

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, October 8, 2006

PRE-REQUISITES FOR SUCCESSFUL COPY TESTING

pre-requisite, adjective: required beforehand

This article is the third in a series on copy testing. The first article, titled “Weighing the Merits of Copy Testing,” both weighed the merits and suggested ways copy (i.e., advertising communications) testing could be utilized to manage the development of more effective advertising. The second article, “Requisites for Successful Copy Testing,” addressed the three key measures of successful copy testing, and marketplace performance, employed by marketing research companies such as Millward Brown: “branded impact” (i.e., the customers ability to remember the advertising and brand); “strategic communication” (i.e., the degree to which intended messages are coming through strongly to customers, and are on strategy); and “response,” or persuasion (i.e. ability of the tested ad communications to drive favorable purchase intent). Additionally, the article suggested specific actions to gain favorable scores in each measure. For example, we recommended that you ensure that your advertising communication offers a “relevant, meaningfully differentiated benefit” to achieve a high response, or persuasion score.

However, while the requisites are quite clear and undeniable, achieving them poses quite a challenge to marketing managers and their advertising agencies. This is evidenced by the paucity of ads that achieve high scores in all three measurements – or for that matter, any combination of two measurements. But then we shouldn’t be surprised. The requisites for hitting a home run off a major league pitcher or painting a masterpiece are equally clear and undeniable yet few achieve either. Before the requisites are met certain pre-requisites must first be satisfied. The pre-requisites deal with organizational beliefs, practices and processes.

These pre-requisites are essential to gaining the requisites to achieve favorable copy testing scores and, more importantly, leadership advertising communications on a consistent basis:

1. At the top of our list is a belief in the value of advertising and an unswerving commitment to achieving leadership advertising. We are not talking about advertising for the sake of having something to air in order to finalize a marketing plan. Instead, we are referring to the kind of advertising communications that rings the cash register in the present while building brand equity over the long-term. This belief is manifested by increasing ad budgets consistent with (anticipated) growing sales, market share and profits. It is also evidenced by making ad development a priority throughout the year, not just a seasonal thing. It is marked by a plethora of ad development initiatives prior to actually needing new advertising. It is also reflected by recognizing managers and agencies for delivering advertising that has been proven effective through successful copy testing scores and marketplace results. It is further evidenced by training programs for marketing managers. And, it is demonstrated by senior

management undergoing refresher training in ad development and serving as mentors to the organization's marketing managers. Without a strong belief and firm commitment the organization will not be able to make advertising excellence (as reflected by achieving highly successful copy testing and marketplace results) a core competency.

2. Inherent in the commitment to advertising communication is the strong belief in the power of ideas. Advertising is much more than "copy" or words. It is a stimulus designed to gain a specific, pre-determined behavior from the target group. It is about ideas that cut across mediums and, in some instances, even geographies (e.g., consider the Dove Real Beauty campaign idea) with, perhaps, different executions. Ideas translate strategy talk into compelling customer language. Not to wax poetic but we believe it is the language of the heart, mind and soul. As David Ogilvy stated many years ago, "If your advertising does not contain a big idea it will pass like a ship in the night." A unique Campaign Idea, that only fits your brand, will serve to deliver the brand story in an ownable way and help prospective customers see the brand in a new light. While you're at it, reach deep for a BIG Idea. It should work to take your breath away and last a long, long time across many different mediums to touch customers where it is most likely to have impact.
3. Another important pre-requisite revolves around the customer. Marketers must have a deep seated understanding of the customer – her/his perceptions, attitudes, psychographic mindsets, usage practices and behaviors. It is through a thorough understanding of what lies below the quantitative research, in the customer's mind and soul, that we may determine those needs (for our specific target group segment) that our brand can win with. Moreover, this understanding puts us in a better position to discover a legitimate and, hopefully, productive Customer Insight. Both the needs and insights lead us to the development of a "relevant, meaningfully differentiated benefit," which is absolutely essential to achieving success.

All marketers need to understand the customer so well that they can predict how s/he will respond to a given piece of stimulus (and the proffered benefit, or promise, is a form of stimulus). We should only promise that benefit which (ties to the Customer Insight and better satisfies relevant needs that) will get the targeted customer to respond in a pre-determined way to achieve the brand's Marketing Objective.

Finally, while many marketers may have considerable work ahead of them to understand the customer as more than a demographic, title or condition, gaining this depth of understanding is a giant step in the right direction but it's not enough. Marketers must cultivate a desire to serve the customer, and serve her/him better than competition. As a goal, we should seek to "delight" the customer in everything we do with the brand – including its advertising.

4. An appreciation for the "whole" product and what it means to, and can do for, the target group is yet another important pre-requisite. The whole product includes but goes beyond the physical product. It comprises the many intangibles that make the whole product offering (such as sales terms, alliances, quality of distribution, etc.). Moreover, we need to understand the constellation of values that comprise our brand. If we cannot win with the physical product, perhaps, we can win with the whole product. If not with the whole product then, perhaps, with the brand. Not only do we need to know our whole product and brand but that of our competitors as well. We need to be able to deliver on those advertising promises that

we make to our target group in both the absolute and relative to competition.

These last two pre-requisites, an in-depth understanding of the customer and the whole product, while rather basic are too often given short shrift. It is rare, in our practice with leading companies and brands, that we review a Creative Brief that evidences a meaningful understanding of the target group. As a consequence, needs and corresponding benefits are generic – failing to differentiate the benefit from competition, and the Customer Insight is anything but legitimate and/or productive. As per the product, once again we find merely a superficial knowledge that neither cuts deeply into the whole product nor the equity of the brand in distinguishing it from competition. As a result, more advertising than not fails to achieve high persuasion scores in copy testing.

5. It's critically important that the organization identify and institutionalize best practices, processes and tools that have proven effective in developing advertising that consistently generates successful copy testing. There are obviously better ways to creating effective advertising than doing the same thing in the same way over and over again - that has consistently failed to get the desired results. If your organization is not getting the results it wants then something has to change. There is no silver bullet! But there are best practices, quality processes and tools to creating advertising communications that significantly enhances the likelihood for consistently developing advertising that's successful in copy testing and growing sales.

For example, for years we have been sharing our Accelerated Strategic Ad Process (ASAP) with clients (and, in some cases, their agencies), which consists of the agency sharing Campaign Ideas prior to the development of storyboards, print ad comps or other ad vehicle expressions. It's an additional step (in the typical process) that works to save development time and enhance client-agency relationships while producing better quality ideas.

We also have a toolbox full of useful tools such as the Creative Brief Scorecard. The Creative Brief Scorecard is a highly productive tool that directs the development of a technically and strategically sound Creative Brief, and its assessment. The purpose is not to get a "score" but to focus the marketer's thinking in developing a Creative Brief that will provide strategically appropriate and clear direction to make creative development more productive. (Certainly, it doesn't work if the marketer doesn't use it. Nor does it make sense for the client and agency to use different tools for the same task. Having the client develop (or better yet, work with the agency to develop) a Creative Brief only to have the agency translate it into a format of their own creates problems rather than simplifies or illuminates creative direction.)

Also there is the practice of coaching which is really about providing direction to add value in realizing the potential of an idea rather than criticizing. Evaluation or criticism fails to garner agency understanding and commitment. Good coaches identify what they need to see to make an idea effective rather than talk about what they see that they don't like. This practice serves to transform the way we manage from judging to collaborating (more on collaboration later).

We strongly suspect from our work, with even Fortune Top 100 companies, that if the organization is not getting the results it wants it because it is not utilizing quality processes

(like ASAP) that leverage client and agency roles in generating many ideas, instituting proven practices (such as coaching), employing productivity tools (such as the Creative Brief Scorecard) that assist in providing direction and assessing thinking, etc. Marketing personnel may be well aware of, and even have been trained by us in, these processes, practices and tools but if they are not institutionalized in the organization they will not be practiced. The daily demands for execution of the business coupled with the lack of appreciation and support by senior management for these processes will undercut the best intentions of marketing personnel. Stop searching for the silver bullet and institutionalize best practices!

6. Training for all marketing managers and even corresponding agency personnel in best practices, quality processes and productivity tools is another critical pre-requisite for achieving the requisites for leadership advertising. The development of effective, no less leadership, advertising is about more than gaining information. One may know what elements comprise a Creative Brief but it takes skill to manage the development of a technically sound, strategically appropriate, single-minded Creative Brief that provides simple, clear direction for ad communications development. Both senior managers and agency personnel claim they are dissatisfied with the quality of the creative direction as provided by many Creative Briefs. Well, marketing managers need to be trained in the development of a productive Creative Brief and so do their managers. (If a senior manager is dissatisfied with a Creative Brief why does s/he sign-off on it?) But let's face it, this type of training does not take place in the B-Schools. The training needs to be real, practical and immediately applicable. Managers of all levels in the ad development and approval process should undergo periodic formal training and receive on the job coaching. This will assist in institutionalizing learnings and, in turn, reinforce individual skill development, leading to the development of more effective advertising. (For information about the upcoming BDNI Leadership Communications Conference or our other training programs visit www.bdn-intl.com, reply to this DISPATCHES article or simply give us a call.)
7. The adoption of "collaborative" management practices is also an essential pre-requisite to ensure the very best thinking and work. It's important to abandon the old management practice of delegating and adopt the practice of collaborating. Despite the talk of client-agency partnerships these are largely client to supplier relationships in actual practice. The client develops strategic direction and then delegates the creative execution to the agency while maintaining firm control over the final product (i.e., the advertising communication that is aired or published). Prior to developing creative the agency develops a Creative Brief of its own to "inspire" the creative team. Clients may or may not even see this Creative Brief. Chances are the "what" of the messaging (i.e., strategic benefit) will be changed thus changing the communication strategy. The agency begins the development of storyboards or scripts which it has selected for presentation to the client. The client sits in quiet judgment of the agency's work, evaluating the boards presented. On the other end of the spectrum, is the agency that dominates the client. The client, concerned about ruffling the agency's feathers, regretfully accepts the agency's work without thoughtful participation in the process. This is not collaboration. This is not sharing understanding. It is a recipe for disappointment and frustration.

Collaboration is about getting the best thinking of key team members. It is recognizing that everyone has a piece of the puzzle yet no one has the whole. Collaborating is putting together

all the pieces to create a mosaic of the whole Collaboration starts from the earliest strategy planning stage. It includes the agency, not just account personnel but also the creative team, from the first day. It represents a team effort in the development of the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement, Ad Communication Strategy and Creative Brief. Collaboration extends to the agency sharing rough Campaign Ideas with the client to gain input and insights that can add value to their efforts. It also consists of dialoguing with customers to gain insights into the effectiveness of alternate ideas. Moreover, collaboration calls for marketing managers to get senior managers involved early in the process – both strategic and creative – to gain the advantage of their experiences and insights.

8. One additional pre-requisite is to develop a learning organization. We need to find ways to learn about current and prospective customers. We need to learn about the effectiveness of marketing initiatives and advertising communications. A learning organization stays close to customers. It goes beyond gathering facts to developing understanding. It dialogues with customers in iterating its way to success. In other words, it adapts programs and messaging based on learnings in the marketplace in order to develop initiatives such as advertising campaigns that resonate with customers.

Importantly, a learning organization uses copy testing wisely. It does not use it merely as a report card to denote pass or fail, or a substitute for judgment. Instead, copy testing is used as a diagnostic tool to assist the marketer and organization in developing more effective advertising. It analyzes the results and seeks practical solutions. It learns to exploit opportunities (i.e., adopting key drivers of ad communications that successfully copy test) and solve problems (i.e., determine factors which retard copy testing scores and develop indicated actions to correct or avoid them in the future). For example, if an ad scores poorly for persuasion the learning organization demands that the marketer and agency investigate the Creative Brief to determine if they have a relevant, meaningfully differentiated benefit and if so whether it is the correct one. It also demands that the team review the advertising to determine if it contains a Campaign Idea that communicates the strategic benefit in a compelling manner. In short, the learning organization goes beyond collecting data and information to building knowledge.

Lastly, the learning organization uses its new found knowledge to generate a cycle of continuous improvement.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

1. Create and use action standards for advertising communications that equate to providing a positive return on investment (ROI). If it's copy testing scores then use them. But, please, go beyond mere blind allegiance to "scores" to ascertain whether your communications has the requisites for successful copy testing and marketplace performance (i.e., relevant, meaningfully differentiated benefit, compelling Campaign Idea and strong brand linkage in an engaging execution). If your advertising doesn't meet the action standards or, more importantly, doesn't contain the requisites of effective communications, do not run it. Commit the organization, or your brand, to running only advertising communications that will build the business.

2. Be a patron of ideas. Encourage them; seek them relentlessly; champion them; reward those who develop them. They, not “copy,” are the stuff of leadership advertising.
3. Get to really know your customer. This means getting out of the office to talk and observe your customers. Go beyond the quantitative to dig into the qualitative. Define your target clearly and completely by going beyond demographics to include psychographics, condition or lifestyle, attitudes, current usage and behaviors and needs (both rational and emotional) that the brand can win with.
4. Explore the whole product with R&D personnel, and customers. Determine where you can offer advantages versus competitors to your customer. Investigate messaging that offers a relevant, meaningfully differentiated benefit (which could be in the form of a brand character that badges customers, a reason-why that makes a benefit more believable, etc.).
5. Download and use the tools from our toolbox. Share them with your colleagues and agency team members. You will find them at www.bdn-intl.com. They will serve to help direct and guide your thinking regarding critical elements of brand positioning, ad communication strategy, target profile, Creative Brief, etc. While these tools won't lead you to “what” to think they will assist you in “how” to think about these elements.
6. Develop yourself and your people. Investigate and avail yourself to training programs. If not with us, with others. Consider programs dealing with advertising, brand management, writing, presentations, customer psychology, etc. Also, look for opportunities to grow through reading, travel and living your life consciously. You'll find recommended reading at our Website.

But don't just seek information, develop skills. Develop the skills needed to:

- Define the target group clearly and completely;
- Discover and test for legitimate and productive Customer Insights;
- Develop a single-minded, competitive Creative Brief;
- Recognize “big” Campaign Ideas;
- Assess creative ad communication submissions;
- Coach the agency to add value to the development of Campaign Ideas ... among others.

If you are interested in receiving training to enhance your skills then please consider the Leadership Communications Conference, which we will conduct from 31 October through 3 November in Evanston, Illinois. The conference is made-up of four workshops. These workshops provide best practices, processes and productive tools. Specific programs and dates are as follows:

- Day 1 - *Discovering* Customer Insights College (Tuesday, 31 October)
- Day 2 - Creative Brief Development College (Wednesday, 1 November)
- Day 3 - Developing the BIG Campaign Idea (and Coaching to Add Value) College (Thursday, 2 November)
- Day 4 – High Impact Communications Execution (and Coaching to Add Value) College (Friday, 3 November)

7. Get collaborative. Learn to work in concert with your agency. Establish processes that nurture collaboration such that neither client nor agency needs to sell the other. Instead both buy of their own accord. Extend the collaborative process to include senior management. This may be established in part by: requiring the senior most person on the client and agency teams to sign-off on the Creative Brief prior to undertaking creative development; having tissue meetings to share and review potential ad Campaign Ideas; etc.

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*Please forward any comments regarding the newsletter to Lori Vandervoort at our Central Division Offices of BDN International, 800-255-9831 or 620-431-0780.
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Registration is filling up quickly and time is running out to take advantage of early registration discounts (up to \$1400 per person). Call today 800-255-9831 or 620-431-0780 to register for the upcoming Leadership Communications College which begins Tuesday, October 31st through Friday, November 3rd, 2006 just go to our website www.bdn-intl.com and click on the blue registration at the bottom left of the page. You may also call Lori Vandervoort at 800-255-9831 for additional help in registering.

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