

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

March 16, 2008

## THINGS YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO HEAR

During our *Positioning & Communication College* this past week—in one of our client-agency role plays - we heard some very familiar “response” statements, mimicking what our advertising agency teammates often answer back to us clients. Because we clients can so readily repeat them, it’s pretty obvious that these statements are used a lot. But actually, they are not really things we want to hear because, as with the language of international diplomacy, there are underlying subtleties to these often-uttered statements that suggest our creative development process isn’t working as it should.

So we thought that for this week’s *Dispatches Boats & Helicopters* we would generate a list of some of these troubling statements—along with our take on what the subtle meanings really are. See if you don’t recognize many of these; and when you hear them in your own creative processes, think of them as “alarms” that the process needs fixing, or at least some adjustments.

### BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

1. *“If you want to see campaign ideas **before** we move to storyboards, we’ll bring you some scripts.”* An offer like this sounds at first like an agreeable response from the agency. The client has, quite rightly, requested to review ideas prior to investing in the time and expense of full-blown boards. But upon second look, what has the agency really agreed to do by bringing scripts? Isn’t a script simply a storyboard without the pictures? And, by the way, don’t clients need (and deserve!) to *see* the Idea as well as hear it? The truth is that agencies who insist on scripts as the way to share campaign ideas are not-so-subtly saying to the client, “If we don’t spell out the entire story, you aren’t clever enough to understand the idea.”
2. *“OK, we have a couple of campaign ideas to share with you.”* A couple? This represents the breadth of the work the agency has already developed? Hardly. Back at their shop they have certainly worked up a dozen or more ideas and then have sorted the ones they think are the strongest—and that they would like to sell the client. But, early in the creative development process, both the agency and client should be considering a wide range of approaches. For sure, seeing a range of ideas does two important things: trains the client to understand and appreciate ideas even more, and makes the client smarter about the pros and cons of various ideas. Early on, options are a good thing! And the agency that severely limits options is really saying to the client, “We don’t trust your judgment to know which idea directions are the stronger ones.”
3. *“We’ve used the same slogan in all four ideas because we think it’s a terrific line and it*

*can work well in all four.*” A campaign idea slogan (what we like to refer to as Key Copy Words) must meet two objectives to be effective: it must deliver the brand’s benefits, either directly or indirectly; and it must fit with the core dramatization of the idea (as in the words and pictures going together). If one slogan works equally well across four ideas, you have to wonder if you’re really looking at four different ideas...or merely the same idea expressed in four situations. In any event, clients should expect to see each idea with its own matching Key Copy Words and Core Dramatization. When agencies tell clients that “one slogan fits all,” they are usually saying, “We’ve found the idea we want you to buy.”

4. *“Actually, we don’t think this idea needs a slogan.”* Equally as disturbing as hearing that the same slogan works across many ideas, when a campaign idea is presented without Key Copy Words clients should be wary. It’s true that there have been some very successful campaigns without slogans—for example, right now the Mac campaign in the U.S. with the personified PC and Mac users playing off each other has no ending slogan. And it is building the business. But having a compelling slogan is just one more creative best practice that makes it easier for customers to think about the brand. As one of our clients once told us, “Good Key Copy Words walk with you.” If an agency says they are not needed, what they may really be saying is, “We couldn’t come up with anything we really liked.”
5. *“Don’t worry. We’ll capture that in the voiceover.”* Oh boy, talk about an “alarm” for the client. This response statement usually follows a client comment something like, “We need to make sure that our second benefit comes through in the idea equally as well as the first benefit.” As a response it is surely scary because, no matter what research methodology a client uses, each shows that voiceover copy is recalled at a very low level. It’s like body copy in a print ad—where stuff gets buried. Here’s a tried and true axiom for clients and their brand benefits: *if it isn’t in the Idea, it isn’t there.* Don’t fall into the voiceover catch-all trap; but **do** take notice of what the agency is really saying when they fall back on it: “We couldn’t find a way to incorporate both benefits into the Idea.”
6. *“In this first idea you’ll see that we’ve focused on the emotional benefit in the brief.”* Much like the voiceover response, this one also indicates that the creative team has either not been able to work both the functional and emotional benefits into the idea, or they have made the decision that one benefit is more important than another. But if the brand and agency teams have built the creative brief together and already made the decision that the brand requires two, equally important benefits to win in the marketplace, then no one else has the right to choose or decide otherwise. By the way, of all the response statements we’ve reviewed here, this is the one that most clients say they hear the most. Hmmmm. Makes you more than ever want to be sure that, when crafting the Creative Brief, multiple benefits are what the brand really needs.

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