

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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## DEVELOPING A MORE PRODUCTIVE CREATIVE BRIEF – Part 1

Deepwater Horizon is an ecological disaster of epic proportions. It has taken lives and is fouling the sea, killing aquatic life, despoiling the white, sandy beaches of the Gulf Coast, negatively impacting the livelihood of many people, and threatening our economic recovery. Sadly, the aftermath of this growing horror is expected to take decades to address and remedy.

While the well continues to spew tens of thousands of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico experts are trying to find a way to cap it, to shut-off the gushing outflow of oil. At the same time, U.S. legislators are demanding answers from British Petroleum executives to questions such as: how did this happen; could it have been prevented; who is responsible; why didn't BP do more; what can we do to prevent this from ever happening again; and so forth. (Our Washington leadership also needs to seek effective solutions, which they have long been bereft, regarding how to clean-up and restore the pristine beauty and ecology of the Gulf area.)

Just a little more than a week ago, Tony Hayward, CEO of British Petroleum, testified before a congressional committee, whose members grilled him mercilessly regarding the incident, situation and BP's culpability in this disaster. Mr. Hayward deferred questions dealing with the *specific details* of causality, as he awaits the conclusion of an investigation being undertaken by BP. Notwithstanding the specific details, it is clear that four broad areas are emerging as contributing to this disaster: faulty engineering; errors in human behavior; lack of oversight; and dysfunctional corporate culture.

The Deepwater Horizon situation provides an interesting metaphor for the development of the Creative Brief. These aforementioned four areas provide us fertile ground for investigation into the failure of marketers to develop Creative Briefs that provide strategically appropriate, single-minded direction for the development of leadership advertising, and its subsequent assessment. While the results of mismanaging these four areas in the development of the Creative Brief do not have anywhere near the same negative impact as wrought by the Deepwater Horizon well, they contribute to undermining the health of a brand, the relationship between the brand and its customers, and agency productivity. This issue of DISPATCHES will deal with engineering, the design and composition, of the Essential Creative Brief. Subsequent issues will address the each of the other areas.

*Engineering* is about design. Not design for the sake of aesthetics but something that will contribute to proper functioning. It's about structure. It's about integrity of the unit. It's an essential discipline. It directs form to guide proper functioning, where form contributes to producing better outcomes. Faults in engineering, especially deep below the sea, paved the way for eventual failure. Additionally, lack of sufficient back-up systems in the engineering design

were unable to prevent catastrophe, leading to the failure of the well and the grave consequences we face today.

Engineering is also important when it comes to designing the Creative Brief. In this case we are referring to the elements that comprise the “Essential” Creative Brief. This consists only of those elements that provide, as stated in its name, “essential” direction for developing leadership advertising. What we experience when clients share their Creative Briefs with us are elements that are either: a) inappropriate (e.g., non-essential, misleading, etc.); b) missing; c) inconsistent; and d) contradictory. The “Essential” Creative Brief will remedy these issues.

### Review of 10 Creative Briefs

Here’s a review of 10 Creative Briefs for consumer and OTC brands. These are taken from one company (various divisions, brands within a division and their agencies). As shown in the table below, there are a wide variety of elements (more than 50) being addressed. Additionally, you will observe the inconsistency in language. For example, some Creative Briefs identify “benefit” while others address “messages,” “brand” and/or “product benefits.”

<u>Creative Brief Element</u>	<u>%</u>
• Why are we advertising	10
• Brand Positioning	30
• Brand Idea	10
• Background	10
• Assignment	40*
• Task	10
• Budget	30
• Timing	40
- Timing	30
- Deadlines	10
• Required Materials	10
• Where in the World	10
• Objective	90
- Objective	20
- Business Objective	10
- Marketing Objective	10
- Communication Objective	50*
• Barrier to Overcome	10
• Problem	10
• Customer/Consumer Insight	70*
• Discoveries	10
• Target Audience	90*
- Target	80
- Core Target	10
• When and Where Target Most Responsive	10
• Stimulus	

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• Competitive Framework	
• Benefit	90
- Benefit	60
- Key Benefit	10*
- Brand/Product Benefit	10
- Primary/Secondary Messages	10
• Desired Customer Response	10
• Reason-to-Believe	80
- Support	60
- Reason-to-Believe	20*
• Tone	70
- Tone/Tonality	50
- Tone & Manner	20
• Brand Character	40*
- Tone and Brand Character	20
• Mandates	70
- Executional Considerations	10
- Creative Guidelines	10
- Mandatories and Other Stuff	10
- Creative Mandatories	10
- Executional Mandatories	20
- Visual & Communication Mandatories	10
- Legal & Regulatory Mandatories	10*
• Channel Thinking	10
• Cross-Sell Level	10
• Approvals	50
- Approvals	10
- Client	20
- Agency	10
- Client & Agency	10*

\* Essential elements

As you can observe, this is poor performance on essential elements. And, there's a lot of time and energy being focused on non-essential elements, which ultimately dilutes focus.

Additionally, some briefs contain multiple expressions of what the advertising communications are to deliver. For example, a brief contains "benefit" and "desired customer response." Another calls-out "brand" and "product benefits." Yet a third seeks "primary" and "secondary messages." These are clearly not single-minded and highly unlikely to direct the development of a single-minded message delivered via a compelling Campaign Idea.

Remember, these are from one company and its agencies. Imagine how many more elements exist in the wider world of other companies, sectors, countries and agencies. It blows the mind!

## **Problem with current Creative Briefs**

This variety of terms creates problems. The first problem is that there is no clear picture within the organization of what elements are essential and which of them are not. This results in diluting attention and focus from what is really important in directing and assessing creative work. If the Creative Brief is not clear then it is highly unlikely the creative work will be clear, and lead to leadership advertising. (Actually everyone makes it clear in his own way. And that's a problem, a major problem. The agency will select what they believe is appropriate. It is highly unlikely that the client will select the same thing. Moreover, there will not be unanimity among the client team. The result is strategic discussions when managers are supposed to be assessing the creative. If you think this is likely to spur the development of leadership advertising, think again.)

A second problem is that the senior managers responsible for approving and acting upon these briefs have no standard by which to compare one versus another. This can cause confusion and undermine the ability and insights of these senior managers in the development of the communication strategy (which is the heart of the Creative Brief). It also takes away from training marketing managers in how to think and develop a sound, strategically appropriate and single-minded brief. It's no wonder many managers do not know how to develop an effective Creative Brief. It's no wonder that strategic direction is generic. It's no wonder the creative process is so arduous. It's no wonder that most advertising sucks.

### **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

We need sound engineering. The Creative Brief should be designed to do what it is expected to accomplish. Provide sound, strategically appropriate, single-minded direction for the development of leadership advertising. Here's what we need to do about it:

1. ***Adopt the "Essential" Creative Brief.*** These are the elements contained in the Essential Creative Brief:
  - Assignment
  - Communication Behavior Objective
  - Target Customer
  - Customer/Consumer Insight
    - Basis for Insight
    - Insight
  - Key Thought (Benefit/Belief)
  - Reasons-to-Believe
  - Brand Character
  - Legal & Regulatory Mandates
  - Client and Agency Approvals

We call this the "Essential" Creative Brief because, well, these are essential for providing sound, strategically appropriate, single-minded direction for the development of the brand's advertising communications. If you are missing any of these elements, incorporate them into your Creative Brief. You will need them. We'll explain each element in Part 2, a future issue of DISPATCHES.

2. **Delete anything from your current Creative Brief that is non-essential.** If it is not in the aforementioned point, delete it! Anything that is not essential drains energy and focus. We need to be doing the right things, not the wrong things in the right way. It will provide us with the proper focus for strategic thinking, and our agencies with the proper focus for creative development.
3. **Get your agency on-board with the Essential Creative Brief and use it throughout the organization.** One of the reasons we have so many creative brief formats floating around in our organizations is that we typically use more than one agency. Each agency has its own brief. That may be all well and good for a given agency but it is hell for a client organization. As mentioned previously it confuses senior managers who have to review different brief formats and undermines their ability to focus their experience and insights into ensuring appropriate strategic direction. Also, it undermines institutionalization, which is essential to building capabilities and creating a learning organization. The client needs to get the agency to collaborate with them on adopting, and developing, the Essential Creative Brief for each new campaign development assignment.

In Part 2 (3-weeks from now) we will deal with the role of each element in the Essential Creative Brief and tackle “human behavior,” which deals with how to address each correctly.

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