



# ***Developing A More Productive Creative Brief***

## ***The “Essential” Creative Brief<sup>®</sup>***

**BRAND DEVELOPMENT NETWORK *International***

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# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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## DEVELOPING A MORE PRODUCTIVE CREATIVE BRIEF – Part 1, Design and Composition of The Essential Creative Brief

Deepwater Horizon was, and remains, an ecological disaster of epic proportions. It claimed lives and fouled the sea, killed aquatic life, despoiled the white, sandy beaches of the Gulf Coast, negatively impacted the livelihood of many people, and threatened economic recovery from the financial meltdown. Sadly, the aftermath of this horror is expected to take decades to fully address and remedy.

While the well continued to spew tens of thousands of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico experts valiantly tried to find a way to cap it, to shut-off the gushing outflow of oil. At the same time, U.S. legislators demanded answers from British Petroleum executives to questions such as: how did this happen; could it have been prevented; who is responsible; why didn't BP do more; what can we do to prevent this from ever happening again; and so forth. (Our Washington leadership also sought effective solutions, which they have long been bereft, regarding how to clean-up and restore the pristine beauty and ecology of the Gulf area.)

Tony Hayward, who at that time served as CEO of British Petroleum, testified before a congressional committee, whose members unmercifully grilled him regarding the incident, situation, and BP's culpability in this disaster. Mr. Hayward deferred questions dealing with the *specific details of causality*, as he claimed he was awaiting the conclusion of an investigation being undertaken by BP. Notwithstanding the specific details, four broad areas were identified as contributing to this disaster: faulty engineering; errors in human behavior; lack of oversight; and dysfunctional corporate culture.

The Deepwater Horizon situation provides an interesting metaphor for the development of the Creative Brief. These aforementioned four areas provide us fertile ground for investigation into the failure of marketers to develop Creative Briefs that provide strategically appropriate, single-minded direction for the development of leadership advertising, and its subsequent assessment. While the results of mismanaging these four areas in the development of the Creative Brief do not have anywhere near the same negative impact as wrought by the Deepwater Horizon well, they contribute to undermining the health of a brand, the relationship between the brand and its customers, and agency productivity. This issue of DISPATCHES will deal with engineering, the design and composition, of the Essential Creative Brief. Subsequent issues will address each of the three remaining areas.

*Engineering is about design.* Not design for the sake of aesthetics but something that will contribute to proper functioning. It's about structure. It's about integrity of the unit. It's an essential discipline. It directs form to guide proper functioning, where *form contributes to producing better outcomes*. Faults in engineering, especially deep below the sea, may have paved the way for eventual failure. Additionally, lack of sufficient back-up systems in the engineering

design were unable to prevent catastrophe, leading to the failure of the well and the grave consequences from it.

Engineering is also important when it comes to designing the Creative Brief. In this case we are referring to the elements that comprise the “Essential” Creative Brief. This consists only of those elements that provide, as stated in its name, “essential” direction for developing leadership advertising. What we experience when clients share their Creative Briefs with us are elements that are either: a) inappropriate (e.g., non-essential, misleading, etc.); b) missing; c) inconsistent; and d) contradictory. The “Essential” Creative Brief will remedy these issues.

### **Review of 10 Creative Briefs**

Here’s a review of 10 Creative Briefs for consumer and OTC brands. These are taken from one company (various divisions, brands within a division and their agencies). As shown in the table below, there are a wide variety of elements (more than 50) being addressed. Additionally, you will observe the inconsistency in language. For example, some Creative Briefs identify “benefit” while others address “messages,” “brand” and/or “product benefits.”

<b><u>Creative Brief Element</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>
• Why are we advertising	10
• Brand Positioning	30
• Brand Idea	10
• Background	10
• Assignment	40*
• Task	10
• Budget	30
• Timing	40
- Timing	30
- Deadlines	10
• Required Materials	10
• Where in the World	10
• Objective	90
- Objective	20
- Business Objective	10
- Marketing Objective	10
- Communication Objective	50*
• Barrier to Overcome	10
• Problem	10
• Customer/Consumer Insight	70*
• Discoveries	10
• Target Audience	90*
- Target	80
- Core Target	10
• When and Where Target Most Responsive	10
• Stimulus	

• Competitive Framework	
• Benefit	90
- Benefit	60
- Key Benefit	10*
- Brand/Product Benefit	10
- Primary/Secondary Messages	10
• Desired Customer Response	10
• Reason-to-Believe	80
- Support	60
- Reason-to-Believe	20*
• Tone	70
- Tone/Tonality	50
- Tone & Manner	20
• Brand Character	40*
- Tone and Brand Character	20
• Mandates	70
- Executional Considerations	10
- Creative Guidelines	10
- Mandatories and Other Stuff	10
- Creative Mandatories	10
- Executional Mandatories	20
- Visual & Communication Mandatories	10
- Legal & Regulatory Mandatories	10*
• Channel Thinking	10
• Cross-Sell Level	10
• Approvals	50
- Approvals	10
- Client	20
- Agency	10
- Client & Agency	10*

\* Essential elements

As you can observe, this is poor performance on essential elements. And, there's a lot of time and energy being focused on non-essential elements, which ultimately dilute focus.

Additionally, some briefs contain multiple expressions of what the advertising communications are to deliver. For example, a brief contains "benefit" and "desired customer response." Another calls-out "brand" and "product benefits." Yet a third seeks "primary" and "secondary messages." These are clearly not single-minded and highly unlikely to direct the development of a single-minded message delivered via a compelling Campaign Idea.

Remember, these are from one company and its agencies. Imagine how many more elements exist in the wider world of other companies, sectors, countries and agencies. It blows the mind!

## **Problem with current Creative Briefs**

This variety of terms creates problems. The first problem is that *there is no clear picture within the organization of what elements are essential and which of them are not*. This results in diluting attention and focus from what is really important in directing and assessing creative work. If the Creative Brief is not clear then it is highly unlikely the creative work will be clear, and lead to leadership advertising. (Actually everyone makes it clear in his own way. And that's a problem, a major problem. The agency will select what they believe is appropriate. It is highly unlikely that the client will select the same thing. Moreover, there will not be unanimity among the client team. The result is strategic discussions when managers are supposed to be assessing the creative. If you think this is likely to spur the development of leadership advertising, think again.)

A second problem is that the *senior managers responsible for approving and acting upon these briefs have no standard by which to compare one versus another*. This can cause confusion and undermine the ability and insights of these senior managers in the development of the communication strategy (which is the heart of the Creative Brief). It also takes away from training marketing managers in how to think and develop a sound, strategically appropriate and single-minded brief. It's no wonder many managers do not know how to develop an effective Creative Brief. It's no wonder that strategic direction is generic. It's no wonder the creative process is so arduous. It's no wonder that most advertising sucks.

## **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

We need sound engineering. The Creative Brief should be designed to do what it is expected to accomplish. Provide sound, strategically appropriate, single-minded direction for the development of leadership advertising. Here's what we need to do about it:

1. ***Adopt the "Essential" Creative Brief.*** These are the elements contained in the Essential Creative Brief:
  - Assignment
  - Communication Behavior Objective
  - Target Customer
  - Customer/Consumer Insight
    - Basis for Insight
    - Insight
  - Key Thought (Benefit/Belief)
  - Reasons-to-Believe
  - Brand Character
  - Legal & Regulatory Mandates
  - Client and Agency Approvals

We call this the "Essential" Creative Brief because, well, these are essential for providing sound, strategically appropriate, single-minded direction for the development of the brand's advertising communications. If you are missing any of these elements, incorporate them into your Creative Brief. You will need them.

2. **Delete anything from your current Creative Brief that is non-essential.** If it is not in the aforementioned point, delete it! Anything that is not essential drains energy and focus. We need to be doing the right things, not the wrong things, in the right way. It will provide us with the proper focus for strategic thinking, and our agencies with the proper focus for creative development.
3. **Get your agency on-board with the Essential Creative Brief and use it throughout the organization.** One of the reasons we have so many creative brief formats floating around in our organizations is that we typically use more than one agency. Each agency has its own brief. That may be all well and good for a given agency but it is hell for a client organization. As mentioned previously it confuses senior managers who have to review different brief formats and undermines their ability to focus their experience and insights into ensuring appropriate strategic direction. Also, it undermines institutionalization, which is essential to building capabilities and creating a learning organization. The client needs to get the agency to collaborate with them on adopting, and developing, the Essential Creative Brief for each new campaign development assignment.

If you're ready, read Part 2, where we will deal with the role of each element in the Essential Creative Brief and tackle "human behavior," which deals with how to address each correctly.



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## DEVELOPING A MORE PRODUCTIVE CREATIVE BRIEF – Part 2, Human Behavior Issues

We are using the Deepwater Horizon ecological disaster as a metaphor for what goes wrong in the development of the Creative Brief. (And, what can go wrong will go wrong!) Part 1 addressed engineering. This consists of the design and composition of the Creative Brief. We defined the Essential Creative Brief, as providing the information that is absolutely essential for the development of leadership advertising. This, Part 2, addresses errors, or human behavior issues. While we are not competent to talk about the myriad human errors leading to and/or compounding the Deepwater Horizon debacle, we are knowledgeable as it relates to the development of the Essential Creative Brief. Therefore, this deals with the role of each element in the Essential Creative Brief and tackles the most common errors in “human behavior” that compromise marketers’ ability to develop actionable briefs.

**Assignment** – This should be self-explanatory. What is it that you want the agency to develop? Television advertising? Print advertising? A sales aid? Website? Integrated communication campaign consisting of alternate media vehicles that work together? A big, juicy Campaign Idea? What? In addition to the “what” of the assignment is the timing, as in when do you need it?

“What” you want the agency to develop certainly needs to be consistent with the budget and, as such, your communication media plan, which is based upon your Media Objectives (which tie to the Communication Behavior Objectives). Some marketers actually include the budget level in the assignment but we do not believe it is absolutely essential for the creative team because: a) creative personnel do not develop communications to a budget but, instead, a Communication Behavior Objective; and b) communication budgets are forever changing and if it was so essential it would, therefore, require marketers to continually update the Creative Brief, otherwise it would be rendered useless. However, if your organization feels it is absolutely essential, we would not object, strenuously. We leave it to you.

Message length can be an important component of the assignment. However, we need to be careful in managing this too. If we insist on a short message (as in 15-second TV spot) we may: a) fail to get a big Campaign Idea because the agency (or resource group) creative personnel do not believe their ideas can be executed in the short message length; and/or b) fail to communicate the Key Thought in a compelling manner. (This is a virtual certainty if your Creative Brief contains Executional Considerations, in which “considerations” is another word for “mandates.”)

Timing is critical. We need to provide the agency with enough time to throw out the bad ideas, dialogue with customers and iterate our way to successful communications. We came across a Creative Brief for an Rx pharmaceutical (i.e., prescription drug) switch to a breakthrough OTC (i.e. over the counter) drug, which promised to prevent a catastrophic cardiovascular event for the Target Customer. The assignment provided the agency with only “one-week” to develop the

creative work against this important promise. Insane! The agency, or creative resource team, should develop the timing. We, marketers, should be sensitive to begin creative development with sufficient time to meet our in-market dates for the communication.

The most frequent errors to avoid in handling the Assignment are: a) not clearly articulating what we want the agency to develop; and b) providing insufficient time for creative development.

**Communication Behavior Objective** – This is what the communication needs to accomplish. It is a specific customer “behavior” needed to achieve the brand’s Marketing Objectives (overarching behavior objectives) and, in turn, realize the Business Objectives of sales, market share and profits. The Communication Behavior Objective must be SMART: Specific (as in penetration, switching, etc.); Measureable (use numbers that can be measured with marketing research); Achievable (as in “realistic”); Relevant (ties to the Marketing Objectives and, in turn, to the Business Objectives); and, finally, Time-bound (achieved in a specific time period).

This is so very important to do correctly since it identifies the task of the communications, and making it accountable for results. What is it that you need for the communications to accomplish? Get competitive users to switch to purchasing, or prescribing, your brand? What? If the Communication Behavior Objective is penetration (i.e., using or doing something they have not done before) then the communications will need to convince the Target Customer why it is important to use or do it. On the other hand, if the Communication Behavior Objective is to get the Target Customer to switch then the communications will need to convince him that your brand is a better choice.

“Awareness” is not a Communication Behavior Objective. It is a Media Objective! If your media is \$10-million and the budget is cut to \$5-million can we expect to achieve the same level of awareness? Of course not! Also, the creative personnel cannot develop communications to an “awareness” level. Nor is “trial” or “sampling” a Communication Behavior Objective. These are Promotion Objectives. It is important to get this correct since the Campaign Idea must work to achieve the appropriate Communication Behavior Objective.

The most frequent errors that need to be addressed when developing the Communication Behavior Objective are: a) not having a “behavior” objective; b) stating a media, promotion or some other marketing mix element objective instead of a Communication Behavior Objective; c) having an inappropriate strategic objective (e.g. penetration versus switching); and d) the objective not being SMART.

**Target Customer** – This gets at who we must convince or win-over to achieve the brand’s Marketing and, ultimately, Business Objectives. This is the target for the Communication Behavior Objective. We define the target going well beyond a media target, often referred to as the target audience. Instead, the Target Customer is much more. It is our positioning target, as articulated in the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement, or a subset of it.

It is not enough to define the target as “moms 20 – 34-years of age with children 2 – 9-years of age,” “Internists treating diabetics,” or “Orthopedic surgeons.” This tells the creative personnel little to nothing about the target; nor does it demonstrate sufficient understanding to unearth legitimate and productive customer insights. We need to define the Target Customer with several elements, which are: “demographics”; “psychographics”; “patient-condition” (for pharmaceutical and medical device products), “lifestage” or “occasion” (for consumer products); “attitudes”

about their situation or the category of products; “current usage” (name brands they are using) and “dissatisfactions” (or for dissatisfactions you can insinuate given the performance of your brand); “telling behaviors” that give insights into how the Target Customer thinks, and provides support for the aforementioned elements; and “needs” – both rational and emotional (that the brand can better meet or serve).

Using all several elements provides a clear and complete picture, and demonstrates understanding, of the Target Customer. Using all several elements does not narrow the target anymore than presenting the details of your curriculum vitae narrows you. It makes the Target Customer more accessible.

It is critically important not to cite “generic” or “category” needs. These must be needs that the brand can better satisfy than competition. Importantly when these needs are satisfied by the benefit (found in the Key Thought) it will lead to the achievement of the Communication Behavior Objective. One other note, the emotional need may not be necessary. If you have a product performance advantage then go with a functional (i.e., rational) need. In this case you would not include the emotional need because to do so you would have to pay-off the emotional need with an emotional benefit. This could dilute the persuasiveness of your communications and/or increase the difficulty of developing a big Campaign Idea.

The most common errors to be addressed in defining the Target Customer group are: a) defining a media versus communication target; b) providing an incomplete target definition (e.g., just using demographics and overlooking each of the other important components of the Target Customer definition – psychographics, condition/lifestage/occasion, attitudes, current usage and dissatisfactions, telling behaviors and needs); c) identifying generic or category needs that don’t differentiate your offering; and d) employing an emotional need that is either not called for or is not realistic.

***Customer Insight*** – This is the cornerstone of developing leadership communications. The Customer Insight must be both “legitimate” and “productive.” An insight is not a fact. Instead it is a deep-seated belief that governs customer behavior. By “legitimate” we mean it falls into one of three areas: 1) perceived or real weakness that the brand can exploit; 2) attitudinal barrier to overcome regarding your brand that if you were to remove it then it would lead to (faster) growth; and 3) untapped compelling belief that you can own through commitment and persistence. By “productive” we mean that the insight needs to be able to be paid-off by the Key Thought and achieve the Communication Behavior Objective. It is imperative that the Customer Insight be legitimate and productive.

We state the Customer Insight in three parts: 1) basis for the insight (one of the three areas mentioned in the aforementioned paragraph); 2) the insight itself as it would be expressed by the Target Customer (we write it in italics and bracket it with quotes); and 3) the Key Thought, which is the pay-off.

The Customer Insight will identify an overlooked, untapped or poorly satisfied need. It will also lead to the pay-off, which is the Key Thought. The Key Thought seeds the attitude or belief that is needed to drive the customer behavior to achieve the Communication Behavior Objective. Everything, absolutely everything, is linked.

The most common errors to be addressed when discovering and articulating the Customer Insight are: a) the insight is not “legitimate” as defined by falling into one of the three key areas mentioned above; b) the insight is not stated using all three parts – basis for the insight, insight in customer language, and the pay-off (expressed as the Key Thought); c) the customer insight is not “productive”; and d) it doesn’t tie back to the Communication Behavior Objective and/or forward to the Key Thought.

**Key Thought** – This is the belief or benefit that will lead the Target Customer to take the behavior specified in the Communication Behavior Objective. It cannot be generic. It must suggest either something that is better in degree, or in kind of benefit. It must lead to driving preference for your brand. It should be persuasive if it flows from a legitimate Customer Insight.

All too often there is no Key Thought but, instead, merely a benefit that is generic, puffery or unrelated to the needs of the Target Customer. All marketers must ask themselves whether the Key Thought will drive the intended customer behavior. If not, you must pass on it and search for something that is more meaningful. That search should begin with a thorough understanding of the Target Customer and the discovery of a legitimate and productive Customer Insight.

Key errors to be addressed are that the Key Thought (i.e., benefit or belief): a) is generic; b) does not flow from a “legitimate” customer insight; and c) will not drive preference and/or lead to the achievement of the Communication Behavior Objective.

**Reason-to-Believe** – This is the support for the Key Thought. Its purpose is to help make the Key Thought believable to the Target Customer. If you have more than one benefit articulated in the Key Thought then you need to have support for each. The Reasons-to-Believe must link to the Key Thoughts.

In virtually all cases the Reason-to-Believe needs to be an incontrovertible fact and/or an endorsement from a recognized authority. It cannot be more benefit claims. Often marketers will take benefits that they were not able to get into the Key Thought section of the Creative Brief (hopefully because they disciplined themselves to be choiceful) and stash them here (which means that “choicefulness” has been selective, as opposed to comprehensive). If the statement is not a piece of evidence (as in being able to stand-up in a court of law) then it is not a Reason-to-Believe.

The best Reasons-to-Believe are those that when presented to customers allow them to immediately identify the benefit. Also, the RTB, like a benefit, needs to be meaningfully differentiated from the competition. In many cases pharmaceutical products will offer-up clinical studies that merely indicate that the product works but does not assist in stimulating customer preference for the product.

Often the only RTBs the marketer will consider are those that product research and development personnel provide to them. However, we marketers (and creative personnel) can help create marketing RTBs. For example, Jeep created the Trail Rated system, which serves as support for consumers to believe that Jeep vehicles perform best.

Finally, what worked in the past for you, or another brand, may no longer be competitive. For example, when Crest Toothpaste received the first ADA endorsement, which was a major breakthrough at the time, they were able to triple their market share. However, if a product were

to get the ADA endorsement in today's age it is highly unlikely to fuel incremental growth because the ADA endorsement is commonplace and has become a cost of entry.

Common errors in handling Reasons-to-Believe include: a) making benefit claims in the RTB section; b) using generic (e.g., clinical studies that are the same as competitors) Reasons-to-Believe; c) not linking the RTBs to the Key Thought; d) having "floating" RTBs (i.e., don't connect to a Key Thought; and e) limiting RTBs to only what product research and development personnel provide.

***Brand Character*** – This states the personality of the brand. It should be lifted directly from the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement. It represents the soul of the brand and will serve to ensure that the creative communications reflect the brand positioning strategy.

It is not, nor should it be confused with, tone. Brand Character gets at the personality of the brand. It is strategic. Tone gets at a facet of Brand Character and is executional. It is about messaging, not the brand. One does not know what "tone" the advertising messaging should have since it is based up the Campaign Idea. On the other hand, we do know the personality of the brand, since it is found in the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement, and need to reflect it in all our communications.

The Brand Character (or what incorrectly passes for it) is usually a series of adjectives such as "trusted," "caring," "leader," and "authority." These are rather generic and have little meaning beyond making managers feel good that they have addressed this section of the Creative Brief. Instead we need to create a narrative that is either aspirational, and serves as a badge, or reflects the relationship of the brand to the Target Customer.

Common errors in handling the Brand Character include: a) using tone instead of Brand Character; b) not lifting it directly from the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement; c) stating the personality as a series of common adjectives, which have no real meaning, as opposed to using a narrative; and d) choosing a personality that either does not lead to "badging," or establish the relationship of the brand to the Target Customer.

***Legal/Regulatory Mandates*** – Now, let's be clear on this element of the Essential Creative Brief. It is titled "Legal/Regulatory" mandates. It deals with laws (e.g., as in use of trademark) and regulations (e.g., as directed by the FDA). It is not titled "Executional Considerations or Mandates."

Legal and Regulatory Mandates should be kept to legal and regulatory directives only. We should not, and must not, employ executional directions. Executional directions sabotage, obstruct, and thwart the development of Campaign Ideas. Now, we know that many senior managers are going to disagree with us on this issue. Executional Considerations are in virtually every Creative Brief we see. We can't explain the logic of using Executional Considerations other than marketers have little faith in their Key Thought and/or their agency creative capability. Or, perhaps, they think they know what the advertising should look like. This is an absolute idea killer.

The only error that we are concerned with regarding Legal/Regulatory Mandates is the use of Executional Considerations, which foul the development of leadership advertising.

**Approvals** – This is essential to signify that the client and agency are committed to achieving the strategic direction as stated in the Creative Brief. As such, the Essential Creative Brief is signed-off by the most senior client manager responsible for approving the advertising, and the most senior agency manager responsible for delivering the advertising – before beginning creative development work.

Many of the Creative Briefs that are shared with us either have no signatories, or the only signatories are those from the client team, or the signatories are lower level managers who do not have the authority to approve the final creative work.

If we don't have approval and commitment to achieve the Creative Brief, as indicated by the signatures of the senior client and agency manager, then it is likely that we will have strategic discussions when we should be assessing the creative work. It is also highly likely that the creative development process will take longer and be fraught with frustration. Finally, it is very likely that the client-agency relationship will be tarnished and its productivity undermined.

The errors to avoid with Approvals are: a) not noting approvals by gaining signatures; b) only having client approvals; and c) not having the senior most client responsible for approving the advertising and the senior most agency person responsible for delivering the communications sign-off on the Essential Creative Brief.

## **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

Now you know how to approach the Essential Creative Brief and what behavioral errors to avoid. But it would also be wise to consider the following:

1. ***Devote your full attention to developing the Essential Creative Brief.*** Andy Langer, Chairman and Chief Creative Officer, Roberts & Langer Advertising, says, “The Creative Brief is the most important piece of paper in our agency.” This is a profound statement. Can we marketers say the same thing? With conviction? The Essential Creative Brief sets the table for the development of leadership advertising. Give it your full attention. Treat it as if it is the most important undertaking for the brand.
2. ***Develop the Essential Creative Brief in collaboration with your agency resource team.*** Developing and handing-off a Creative Brief for execution does not work as well as when both client and agency collaborate. A deeper appreciation and understanding ensues. What's more the agency has ownership in delivering against it and will hit the ground running with ideas that are bound to percolate during the Creative Brief development stage. Consider also including the creative personnel in the development of the brief. Good creative personnel are inherently strategic just as good strategic managers are inherently creative. Moreover, you will avoid a tug of war between the account and creative team.
3. ***Make certain that the Creative Brief provides single-minded direction.*** All the parts of the Essential Creative Brief must be linked. We refer to this in our training programs as being “cohesive.” There is one link that is particularly important. We refer to it as the Strategic Triangle. This is the link between Target Customer Needs, the Customer Insight and the Key Thought. All three must point in the same direction. If they do not then this

would indicate multiple directions. If you are interested in learning more about the Strategic Triangle, contact Richard Czerniawski at [richardcz@bdn-intl.com](mailto:richardcz@bdn-intl.com).

4. ***Collaborate not just with the agency but your senior management when developing the Essential Creative Brief.*** This will gain the advantage of their experience and insights, which may prove invaluable. Also, it will deepen their understanding and appreciation for the strategic direction, which will be invaluable in helping the creative development process run smoothly.
5. ***Strengthen your capabilities to develop a strategically appropriate, single-minded Essential Creative Brief.*** It takes skill to develop a sound brief. Participate in one of our marketing communication training programs. The Essential Creative Brief, and the development of BIG Campaign Ideas, are the focus of both the ALPS 2 and High Impact Ad College programs. These programs are designed to enhance capabilities through actual skill development. For more information about these training programs please contact Richard Czerniawski at [richardcz@bdn-intl.com](mailto:richardcz@bdn-intl.com).



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## **DEVELOPING A MORE PRODUCTIVE CREATIVE BRIEF – Part 3, The Importance of Oversight**

Part 1 addressed engineering, the structure of the Essential Creative Brief. Part 2 addressed errors, or human behavior issues in developing the Creative Brief. This article, Part 3, deals with lack of *meaningful oversight* in supervising the development of more productive Creative Briefs.

***o-ver-sight*** (noun) 1. Failure by omission; 2. Supervision.

The Deepwater Horizon disaster prompted lawmakers to seek new regulation over the oil industry and, in particular, offshore drilling. But, perhaps, it is not new, or more, regulation that is needed but, instead, ensuring that existing regulations are being followed. Atul Gawande, states in his book, *Better*, that patient infection rates in hospitals vary significantly. The medical staffs in hospitals are well aware of what needs to be done to minimize infections from developing and spreading but the fact of the matter is that proper procedures (substitute if you like: regulations, or best practices, or protocol) are not followed faithfully. It is not necessarily that the regulations are lacking but, instead, there is often an absence of oversight regarding enforcement of the regulations.

Oversight is about inspecting for that which you expect, both in behavior and resultant performance. There are two parts to oversight as noted in the definition provided above. One is being on top of the situation, as in not omitting or overlooking inspection (this is the failure by omission). The second is providing proper supervision to ensure that the matter is being handled according to a set of standards.

The lack of oversight in developing a technically sound and strategically appropriate, single-minded Creative Brief is no different than failing to provide oversight in the Deepwater Horizon or hospital setting. Either “best practices” have been identified and are being followed, or they are not. Either the work is being performed correctly, or it is not. Either the work is being inspected, or it is not. Either supervision is being provided in order to ensure appropriate behavior, or it is not. It’s really that simple. From our experience working with many, many companies throughout the world meaningful oversight, with regard to the development of the Creative Brief, is the exception, not the rule. Why? There are a number of contributing factors to this lack of oversight. These include:

1. ***No organizational standard for the Creative Brief.*** Each brand and each agency serving a given organization has a different Creative Brief (as apparent from the number of disparate terms being used going from one brief to another). So managers have nothing to use as, at minimum, a guideline.

2. ***Either a lack of training regarding how to address each element of a Creative Brief appropriately, or lack of reinforcement of expected performance.*** As a result, there is no, or little, oversight provided by senior managers, or if it is conducted it is not very instructive.
3. ***Doing things the way they have always been done.*** It doesn't matter that the process is not working for the organization, managers keep making the same mistakes out of ignorance (see the aforementioned two points), the desire to avoid making waves, or indifference.
4. ***Search for the "silver bullet."*** If it is not working managers will first seek a new approach, rather than thoughtfully and critically analyzing where the process is going wrong and fixing it. Hospitals don't need a new protocol for medical practitioners to wash thoroughly before and after contact with patients, they just need to enforce the protocol they have in place. They don't need another protocol that, like the former, is not going to be followed.
5. ***Not enough time.*** We have heard this time and time again. C'mon there's really no excuse for this one. We know that everyone in marketing is busy, extremely busy. We truly empathize with you. But the development of a technically sound and strategically appropriate, single-minded Creative Brief should be a priority, not something that is nice to do when you have time to get around to doing it. Remember, "garbage in, garbage out." We spend millions of dollars in support of the advertising that is developed as a result of the Creative Brief. We need to ensure that we are providing appropriate direction for the development of leadership advertising to leverage our communication support funding.
6. ***Lack of accountability.*** There's blame, but marketers place it on the agency. There's blame, but senior managers place it on the inexperience of junior marketers in developing the Creative Brief. It is rare in deed that senior management goes back to the Creative Brief to see where the creative development process went awry, or holds itself accountable for the poor work.

It all comes down to needing standards (established through best principles and practices) and enforcing them. We have provided you with standards (based upon best principles and practices) that we refer to as the Essential Creative Brief. We have also provided you, in Part 2, with instruction regarding how to address each element of the Essential Creative Brief. Now we are going to provide you with a *productivity tool* to provide guidance and direction for the development of the Essential Creative Brief, and to enable all marketers to conduct appropriate oversight. This tool is the Creative Brief Scorecard. We have benchmarked it against Creative Briefs that were developed with the aid of this tool and have found that the ***Creative Brief Scorecard*** helps users of the tool identify what needs to be done to make the brief significantly more productive.

The Creative Brief Scorecard enables the user to objectify her subjective judgment against standards (based upon best principles and practices). Importantly, it helps to direct the user to what needs to be done to achieve the gold standard of marketing excellence. It is a thorough checklist that works like this: for each Creative Brief element (such as the Customer Insight or Key Thought) you determine, based upon the performance hurdles presented, the performance of

the work. You will score the element either a “0,” “3” or “5,” depending where it fits (based upon the performance hurdle it meets). There are no other ratings. Either an element meets the criteria to be scored a “3” or not. If it does not achieve a “3” then you must give it a “0.” (Not a rating of “1,” or “2,” or “1.5!”) But it doesn’t end here with a rating, because it will enable you to identify what needs to be done for the performance to achieve a rating of “5.” Additionally, each element is weighted for impact as it relates to achieving leadership advertising. For example discovering a “legitimate” and “productive” customer insight receives more weight than crafting a technically correct “assignment.” The max score you can receive is 103. Everyone should work to achieve 103 points. No one should settle for less. (Either the doctor scrubbed for the allotted time before examining the patient, or not. Either the landing gear was down and the aircraft ready for landing, or it was not. If it is “not,” then the probability for a less than successful outcome goes up significantly.)

***To get a copy of the Creative Brief Scorecard go to [www.bdn-intl.com](http://www.bdn-intl.com) and click on Toolbox.***

The Creative Brief Scorecard should be utilized on two levels. Level one is with the team that is developing the Essential Creative Brief. Use the Creative Brief Scorecard to guide its development and check the work. Level two is with the appropriate supervisor to ensure that the work has been done correctly prior to acknowledging agreement, with her signature, to begin creative development work.

The Essential Creative Brief establishes the “expectations” for the work. The Creative Brief Scorecard provides a tool to facilitate oversight in “inspecting” the work. However, the Creative Brief Scorecard is not, and should not be used, as a report card, but as a valuable tool that will enable you to iterate your way to a technically correct and strategically appropriate, single-minded Essential Creative Brief.

### **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

- 1. If you haven’t done so already, adopt the Essential Creative Brief*** – What are you waiting for? There’s no need to reinvent the wheel. What are you going to do, conduct a 6-month “quasi” study to determine the essential elements for a technically sound Creative Brief? We’ve already done the work for you. If you have a compelling argument for making it more clear, or using nomenclature your organization is familiar with, then go-ahead and adapt it. Don’t waste time that you don’t have to make changes that don’t add value or worse yet diminish the organization’s ability to provide clear, strategically appropriate, single-minded direction.
- 2. Use the Creative Brief Scorecard to help guide and assess the work*** - It will reveal what you need to do to develop a technically sound and strategically appropriate Creative Brief. It will not tell you how to think, but it will guide your thinking to achieve standards of true marketing excellence.
- 3. Get training in the development of the Essential Creative Brief and the Creative Brief Scorecard*** - Participate in ALPS II or the High Impact Ad College programs we offer. This applies to senior managers, too, who are responsible for approving the direction provided to the agency inherent in the Creative Brief, and the brand’s advertising campaign. It is the job of the senior managers not just to provide oversight, but to also: a) provide coaching that adds value to the work consistent with their experience and

insights; and b) help develop their marketers. These programs will help you accomplish all of these critically important management functions.

- 4. *Institutionalize the practice, and process, of using the Essential Creative Brief and Creative Brief Scorecard*** - The ensuing review process and dialogue will be richer, leading to more thoughtful creative strategies and improving the likelihood of receiving meaningful creative work from your agency. It will serve to enhance the client-agency relationship, making it more productive.
- 5. *Apply the Creative Brief Scorecard*** – What are you waiting for? Put it to the test! Take one of your, or another brand's (within your company), Creative Brief and apply the Creative Brief Scorecard to it. See what you discover. Importantly, use it to determine what needs to be done to make the Creative Brief technically sound, strategically appropriate and single-minded.

With the proper oversight you can snatch victory from the jaws of disaster.

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

## DEVELOPING A MORE PRODUCTIVE CREATIVE BRIEF – Part 4, The Role of Leadership and Corporate Culture

This is the final installment in a four-part series of DISPATCHES articles titled “Developing a More Productive Creative Brief.” We are using the Deepwater Horizon ecological disaster as a metaphor for what goes wrong in the development of the Creative Brief. (And, remember, what can go wrong will go wrong!) Specifically, we contend that four broad areas emerged as contributing to the Deepwater Horizon disaster: faulty engineering; errors in human behavior; lack of oversight; and dysfunctional corporate culture resulting from a lack of leadership. These aforementioned four areas provide us fertile ground for investigation into the failure of many marketers, and their organizations, to develop Creative Briefs that provide strategically appropriate, single-minded direction for the development of leadership advertising, and its subsequent assessment.

Part 1 addressed engineering, the structure of the Essential Creative Brief. Part 2 addressed errors, or human behavior issues in developing the Creative Brief. Part 3, tackled the lack of meaningful oversight in supervising the development of more productive Creative Briefs. This last article, Part 4, deals with *dysfunctional corporate culture and the lack of strong leadership contributing to it.*

### Corporate Culture

Corporate culture reflects and manifests the company’s values and beliefs in its operating systems. Ultimately, it’s about how individuals, and the organization, behave consistent with those (shared) values and beliefs, both with each other and those outside of the company. It helps guide everyone within the company to make decisions, and take what senior corporate managers believe are appropriate actions.

When it comes to corporate culture, actions speak louder than words. It has been reported that while BP publicly advocated safety, its corporate culture allowed extreme risk taking, ignoring of expert advice, and overlooking warnings about dire safety issues. While the leadership professed safety, a rig survivor of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, which claimed eleven lives, told “60 Minutes” that BP ordered its partners to cut corners in an effort to meet aggressive drill schedules. If this is the case then clearly behavior and beliefs are inconsistent, which suggests that the corporate culture is dysfunctional.

In our work we hear senior marketing executives, and their agency partners, proclaim the need to develop Creative Briefs that provide creative resources with strategically appropriate, single-minded direction. Yet, we observe so very few Creative Briefs that are technically sound such that they provide anything near being strategically appropriate, or single-minded. They’re a hodge-podge of conflicting thoughts and direction. You may ignore our observations and

experiences but if you think about it, how many managers are satisfied with the Creative Briefs developed for their brands and organization? Not many!

As a consequence marketing committees are assembled to study the issue and reshuffle the chairs on the deck of their proverbial Titanic. A new Creative Brief is developed that represents a compromise, with little or no basis in the reality of how things (in this case, communications) work. The same old garbage gets produced, only now it has a new, fresh look. It's like painting over a house when it has termites eating away the structure. It looks good, and everyone on the committee feels a sense of accomplishment, but the end product is a Creative Brief that lacks the requisites that will lead to guiding the development of leadership communications.

This insanity of *doing the same things* that lead to the same poor results, or *reinventing the wheel* when a new manager comes on board or management decides it is time to focus on raising the bar on Creative Brief development underscores a dysfunctional culture and lack of leadership. We've already dealt with the structure of the Essential Creative Brief, how to address each element within the CB, and how to provide thoughtful and timely oversight through the Creative Brief ScoreCard. Now we need to address the final, critical issue, corporate (or on a smaller scale, brand team) culture and leadership.

### **Causes of a Dysfunctional Culture**

There are a number of factors contributing to a dysfunctional culture (as it relates to developing sound Creative Briefs and the development of leadership advertising), among which are the following:

- ***Absence of a shared vision on the need for leadership advertising.*** Do you and your managers really believe that leadership advertising can make a difference? Do you and your managers really believe that a sound Creative Brief provides the requisite guidance needed for the development of leadership advertising, and its assessment? It's easy for managers to say that they "agree" on the importance of advertising, but it is totally another thing to back-up the belief with action, as in increasing (as opposed to decreasing) ad spending. It's one thing to talk about the importance of advertising, but it is another thing to ensure that it is given priority, as reflected in providing single-minded attention to the development of the Creative Brief, over actions such as taking care of something as mundane as emails. *A sane culture requires shared values regarding leadership advertising and alignment between individual and corporate actions and beliefs.*
- ***Ignorance about what are the correct things to do and/or how to do them correctly.*** This traces to a lack of understanding of what it takes to create effective communications. And, ignorance is never really bliss. It's an opiate that will cause the world to come crashing down upon you as the Deepwater Horizon disaster has crashed down upon BP, our citizens and the ecology of the Gulf Coast. *A competent culture requires knowledge. Not the theoretical stuff! But knowledge born of real world experiences, coupled with thoughtful analyses. It requires knowledge and adoption of best practices. And, as Peter Senge, MIT professor and the author of The Fifth Discipline, might counsel, it requires the development of a learning organization.*

- **No uniform operating system.** There is no standard operating procedure that reflects a quality process. It's everyone for him or herself. Managers do it their way, or the way their agencies do it. If three different agencies are working on behalf of different brands within a company then one can expect, at minimum, three different Creative Brief formats. If the marketing managers report to different senior marketing managers then the elements in each brief, way of handling each element, the process undertaken, the assessment by each, etc., can be expected to be different. This is exacerbated when managers come from different organizations and believe their way is superior. It becomes "war of the words." Please don't even try to tell us that this represents healthy independence. That's pure B.S. There are generally accepted accounting principles that all organizations follow. Why wouldn't it make sense to, or couldn't they, follow generally accepted marketing principles and practices? *An intelligent marketing culture requires a uniform operating system that captures the correct things to do, and how to do them correctly (best practices incorporated into a quality process). Thereafter, every agency, every brand team, every senior marketing manager adopts these standards and follows standard operating procedures (SOP) that serves to ensure that actions are consistent with beliefs.*
- **Absence of leadership.** Once the operating system has been developed, it's time for everyone to step-up to the plate and to make it a reality. This starts with senior marketing managers. It's up to senior marketing managers to model and reinforce the behavior for their direct reports, and everyone within the marketing department. *This requires that everyone, no exceptions, is trained to understand the uniform operating system and follow SOP. This includes senior managers!* What we hear time and again is that senior managers know this stuff and don't need the training. Well, if they really knew it then they would be far more satisfied with the Creative Briefs their direct reports and agencies develop. If they really knew it, they would be developing, on a consistent basis, leadership advertising. The fact is they really don't know it! *It also requires that managers take time to learn.* No one practices more or works harder than a champion, regardless of their endeavor, regardless of their talent. We hear that managers don't have two or three days to devote to training. In that case, we advise anyone who feels that way to revisit the first bullet-point. *It also requires that senior managers provide feedback. Specifically, it needs to be quick and consistent with the operating system.* This will serve to reinforce and inculcate positive actions, while it remedies negative actions, in institutionalizing best practices to help make the culture strong.
- **Lack of personal accountability.** It would be irresponsible for marketers to conclude that corporate culture is the responsibility of senior management. No, it is everyone's responsibility. *This requires that despite the pitfalls and shortcomings of the organization or its leadership that you take personal responsibility to ensure that the Creative Brief is developed based upon sound principles.* If the direction is not single-minded then it is your duty to ensure that it is made to be single-minded. No excuses! This will help instill a responsible culture.

## **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

Mark Twain said, “Everybody talks about the weather but no one does anything about it.” It’s time to stop talking about the failure to develop more productive Creative Briefs and to achieve leadership advertising. It’s high time to do something about it. We’ve provided you with a number of actions for your consideration in each of the previous three articles in this series “Developing a More Productive Creative Brief. “ We’ve also identified requirements for correcting a weak corporate marketing culture when we identified some “causes of a dysfunctional culture.” In order to get on the right track here’s what you can do to build a sane, competent, intelligent, strong, and responsible culture that will leverage everyone’s thinking in developing more productive Creative Briefs:

- 1. *Come together*** – What do you, and your marketing management colleagues, really believe and value. Get it on the table and capture it on paper. Then take a hard look at actual practices regarding the development of the Creative Brief (and for that matter the advertising process), yours and others. Are your beliefs/values and practices/actions in harmony? If not you’ve more work ahead of you. Fess-up and face-up to the differences and address them. Don’t walk away until you have forged shared values and beliefs regarding leadership advertising, and identified specific actions that ensure alignment between individual and corporate actions and beliefs.
- 2. *Adopt best practices*** – We’ve done what we can to make you aware of best practices by sharing the Essential Creative Brief (sound engineering: structure and composition of the CB); identifying how to address each element (avoiding human error: enhancing competencies); introducing the Creative Brief ScoreCard (to avoid lack of oversight: conducting the stewardship); and alerting you to common causes of dysfunction (addressing a dysfunctional corporate culture and lack of leadership: requirements for overcoming these). You should have everything you need. Or, if you prefer, you have a lot more than you had before we started this series. (Don’t waste time on rethinking each piece and debating over a word here or there. Get focused on the big picture, what is really essential from the organization’s behavior and leadership to developing more productive Creative Briefs.)
- 3. *Develop a uniform operating system that captures the best practices and quality process, and make them SOP (Standard Operating Procedure)*** – C’mon, that’s what really good managers do! Anybody can have a success but to be able to produce successes on a consistent basis will require that you, and your organization (whether it be at the level of the brand team or the corporation), institutionalize best practices in a uniform operating system. Taking an intelligent uniform operating system (which, by the way, is inherent in the Essential Creative Brief and the Creative Brief ScoreCard) and making it SOP will serve to ensure that actions are consistent with beliefs.

4. **Work at it** - This requires that everyone, no exceptions, becomes actively involved. The organization isn't actively involved if it sends its junior marketing people for training but those who are responsible for reinforcing that training and approving the work product don't undertake that same training. Senior managers must provide "knowledge-based" feedback based upon the training and uniform operating system. All feedback to work on the Essential Creative Brief needs to be immediate and consistent with the operating system. This will serve to reinforce and inculcate positive actions, while it remedies negative actions, in institutionalizing best practices to help make the culture strong.
5. **Do the right thing!** And do it in the right way. Don't pass the buck. You have more leeway than you can imagine if you focus on true (which reflects proper intent) versus blind obedience. That's real leadership. It's up to you to help develop a responsible culture. Enough said!

As one of our colleagues is fond of saying, "clients get the advertising they deserve." Practices and actions determine what you deserve. BP got what they deserved. Dysfunctional culture and lack of strong leadership lead to disaster. Are you getting what you deserve? Choose to make your culture sane, competent, intelligent, strong and responsible!

**For more information and resources on  
Developing a More Productive Creative Brief  
and Developing LEADERSHIP Communications**  
go to [www.bdn-intl.com](http://www.bdn-intl.com)  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Richard Czerniawski** is the founder of Brand Development Network *International* (BDNI), a marketing consulting and training firm, where he serves as Global Marketing Empowerment Partner, and along with his business partner, Mike Maloney, Chief Instructor.

Richard has held brand marketing management positions with Procter & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson, Richardson-Vicks, and the Coca-Cola Company (where he served as Director of Marketing for all soft drink brands in the United States). More recently, he served in the role of Chief Marketing Officer for a start-up company in the natural health-care category, where he managed the development of successful ad campaigns to consumers and healthcare professionals. Until the recent sale of the company he served on its Board of Directors. Richard has contributed to the successes of well-known brands such as Folger's Coffee, REACH Toothbrush, Band-Aid Brand Adhesive Bandages, and CocaCola Classic. He also has extensive experience and successes in the Pharmaceutical and Medical Device & Diagnostic sectors.

Richard holds a BS in Education and an MBA. He is a former Naval Aviator and Officer who served as an Instructor Pilot. Additionally, he is the author of numerous articles on marketing management (e.g., Journal of Consumer Marketing, DISPATCHES). He has served as a guest lecturer for the MBA programs at DePaul University, Lake Forest College, Thunderbird International School of Management, and Notre Dame. Richard is a certified fourth-degree black belt in TaeKwonDo and a fourth-degree black belt in HapKiDo. He is co-founder of Moodo Martial Arts Club, where he is a senior instructor.

Richard Czerniawski is co-author, along with Mike Maloney, of **CREATING BRAND LOYALTY** and, more recently, **COMPETITIVE POSITIONING**. Richard and Mike are founders of the Brand Positioning & Leadership Communications College program, among other highly popular training programs, in which they have trained thousands of marketing managers from leading companies throughout the world.

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