

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

October, 2000

WHEN BAD ADVERTISING HAPPENS TO GOOD PEOPLE

It strikes everyone at some time. Bad advertising. It may manifest itself as an inordinately lengthy or inconclusive campaign development or, worse yet, the airing of a commercial you would prefer to forget.

We all come from good schools. Our senior managers proclaim their belief in the importance of, and commitment to, advertising. We work with highly successful ad agencies staffed with talented and experienced Creatives. Yet, bad advertising still occurs. Why?

There are “flashpoints” in the ad development process that we need to be sensitive to, and manage carefully. These are vulnerable points in the process, or actions that are easily muffed, where creative development may burst into flames – leaving the team with smoldering ashes. Here are a several possible flashpoints:

1. The first flashpoint occurs with the development of the Agency Brief. It is the document that provides the guidance to the agency for the development of the brand’s advertising. It includes the brand’s Marketing Objective, the Consumer Insight and the Advertising Strategy – in addition to the Assignment specs and Brand Character statement. Some common problems encountered with the Agency Brief include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Fuzzy thinking and a resultant lack of clarity;
 - Too many benefits;
 - Incomplete target definition;
 - Absence of linkage between target need and benefit;
 - Not having the correct Consumer Insight;
 - Defining the Business Objectives versus the Marketing Objective and/or not addressing the brand’s Marketing Objective in the advertising.
2. Engaging the agency to begin creative development without securing commitment to the Agency Brief. Commitment needs to be gained not just from the agency but internally as well. Let’s start with the agency. The only way to truly gain commitment is to ensure that the agency participates in the development of the brief from day one. We are talking about a collaborative exercise here. This includes key members of the creative team. It will help you achieve the best thinking, ensure a common understanding of the essential components of the brief and give the creative team a head start on development. Internally, the brand must gain the commitment of the senior-most manager responsible for approving advertising. Without commitment indeed, as well as word, people will haggle over strategic issues when they should be focused on creative.
3. Not allowing sufficient time for campaign development. What’s sufficient? Sufficient is not force-fitting development against an impending air and/or publication date. Sufficient is not preempting time for a check with consumers. Sufficient is not ignoring time needed for the development and growth of ideas. So, what is sufficient time? You need to work that out with your agency.
4. Focusing on execution versus Campaign Ideas. To ensure effective advertising you need to have a meaningful Campaign Idea. A breathtaking photo is not a Campaign Idea. A storyboard containing

numerous package shots is not a Campaign Idea. A humorous spot is not a Campaign Idea. A restatement of the Ad Strategy is not a Campaign Idea.

What is a Campaign Idea? A Campaign Idea is the creative concept, the treatment that translates the strategy into meaningful, compelling and provocative consumer language. It serves as the legs for an entire campaign. The Campaign Idea for ABSOLUT Vodka (now in its twentieth year) is the use of engaging visual puns along with the key copy words ABSOLUT () that create an impression that the brand is hip, cool – and so are its consumers. Execution deals with how we showcase the Campaign Idea. We should not get involved in execution until we have created an important Campaign Idea. This is why we recommend that client and agency have a Campaign Idea review meeting prior to beginning storyboard or print ad development.

5. Incomplete understanding of the consumer. We must know our consumer better than we know our products – better than we even know ourselves! We should know not just the needs of our consumers but what turns them on and what turns them off. We need to understand their deepest motivations, attitudes and behaviors. In fact, we should strive to know our consumers so well that we can anticipate how they will respond to a specific piece of stimulus – namely the Campaign Idea. And, certainly, we should only feed consumers that stimulus which will get them to behave in a predetermined manner that benefits our brands. So, when we assess Campaign Ideas it is with the eyes, mind and soul of the consumer that we respond. Along this line, we should utilize consumers to gain feedback on hypotheses and ideas. This is not to suggest pre-set testing methodologies and practices but encourages, at minimum, frequent dialogues (e.g., in the form of qualitative) with consumers.
6. Discarding potentially meaningful ideas in their nascent stage of development. We tend to see ideas as half-empty (i.e., lacking) as opposed to half-full (i.e., having potential). We cannot afford to squander potentially good ideas because they have not yet come together. Instead, we have to recognize any potential that exists and like fine wine give them time to breathe. The “got milk” campaign started with nothing more than these two words. Through frequent, creative dialogues with consumers it developed into a very successful campaign. Importantly, we clients need to strive to identify potential fragments of ideas, and provide direction, for the agency so that they may fully realize the idea.
7. Not providing appropriate and clear direction to the agency. By appropriate we mean dealing with critically important issues (like the Campaign Idea, for example) in a relevant manner. It is inappropriate to tell the agency to get your package into the first few seconds of the spot. It is; however, appropriate to ask the agency to strengthen the brand linkage in the advertising. Importantly, when we provide direction it should be in a manner that is incapable of being misunderstood. It is a good idea to check the agency’s understanding of our direction before proceeding further. It will save time and frustration and any erosion of the relationship.
8. Understand what makes the campaign work. If your campaign is working, it is important to find out what makes it work. Once determined, these elements can be captured in a pool plan to ensure that subsequent pool-outs are consistent with the campaign. This practice enables us to better understand the campaign and its relationship with consumers, appreciate the agency’s creative thinking, develop hypotheses for future creative explorations and, hopefully, avoid prematurely burying effective campaigns.

Being aware of these flashpoints and taking the right kinds of actions could help us avoid bad advertising. Importantly, it could lead us to developing effective campaigns on a more consistent basis.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS

1. Develop the Agency Brief (i.e., each element) with the collaboration of the agency – including the Creatives.
2. Check to ensure that the Agency Brief is complete, incapable of being misunderstood, and has a strong linkage among each element.
3. Secure commitment to the Agency Brief from the agency and internal management before beginning creative development.

4. Make certain the agency has sufficient time, by their standards, for campaign development.
5. Put your focus against Campaign Ideas before you proceed to, or even begin to consider, execution.
6. Know thy consumer – and check-in with her/him frequently.
7. See the glass as half-full. In other words, understand the potential of an idea fragment and encourage the agency to develop it.
8. Assess Campaign Ideas through the eyes, mind and soul of the consumer.
9. Provide appropriate and clear direction to the agency. Talk with your colleagues and agency people about what they believe is appropriate. Make sure the agency understands the direction you provide to them.
10. Learn what makes your campaign work (or not work) and develop a pool plan to ensure consistent pool-outs in extending the campaign.
11. Iterate your way to success. Don't look at each step as a pass/fail moment. Instead view it as a learning experience for the client-agency team to get smarter and do great work.

Richard Czerniawski and Mike Maloney

Richard Czerniawski

.....
 430 Abbotsford Road
 Kenilworth, Illinois 60043
 tel 847.256.8820
 fax 847.256.8847

Reply to Richard:

rdczerniawski@cs.com or
richardcz@bdn-intl.com

Mike Maloney

.....
 1506 West 13th Street, #17
 Austin, Texas 78703
 tel 512.236.0971
 fax 512.236.0972

reply to Mike:

mikewmaloney@cs.com or
mikemaloney@bdn-intl.com



© 2003 Brand Development Network (BDN) International. All rights reserved.