

# **DISPATCHES**<sup>TM</sup>

*Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front*

---

October 14, 2007

## **CREATIVE BRIEF DEVELOPMENT – THE IMPORTANCE OF PROCESS**

All the functional disciplines establish, pursue and attempt to follow quality processes. The sales force executes against a 7-step (or whatever the number is for your organization) process. Product Research & Development personnel adhere to the scientific process. The finance department abides by generally accepted accounting principles and financially sound processes. The purpose is clear. Quality processes lead to predictable, quality results. Sans a quality process the results are a random walk down the road of “coulda been.” Success, if it is realized, is merely fortuitous.

Many marketing departments fail to establish quality processes. Marketers are left to their own devices, which translates to “flying by the seat of their pants.” Or, they do it the way it has always been done. While doing it the way it has always been done is a process it tends to be less than “quality.” It is more mindless than mindful. It’s a key reason why the creative brief is frequently not actionable. There isn’t a quality process founded on sound practices. The result is predictable (you’re undoubtedly familiar with the maxim, “garbage in, garbage out”) – bad advertising. And, while bad advertising is certainly not desired it is, unfortunately, deserved when the creative brief is not technically sound and/or strategically appropriate.

There are a host of reasons why there is so much bad advertising in the marketplace (see [When Bad Advertising Happens to Good People](#)). But the starting point is the absence of a process consisting of sound practices to guide the development of a strategically sound, single-minded creative brief. Here are some of the practices to avoid:

1. Poor creative brief template – Many creative briefs contain information that is not essential or even helpful in the development of the creative product. And/or they lack what is essential to ad development. The “essential” creative brief consists of the following:
  - Marketing Objective – This sometimes called the communications behavior objective. The key is that it is the specific customer behavior you hope to elicit with the advertising.
  - Assignment – What you need the agency to develop including timing.
  - Customer Insight
  - Target Customer Profile
  - Benefit/Belief - This is also called the Key Thought. It is what you need to change attitudes in order to achieve the Marketing Objective.
  - Reason-Why – The factual support used to make the benefit believable to the target customer.

- Brand Character – Personality of the brand taken from the brand positioning strategy statement.
- Legal/Regulatory Mandates – Do not include execution mandates.
- Sign-off – This acknowledges agreement with and commitment to the creative brief by the senior most client manager for approving the advertising and the senior most agency manager for delivering the advertising.

That's it! Nothing more is required. In fact, anything more is likely to obfuscate rather than clarify.

1. **Development by silo versus collaboration** – Either the client or agency seizes control of developing the creative brief. Both groups feel it is their responsibility and/or that they can do a better job of it. Each group operates (consciously or subconsciously) with a silo mentality. Depending upon the client-agency relationship the responsibility can fall to either group. Regardless of who gets it the other side is bound to be resentful and less accepting of the work. Or the client may choose to delegate development (of a draft) to the agency to get the process started. Regardless of which silo controls creative brief development it does not bode well. It shouldn't be about control, which is both a contributor and product of silo thinking but, instead, a collaboration which leads to a sharing of insights and knowledge.

If the client develops the brief they typically do not gain the benefit of the experience and insights of the agency creative personnel. Good creative people tend to be very strategic minded just as good strategists tend to be very creative. Creative people can contribute to gaining a strategic advantage for the brand through the development of a relevant, meaningfully differentiated proposition to achieve a SMART customer behavior (i.e., Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Compatible with the business objectives and Timebound). Clients should invite and even demand this involvement. At the very least, gaining the input of the creative team in the development of the creative brief will get them thinking about the brand, target customers and messaging well before creative development begins. The earlier their involvement in the process, and the resultant longer incubation time for their thinking, could very well contribute to the development of a big idea.

If the agency develops the creative brief it could change the dynamic of the relationship to “selling” as opposed to “sharing.” The agency will gain the input of the creative personnel and at that point are likely to be in a sell mode when they present their so-called “draft” to the client. This tends to short circuit real exchange marked by listening, understanding and learning. In those cases where the agency does share versus sells the client assumes the role of an “evaluator” of the work as opposed to a value-adding team member. Even where intensions are sincere the client typically is less than fully present when reviewing, versus collaborating in the development of, the creative brief.

2. **Lack of rigor** – In this “age of sameness” where products and services are indistinguishable the importance of sound strategic thinking is a critical success factor in driving customer preference. The lack of a rigorous analysis of the creative brief is a

significant problem in developing a strategic advantage. This traces to two problems: a) CPA; and b) the absence of objective criteria.

CPA is an acronym for Continuous Partial Attention. This is a condition that plagues everyone who hyper-tasks his/her way through the day. It translates to getting less than everyone's best efforts due to their not being fully present and mindful in the development of the creative brief. For more on this subject read a recent DISPATCHES™ article titled [CPA](#).

The development of a strategically appropriate, actionable creative brief requires: sound strategic thinking; technical competency; and, a quality process. We've developed a tool we call the Creative Brief ScoreCard, which enables managers to objectify their subjective judgment on the aforementioned requirements. (Go to Resources and click Toolbox to find the [Creative Brief ScoreCard](#).) This is not intended to be a report card. Instead it serves to guide creative brief developers in the thoughtful creation of an actionable brief.

- 3. Consensus versus choice** – Consensus leads to briefs that are not single-minded. If a creative brief is not single-minded it is unlikely the agency will be able to develop a compelling campaign idea. Without a compelling campaign idea it is unlikely the advertising will register strong strategic communication with target customers. If the advertising does not register strong strategic communications it is unlikely the advertising will stimulate achievement of the customer behavior objective. So it is critically important that the creative brief be single-minded. Consensus management serves to satisfy the direction of many people. It invites the development of a creative brief with many messages.

When a creative brief is not single-minded it is not only difficult for the agency to develop a compelling campaign idea but also it opens creative assessment to a debate about strategy. Instead of focusing upon “how” well the creative works managers wrestle with what should be communicated. Each person who reviews the creative work will attach him/herself to something different.

When it comes to providing direction “less is more!” We tend to be overly ambitious regarding what we want to communicate. But we must keep in mind what we can communicate. We must be single-minded. And while everyone on the team may have a valid position someone has to make the hard choice. Don't attempt to incorporate everyone's different position. Listen carefully. Make sure you understand. Use marketing research as appropriate. Then make a choice to be single-minded.

The single-minded choice is reflected in what we have identified as “the strategic triangle” of the creative brief. This consists of the customer need, the customer insight and the benefit/belief. All three of these elements must be in agreement. They absolutely must point in the same direction. If they are not in agreement then the brief is not single-minded. You have to choose and then ensure cohesion.

- 4. Not gaining the commitment of key players** – Commitment is likely to result among all parties who have thoughtfully participated in the collaboration of the development of the

creative brief. It is also likely to result from a rigorous analysis of the creative brief. But it must be acknowledged. Not just by anyone but the key players involved in ad development, including the senior most client manager responsible for approving the advertising and the senior most agency manager responsible for delivering the advertising. On the agency side we are not just talking about the senior account manager. This includes the senior most creative person at the agency. On the client side we must gain approval from that manager who has the “final word” on whether the advertising will ever see the light of day.

There can be no doubt that client and agency team are of one mind before proceeding to the development of the creative work. Without a clear-cut commitment client and agency are highly likely to have strategic debates when they are reviewing creative. This is time consuming contributing to numerous revisions. It is terribly costly since the client is billed for the added time. It can be demoralizing to the agency team. And, it interrupts focus on the creative product. Instead, the review of the creative work should focus against the idea – not the strategic direction. It is not likely to happen without a shared commitment to the creative brief.

### **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

Here’s a quality process with sound practices for you to consider using:

1. Utilize client and agency team members to collaborate in the development of the creative brief. Include the agency creative personnel. It might be helpful to employ someone to design and facilitate the session. (If you are interested in assistance go to BDN Implementation and click on [Creative Brief Navigator](#).)
2. Utilize the “essential” creative brief.
3. Make choices to be single-minded. Don’t arrive at a creative brief by consensus. And don’t be afraid of making the hard choices. Use marketing research in helping make the correct choice.
4. Use the Creative Brief ScoreCard to guide the development of a strategically appropriate, single-minded creative brief.
5. Gain acknowledgement of the commitment to pursue the brief through the signature of the senior most client manager responsible for approving the advertising and the senior most agency manager responsible for delivering it.

Richard Czerniawski & Mike Maloney

*See next page for contact information*

**Richard Czerniawski**

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

Reply to Richard:  
[rdczerniawski@cs.com](mailto:rdczerniawski@cs.com) or  
[richardcz@bdn-intl.com](mailto: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](mailto:mikewmaloney@cs.com) or  
[mikemaloney@bdn-intl.com](mailto:mikemaloney@bdn-intl.com)



---

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