

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Monday, February 8, 2016

HOW TO JUDGE (SUPER BOWL) ADVERTISING



By the time you read this article Super Bowl 50 has come and gone. And, we're in Zurich preparing to conduct a Leadership Communications (as in advertising) workshop.

Hopefully your team was the winner. Regardless, if you were an advertiser it is important to know if your commercial scored with consumers. And, if you were not an advertiser in this sports "adstravaganza," you, as a marketer, are undoubtedly involved in debates around the water cooler as to which sponsorship brand(s) had the "best commercial."

Unfortunately, much of the debate focuses around "entertainment" value, as measured by meaningless "likeability" ratings in polls conducted among viewers, and reported by the media. At a record of \$5-million US for airtime, per each 30-second spot (which is \$166,666.67 per second, an increase of about 11% versus 2015), the advertiser's marketing communication had better be exceptional to generate a positive ROI (return on investment). As advertising legend Bill Bernbach stated, "It's not creative unless it sells." Instead of focusing on "likeability," *the real measure of worth is "effectiveness."* This is determined by the impact of the communication in the marketplace and, more specifically, *whether it rings the cash register, and builds the business.*

Marketers should not fall into the trap of measuring the effectiveness of marketing communications (of which television advertising is merely one avenue) by irrelevant criteria such as "likeability," or "popularity," or "funniest," but instead on the basis of whether it *stimulates target-customers to adopt the specific behavior needed to grow sales* (i.e., the Communication Behavior Objective). We need to step back and judge marketing communications (regardless of the form it takes and/or the medium used to deliver it) in a truly professional matter.

"Professionals" judge communications based upon perceived (and, after the fact, real) effectiveness. *Effectiveness is about getting results.* We can judge, in an attempt to determine, whether a communication will be effective (before the final results are in) by assessing the:

1. Intended Communication Strategy (and identifying the Communication Behavior Objective);
2. Campaign Idea; and, finally,
3. Execution.

Communication Strategy

It all starts with determining what the messenger (or in the case of Super Bowl 50, the advertiser) intends (the Communication Strategy), and to what end (the Communication Behavior Objective). This consists of inferring three elements: 1) target-customer; 2) key thought (i.e., benefit or belief); and 3) support for the key thought (i.e., the reason-why). If the communications are true to a technically sound, single-minded strategy we should be able to infer it correctly. If not then it is, at best, a WAG (wild-assed guess!). But in the latter case it won't matter since any communication that does not deliver against a relevant, meaningfully differentiated strategy, no matter how strong the execution, is not likely to be effective communications.

In order to infer the strategy we need to ask ourselves "who is the intended target-customer." This includes identifying: 1) the *demographic and psychographic profile*; 2) *condition, lifestyle or occasion* (depending upon the sector and category); 3) the target's *attitudes* about the category and/or brand; 4) current (competitive) *product usage and dissatisfactions*; 5) *telling behaviors* consistent with their attitudes and psychographic profile; and 6) *needs* of the intended target-customer (rational and/or emotional) that the advertiser can best satisfy, or own with the "brand."

Next we need to determine the *key thought*. This is what the advertiser must get the target-customer to believe in order to drive a shift in attitudes needed to trigger the achievement of the Communication Behavior Objective. In most cases, it's the *benefit* that the marketer is promising to its target. The benefit should link back to, and payoff, the need. The benefit can be a product benefit (namely, what the product does), customer benefit (what's in it for the customer), and/or an emotional benefit (how it makes the target feel). Regardless of whatever articulation of the benefit is employed, *it must drive achievement of the brand's intended Communication Behavior Objective* (e.g., switching, adoption, frequency of usage, etc.) and, in turn, grow sales consistent with the brand's Business Objectives (i.e., sales, market share and profits). It should be also be clear *what* the communicator wants the target-customer to do (i.e., the Communication Behavior Objective).

Finally, we need to identify the *reason-why* support for the target to believe, really believe, the key thought (most likely that the product can fulfill the benefit promise of the communications). Reason-why (also referred to as reason-to-believe) support can be intrinsic (i.e., inside the product) and/or extrinsic (i.e., outside of the product, such as an endorsement from an authoritative body). If we don't have convincing reason-why support customers might not find the communication promise of the benefit believable. As such, the communications will fail to motivate achievement of the Communication Behavior Objective.

Once we are satisfied with our inferred Communication Strategy, and Communication Behavior Objective, *we next need to apply our judgment regarding whether it is strategically sound and meaningful (i.e., competitive)* given our knowledge of the target's attitudes and behavior, category, and competition. We need to determine whether it is relevant, and meaningfully differentiated, versus competition. Importantly, *we need to use our best judgment to assess if the strategy is capable of achieving the inferred Communication Behavior Objective* with the target-customer.

The Campaign Idea

Next, we need to determine if there's a *Campaign Idea*, and then assess it. *The Campaign Idea transforms the Communication Strategy into compelling customer language that moves the customer to action.* It consists of three parts. These are: 1) the Key Copy Words; 2) coupled with a dramatization of the benefit; 3) within the context of the Naked Idea (i.e., creative concept that deals with *how* the benefit will be communicated in each and every execution, and across all communication mediums).

The first question we need to address is whether there is a Campaign Idea driving the communications. We should be able to articulate the Naked Idea (i.e., creative concept), which drives each execution, in no more than a sentence or two. The Key Copy Words also need to dramatize the key thought (benefit) in customer (not strategic!) language. The Key Copy Words serve as a post-it note that helps target-customers remember the brand and, certainly, its key thought. Importantly, they must strike a responsive chord in such a way as to move the customer to action. The final part is the core dramatization, which can be visual or audio in execution. It dramatizes the key thought in one visual, or leads customers to it. By the way, it's more, much more, than a smiling face of a contented customer, or a close-up of the product.

The second question to address is whether *the 3 parts of the Campaign Idea work together to "dramatize" a single-minded message* that effectively communicates the key thought (again, most likely, the benefit) stated in the Communication Strategy. In other words, it needs to be both single-minded and emotive. Finally, *we must use our judgment to determine whether the Campaign Idea will compel targeted customers to take the intended action identified in the Communication Behavior Objective.*

Execution

This is the moment most marketers rush to address – the *execution*. Typically, when asked what they think about a piece of marketing communication, such as a television or print ad, the majority of marketers will pipe-in regarding the execution (more specifically the situation and what they see and/or hear), avoiding the more critical elements of the Communication Strategy and Campaign Idea. And, oftentimes their comments regarding the execution are rather superficial, lacking a thoughtful analysis. Doubt us? Prove it to yourself. Ask a colleague about one of the Super Bowl 50 ads, or, for that matter, any piece of marketing communication, and listen to what they play back to you. Most likely it will be executional in nature.

The execution certainly has its place of importance. *Its role is to cut through the clutter, engage the target-customer, and showcase the Campaign Idea.* Just as the Campaign Idea delivers the Communication Strategy, the execution delivers the Campaign Idea. The execution not only serves to achieve this important objective but may also be expected to add power, and credibility to the promise.

Additionally, the execution should *establish brand linkage*. What we mean is that it helps the customer remember the brand, and its benefit. There are other things that one should assess, such as audio-visual synch (i.e., that the words and pictures go together), type of execution (e.g., direct voice versus voice over, demonstration, etc.), simplicity of the language, ease of navigating for the customer, etc. Many of these other factors are media specific. For example, whenever you assess the executional elements of a TV commercial (such as a Super Bowl 50 ad), ask yourself these important questions:

1. Do you understand what is happening in the advertising?
2. Does it tell a picture story?
3. Does it contain drama or another powerful element (e.g., compelling presenter, etc.) to cut through the clutter?
4. Are the words and pictures in synch to enhance understanding and memorability of the story?
5. Does it dramatize the benefit to set it apart from competition?
6. Does it showcase the Campaign Idea?
7. Does it add credibility to the promise?
8. Is the brand made relevant and integral to the spot to ensure strong brand linkage?

If you answer “no” to any of the above questions the execution is lacking, and further work is needed.

Pulling It Together

Now that we have inferred, and assessed, the critical elements of a marketing communication (such as one of the Super Bowl 50 television ads), namely the Communication Strategy (including the Communication Behavior Objective), Campaign Idea, and execution, well, we are ready to pull together our judgment regarding the *effectiveness* of the communications. We need to express our judgment through the “overview” and add-value through the inclusion of “indicated actions.”

- 1) ***The Overview*** – This is your *conclusion regarding the effectiveness of the communication* following your thoughtful assessment of the three key elements. By effectiveness, we mean will it serve to achieve the Communication Behavior Objective and, in turn, sell or, better yet, compel target-customers to take action. Therefore, your conclusion might be: extremely effective; very effective; effective; somewhat effective; or not effective. You then support your conclusion by sharing your thoughtful analysis of the aforementioned elements in the previous paragraphs.
- 2) ***Indicated Actions*** – This is where you advance your thoughts as to *what needs to be done to make the communication more effective*. It’s not what’s wrong. Instead, it’s all about what you would need to see (and have done) in order to make the communication more productive in stimulating the intended target-customer behavior and achieving the Communication Behavior Objective.

Your judgment may differ from others assessing the effectiveness of any given communication – and that’s okay. Yours is just one hypothesis. Theirs is another. We can confirm, or change it, by learning the target-customers’ take on the critical elements of the Communication Strategy, and the appeal of the message to the target in the absolute, and relative to other products or services. At least now we are looking with the eyes of a professional by dealing with the essential criteria in judging the effectiveness of marketing communications.

Is this hard work? You bet it is! But this is the way a true professional judges marketing communications. True professionals work hard and, better yet, they work smart.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

1. **Reread this article** – No, we’re not challenging your reading comprehension. This is a very dense article, requiring considerable thought. It might be a good idea to outline the steps to conducting a thoughtful analysis and assessment.
2. **Follow these disciplined guidelines** - When you review marketing communications, whether it is something close to your business or just practice while you watch television, skim a magazine, or come across something digital, develop the habit of doing these things:
 - **Conduct a professional analysis** - Identify and assess the 3 key elements, Communication Strategy, Campaign Idea and execution within the context of the Communication Behavior Objective, using the framework we’ve shared with you.
 - **Tell where you stand** - Provide an *overview* of what you think about the effectiveness of the communication (and reasons for your judgment based upon your disciplined and thoughtful analysis); and
 - **Add-Value** - Identify *direction*, designed to make more productive any one or more of the elements needing work. Remember, here’s where we identify what needs to be done to make the work more effective, as opposed to merely pointing out what we think is wrong.
3. **Put it into practice** - We encourage and invite you to give this way of judging marketing communications a try. Take one of the commercials appearing on Super Bowl 50, roll-up your sleeves, and get to work. Oh, if you’re concerned about going solo, pull together a few marketers and make it a “lunch and learn” experience.

If you learn to do this with each and every marketing communication, you’ll be a Super Bowl winner in judging the effectiveness of advertising.

Richard Czerniawski and Mike Maloney

If you’re interested in becoming a more effective manager in the development of marketing communications that make a difference contact us to learn about our Leadership Marketing Communications Workshop and/or Coaches Clinic.

Richard Czerniawski

.....
430 Abbotsford Road
Kenilworth, Illinois 60043
tel 847.256.8820
fax 847.256.8847
.....

Reply to Richard:
rdczerniawski@cs.com or
richardcz@bdn-intl.com

Mike Maloney

.....
1506 West 13th Street, #17
Austin, Texas 78703
tel 512.236.0971
fax 512.236.0972
.....

reply to Mike:
mikewmaloney@gmail.com or
mwm@bdn-intl.com

BDN International