

# **DISPATCHES**<sup>TM</sup>

*Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front*

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## **BLAME THE AD AGENCY, OR NOT?**

I recently wrote a Marketing Matters article, AVOID PLAYING THE BLAME GAME. (If you missed it, you could find it here <http://bdn-intl.com/avoid-playing-the-blame-game> )

One of our readers wrote back and stated that he expected me to talk about “blaming the agency.” Why not? Marketers do it all the time. Haven’t you?

Think about it; most advertising sucks! The advertising proffers the same strategic benefit as competitors. It lacks a Campaign Idea. Moreover, the advertising employs the same executional format as the category. The process is like a minefield, threatening to blow up in our faces.

Accordingly, the advertising doesn't generate incremental sales that build market share. In other words, it's not working to grow the business. It's an expense, not an investment.

What defense do marketers have for their poor messaging? That’s easy. Blame the agency, which we do most times.

### **Why Agencies are to Blame for Advertising that Sucks!**

There are many ways to lay blame on the agency’s doorstep. Here are a few of many you can use to win at the blame game:

- The agency is sticking us with a weak creative team.
- The account group and agency don’t understand our business (or us, for that matter).
- They don’t listen!
- They’re not creative.
- They’re incredibly slow, failing to comply with milestones.
- All they care about is winning awards.
- They present work that consistently fails legal and regulatory scrutiny.
- Agency personnel are argumentative.
- They don’t do what we tell them to do.

On and on it goes.

However, the fact of the matter is that client marketers and their management sign off on the advertising (regardless of the delivery vehicle) and run it!

So then, who's responsible for advertising that sucks? The 1971 Walt Kelly Pogo cartoon says it all, "We've met the enemy, and he is us."

Who's us? The client marketer.

Suck it up. Jocko Willink, former Navy SEAL and coauthor of *Extreme Ownership*, says, "Leaders must own everything in their world. There is no one else to blame."

We need to turn the finger on ourselves. We own the work.

Take a hard look at what went wrong and right it.

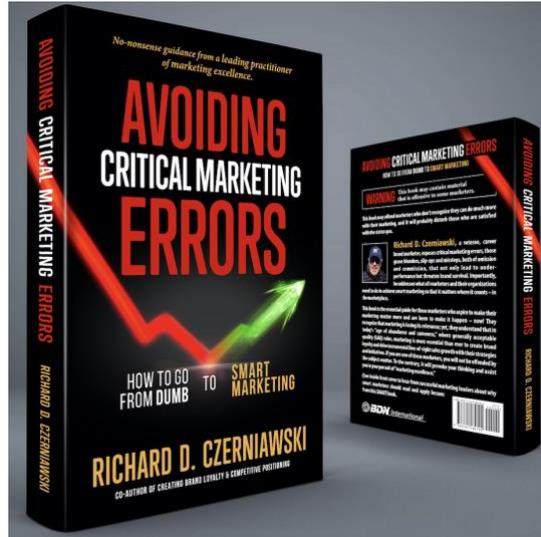
### **Why Your Advertising Sucks**

Here are a few of the many reasons your advertising sucks. These are taken from Richard's most recent book, *AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing*. They address the Essential Creative Brief, Campaign Idea, Execution, and Process.

- The creative brief is not single-minded. The "strategic triangle" of target customer needs, customer insight, and key thought is not cohesive—each point in a different direction with no clear focus for messaging development and assessment.
- The target customer definition is superficial, incomplete, lacks clarity, isn't real, or is not choiceful. In other words, it's too broad and vague.
- So-called customer insights are, in fact, customer unsights.
- The key thought (or benefit) is not relevant to the target customer or meaningfully differentiated versus competition.
- The communications don't deliver the key thought. In other words, it's not on strategy!
- The advertising does not contain a Campaign Idea.
- The same pedestrian expected delivery (like an overused life situation, or featuring a beauty shot of the product, or a smiling face of a satisfied customer, etc.) is no different from your competitors.
- Even if the execution differs from competitors, the advertising is merely telling versus dramatizing.
- Poor brand linkage. The brand is not integral to the story.
- Not providing the agency with sufficient time to develop creative ideas and throw out the bad ones.
- Not validating the messaging before launching it to determine if it works.

If you want to get high-impact advertising, stop playing the blame game, identify the errors that sabotage effective messaging, and fix them!

***Don't blame the agency; take charge!*** Read Chapter 9, Brand Communications that Suck, in **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**. You'll find many of those errors mentioned above and more that you need to avoid. Importantly, you'll learn what it takes to fix them. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>.



Peace and best wishes,  
Richard Czerniawski and Mike Maloney

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