

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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WHEN WILL WE GET TO THE BIG IDEA?

Quite a few years ago, during one of our *BDNI Institute* workshops, a client asked the above question—with considerable anxiety in his voice. At the time, we attempted to calm his anxiety by assuring him we would cover the concept of a *campaign idea* in great detail...and that determining whether any campaign idea was a big one was a matter of judgment and, ultimately, the marketplace results it generated. One of the reasons we cited the role of judgment in recognizing a big idea was that even the most formidable of creative types have cited the same. As David Ogilvy once said, “It is horribly difficult to recognize a good idea. I shudder to think how many I have rejected.”

Now, just within the last few weeks, the question of recognizing a big idea has come up again from one of our clients. Specifically, our client was looking for ways for their regional marketing team to “qualify” an idea as potentially Big (or at least bigger than other options being considered) early in its development. As for the type of idea, she and her team were really thinking well beyond just an advertising campaign idea. In our brainstorming discussion with her we came up with a number of “checklist” criteria that any marketing team might use to sort ideas with big potential from those lacking that potential.

Let’s face it, every marketer is looking for Big Ideas. No one wants a little idea. But how insistent are we in our practice of “pre-screening” an idea for potential bigness? For this week’s Boats & Helicopters we offer a Big Idea Checklist—not as a guaranteed way to pre-determine how big an idea might be, but as a way to increase the odds of bigness in your favor.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS—“The BIG IDEA Checklist”

1. The Idea appears capable of lasting a long time and of extending into multiple customer/consumer “touch-points.” Actually, most marketers and their creative partners do use these two-pronged criteria to determine how big an idea might be. They usually call an idea that can do both “campaignable.” But just because a concept or idea can be executed in numerous situations (in advertising) or its theme-line plays equally well in advertising, promotion, PR, and merchandising vehicles doesn’t mean it’s a big concept or idea. Doing these things may be a start, but there are even more important criteria to consider.

2. The Idea inherently *resists the usual*. In other words, there is something inherent in the idea itself that goes almost contra-category or (in drugs) contra-class. For example, when a major pharmaceutical company in Europe was planning to launch its proton-pump inhibitor drug as the 5th in the market, they recognized that to build the launch around class-effect

functional benefits and features would get them nowhere. So, they resisted the usual and hired a consumer goods creative agency (NOT a medical creative shop) to develop a big idea that would help overcome being 5th to market. This agency didn't fail them; they came up with an unheard of and clever idea of linking the PPI class-effect benefits to something more important for the patient and definitely intriguing for the physicians: the joy of eating (without fear of heartburn). And they delivered the idea across multiple media and exposures—to include even the Sales Force's business cards—in a gastronomic format. Their results? Extended period growth rates of over 45%.

3. The Idea links directly to a legitimate and productive insight. Insights are the germinating seeds of ideas, reflecting untapped or overlooked attitudes in the minds of the target customer/consumer. Legitimate insights derive from some kind of research and typically do one of three things: exploit a weakness in competition; overcome some barrier confronting our brand; or tap into a compelling belief. Productive insights “pay off” with some perceived or real advantage that our brand offers. What better example of a big idea that linked to a legitimate and productive insight than Dove's “*Campaign for Real Beauty*”? Its grounding in nearly universal, untapped compelling beliefs among women that beauty advertising and marketing has always been “unreal” made it instantly legitimate. And its initiation by the Dove Brand—the first ever to go honest—gave the brand a perceived emotional benefit advantage...making the insight also very productive for the brand.

4. The Idea obviously has the potential to deliver against the brand's marketing objective. We emphasize the word “obviously” with good reason: any big idea should make crystal clear what behavior (bring in new users, increase consumption frequency, incite brand switching) the brand seeks from the target. The “*got milk?*” campaign's initial behavioral goal was transparent to everyone—make sure there is always milk in the house to accompany those foods and treats that absolutely require milk for enjoyment. Just as the Pepsi Challenge idea made it obvious that Coke drinkers should switch to the taste of Pepsi that they time and again prefer. Among all the criteria for a potential big idea, this one may be the best indicator. Of any potential idea ask yourself, “Is it apparent to our target what behavior we're seeking?”

5. The Idea should serve multiple constituencies. Really big ideas don't just move consumers. They also energize and motivate other critical business-building groups—like the Sales Force; like retail customers; like doctors and nurses. When initially conceived, Visa's “*Everywhere You Want to Be*” idea not only advised credit card users where Visa could be accepted and American Express could not; it also provided countless “prestige retail accounts” with incentives to disallow American Express. This alternate constituency “exclusivity” significantly grew Visa's volume and gave Amex fits.

6. The Idea—if copied by a competitor—would most likely not work. It has been written that, when first tested, MasterCard's “*Priceless*” campaign idea did not do well. But the marketing team decided to go with it anyway. Whatever their reasoning, it was pretty clear from inception that this was one idea Visa could not easily replicate. Visa had spent so many years and so much money beating up American Express and establishing the brand as “high prestige,” that there was no comfortable (or credible!) way for the brand to suddenly be the “un-prestige” card that MasterCard presented. Now this is a true test of a potential big idea: does it go where your toughest competitors cannot easily or comfortably follow?

In your next search for a Big Idea, put the candidates, one by one, to these 6 tests. See if doing so doesn't increase your odds of ending up with, at the very least, a bigger idea.

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