nothing fancy about it. It wasn't a very well done product, but we spent hours on it after school every day, we'd chat with friends from school. We would meet new people from other schools on there and chat with them. And I remember it was not uncommon for people in my school to spend five or six hours on there after school every day. You know, they'd go home, they'd be doing their homework and have AOL instant messenger open and they'd be messaging on that. I mean I didn't hear people spend as much time on there definitely when I was growing up as people spend on or spent on Facebook and it's at its peak. And so I think that that's a good example of just like AOL, they weren't using addictive hooks or any of these crazy nudging tactics.

They just built a place where a lot of people congregated. And so of course a lot of people want to spend time there. You see the same thing with parades. Whenever there's a parade in any city, anywhere, tons of people come out. Most of them don't really care about the parade or the floats going by. They just want to people watch. Right.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

They just want to see, stare at the people that are there, see who's coming, meet new people, socialize. This is just such an ingrained part of our just our minds, our biology that I think that that's the reason that these products are so addictive. Like if tomorrow you just took half the people that were on Facebook off of Facebook, it wouldn't be nearly as addictive. It's not because the core, like the app mechanics have so much, but it's just because there's fewer people there, just people just like people. And so I think that a lot of the people analyzing these tech that these technologies have just focused too much on the trees. They missed the forest.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. You know, you make a good point. I was a community builder back in the early days of online forums starting in the late nineties and then early two thousands and just as you were describing with AOL instant messenger, we had people who would spend hours and hours each day in the forums talking to other people, often providing help, sometimes asking for help and it was, you know, people did that. But perhaps what's changed since those times is that now we all carry those things around in our pocket. So they're always there where before, well as you say, you got home from school, you know, you could log onto the computer, now your phone is with you everywhere so that that behavior becomes perhaps more intrusive throughout the entire course of your day as opposed to some time segment where you can sit down and do it.

Jason Hreha: Definitely. No. Yeah, I think that you hit the nail on the head. I think that that's the fundamental change. I mean that's fundamental change is it's with you all the time. And

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

so I think trigger management, right? Like notification management is probably, if you would just want to kind of bring things back to the least intrusive state. Right. You would just kind of turn off notifications. I've done that on my phone. I just turn off notifications for pretty much every social app so that I just check it usually in the morning, maybe once in the afternoon and then in the evenings. But after turning off notifications, yeah, I mean my life dramatically changed. So.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. Jason jumping over to your day job, Walmart's been kind of an early adopter of behavioral science as a separate independent group. What's the origin story there? How did you know, was there a CEO who just had an epiphany and said, "Hey, I need behavioral scientists?" What, how did that get started?

Jason Hreha: Yeah, that's a great question. So I started the group with Om Marwah, I think you've had him on the podcast as well. And so Om had been at Walmart his entire career up until the point when he created the behavioral science group. I don't know the full origin story from his point of view of course, but from my point of view, he had been at Walmart his whole career.

He had a very close relationship with the then CEO of Walmart.com, Neil Ash and he had shown Neil just the magic of behavioral science. I know that Om had some success using behavioral science for different projects he was working on over here.

I think that had gotten some attention from Neil and some of the other executives and so they were fully bought on

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

with the idea of behavioral science being useful and then Om contacted me and said, "Hey, do you want to come here to Walmart, kind of build this group out with me." And I said, "Absolutely."

I was really excited about that because up until that point I'd spent my whole career working on digital behavior change and I'd gotten really good at it. So, my specialty was coming into companies who had just really had behavior problems. So if you want to call them that, so they either had retention or engagement problems and so in working with the teams, running experiments to get those numbers in the right direction.

Roger Dooley: Okay. You're talking about retention and engagement. Are you talking about customers or employees?

Jason Hreha: Customers. Yeah, customers.

Roger Dooley: Okay. So part, some conversion optimization type stuff. No doubt. And some loyalty type stuff.

Jason Hreha: Absolutely. Yeah. So pretty much my job up until that point, for most of my career it's, a company would say, "Hey listen, you know, we have this app, you know, at a very, you know, only 10% of the people who download it are still with us a month later. Like, help us, what do we do?" Or, "Hey listen, we have this app, we actually have pretty good retention. 40% of the people stick around but they only log in once a week. What do we do? How do we get people to log in more often and engage more often?"

And so my specialty really was just bringing this behavioral approach. And so coming in, usually I would

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

do interviews with different users, usability sessions and look and then also just look at, of course, their numbers and just try and figure out what's going on, look at different funnels.

And then based upon all that and just based upon my understanding of just how humans, how people work, how our brains work, I would come up with hypotheses for why I think the engagement or the retention or whatever metric we're trying to move, why it was lower than it's supposed to be. And then we would, I would come up with suggested changes to the product that I usually would design as well. Or I'd have a team member design those changes and then we would bring them to the client and then work with the client to implement them and run these quick experiments and see whether or not those changes dramatically impacted the numbers. And so that's been my specialty throughout my career.

It's like behavioral modification, just these behavior change products for applications, web apps or mobile apps. And so up until the point that I joined Walmart my whole career really was building web apps, building mobile apps and making them as retentive and sticky as possible or as engaging as possible. And then when I was contacted by Walmart, I was like, "Oh Whoa, this is cool." Like I've been stuck in the digital realm my whole life. Now, this would be a cool opportunity to actually join a company that's not just dealing with digital behavior change. So I do a lot of work with our store groups and I have to just be careful about what I talk about. But I've done a lot of work around, for example, checkout.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

I've done a lot of work around the returns processes. I've done a lot of work around just the store, even the store layout or how to change up the format of our stores. I'm speaking very vague general terms right now just because I only can in general talk about public work that is now public and out in the wild widely, right, experiments that are currently ongoing I can't really talk about. But just give you an example. Like we did release, say this is public knowledge now. Like we just opened in Dallas not too long ago, it was a few months now. We introduced a new store format with Sam's clubs, so Walmart and Sam's club. It's our warehouse, our kind of a warehouse membership store. Right. So you can go in there. Okay, great, great. So you can go in there and purchase, you know, items in bulk.

So we have really high quality items at a reasonable price that you purchase in bulk. And at Sam's Club we also have an app that we built years ago called Scan and Go where you can scan, you can pretty much check yourself out so you can scan all the items in your cart using this application that is connected to your membership. And so you can scan all the items in your cart and instead of going, just waiting in the checkout line, you can just go directly to the exit. Where an exit associate will scan your phone and then just let you through. So it saves a lot of time. It's just, it's awesome. It's like my favorite shopping experience ever. And so we actually released a store that's Scan and Go only.

So the whole idea is, okay, cool. So we, let's fill the store with no checkouts and build a store where Sam's Club store, where you walk in, there are no checkouts, all the

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

associates in the store instead of being like cashiers at the checkout, they're there to help you. So they're there to help you pick which items, that pick items out, they're there to help you shop and they're there just to provide a great experience. So it's kind of like taking the people that would traditionally be cashiers and just using them to have just a more, I guess the, yeah, like a more engaging shopping experience than you would otherwise have. And so I was heavily involved in that project kind of helping think about, okay, like this is a dramatically new behavior for individuals.

We're just breaking the mental model that people have of retail and just how a warehouse store or just any store works. And so I worked very heavily on that project, trying to figure out how do we design the exits, how do we design the entrance and everything like that to be as understandable as possible and to get people, teach people how to use it with different cues, et cetera. And so I was heavily involved in that project. So that's an example of a physical retail project that I'd work on.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I'll bet. Yeah. I just had a partial experience of that at one of the Austin stores where I used a self checkout and it was the first time that I was doing that. So you've got to figure out, well where do I scan my card and does this little thing come out of the holder or is there a cord or whatever. And there was an associate there who was very patient, just walked me through the process in a very friendly way. But presumably after I'm trained once or twice a day, I won't need that assistance. But I, you know, the story that you're talking about, I've heard echoed from other types of merchants and restaurants that if they can

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

implement technology, it's not to reduce the head count in their facility necessarily. It's to free up the associates from some of the busy work and let them interact more and make it a more human experience. As odd as it sounds to say, "Well, we're going to automate everything, but it's going to be a more human experience." But in many cases that's really the goal.

Jason Hreha: Absolutely. Yeah. No, absolutely. I mean like, yeah, I could not agree more. I mean, it's at the end of the day, like what we humans are really best at is interacting with other people. Right? I mean that's really where the magic comes in. Like where as we talked about earlier when we were chatting about Facebook and addictive technology, we're social creatures, so much. So much of our cognition is geared towards understanding people subtly, even subconsciously mimicking their behavior, getting along with others, right. Kind of interacting with others. So that's the whole reason why we've even developed language in the first place. Right? So we're social creatures, that's what we're really good at. And so you can free up people from doing this drudge work, then you can really allow them to fully express their humanity and just provide great service to customers and just yeah, delight people. So I think that that's the whole idea about with so many of these technologies it's let's free people up to do what they do best.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. Jason, in one of your blog posts you wrote about the White House Behavioral Science Unit that was there for I guess the last few years of the Obama administration and one of their key activities was taking long, bloated government forms and processes and just simplifying

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

them, making them a lot more simple so that people could do them. So if you want people to sign up for some kind of a program, well you just make it easier to do that. I mean, that's great work, but it seems so basic that you wouldn't need behavioral scientists do that. Why do, it seems like most, not just government offices even, but corporations, for profit corporations and even nonprofits. Why do they end up with such difficult processes?

Jason Hreha: Yeah, that's a great question. I mean, yeah, I think we could probably talk for three or four days about this single topic, but, well, I, okay, first of all, I think that it's because, and this sounds kind of bad, but I, and I don't think this is done consciously. I think that this is largely done subconsciously, but I was always reminded, so like my mom worked for many, many years at a community college. And you know, when she first started working there, there were very few administrators. So it was the ratio of administrators to teachers was very low. And then over time, over time, over time the number of administrators there just kept rising, kept rising, kept rising. And what these administrators did is they just added, they were very meticulous organized people and they just wanted people to follow standard processes and fill out this form or that form.

It's just based on their personalities, it's just kind of what they did. And they started, like my mom started getting loaded up with all this administrative grunt work. And then of course, after a few years of one administrator being there, a new administrator would come in and they would add in new forms or new processes. And so you have, rarely strike the old ones and for various reasons, one it's

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

maybe you built some software, like some software system where you require certain fields and then a new person comes in and it would be, it takes so much worker effort to modify the old system or to get rid of requirements in the old system. So you want to add, you want to, you know, you're a new person, you just came into a new organization, you want to add your spin on things or you want to do what you think is best.

But you know, you can't really modify what came before so instead of just modifying what came before, you add what you think is necessary, now necessary to the system in order to make it a little bit better. So I do think that there's just unfortunately a lot of people, I think with the knowledge of how to change the earlier system, especially when it comes to really old software administrative systems, when they leave your ability to then change that earlier part of the system just kind of disappears. I also think that perversely, like in big organizations, there often is an incentive to make things, to make yourself indispensable. Right? Even if you're making yourself indispensable by just adding friction, as you're about to call your new book to adding Friction.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, definitely. I think that occurs in political regimes as well, where I've talked to folks from India and there's a sort of a huge incentive to make your own processes more difficult because then you can control the flow of activity through there, you may be able to supplement your income by speeding things up and so on.

Yeah. You know, and I think sometimes it's even a lot more innocent than that. Like people who are in say,

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

customer service, they want to understand how, what a customer experience was like. They create a survey about your hotel room stay or your last flight on United or whatever and these things are horribly long that you know, it's going to take you 10 minutes to answer now like 10 pages of questions and some with a strange matrix of variation answers and it's like nobody is going to do that. Nobody wants to do that. Now the only person like you know, if you found a dead rat in your room or something, okay, then you're going to fill out the form. But normal people aren't going to do that. And even though the folks are well intentioned who are trying to collect the data but they don't understand that human behavior is such that if you make it very difficult to do, people just aren't going to do it.

Jason Hreha: Yeah, no, you definitely do have representativeness issues whenever you are dealing with something like that, you're totally right where you're just going to have massive skews in the negative direction for the feedback that you're getting. But yeah, I guess just to encapsulate the question, you know, I do think that there are perverse incentives. That's number one. Number two, it's like, I do think that just unfortunately certain systems that you create, like once you have inertia behind a system often in a large organization, it just becomes really hard to change the old system and the people that know how to change the old system often are just gone.

And then finally, I just do think that, I mean this sounds, I mean I do think that there is, I don't know if it's a personality thing or what, but I do notice that in, for example, like most of my career, I spent most of my

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

career in startups and in startups you have just a lot of crazy people, like you have the craziest, riskiest people ever. Just kind of, you know, that congregate together around problems and try and solve them. Right. And they'll do crazy stuff. Right. You know, you hear stories like, "Oh like Airbnb broke like Craigslist." Like I don't know if this is true or not, but I remember hearing that back in the day like Airbnb broke Craigslist terms of service by writing a bot that would mass message every single type of listing.

Roger Dooley: I think the Airbnb hacking of craigslist was pretty much true.

Jason Hreha: Yeah. So you know, they hacked that, so of course, violating the terms of service like that and doing something like that is you know, puts that organization in legal, at a legal risk. Right. So it's like, but they're okay doing it because they're-

Roger Dooley: But they survived and they grew and now they don't do that anymore.

Jason Hreha: Exactly. So it's like, that would never happen at a large company just because there's just a lot more ... Number one, there's a lot more to lose. And number two, it might be a personality thing. I just think larger organizations tend to, they tend to attract more risk averse individuals as well, where it's like if you, startups attract I think just much more risky individuals who are willing to take moonshots but work for 30 grand a year, right? Work for 30 grand a year when it's probably not going to work out. But if it does work out, everybody makes \$20 million.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

Right? Whereas I think at larger companies it tends to attract more risk averse individuals, then the organization itself also just has a lot more to lose. Right?

And so you just have this built in risk aversion and then you also are just a bigger target, right? So people are looking out for you ... Like people are just scrutinizing big companies more for them to mess up or waiting for them to mess up so that they can kind of take a shot at them. Right. And so I think that you just have this big confluence of factors just coming together just to make large organizations just, yeah, just slower moving and just prone to bloat.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. While I was researching my Friction book. One statistic popped up that was there are something like \$3 trillion in organizational waste due to corporate bureaucracy and they encompass a lot of things in that but forms like we're talking about, but also just procedures that slow things down. Meetings where they involve way more people than they need to, email, time spent reading email that isn't relevant and so on. It's a huge number. Let me ask you one last question before we wrap up. On your website you talk about simplification, motivation and instigation. Can you explain that. It sounds so, like it sort of maps to the Fogg behavior model, but how, what's, how do you define those terms? Because I've just found your definition a little different.

Jason Hreha: It, I mean they pretty much are a direct map to the Fogg behavior model. Whenever I'm teaching a material like that or just talking about these things. I like to change up the language and teach the same subject from a few

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

different kind of angles just because I find that different language or different framing works better for different people and so that's exactly, you exactly nailed it. So simplification is really just, you know, even BJ talks about this ability in terms of simplification. He has a, I think his first video where he actually breaks down ability, the ability component in the Fogg behavior model, it's called like the Nine, I forget. It's like the Nine Elements of Simplicity or something like that. So simplicity, I just find just certain people just, it really, they understand it a lot more when you just talk about ability in terms of simplicity. I don't remember.

Roger Dooley: When you start breaking simplicity down nine ways it becomes a little less simple.

Jason Hreha: It does yeah. It becomes a little less simple. But yeah, that's just a different way of just framing the ability component of the Fogg behavior model. Motivation. I just like to talk about, I forget what the, what are the other two components? I write so much that sometimes I forget all, everything that I write, what were the other ones?

Roger Dooley: Well, motivation, instigation, motivation. You talked about enjoyment which I thought was kind of interesting because that's not a ... sort of not the usual interpretation.

Jason Hreha: Yeah, no definitely. I mean like you know and we do know from neuroscience that wanting and liking actually are neurologically distinct and so you can be really motivated to pursue something but even if you don't necessarily like the pursuit of it or the thing itself. But I just find that when I'm talking about motivation with people, in particular,

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

when I'm talking about motivation with people, when it comes to marketing or product design, I like to break it down into the, I like to just talk about enjoyment. Like do you think that using this product is something that somebody would enjoy or is the behavior that you're asking people to do actually enjoyable.

Roger Dooley: Right. That's something those form designers need to think about, you know, and I was saying, "Well, we really want people to tell us how we're doing." You know, are they going to enjoy answering these 48 questions?

Jason Hreha: Totally. Totally. And you know, this is something that I have a book I've been procrastinating on and trying to write for a long time now, but actually it'll be coming out this, right now we're talking at the end of February. But it'll be out in June, June or July at some point. But in it I actually go through, I have my own method or Menlo method for changing behavior that I've just cobbled together over the years. And one of these, one of the steps in my behavior change method that I always do is I actually grade the behaviors that I want people that I'm thinking of having my audience do. I grade them according to three different things, simplicity, enjoyment and attractiveness.

So simplicity is the ability, like how easy is the behavior to do, then enjoyability or how enjoyable it is, I measure, I rate each behavior according to enjoyability because the way that I look at it, the more enjoyable behavior is, the more pleasurable it is to do. And you know, that's kind of your reward. That's your positive reinforcement for doing the thing.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

So behaviors that are enjoyable are more likely to self perpetuate and move forward on their own, right, because it's, the behavior itself is enjoyable. Then when people do it, they're going to feel good or they're going to feel rewarded and they're going to be more likely to do it again. And then the last one is attractiveness. And the reason I separate out enjoyability and attractiveness is because, especially in the early stages of doing a behavior when you've never performed it before, the chances are if the behavior isn't very attractive or if it doesn't really stimulate you in any way, you're not even going to do it those first few times in order, you know, which needs to happen in order for the enjoyability to kick in and self perpetuate the behavior.

So I always grade behaviors according to those three components and but enjoyability is really just one, one of the things that you need. But yeah, that's how I tend to think about it.

Roger Dooley: Pretty cool. That's probably a good place to wrap up. Today we're speaking with Jason Hreha, head of Walmart's behavioral sciences group. Jason, how can people find you and your ideas?

Jason Hreha: Yeah, so the best place to find my ideas, find my writing and everything is at www.thebehavioralscientist.com and I just put everything on there. So if you just want to find out anything about me, just go there.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, we will link there and to any other resources we mentioned on the Show Notes page at RogerDooley.com/podcast and we'll have a text version of

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

How Walmart Applies Behavioral Science with Jason Hreha

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jason-hreha-walmart/>

our conversation there too. Jason, thanks for being on the show.

Jason Hreha: Oh, it's my pleasure. Thanks for having me, Roger.

Thank you for tuning into this episode of Brainfluence. To find more episodes like this one, and to access all of Roger's online writing and resources, the best starting point is RogerDooley.com.

And remember, Roger's new book, *Friction*, is now available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and book sellers everywhere. Bestselling author Dan Pink calls it, "An important read," and Wharton Professor Dr. Joana Berger said, "You'll understand Friction's power and how to harness it."

For more information or for links to Amazon and other sellers, go to [RogerDooley.com/Friction](http://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction).

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>