



By Richard D. Czerniawski

AVOID THIS CRITICAL CREATIVE BRIEF ERROR

Excuse me for being direct, but so many creative briefs are not worth the price of the paper on which they are printed. Andy Langer, Executive Creative Director at BBDO Worldwide, said, “The creative brief is the most important piece of paper at the agency.” It’s a pity that marketers and their agency counterparts typically don’t provide strategically appropriate, single-minded creative briefs that are technically sound.

Why's this so important? Well, poor creative briefs will likely lead to poor (i.e., ineffective) advertising. GIGO – Garbage In. Garbage Out. Chapter 9, *Brand Communications That Suck*, of my new book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**, delves into many critical creative brief errors and how to avoid or fix them. However, there’s one that I want to highlight here.

Do not substitute “tone” or “tonality” for Brand Character. Brand Character is the personality of the brand. It is the essence of “who” your brand is to the target customer. It's either a badge, as in the case of Harley-Davidson or a reflection of the brand’s relationship to the target customer, as is the case of State Farm Insurance.



The badge that Harley-Davidson riders wear is one of “the rugged, individualistic rebel, who roams far and free and won’t buckle to authority or arbitrary boundaries.” One would think Harley-Davidson owners are members of Hell’s Angels. Well, some might be; however, they come from all walks of life. Many are professionals—doctors, lawyers, and such.

State Farm Insurance is “the ‘good neighbor’ who is on the spot to help you out of a jam and recover from accidents—even disasters.” This Brand Character reflects who State Farm is and how it relates to those of its current customers.



Brand Character is a strategic element of the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement. It must be consistent with the Brand Idea and should be a staple in the creative brief. All marketing mix elements, advertising included, must be true to our brand and its Brand Character.

Brand Character, tonality, what’s the difference? Tone or tonality is a mode of expression at a given point in time. It is situation or, in the case of advertising, idea specific. Tonality is tactical, not strategic. The oncologist who is a rebel on the weekend when s/he climbs aboard her Harley-Davidson may express deep "compassion" when informing a patient that s/he has run out of treatments. That same oncologist can be "mentoring" to a young intern, "inspirational" or, even, "authoritarian." Tonality is situation dependent.

What does this mean for our advertising? I know what the Brand Character is for my brand. It’s fixed and an inextricable part of my Brand Positioning Strategy. However, the tonality is dependent upon the Campaign Idea of the advertising. The Campaign Idea should lead to the mode of expression, not the other way around.

When we replace Brand Character with tonality in the creative brief, and insist upon using it, we limit creative thinking to a non-strategic element. The context is arbitrary and not idea specific. So, **don’t substitute “tone” or “tonality” for Brand Character.** It’s an error that is likely to undermine the effectiveness of your advertising.

Put an end to advertising that sucks or is, at best, mediocre! Create high-impact advertising. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Stay SAFE, and be well.

Peace and best wishes,

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