

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Five Uncommon Fixes for Five Common Creative Brief Errors

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In the past few weeks we were asked to review two creative briefs. One was a client brief design (format) the other was from an ad agency. Two different brief designs consisting of different elements. One was for a medical device brand and the other for a pharmaceutical brand. What was our impression of each? They were both absolutely dreadful in design and content! The shame of them is they do not provide the surefooted direction that is needed to lead to high impact, let alone effective brand messaging.

The late humorist Will Rogers once said, “common sense ain’t common.” When it comes to marketers’ management of creative briefs we say, “the most uncommon thing is common sense.” There are a number of common errors among creative briefs that sabotage creative development. However, the fixes for common creative brief missteps in design and content are uncommon. If they were applied broadly and consistently they would be common. But alas they are not. Here, then, are **five uncommon fixes for five common errors** (among, sadly, many errors).

1. **Common Error: Not being selective in targeting and/or incomplete target-customer profile.** The target-customer is either too broadly defined, as in “orthopedic surgeons” or “internists treating cholesterol” or “moms with children 4 - 11,” and/or the target profile is incomplete, making her or him an abstraction.

Uncommon Fix: Be choiceful in your selection of the target-customer and define her/him completely. While there is no one sure way to success one sure way to failure is to try to appeal to everyone. As Philip Kotler, who authored the marketing textbook you probably used in school said, “If you’re not thinking segments, you’re not thinking marketing.” So, segment your market. Select the one segment whose customers, in the words of Simon Sinek, Executive Coach and author of START WITH WHY, “believe what you believe.” He emphatically states, “The goal isn’t to do business with people who need what you have. The goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe.” Your Brand Idea, the theme of your brand positioning strategy, is what you believe - your brand’s “WHY!” If you don’t have a Brand Idea it will be difficult for you to effectively segment your market, so get on with developing one.

Once you’ve chosen your segment it’s time to define the target-customer. What we’re referring to is to define the target-customer not as some abstraction but a human being (after all, that’s what they are) and in such a way that the creative team, sales personnel, everyone, has a clear picture of who s/he is serving and what makes her/him tick. We should know and understand the customer so well that we will be able to predict how s/he will respond to a piece of stimulus. Everything we share with

prospective customers is stimulus to trigger a specific, intended behavior. Unfortunately, few marketers (or agency creatives) can predict how customers will respond to a promotion, or messaging, or continuing medical education, without a complete and robust profile of the target that leads to a deeper understanding of her/him.

We urge you to adopt the following four elements for your target-customer profile:

- **HCP (Health Care Professional) or Consumer Demographics** - This is the nuts and bolts of the target-customer consisting of age, gender, practice, socioeconomic group, geographical setting, type of practice, etc. It is your first pass at segmentation.
- **HCP or Consumer Psychographics** - This addresses the target-customers values and what they believe. This is the one area that reveals the most critical information about your target-customer. It is the mindset that shares the belief and values of your brand.
- **Patient Condition or Consumer Occasion State** – The choice varies by sector and category. You need to make that choice. This is what and who you are addressing. Is it naive or failed patients? A critical medical procedure for a specific condition for a specific patient? A specific day part or occasion? What? And while you're at it consider including the psychographic label for the patient if you've been addressing the HCP target-customer.
- **HCP or Consumer Current Usage & Dissatisfactions** - What are they using? Name "names" of competitive products. And identify their dissatisfactions or what is it about your brand that will make them dissatisfied?

2. **Common Error: No or inappropriate communication behavior objective.** Virtually all creative briefs we view lack a communication behavior objective. These two were no different. This element gets at what behavior you need to achieve to drive incremental sales. If you don't have a communication behavior objective, then you don't know what you need your messaging to accomplish. Then there are those creative briefs we see that have a communication objective that is neither a behavior and/or, if it is, it's not SMART.

Uncommon Fix: Make certain you include a communication "behavior" objective. The key word here is "behavior." There are a few target-customer behavior objectives: switching, adoption, trade-up (sometimes referred to as upgrade), increased frequency or utilization, compliance, among others. It is important to use the precise labels to be clear on what the messaging should achieve. Note that different behavior objectives will require different promises. So, you've got to get it right otherwise your messaging will not work. And, once you have a behavior objective, and certain it is appropriate, **make it SMART.** SMART is an acronym for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. Check that your SMART behavior communication objective translates to cases, scripts or procedures needed to drive incremental sales.

3. **Common Error: So-called "customer insight" is neither "legitimate" nor "productive."** Most of what passes for insights in the briefs we review are really "unsights." They're

“facts” or “accepted customer beliefs” (which, at one time, may have been insights), not insights. Without a deep dive into the target-customer and a robust profile (see #1) it is very unlikely the marketer will discover a real, rootin’-tootin’ insight that will lead to a strategically appropriate, compelling message that spurs achievement of the communication behavior objective.

Uncommon Fix: Get to know your customer, think like her/him and feel as s/he does. Dig, dig, dig to **find a legitimate customer insight, which you’ll find in one of three buckets: perceived or real weakness of the competition; attitudinal barrier to overcome regarding your brand; or untapped compelling belief.** If you haven’t found an insight in one of these three areas go back and dig. If you’ve found something that does not arise from one of these three insight buckets, then it is unlikely to be a legitimate insight. Pick-up that shovel and keep digging. And **when you discover a legitimate customer insight make sure it is productive.** In order to be productive, you need to be able to pay-off the insight with product performance or customers’ perception of the brand. There’s one other requirement, it must lead to a strategic message that is capable of triggering the SMART communication behavior objective. If you can’t pay-off the insight or it is insufficient to achieve the behavior goal then, you’ve got it, keep digging.

4. **Common Error:** *The benefit promise (i.e., key thought or intended future belief) is (pick one or more): not single-minded; doesn’t address the customer insight or satisfy presently held dissatisfactions with competitive choices you’ve identified in the target-customer profile; is generic; or is not big enough to motivate achievement of the target-customer behavior objective.* Whew, if we take a minute or so we can come-up with more. The key takeaway: it just doesn’t work.

Uncommon Fix: It’s rather simple. It’s not easy but simple. First, check to **make sure your benefit promise pays-off the customer insight.** Second, you must **satisfy current dissatisfactions.** In other words, your benefit promise must link to something relevant and meaningful. Otherwise it is meaningless. Third, **make it single-minded.** Resist throwing-in the kitchen sink. If you fall prey to that siren song, you will dilute or obfuscate your message, like we see in 95% of the many creative briefs we review. Fourth, **make sure you have a POD benefit promise.** POD stands for Point-of-Difference as in “not the same as competition.” Keep in mind that this is not difference for difference sake. It must be relevant and meaningful to those your brand serves - your target-customer! If you are faithful to the first three points, then a POD benefit should be the result. Check to make sure it is.

5. **Common Error:** There are just so many more to choose from when dealing with creative briefs such as not having critically important elements, stuffing it with inappropriate elements, stuffing product benefits in the reasons-to-believe element, having more than one (behavior) objective, cohesion among customer insight - key dissatisfactions - POD benefit, etc. But since we offered five, and only five (sorry we mentioned a few others), we’ve got to make a choice. And, we choose **lack of strategic messaging focus.** What is

it that our messaging must communicate? Is it the POD benefit promise? Key customer take-away? What we want the target-customer to think? Believe? Feel? What?

Uncommon Fix: *We must have one focus and that's the POD benefit promise.* Having these additional messaging elements in the same creative brief undermines focus and, therefore, must be removed from the creative brief. What we want the creative to deliver is the POD benefit to the target-customer in compelling customer language via a BIG campaign idea. We don't want the agency team running off to determine which, among the different messaging elements, is most important. Nor do we want client team members to each inspect the agency creative based upon differing expectations of what is to be messaged. And, as previously mentioned, the POD benefit must be cohesive (in alignment) with the customer insight and target-customer dissatisfactions. If not then not just the agency creatives but the entire team will lose focus on what's important to the target-customer.

So, check your creative brief. **Be the uncommon marketer with common sense.** Apply uncommon fixes to common errors to get your creative brief in order before you begin creative development. This will improve your likelihood of achieving effective communications. And, if you have a BIG campaign idea to back it up then you've just bolstered your chance of achieving high impact messaging.

Best wishes,
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