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Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

HOW TO PROVIDE DIRECTION TO MAKE YOUR BRAND MESSAGING MATTER MORE

Direction – the management or guidance of someone or something.

It seems like everywhere I turn people lament the absence of leadership and the adverse impact on their organization and life. Then there are those providing advice on what it takes to be(come) an effective leader. Why, then, the dearth of effective leadership? We've leadership examples going back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. There have been tomes written about leadership. The principles haven't changed.

Poor practices regarding providing direction are a significant part of the problem. Effective leaders start by being clear on the objectives and providing the needed direction to achieve them. However, it does not end there. They also offer clear feedback with further guidance to stay on course and enhance individual and team performance to boost results.

We brand marketers are responsible for leading the development and growth of the brand. If we are to be effective leaders, we are required to provide sound direction to brand support teams inside and outside our organization. One of the most critical teams is our advertising agency. This article is dedicated to developing high-impact brand messaging.

GIGO

Garbage in, garbage out.

Stage One

Providing sound direction to the agency for developing the brand's messaging starts with developing "The Essential Creative Brief." The Essential Creative Brief identifies the most critical elements for effective message development. It includes the Assignment, Target Customer, Communication Behavior Objective, Customer Insight, Benefit Promise (which we refer to as the "Key Thought" – that which we must put in the Target Customer's mind to achieve the Communication Behavior Objective), and Reason(s)-to-Believe (the Benefit Promise). Learn more and get the details here regarding The Essential Creative Brief: <http://bdn-intl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Developing-a-More-Productive-Creative-Brief.pdf>

The direction for the start of creative development is only as good as the information provided in The Essential Creative Brief. Accordingly, undertake it collaboratively with the agency. This practice will lead to gaining the best and clearest thinking. It also helps ensure alignment between the client (i.e., the brand team) and its agency. There must be a clear understanding of what is communicated to whom and for what purpose.

Additionally, The Essential Creative Brief requires signed approval of the most senior client responsible for approving the brand's communications and the senior most person at the agency responsible for delivering it. It acknowledges the direction the agency and client will take. No creative works should begin until both parties approve the Essential Creative Brief.

One additional note, avoid dueling briefs. Agencies nearly always translate a client's brief into their "proprietary" briefing format, resulting in not one but two briefs. Change one word or even a punctuation mark, and you change the meaning.

**Eats, shoots and leaves.
Eats shoots and leaves.**

There can be only one brief. If there are two opposing briefs, which will the agency follow? Undoubtedly, their own! If your agency is determined to create a second, the client leader must make it perfectly clear that s/he will review all creative work through the lens of the approved, shared brief—The Essential Creative Brief.

Stage Two

This stage focuses on the creative development of the message to the Target Customer. Typically, once a creative brief is approved, the agency returns to the client two weeks, two months, or two years later (OK, I'm exaggerating) with creative recommendations in the format of intended media vehicles, such as storyboards for TV and print ad comps for print. This practice takes time and can be very costly (in personnel and monetary resources). Moreover, it misses a critical element. Namely, what's the BIG Idea!?!

“Without a Big Idea, your advertising is likely to pass like a ship in the (moonless, overcast) night (with its lights out).” David Ogilvy, parentheses yours truly

The best practice is to schedule a tissue meeting where the agency shares Campaign Ideas to ensure a quality process. I've written about, talked about, taught about, and practiced Campaign Ideas throughout my career as a brand marketer. The Campaign Idea is the "center of the plate" of high-impact leadership advertising. It consists of: the Naked Idea (i.e., creative concept), which is "how" the "what" (Benefit Promise) translates into compelling customer talk; Core Dramatization; and Key Copy Words. These three elements work together to deliver the single-minded direction of The Essential Creative Brief.

MasterCard “Priceless” Campaign Idea

Naked Idea: Juxtaposition of all the things one can buy with MasterCard, with the one priceless moment money cannot purchase.

Core Dramatization: Two visuals – Using the MasterCard to purchase something (e.g., two tickets to a Major League Baseball game) and then the priceless moment (e.g., father and son cheering on their team).

Key Copy Words: There are some things money can't buy; for everything else, there's MasterCard.

Tissues are like tracing paper. The Campaign Idea is scribbled on the paper. Direct the agency to prepare at least several Campaign Ideas that span several creative approaches (e.g., brand as hero, metaphor, etc.). The goal is to identify those ideas worthy of pursuing further. This stage focuses on the idea, not frivolous execution elements (like casting). It checks that the creative work is consistent with the strategic direction provided in The Essential Creative Brief. It saves time and money in developing creative messaging that will achieve the brand's Communication Behavior Objective.

It leads to further collaboration between the client and the agency. More on this is below.

Feedback: I hesitated to call this Stage Three because it's not a separate stage. Instead, this is the glue that holds all stages together. There are many other stages; I focused on the first two to ensure the creative development messaging process gets off to a sure-footed start. It's a hallmark of effective leaders.

Throughout messaging development, marketers must demonstrate leadership in providing clear, appropriate direction on all work. We do this through our comments. However, our commenting is mainly evaluative, an ineffective way to provide direction.

Imagine your boss encounters you outside your office. S/he loudly speaks to you: **I NEED TO SEE YOU IN MY OFFICE NOW. WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT WHY YOU'RE NOT GETTING PROMOTED HERE!** (Ouch, my ears hurt, and my face is turning crimson. I'm feeling embarrassment, anger, and lack of appreciation.)

You can expect that s/he will tell you everything you are doing wrong. Will you hear what the boss has to say? Not likely. You're going to be putting up your best defense. It's unlikely that the boss's talk will lead you to change your behavior (other than seek employment elsewhere or try to outlast the jerk). This exchange is what evaluation feels like and the adverse impact it has on you and your future performance. S/he hasn't helped guide you to the desired behavior for promotion. No one respects nor is interested in following this type of boss.

Coach: A vehicle for transporting people to a place they could not reach on their own.

On the other hand, consider coaching. Coaching is a super skill of an effective leader in providing sound direction that helps people achieve a higher level of performance they could not reach on their own. It's all about not commenting about what you don't like but what you need to see to make the messaging more productive.

Imagine the same boss, speaking in the same tone, with the same passion as before, but stating: **I NEED TO SEE YOU IN MY OFFICE NOW. WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO GET PROMOTED HERE!** It's music to my ears (albeit played loudly, which in this case could be inspiring). I'll gladly march into my boss's office to learn what I can do to get promoted.

When we coach others, regardless of whether it is our agency or other resource team member(s), we identify what we need to see to make the agency's work more effective—to take them to a place they couldn't reach on their own. (Obviously, if they could reach it independently, they would have already done so!)

Keep in mind that our coaching needs to be directional, not prescriptive. This means we need to allow whom we are coaching to find the solution. Why would we prescribe specifics to team members who have skills we may think we possess but, in truth, do not? Why would we pay our agency to provide them with our solutions?

What's prescriptive versus directional?

Prescriptive: Make the Key Copy Words say ...

Directional: We need to express the Key Copy Words in customer language and tie them in with the Campaign Idea. As a next step, please propose several alternatives at our next meeting.

Effective leadership starts with the proper direction. Proper direction will improve the likelihood of developing high-impact messaging. It's what effective brand leaders do.

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Also, consider following me on LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/richarddczerniawski/> where I share my perspectives from 50 years of successful worldwide brand marketing experience in my blog THINK ABOUT IT each week.

Are you interested in making your marketing matter even more in 2023? Please read my most recent book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors> It shares many of my learning to help avoid critical marketing errors and, importantly, suggest actions to take your marketing to the next level.

Peace and best wishes,

Richard Czerniawski