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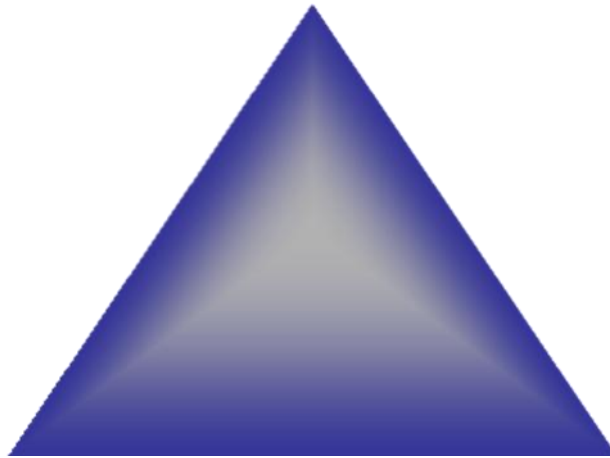
Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

March 14, 2010

THE STRATEGIC TRIANGLE

While conducting one of our *High Impact Ad College's* recently, we got to a key point in our Creative Brief instruction—explaining the concept we call the Strategic Triangle. As we illustrated the concept with an inferred example (from the “Priceless” MasterCard campaign), one of the client participants raised his hand and inquired, “Isn’t there a mistake on your slide?” We naturally stopped, stepped back a bit, and re-read what the slide said about the MasterCard campaign. Here’s the slide we were all taking a hard look at:

Insight: “Badge” things like credit cards cannot buy happiness or take the place of what really matters in life



Needs: A card that works so I can savor what really matters/makes me happy

Benefits: A card that works so I can savor what really matters/makes me happy

Maybe you can see what “mistake” the client was referring to? We could not—until he said, “You must have omitted the Benefits...because it looks like you repeated the Needs, as Benefits, word for word.” To which, somewhat relieved, we replied, “Actually, no. We repeated them on purpose.” Of course, you can empathize with the client’s initial impression; after all, weren’t we taught in school: “Do not repeat your words—you will bore your reader!” But a Creative Brief,

like other important strategic documents we craft, is not concerned with effects such as boredom. Rather, it's concerned, first and foremost, with the effect of precision—precision of meaning that is conveyed via precision of language.

But perhaps we're getting ahead of ourselves a bit. Though you have seen our concept of the Strategic Triangle in the illustrated MasterCard example, you haven't yet heard much by way of an introduction to or explanation of the concept. Maybe not much really need be said because the illustration, simple as it is, probably gets the idea across pretty quickly. But, just to be sure, here are few headlines:

- The Strategic Triangle refers to the natural alignment that any tight Creative Brief should exhibit among (1) the Target's Needs, (2) the Insight about that Target, and (3) the Benefits the brand is promising to pay off the Target's Needs.
- Needs and Benefits form the "strategic base" of the triangle: they derive, of course, from that most fundamental of strategic documents, the Brand Positioning Statement. And because Benefits are the natural payoff of the Target's Needs, many marketers will refer to these two positioning elements as "two sides of the same coin."
- The Insight forms the "capstone" of the triangle. While technically a strategic element (because it is always included in the Creative Brief, the "single most important strategic document" that clients and the agencies use to design communications), the Insight is also the "direction finder" or the "pointer" to creative ideas. After all, it is the Insight that enables the creative teams to make the brand's Needs-Benefits communication *relevant*...as in, "Wow, that's exactly how I feel, this brand is definitely talking to me."
- In summary, you might say that the Needs and Benefits provide the essential "what" of a brand's communication; the Insight provides the "how" of that communication.

As we said, it's really a very simple concept, this Strategic Triangle. But you would be surprised how often it is missing or incomplete. The most common Strategic Triangle "misses" we see in Creative Briefs are these two: there are Needs expressed in the Target description which are not paid off in the Benefits; and/or, there are false Insights—Needs, Facts, and Accepted Consumer Beliefs—that are not legitimate Insights at all...that do not readily offer the creative teams "relevance pathways" to the Target's mind and heart.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS—for The Strategic Triangle

1. When you and your agency teammates get together to draft a Creative Brief, take the time to sketch an equilateral triangle off to the side of the brief; then write down in each of the 3 corners, word for word, what you have put in the brief under Needs, Benefits, and Insight. Ask the team to assess how well the foundation elements (Needs and Benefits) link. And also ask how well the Insight links to those elements.
2. When writing the Benefits in the brief, follow the principle of "conscious redundancy." This means, simply, to consciously copy the Needs as Benefits, word for word. And in so

doing, you will leave no doubt about (a) what Needs are most important to the Target *that the brand can win with*; (b) that the brand's promises (Benefits) can satisfy those Needs.

3. Look to consciously express a similarity of theme in all three corners of the Strategic Triangle. Just as in the MasterCard "Priceless" campaign example, the emotional theme of "what really matters in life to allow people to be happy" shows up in all three corners of that inferred triangle, so should there be a well-linked theme in the triangles of your brand's briefs.
4. Finally, make sure that what you place in the brief and on the triangle as an Insight is really, truly, legitimately an Insight (and not merely another way to state the Target's Needs).

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