

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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HOW TO JUDGE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

The results for Super Bowl XLV are in. There's a winner - for the game! The Green Bay Packers beat the Pittsburgh Steelers 31 to 25. But there's still considerable debate as to what was the best *advertainment* commercial aired during the annual sports extravaganza.

Unfortunately, much of the debate focuses around "entertainment" value, as measured by meaningless "likeability" ratings reported by the media in their polls of the public. At about \$3-million US, for airtime per each 30-second spot, the advertiser's marketing communication had better be exceptional to warrant this sizeable expenditure. As advertising legend Bill Bernbach stated, "It's not creative unless it sells." Instead of focusing on "likeability," the real measure for effectiveness is whether it rings the cash register, and builds the business.

Marketers should not fall into the trap of measuring the effectiveness of marketing communications (of which television advertising is merely one avenue) by irrelevant criteria such as "likeability," or "popularity," but instead on the basis of whether it *stimulates targeted customers to adopt the specific behavior needed to grow sales* (i.e., the Communication Behavior Objective). We need to step back and judge marketing communications (regardless of the form it takes and/or the medium used to deliver it) in a truly professional matter.

Professionals judge communications based upon perceived (and, after the fact, real) effectiveness. Effectiveness is about getting results. We can judge, and attempt to determine, whether a communication will be effective (before the final results are in) by assessing the: 1) intended Communication Strategy (and identifying the Communication Behavior Objective); 2) Campaign Idea; and 3) Execution.

Communication Strategy

It all starts with determining what the messenger (or in the case of Super Bowl XLV, the advertiser) intends – the Communication Strategy, and to what end – the Communication Behavior Objective. This consists of inferring three elements - target, benefit and support for the benefit. If the communications are true to a technically sound, single-minded strategy we will be able to infer it correctly, if not then it is, at best, a guess. But in the latter case it won't matter since any communication that does not deliver against a relevant, meaningfully differentiated strategy, no matter how strong the execution, is not likely to be an effective piece of communication.

In order to infer the strategy we need to ask ourselves "who is the target." This includes identifying the demographic and psychographic profile, attitudes about the category and/or

brand, current product usage and dissatisfactions, telling behaviors consistent with their attitudes and psychographic profile, and needs of the intended target that the advertiser can best satisfy, or own.

Next we need to determine the benefit that the marketer is promising to its target. The benefit should link back to, and payoff, the need. The benefit can be a product benefit (namely, what the product does), customer benefit (what's in it for the customer), and/or an emotional benefit (how it makes the target feel). Regardless of whatever articulation of the benefit is employed, it must drive achievement of the brand's intended Communication Behavior Objective (e.g., switching, adoption, frequency of usage, etc.) and, in turn, grow sales consistent with the brand's Business Objectives (i.e., sales, market share and profits). It should be also be clear what the communicator wants the targeted customer to do (i.e., the Communication Behavior Objective).

Finally, we need to identify the "reason-why" support for the target to believe, really believe, that the product can fulfill the benefit promise of the communications. Reason-why (also referred to as reason-to-believe) support can be intrinsic (i.e., inside the product) and/or extrinsic (i.e., outside of the product, such as an endorsement from an authoritative body). If we don't not have a convincing reason-why customers might not find the communication promise of the benefit believable. As such, the communications will fail to motivate achievement of the Communication Behavior Objective.

Once we are satisfied with our inferred Communication Strategy, and Communication Behavior Objective, we next need to apply our judgment regarding whether it is strategically sound and meaningful given our knowledge of the target's attitudes and behavior, category and competition. We need to determine whether it is relevant, and meaningfully differentiated, versus competition. Importantly, we need to use our best judgment to assess if the strategy is capable of achieving the inferred Communication Behavior Objective with the target customer.

The Campaign Idea

Next, we need to determine if there's a Campaign Idea, and then assess it. The Campaign Idea transforms the Communication Strategy into compelling customer language that moves the customer to action. It consists of three parts. These are: 1) the Key Copy Words; 2) coupled with a dramatization of the benefit; 3) within the context of the Naked Idea (i.e., creative concept that deals with how the benefit will be communicated in each and every execution, and across all mediums).

The first question we need to address is whether there is a Campaign Idea driving the communications. We should be able to articulate the Naked Idea (i.e., creative concept), which drives each execution, in no more than a sentence or two. The Key Copy Words also need to dramatize the benefit in customer (not strategic!) language. The Key Copy Words serve as a post-it note that helps target customers remember the brand, and its benefit. Importantly, they must strike a responsive chord in such a way as to move the customer to action. The final part is the core dramatization, which can be visual or audile. It dramatizes the benefit in one visual, or leads customers to the benefit. It's more than a smiling face of a content customer, or a close-up of the product.

The second question to address is whether the 3 parts of the Campaign Idea work together to deliver a single-minded message that effectively communicates the benefit stated in the

Communication Strategy. Finally, we must use our judgment to determine whether the Campaign Idea will compel targeted customers to take the intended action identified in the Communication Behavior Objective.

Execution

This is the moment most marketers are anxious to get to – the execution. Typically, when asked what they think about a piece of marketing communication, such as an ad, the majority of marketers will pipe-in regarding the execution (more specifically the situation and what they see and/or hear), avoiding the more critical elements of the Communication Strategy and Campaign Idea. And, oftentimes their comments regarding the execution are rather superficial, lacking a thoughtful analysis. Doubt us, ask a colleague about any piece of marketing communication and listen to what they play back to you.

The execution certainly has its place of importance. Its role is to cut through the clutter, engage the target customer, and showcase the Campaign Idea. Just as the Campaign Idea delivers the Communication Strategy, the execution delivers the Campaign Idea. The execution not only serves to achieve this important objective but may also be expected to add strength, and credibility to the promise.

Additionally, the execution should establish brand linkage. What we mean is that it helps the customer remember the brand, and its benefit. There are other things that one should assess, such as audio-visual synch (i.e., that the words and pictures go together), type of execution (e.g., direct voice versus voice over, demonstration, etc.), simplicity of the language, ease of navigating for the customer, etc. Many of these other factors are media specific. For example, whenever you assess the executional elements of a TV commercial, ask yourself these important questions:

1. Do you understand what is happening in the advertising?
2. Does it tell a picture story?
3. Does it contain drama or another powerful element (e.g., compelling presenter, etc.) to cut through the clutter?
4. Are the words and pictures in synch to enhance understanding and memorability of the story?
5. Does it dramatize the benefit to set it apart from competition?
6. Does it showcase the Campaign Idea?
7. Does it add credibility to the promise?
8. Is the brand made relevant and integral to the spot to ensure strong brand linkage?

If you answer “no” to any of the above questions your execution is found lacking, and further work is needed.

Pulling It Together

Now that we have inferred, and assessed, the critical elements of a marketing communication (such as one of the Super Bowl XLV television ads), namely the Communication Strategy (including the Communication Behavior Objective), Campaign Idea, and execution, well, we are ready to pull together our judgment regarding the *effectiveness* of the communications. We need to express our point-of-view through the “overview” and add-value through the inclusion of “indicated actions.”

- 1) *The Overview* – This is your conclusion regarding the effectiveness of the communication following your thoughtful assessment of the three key elements. By effectiveness, we mean will it serve to achieve the Communication Behavior Objective and, in turn, sell. Therefore, your conclusion might be: very effective; somewhat effective; or not effective. You then support your conclusion by sharing your thoughtful analysis of the aforementioned elements in the previous paragraph.
- 2) *Indicated Actions* – This is where you advance your thoughts as to what needs to be done to make the communication more effective. It's not what's wrong. Instead, it's all about what you would need to see in order to make the communication more productive in stimulating the intended behavior and achieving the Communication Behavior Objective.

Your judgment may differ from others judging the effectiveness of the communication – and that's okay. Yours is just one hypothesis. Theirs is another. We can confirm or change it by learning targeted customers' take on the critical elements of the Communication Strategy, and the appeal of the message to the target in the absolute, and relative to other products or services. At least now we are looking with the eyes of a professional by dealing with the essential criteria in judging the effectiveness of marketing communications.

Is this hard work? You bet it is! But this is the way a true professional judges marketing communications. True professionals work hard.

Boats & Helicopters:

When you review marketing communications, whether it is something close to your business or just practice while you watch television, skim a magazine, or come across something digital, develop the habit of doing these things:

1. Identify and assess the Communication Strategy, Campaign Idea and execution within the context of the Communication Behavior Objective, using the framework we've shared with you.
2. Provide an overview of what you think about the effectiveness of the communication (and reasons for your judgment based upon your disciplined and thoughtful analysis); and
3. Identify direction, designed to make more productive any one or more of the elements needing work. Remember, here's where we identify what needs to be done to make the work more effective, as opposed to merely pointing out what we think is wrong.

We invite you to give this way of judging marketing communications a try. Take one of the commercials appearing on Super Bowl XLV, roll-up your sleeves, and get to work. Oh, if you're concerned about going solo, pull together a few marketers and make it a "lunch and learn" experience.

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