

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

PUT KEY COPY WORDS TO WORK FOR MORE EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

We've recently begun work for a client in a therapeutic category where the right treatment can mean the difference between prolonging life or dying prematurely. As we do with every assignment, we review the client's and their competitors' messaging. In this case, there are 14 brands (including therapies with multiple brands) and 26 ads—14 targeted to healthcare professionals (HCP) and 12 direct-to-consumers/patients (DTC/P).

While this is a category that spends BIG bucks (hundreds of millions of dollars each year) to message both healthcare professionals and sufferers, the messaging sucks for the most part. For one, it is difficult to distinguish a meaningfully different strategic benefit in the choices presented for a given indication. Additionally, except for a couple of brands, they lack a campaign idea. Also, while the majority of the ads contain “key copy words”—we're exceedingly generous in giving them the benefit of the doubt—they don't appear to be compelling.

While we could tackle each of the errors mentioned above, we're going to focus on key copy words (KCW) in this article. KCWs tend to be overlooked and/or misunderstood. They're often referred to as “taglines” because they typically appear at the end of an ad (last 5 seconds in a video and lower right-hand corner in copy). But a tagline is a kiss-off. KCWs are more, much more than a tagline—irrespective of where they appear or to whom they are addressed.

The Role of Key Copy Words

KCWs capture the strategic benefit in customer language. Accordingly, they need to be pithy, compelling, provocative, and emotive. It sounds like a lot to require because it is and needs to be if the KCWs are going to spark achievement of the brand's SMART communication behavior objective (i.e., switching, adoption, et al.). Also, to be KCWs, they must connect to, reinforce, and provide the focus for the campaign idea. KCWs don't just float around the execution or hang-out there like a tagline. Instead, they are an integral part of the campaign idea, which consists of the creative concept—which we refer to as the “naked idea”—and core dramatization.

KCWs serve as a post-it-note that you, the advertiser, attach to the customer's mind so s/he will remember your brand and its relevant, meaningful (and, hopefully, differentiated) promise. They express your strategic benefit in a way that will get target customers to appreciate your brand's proposition and what it means for them. If you skillfully employ KCWs they will serve to improve memorability, move your brand into the customers evoked set, bolster the impact of the campaign idea, and, importantly, drive the customer behavior you need to grow your brand.

Rosser Reeves, a legendary adman, referred to key copy words as "the unique selling proposition," its USP. The USP establishes that the promise needs to be unique to set your brand apart from its competitors. Importantly, it needs to sell target customers on choosing and using your brand. Another legendary adman, David Ogilvy, said, "It's not creative unless it sells." Precisely! We believe that the KCWs should be a USP. However, they must go one step further to capture and support the campaign idea.

If your messaging, in whatever form it takes, does not contain KCWs, then the likelihood of success and/or the degree of success will be diminished.

How to Make Your Brand's Messaging More Effective with Key Copy Words

Here are several ways you can use KCW to make them, and your brand's messaging, more effective:

1. ***Include KCWs in all your messaging.*** If you are going to ignore this principle for achieving high impact, no less effective messaging, you need to have a darn good, compelling reason because you are likely sacrificing connection, memorability, and impact.
2. ***Make it connect to the campaign idea:*** One of the classic ad campaigns for Tide laundry detergent—a torture test—featured demonstrations to show that Tide cleans ALL dirt, including the hard to get at dirt, from your laundry. They ground a white sock in dirt, placed it inside another sock, and then put it in the pocket of a pair of pants. They washed the pants in Tide and then took out the socks and showed that Tide even got the inner one totally clean. The key copy words for the campaign were, "Dirt can't hide from intensified Tide." All executions of the campaign idea dramatized these key copy words.
3. ***State it in customer language:*** If not customer language at least in language that your customers appreciate and will respond favorably, most favorably. Plan B One-Step emergency contraception uses the KCWs "For the perfectly imperfect," which helps those that have missed their birth control to understand it could happen to just about anyone. "Ahhhh, Allegra," clearly communicated complete relief from allergy symptoms. Get rid of stilted, boring strategy talk. If it reads or sounds like strategy, change it. Now!

4. ***Use KCWs that are memorable:*** Try to keep them short. However, this is not to say your KCWs must be brief. You may use a long string of KCWs, mainly where the target customer is familiar with them or something close to them. A good example is the MasterCard “Priceless” campaign, which has fueled some 20 years of growth. “There are some things in life that are priceless, for everything else there’s Mastercard.” Another way to enhance memorability is to make the KCWs rhyme or put them to music.
5. ***Marry the brand name with the KCWs:*** This action will serve to bolster brand linkage, helping target customers recall both the brand and its promise. “If it’s got to be clean, it’s got to be Tide.” “Living longer is possible. It’s TRU. KeyTRUda.” “Lipitor for ChoLESsterol.” Don’t miss out on this opportunity!
6. ***Strive to make your KCWs emotive:*** We want target customers to—in the words of Waterstones’ bookstores in the U.K., “feel every word.” Creating emotive KCWs helps target customers realize what the promise—your proposition—can mean for them. Snicker’s longstanding campaign reminds consumers that “You’re not you when you’re hungry.” The late Maya Angelou advised that “People may not remember what you say, but they will remember how you made them feel.” So, make them feel it!
7. ***Compel target customers to action:*** Employ a call to action with your KCWs. The classic Listerine mouthwash campaign exhorted consumers to “Fight halitosis.” An ad campaign for Prolia (for osteoporosis) in Europe urged HCPs to “Act before impact,” to avoid the devastating consequences to their patients of a bone fracture/break resulting from a fall. Alternatively, use KCWs in a way that inspires target customers to take action in achieving your SMART communication behavior objective!

Choose to employ KCWs to leave an indelible impression in the minds of your target customers. Consider our suggestions to help bolster their effectiveness.

Richard Czerniawski and Mike Maloney