



MARKETING MATTERS

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The Creative Brief – Are You Using It to Inspire the Creatives?

There is a belief among many marketers and agency account managers that the creative brief needs to inspire the creative team. Poppycock (a much more reserved expression than how I really feel about it)! The creative team should be inspired by the challenge of the work and the leadership of the client. The client's job with the creative brief is to provide strategically appropriate, single-minded direction. It's hard for me to even imagine clients being inspiring with their language as so many are left-brained, far from being inspiring, no less engaging, with the written word.

Does this mean that the client can't find a way to use the creative brief to inspire the creative team? No, that's not the case either. Again, we inspire (or, at least, encourage optimism that the creatives won't feel they're being driven down a rabbit hole) by providing leadership in setting the course with strategically appropriate, single-minded direction. What does this mean?

"Strategically appropriate" is about identifying a core differentiated benefit (CDB) promise that will stimulate achievement of a specific target-customer behavior objective. There are three key considerations here:

1. The first is the target-customer selection (following thoughtful segmentation) and defining her/him robustly such that everyone knows the target so well that s/he can predict how the target will respond to a piece of stimulus – all marketing initiatives, including your messaging are stimulus. So, we need a target-customer profile that goes beyond mere demographics to help the creatives understand how the customer perceives, thinks and feels about the category, your brand and competitive brands.
2. The target-customer behavior objective will drive the kind of messaging. If the behavior objective is adoption then the messaging will be why it makes sense to do, use or prescribe a certain thing. If the objective is to generate switching, then the message should lead the target-customer to understand why your brand is a better choice.

Making it SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) provides a clear goal and, at the same time, basis for assessing performance.

3. Then there's the CDB. It must be a specific promise that will lead the target-customer you have chosen to act in accordance with the SMART behavior objective. This usually flows from a strategic insight. Going back to the target-customer profile, if it's not robust it's more likely to lead you to an "unsight" versus an insight and, consequently, an inappropriate strategic message.

"Single-minded" manifests itself in two places. The first is the CDB. Make it single-minded! Less is more. More, merely waters down your messaging. What is the one thing that will drive the target-customer to choose your brand? That's it! Second, make it clear that the CDB is what the creative team needs to deliver in compelling customer language (i.e., BIG idea). This will require the marketer to remove extraneous diversions such as "what is the key takeaway," or "what is the core positioning," or "what do we want the target to believe." While you're at it, get rid of all extraneous garbage from the creative brief that doesn't help the creative team. This will also serve to enable you to focus your attention and thinking on what really matters.

So, if you want to inspire the creative team then start by leading the way with strategically appropriate, single-minded direction.

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