

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

HOW TO JUDGE SUPER BOWL LIII ADS (OR, FOR THAT MATTER, ANY ADVERTISING)



Super Bowl LIII is now ancient history. The winner is ... No, we're not referring to the game but the event's advertisers. If you're one of the advertisers, you want to know if your commercial scored with consumers. If you were not an advertiser in this sports extravaganza, you, as a marketer, are undoubtedly involved in debates (or, at least, discussions) as to which sponsorship brand(s) had the "best commercial."

Unfortunately, many of the discussions with consumers and colleagues, and reports by the media, are focused around "entertainment" value, as determined by meaningless "likeability" ratings. However, this is not the way to measure nor judge the worth of Super Bowl LIII advertising (or, for that matter, any advertising). It's not relevant and, therefore, not professional. What counts and what should be measured is whether it motivates behaviors that generate incremental sales.

At more than \$5-million US for airtime, per each 30-second spot (which is \$166,666.67 per second), the advertiser's marketing communication needs to be exceptional in boosting sales and 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."*** We determine effectiveness by the impact of the communication in the marketplace and, more specifically, *whether it rings the cash register to generate incremental sales and build the business.*

We 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 based on whether it *stimulates targeted-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 or the medium used to deliver it) in a truly professional matter.

True professionals judge communications based upon perceived (and, after the fact, real) effectiveness. *Effectiveness is about getting incremental sales.* We judge and determine, whether an ad communication will be effective (even before the results are in) by thoughtfully assessing the: 1) intended Communication Strategy (including the Communication Behavior Objective); 2) Campaign Idea; and, finally, 3) Execution.

Communication Strategy

It all starts with determining what the advertiser intends (the Communication Strategy), and to what end (the Communication Behavior Objective). This consists of inferring three elements – target-customer, key thought (i.e., benefit or belief), and support for the key thought (reason-to-believe), within the context of the competitive field. 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-ass guess!). However, 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 an effective communication in triggering target-customer behaviors.*

The key thought (or “benefit” if you prefer), ***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 profit). Therefore, it should also be clear what the advertiser wants the target-customer to do (i.e., 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, the 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 can achieve the inferred Communication Behavior Objective with the target-customer.* If not, it's marketing support money poured down the drain and, in the case of Super Bowl LIII, for a moment of fame (or, should we say, “notoriety”).

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 core dramatization of the benefit; within the context of the 3) Naked Idea (i.e., creative concept that deals with *how* the benefit is communicated in each execution, and across all media vehicles).

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. It is not a restatement of the strategic benefit but how the benefit is communicated. The Key Copy Words also need to dramatize the benefit in customer (not strategic!) language. The Key Copy Words serve as a post-it note that helps target-customers remember the brand and its benefit. Importantly, they must ***strike a responsive chord*** with the target-customer in such a way as to move them to action. The final part is the core dramatization, which can be visual or audio in execution. It dramatizes the benefit or leads customers to discover the benefit. 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 three 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 are anxious to get to, and both the media and consumers to highlight – the *execution*. Typically, when asked what they think about an ad, the clear majority of marketers will pipe-in regarding the execution (more specifically the situation and what they see and hear), avoiding the more critical elements of the Communication Strategy and Campaign Idea. Moreover, frequently their comments regarding the execution are somewhat immature, lacking a thoughtful analysis of critical components. Doubt us? Prove it to yourself. Ask a colleague about one of the Super Bowl LIII ads and listen to what they play back to you. Most likely it will be executional in nature (such as what they see and like or dislike).

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

Additionally, the execution needs to *establish sound 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.), the simplicity of the language, and so forth. Many of these other factors are media specific and are undertaken only by those with advanced skills. For example, those with advanced skill in assessing the executional elements of a TV commercial (such as a Super Bowl ad), will ask themselves these important questions:

- Do you understand what is happening in the advertising?
- Does it tell a picture story?
- Does it contain drama or another powerful element (e.g., compelling presenter, etc.) to cut through the clutter?
- Are the words and pictures in synch to enhance understanding and memorability of the story?
- Does it dramatize the benefit to set it apart from the competition?
- Does it showcase the Campaign Idea?
- Does it add credibility to the promise?
- 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, 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 LIII 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 point-of-view through the “overview,” a detailed analysis of your findings, 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 act. Therefore, your conclusion might be:
 - extremely effective
 - very effective
 - effective
 - somewhat effective, or
 - not effective
2. ***Analysis of Findings*** - You then support your conclusion by sharing your thoughtful analysis of the elements in the previous paragraphs starting with the Communication Strategy and Communication Behavior Objective, proceeding to the Campaign Idea and finishing with the execution.
3. ***Indicated Actions*** – This is where you advance your thoughts as to ***what needs to be done to make the advertising more productive***. It’s not about

what's wrong. Instead, it's all about what you would need to see (and have done) to make the communication more productive ***in stimulating the intended behavior to achieve the Communication Behavior Objective.***

Your judgment may differ from others when judging the effectiveness of any given ad or ad campaign. That's perfectly okay. They're merely hypotheses. We can confirm or change them by learning 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. 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! Being a professional and being professional about our work is not easy. However, this is the way a real professional judges Super Bowl LIII advertising or, for that matter, any advertising. True professionals work hard and, better yet, they work smart.

If you learn to do those mentioned above with each marketing communication you'll be a Super Bowl winner in your field.

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