

Winning advertising creative - you get what you brief

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A brand manager's dream: Produce a TV advert showcasing the benefits of a product whilst bringing a tear to the consumer's eye and galvanising them to rush out to purchase it.

A brand manager's reality: For most brand managers, the more likely scenario, unfortunately, is that consumers want to skip past the ad they see on TV.

How many consumers are turned off rather than turned on by advertising creative? ... It seems like they have seen it before, even if they haven't - as adverts blend in to each other. How many people can tell the difference between different shampoo brand adverts before the particular brand in question appears? Who can really tell the difference between the ads for some car brands? What distinguishes one insurance company's ad from the next? And then, if they are distinctive, do you actually want to buy them anyway? What are they actually saying? Or are they saying so much that it's overwhelming?

The art of making winning advertising creative is no easy task.

As manufacturers of brands, we want to use our money effectively. We want to use the little but expensive time we have to say as much as possible, in the hope and expectation that someone is listening.

Brief is best, concise is cool

We often overload ads with all of the benefits of our product. It lasts the longest; does the most; targets the following areas of the skin; is for all consumers; is fun and serious; is on promotion at this store now; has a new product extension and has gone through a packaging change ... and we want to do this in a creative way that makes consumers remember the ads.

Sound familiar?

What often happens is that different levels of management get involved and tweak the advert to "just" include the pay-off line from the main campaign / just add another disclaimer / benefit / special etc and the result is that the advert gets so confusing that it's no longer relevant or distinctive. And who gets the blame for poor creative? The advertising agency! But it only responds to a brief you - the brand owner - delivers to them; poor brief = poor creative.

All of this confusion can be reduced if management spends the time upfront debating the brief. If the brief is clear, ultimately it's easy to measure the creative input and easy to gain alignment.

More often than not according to my agency colleagues, the brief is often written by the agency itself, because the client doesn't have the capability or know-how to write their own brief. This *can* result in creative adverts, but often they are completely off brand strategy.

The agency creative briefing is really the boring part of the process, but without it, the agency is not going to be able to produce a winning piece of creative advertising genius that is spot on your brand strategy. During my career I often recall agencies that would produce phenomenal creative on their own initiative and of which they were very proud - to the extent that they would ask if they could submit it to the Loeries, Cannes or whatever. But it had nothing to do with the strategy of the brand and would not build the business. Just because the result is creative, does it deliver what the brand wants it to?

Easier said than done? Here are some guidelines as to what goes into the perfect brief.

1. What's the history of the brand?

Ever had a creative work on your brand for more than a year? If you answered yes, count yourself amongst the lucky few. Never assume that because your brand has been around for a while that the creative knows it in the way you want them to. What does your brand stand for, what is its equity? Always include this in the brief.

2. What is the business purpose of the advert?

Is it to double the sales of the brand? Is it to create trial? Is it to increase the frequency or amount of use of the product? Or have you launched a new product / new product features and you want to create awareness? These are imperative to the creative outcome. Take the award-winning Prado advert last year. I would guess that their business objective was to create awareness of the benefits of the Prado. Clearly, the very average Telkom mobile adverts' business purpose was to create trial of their service as they seemed to target new users.

3. What are the benefits of your product that the creative could use to achieve the business purpose?

Although an averagely executed advert, the clear message from the Telkom mobile advert was about reliability of the network. It clearly indicated that the Telkom network is significantly better than others are.

What does your brand do? Does it work faster, better, create more fun, understand the consumer better, connect with their heart (the emotionally touching Bells advert that is currently on air is a great example) than any other brand?

What are the standouts of your brand? Important as it is to know what you do better than your competitors do, it is just as important to know what you *don't* do better than any other brand. The creatives need to know this too so they don't waste their efforts focusing on this.

Sometimes the distinguishing benefit may be emotional, like the Dove Sketches campaign. It focussed on how Dove understands you better than any other beauty brand and therefore you should use the brand - an emotional benefit may be sufficient to meet your business goals.

4. Who are you talking to?

This is often the one that people get wrong. What demographic and what psychographic does your target market or campaign have? 18-49 is not a good target market. An 18-year-old thinks and does things very differently to a 49-year-old. Be narrow and focussed, and if you target a core group of consumers well it's significantly better than trying to be all things to all people and ending up with no one buying your brand.

5. What insights do you have about your audience?

An insight is not a demographic description of your target market. It is often the WHY they do things. The Dove Sketches

campaign clearly worked as it was based on an insight that women believe that everyone else only sees their worst possible physical flaws and they then see themselves through this exaggerated negative light. What is it about your consumer's way of thinking that is relevant to your brand and that your brand can legitimately address in a credible way? This may require research but your end product will be so much richer. The potential insight from the beautiful Bells advert is that we put in so much unseen effort so that we can relate to our children as we always hope they can achieve more than we did.

6. What are the deliverables?

Sounds obvious, right, but sometimes it's a campaign that will go across mediums and other times it's a single digital campaign. This is just to ensure everyone is on the same page. I have learned this the hard way. I thought I was crystal clear on the deliverables and our agency believed we were looking for more than I had asked. To be fair, I had no written communication that ensured we were all on the same page. It was an expensive mistake as I had to pay for the unnecessary work done.

7. Keep it simple.

If the agency can understand easily what your key message is, it can more easily turn that into a great creative execution. If it can't, don't expect much back. Albert Einstein said it best. "Make everything as simple as possible but not simpler."

ABOUT DINA SAFFER-MYERS

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