



PERSUASIVE & CREATIVE BRAND COMMUNICATIONS

FROM MAGIC TO LOGIC

SHOULDERS
OF GIANTS™



PERSUASIVE & CREATIVE BRAND COMMUNICATIONS

FROM MAGIC TO LOGIC



A Shoulders of Giants publication

info@SOGiants.com | www.SOGiants.com

Published by **Shoulder of Giants**

info@SOGiants.com

All text © Shoulder of Giants 2009

The work (as defined below) is provided under the terms of the [Creative Commons Public License](#). The work is protected by copyright and/or other applicable law. Any use of the work other than as authorized under this license or copyright law is prohibited.

In terms of this copyright you are free to share, to copy, distribute and transmit the work under the following conditions:

Attribution – You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor

Noncommercial – You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

No Derivative Works – You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

For any reuse or distribution, please see the [Full License Terms](#) of this work.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
USING THE BUSINESS TOOLS	7
PART ONE 6 ESSENTIAL STEPS	9
STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING THE BRAND AND SETTING THE OBJECTIVES	10
STEP 2: GETTING THE TEAM RIGHT	14
STEP 3: TIGHT BRIEF AND INSPIRING BRIEFING	18
STEP 4: GETTING THE MOST FROM PRODUCTION	22
STEP 5: BRILLIANT BRAND ACTIVATION	25
STEP 6: DEVELOPING THE CAMPAIGN	29
MAKING USE OF THE 6 KEY STEPS	31
PART TWO 6 ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS	33
INSIGHT 1: IDEAS ARE PRECIOUS	36
INSIGHT 2: LEARN TO TRUST AND TAKE RISKS	39
INSIGHT 3: IDEAS MUST BE NURTURED	42
INSIGHT 4: HANDLE RESEARCH WITH CARE	45
INSIGHT 5: KEEP IT FRESH	49
INSIGHT 6: IDEAS FOR A CHANGING WORLD	52
APPLYING THE 6 ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS	57

Thanks to the following Giants of *Brand Communications* for their participation:

Scott Bedbury	Brandstream (formerly Nike and Starbucks)
Will Colin	Naked
Stef Calcraft	Mother
Mark Austin	Formerly of Mediaedge:cia
Shelly Lazerus	Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide
John Hegarty	BBH
Mark Earls	Formerly of Ogilvy and Mather and Saint Lukes
Cilla Snowball	AMV BBDO
Tim Delaney	Leagas Delaney
Robyn Putter	WPP plc
David Wheldon	Vodafone plc
Keith Weed	Unilever plc
Rupert Howell	Formerly of McCann Erickson
Charlie Hiscocks	SABMiller plc
Peter Stringham	HSBC
Dave Luhr	Wieden & Kennedy
Dan Wieden	Wieden & Kennedy
Adrian Coleman	VCCP
Mike Hall	Hall & Partners
Robin Wight	WCRS
Chris Satterthwaite	Chime Communications
Andy Fennell	Diageo plc
Robert Saville	Mother
Bruce Haines	Formerly of Leo Burnett

INTRODUCTION

This eBook is aimed at anyone engaged in brand communications at every level, whether on the client or agency side. It will no doubt confirm some prejudices, but it should challenge others also; hopefully it will surprise and inspire.

If you know nothing about advertising and brands, it should enlighten you. If you are already engaged in marketing, it should provide a kind of master class for the true enthusiast. If you are a student, it will teach you valuable insights into what marketing means in the real world and may even inspire you to pursue a career in brand communications. If you are an academic, it should give you some lively class material. If you are a CEO or finance director, it will shed light on tackling the challenges you face in investing money wisely behind your brands.

USING THE BUSINESS TOOLS

This eBook also includes a number of key questions you can use as a tool to put the key lessons into practice. At the end of each section, you will find a set of questions that you can use as:

- an **Alignment Tool**, a great way to get your Brand Comms team aligned at the outset of a project.
- a **Diagnostic Tool** at the end of a project to understand what went well and what could have been improved.

Each question can be ranked in terms of importance. 1 = not that important and 5 = very important.

In recognition that the first in the 6 Essential Steps is to create the right team, the questions have been designed to check that the team is aligned in terms of their objectives, the way they want to work together and what they think is important overall.

The intention is to build a common sense of purpose and ensure that any potential areas of conflict regarding the process are resolved early on. Remember, the most important thing is that the team is energized and has passion for the task ahead. Run a session on this and make sure it is as fun and informal as possible - to help build trust and relationships – and try to follow the following steps:

- The questions should be pre-circulated to allow people to think about them first.

- At the kick off team meeting, the team leader (only one!) should lead the discussion about each question in turn.
- Where there is total agreement on a point that is felt to be important, the team should spend some time discussing how they will achieve what is required.
- Where there is disagreement, everyone should be given a chance to air their views and the team should try to reach a consensus. If necessary, the leader must provide a lead and force a conclusion, but only after everyone has been heard. Then the team should again discuss what is necessary to achieve the desired outcome.
- Most importantly, the team should be invited to add other issues and questions. The tool does not try to be an exhaustive list and the leader should encourage people to contribute their own views and comments.
- At the end of the session, spend some time discussing what success will feel like, what the team want their other colleagues to say about the project, the benefits of success. In other words, end on a high!
- Remember to make this as much fun and as interactive as possible. The session is supposed to lay the foundations for the whole project – the tool is just that, a tool to build alignment and motivation.
- Immediately after the meeting (within 24 hours), the leader should write up the conclusions e.g. 'we agreed these things were important and here is how we agreed to tackle them'. This is for no one else other than the members of the team and should be circulated to them ONLY.
- People have found that it's helpful to get everyone to sign the summary document. This represents a shared bond – there is something about putting one's signature to something that makes it stick.
- At various points in the project – especially if things seem to be going off track – refer back to the document and use it to structure a discussion on how things need to be addressed.

One final observation on using the tools; very few people will go through with this as recommended. Then again, *most Brand Comms projects fail to meet their objectives*. Bear in mind that every expert who contributed to this eBook said that a focused, well-motivated and aligned agency/client team was the key factor in achieving successful Brand Comms.

PART ONE

6 ESSENTIAL STEPS

The advertising budget is often one of the biggest investments a business makes to create shareholder value. And rightly so; the momentum created by great brands can reap rewards for decades – often outliving the people who first created them.

Yet many clients regard brand communications as more of an art than a science - approaching it as almost a haphazard, serendipitous process; one they accept sometimes produces a winner ... but more often an also-ran.

The truth is that the best clients and agencies see brand communications as a journey with clear steps. Understanding the rules will not guarantee success, but by respecting the well-defined steps along the way you can maximize the chances of developing powerful and persuasive brand communications that support your business objectives and help drive your business forward long into the future.

The six essential steps of the Brand Comms process are:

1. **Understanding the brand and setting the objectives**
2. **Getting the team right**
3. **Tight brief and inspiring briefing**
4. **Getting the most from production**
5. **Brilliant brand activation**
6. **Developing the campaign**

STEP 1:

Understanding the brand and setting the objectives

Of course, the brand is at the heart of brand communications. Defining it clearly at the outset is vital if you are to get the most from your investment.

Clarifying the blur

Imagine a brand as being like a radio signal – one that competes with hundreds of others across the airwaves. If that signal is not spot on and accurate it doesn't matter if you play it with the best amplifier and speakers in the world - all you will produce is fuzzy sound.

“ To start a brand communication project without a well-formed brand positioning is virtually impossible for the agency. The expression “you can't make chicken soup from chicken shit” comes to mind ... if you get a bad brand positioning you will never get great brand communication. ”

KEITH WEED, UNILEVER

Brands are complex, like living organisms that evolve and mutate over time. But they are also intangible and emotional, hovering above the actual product like a spirit or ghost at any one moment in time. Remember that the most important part of the brand, the hidden part, is what endures in the long run.

This is the hardest part to capture.

“ It is that thing. It needs to be a very concise thing, like “Coke is it”; it’s a sense of authenticity. If it’s Millers, it’s “the champagne of bottled beers” or if it’s Nike, it’s “just do it”. It’s an athletic authenticity. Those are very simple things, but eventually it has to be embodied in a personality. It has to have an emotional quality to it. ”

DAN WIEDEN, WIEDEN & KENNEDY

One way to think about this is to ask, who are the people behind the brand? The visionaries, architects and believers. What do they believe in and why should anyone care? (That’s why it’s often easier to define a brand essence based on an entrepreneur because the human face behind the brand is already there.) If you get this right it will sound simple, and that’s likely to be a very good thing.

“ There are brand keys, there are brand onions, and there are brand essences. No one knows the difference between a proposition and a positioning. A brand key or a brand onion is more or less unintelligible to most people. All brands now have a service aspect to them and they’re expected to do something with the brand plan that they’re given. If it’s too complicated it doesn’t even begin to work ... simplification is the name of the game right now. ”

CHRIS SATTERTHWAITE, CHIME COMMUNICATIONS

Get the brand right now!

It’s essential to get senior management involved, at least at the early stages of brand planning. This is how the brand can be identified and defined in line with fundamental business objectives - reflecting the character of the business behind it. This is important because you can’t just make a brand up based on assumptions of what you think people like to hear; it has to connect by building a bridge between what’s great about you and your offerings and what people really want.

“ ... the single most important place to start is with an understanding that the brand is about the DNA of the company. You can’t invent brands, you can’t invent the things that the brands need and kind of bolt them on to the company. So the first place to start with is what exactly does the company have to offer that has the potential of making a truly differentiated brand? ”

PETER STRINGHAM, HSBC

There are many tools you can use for this – methods and templates for capturing in words what the brand really stands for. Whatever you use, make sure it leads to a positioning that is simple enough for everyone in the team to comprehend. Don't rely just on words to capture what the brand stands for. Bring it alive using pictures and any stimuli that help convey what is truly unique and special about it, its role in peoples lives and its values. And make sure you get it right early on - discrepancies between what you communicate and what people really observe and experience can prove expensive, if not disastrous.

Brand Comms should take you on a journey from where you are to where you want to be. There should be some stretch in this, a little ambition, but it cannot be so unrealistic as to be fantasy. Accept that the journey may have more than one step. You may not get all the way to where you want to be with 'just one campaign', so be clear about not just the ultimate objectives but also some of the milestones to be achieved along the way.

“ It's very important that you have milestones in any journey. If you don't then you don't know where you're going and you don't know where the key moments are and what you need to focus on. Before you start you have to sit down and say, this is where we are, this is where we're going and, with time, here are the places we can get to. ”

SHELLEY LAZERUS, OGILVY

Before you try to change the course of history with your Brand Comms, you have to know what that history has been, so you don't repeat mistakes and can base your strategy on what already exists. That's why it's so important for anyone joining a brand team to be thoroughly indoctrinated into the history of the brand and what it means, so brand values can be passed from one generation to the next.

Beyond this (or even as a product of all of this) is the tone of voice of the brand - the lasting character that is so vital to brand communications that, most often, only evolves over time. Spend time on this; decide what is timeless about a brand and what the brand would and would not do. Decide and express these as firm guardrails that will help to define future development (see also [Kevin Lane Keller's *Brand Planning*](#)).

“ One of the things that we've done here is try and cut away the oversell and make brands legitimately able to claim something whilst knowing their own place in the world. ”

STEF CALCRAFT, MOTHER

KEY QUESTIONS

- Has the brand been captured clearly and simply, in language everyone understands?
- Is it authentic; does it reflect a product truth that sits well in the present and will endure into the future?
- Is the human quality there, the personality, values and tone of voice; accepting that this evolves over time and may be a working hypothesis?
- Have you defined a destination, along with realistic milestones that will get you where you want to be?
- Are senior decision-makers involved and committed in this process?

STEP 2: Getting the team right

“ The best clients operate to the carrot, not the stick mentality. It’s not “this is what I want and you will deliver it.” Rather, “This is what we’re trying to do, trying to achieve, now how do we get there together?” ”

CILLA SNOWBALL, AMV BBDO

This chapter looks at how to compose the team and what size it should be. It also covers how to energise the team, the part that process plays and the role of the client.

Team is key

The foundation of truly persuasive brand communications is a truly effective team. Getting that team right is half the battle. Yet, surprisingly, the importance of this essential aspect is so often neglected. The same rules apply to a Brand Comms team as would apply to any top project team: good leadership with an optimum balance of the best people that can work well together. Individual brilliance has its place, but only within this context.

“ I would always be in favour of teams that are the smaller the better; where there is clear direction; where there’s a mandate for people to make decisions. ”

CILLA SNOWBALL, AMV BBDO

Keep the team as tight as possible - as few members from both client and agency with the right skills and abilities to maintain focus. Even better: avoid layers on the client side (junior, middle and senior people) by getting your senior and most experienced person to lead the team.

This reflects the way such teams have changed over the years: from agencies receiving their briefing and then coming back with a single concept, to client/agency teams coming together and producing a variety of ideas that are judged and developed collaboratively and decided upon swiftly.

“ Sharing an idea should be a fun activity - something both sides of the table are really looking forward to, where you can't tell who's agency and who's client in the room . That's when it's at its best. Try to create an environment where people have time, are chilled out, are having fun. ”

ANDY FENNELL, DIAGEO PLC

Clients don't work with agencies; people work with people.

Client and agency must work together as partners, the ideal being where you can be discussing something and it is not clear who is working for whom. That means everyone is on the same side and the team is stronger for it.

There should be lots of opportunity to spend time together, doing things not directly associated with 'business' so you really get to know each other and build shared excitement and – most important of all – trust.

“ Trust is central ... you will get trust by admitting your mistakes. ”

ROBIN WIGHT, WCRS

Diversity

Any great team should include challengers, mavericks, builders and drivers. The team leader needs to embrace this diversity and possess the skills to cope with some dissent on occasion. If people care about the 'mission' there will be robust debate and challenge. This is good. Great teams don't avoid conflict; they develop ways of managing it productively.

“ Any vibrant team is always going to have mavericks in it. By definition, if you’ve got the right sort of leader - in other words a leader who enjoys the creative side of dissent then it’s fine. If you’ve got a leader who’s essentially a bully, who just wants his or her own way, you don’t get anywhere. ”

RUPERT HOWELL, FORMERLY McCANN ERICKSON

From brief to decision

That said, the senior person on the client side must still remain involved and take responsibility throughout. They should listen to everyone's views yet be prepared to make a decision, despite any inconsistencies in opinion.

In fact, the golden rule is: *he or she who briefs must decide*. You cannot agree the brief in the team and then pass the ultimate decisions to other senior people who have not been involved in the process. This can be hard to achieve in big companies. However, it is often the single biggest reason why Brand Comms underperform or fail. Make sure senior decision makers are involved right from the start!

Process, but not too much

“ I don’t think anyone who knows me would say I was a process person. I’m not terribly good at flowcharts and form filling and what have you. But I have come to value what process can provide which is guidelines and a level of robust framework. But as ever, I think it’s critically important to recognise and value both - what process can provide, and what it can’t, and what imagination and magic can provide on top. ”

CHARLIE HISCOCKS, SABMILLER PLC

It's important to follow a shared idea of process - a structure that the team will follow. However, this process must allow for some space and room for early discussion. The brief will be refined more and more as the team's understanding advances throughout the process. But you need to allow space for ideas to emerge at this stage. The process is important but must not be allowed to constrain the creation of new thought - especially early on.

There must be energy, fun, excitement, and a true commitment to deliver the best the team is

capable of. Again, this is true of any high performance team but especially true in Brand Comms where the task of uncovering new and profitable paths for the business is that much harder. You cannot just 'go through the motions and expect to find success'.

“ The best client agency relationships are those where you may go out to dinner a lot; you may go drinking, partying, you may fish together. But there's something that goes beyond the business aspect of clients/agencies and that's when it gets real - when a client/agency start trusting each other and start trying new things. That's when it's most productive. ”

DAN WIEDEN, WIEDEN & KENNEDY

KEY QUESTIONS

- Have you really given thought at the outset to what 'a great team' actually means?
- Have you put together the best team you can?
- Are people's roles clear both to themselves and to each other?
- Is the team as tight as it can be, with the minimum number of layers?
- Have you set the ground rules and defined the goal in compelling terms?
- Is the team – and especially the leader – truly able to say 'yes' or 'no'?
- Is there genuine passion; are the relationships strong?
- Is there trust and honesty throughout the team?
- Can you handle conflict objectively?

STEP 3: Tight brief and inspiring briefing

“ ... the rigour of the brief often comes from the product truth. What is it about this product that is unique to this product - the inescapable truth about a product? ”

CILLA SNOWBALL, AMV BBDO

Okay, we've recognised that the team must work to a brief. Now the team is established, its first task is to ascertain and refine what that brief is – to lay out the fundamental aims of the brand and its objectives.

Depending on how evolved and up-to-date the brand is you may get the brief right first time. More often, though, it takes discussion and challenge early on to build it into shape and get the whole team committed to it.

Be wary of a brief that's too obvious and logical, it's more likely to provide a straightjacket rather than a springboard for creativity. Inconsistencies and holes in the initial brief can reveal product truths by picking away at them until you uncover new bases for ideas.

“ ... if a brief makes perfect sense it's wrong. It's the little crack when you start pulling stuff away that doesn't quite add up and you go into the crack and put your finger in it and pull it apart. Then you'll find something truly amazing ... ”

STEF CALCRAFT, MOTHER

Eye-to-eye is invaluable

The initial briefing session, where the client shares what they believe about the brand and what they are trying to achieve, is vital. It must be face-to-face so the agency side of the team can see the conviction behind the brief (honesty, confidence and nuance cannot be expressed or understood in an email!) The key purpose of a briefing is to create a sense of partnership, to inspire and open up thinking. This is your first opportunity to create an atmosphere of expectation, energy and shared motivation.

“ It’s important to take a briefing face-to-face. I want to look into that person’s eyes when they’re briefing me. Do they really believe they want something very different? Do they believe they’re looking for a leap? Do they really believe they want the change? You’ve got to sit in front of somebody and look them in the eye and go: “are you sure you want this? Is this what you need?” ”

JOHN HEGARTY, BBH

The agency should exercise a measure of detachment to the briefing process, in comparison with the client who may be too close to the brand to maintain a balanced view. That’s why it’s important for the agency to preserve a degree of independence - the role of objective outsiders looking in. Everyone should accept that the goal is to convince the world outside the room – not the people sitting in it.

It can be a good idea to make the briefing session fun and inspiring, perhaps in an environment that reflects the brand experience. The swimwear company *Speedo* once held a briefing session in a swimming pool so their agency could understand what was special about the brand.

Write it down

“ ... the ideal brief for starters is one page. I think it’s a waste of time to walk into a room full of art directors, writers and account people with a PowerPoint deck. ”

SCOTT BEDBURY, BRANDSTREAM (FORMERLY NIKE AND STARBUCKS)

At some point, the brief must be committed to paper – preferably one sheet of paper so it is tight, makes choices and is focused. The emphasis should be on clarity of purpose – where the

brand must go and the role of Brand Comms in getting it there. The best briefs are founded on an important truth about the brand and the product behind it (Guinness, for example, has been famously good at this over the years). If you are clear on where you want the brand to get to then the creative team can use their creativity to maximum effect in taking you there. If the creative team likes to work with lots of facts, background and texture, you can support the brief with additional background material - effectively a palette of 'evidence' from which they can begin to paint.

After a briefing, the agency will often huddle together and come up with a range of ideas which can be shared and discussed. Occasionally *the big idea* will come from the first rush of work, but more often, it takes longer. Be prepared for this.

“ You have to allow for magic to be able to happen and then you can rationalise it. You can always rationalise magic; but one thing I do know is that logic does not lead to magic. There's a leap that needs to happen. In whatever process you put in place, make sure that there's enough air in the process to allow the unexpected to fall out the sky. Encourage that to happen. ”

ROBYN PUTTER, WPP

Finally, both client and agency need to think about how they will deal with the result of this process once ideas are presented. All should remain open throughout, even though commercial pressures may add some tension to the process. Notwithstanding, it's vital that everyone maintains honesty at this stage. The client should present their most senior person first (accepting that this is not a training ground for junior staff) who should listen carefully to the ideas presented and give an initial reaction - ideally their instinctive, emotional response, not a considered intellectual one - before retiring with the team to give allow the idea to 'sink in'. Likewise, the agency should offer concepts with honesty and clarity in the best interests of the project and state plainly how they believe their ideas stack up, what they think of each and which one they favour. If the agency has an idea that still needs time to mature, this is the time to say it.

“ I have relationships with many of my clients where I can just call them up and say, “this idea is not quite there yet; there are two others that are, but I think the one that's not quite developed is going to be extraordinary. Could you just give us another week or two and just see where it goes?” Usually, if you've had success together before and you trust each other, most clients will say, “okay, let's go with it for a while and see where we get to.” ”

SHELLEY LAZERUS, OGILVY

KEY QUESTIONS

- Is the brief as tight as it can be?
- Does the brief identify a clear a destination on the basis of a real insight about the brand – a unique truth – and its relationship with its intended users?
- Is the other stuff – background facts, strategic context and opportunities to see how real people use the brand etc. – available if required?
- Are the constraints minimised and is fresh thinking nurtured and encouraged?
- Has thought gone into setting up the briefing and creating the ideal environment and mood?
- Will the team be truly inspired by the briefing and the brief?
- Clients: have you thought about how you are going to react to the first responses?
- Agencies: have you asked about this? Is there enough trust to be honest about what you present?

STEP 4: Getting the most from production

Most briefs include some initial hypothesis about media and other communications tools that will be employed. Getting the most from production is then about how the materials – typically, but not exclusively, the ads – can make the leap from good to fantastic.

Repetitive improvement

However, there is an iterative loop here. You start with a hypothesis on media and activation but (as the next section covers) you have to be prepared to change that when you start to produce work. As the idea develops the team may start to see new and better ways to use the idea in different media and other aspects of brand activation - like packaging and merchandising.

So although we will now deal with production, do not assume this is always the next step. Some teams will logically tackle media and brand activation as part of the brief and then go through the idea creation to production. Some (as noted above) will start with a hypothesis on media etc. and then revisit it. There is no right or wrong answer.

Production is often where a good idea can become a great idea. To take a simple example, the idea for the famous Apple '1984' ad probably looked rather ordinary as a script, but when it was produced and aired in the middle of the Superbowl it became brilliant!

“ There should be leeway given to add to the material you start out with. It's particularly true in visual commercials where you have a two or three-day shoot and can add interesting scenes you hadn't thought about by virtue of where you are on location or by what crops up. That's perfectly acceptable and advisable and should be encouraged. ”

TIM DELANEY, LEAGAS DELANEY

Production is where all the ideas for Brand Comms are handed over to the professionals who will make them happen. A lot of money is spent on this phase. It can be handled well – so a good idea really takes off, or it can be handled badly – so a good idea results in lifeless material. Always bear in mind though that the unexpected often happens during the production process. Allow some flexibility for this in terms of a) budget and b) trusting the professionals to run with any ideas that may crop up during production.

“ We were doing another shoot with Tiger Woods and in between takes he was sitting there bored and started bouncing the golf ball on the end of his club. Luckily, someone on the set said, “hey that’s brilliant, we should do a spot on that” and we shot it. That became a far better spot than what we were actually doing ... that’s the miracle of execution. You have to be flexible enough to spot a good idea or any changes that can improve it. And you need to have clients that are flexible enough to say, “yeah that’s a good idea, go do that”. ”

DAVE LUHR, WIEDEN & KENNEDY

Client involvement

“ The role of the client in execution is key because: first of all they’ve got to let go; (2) they’ve got to afford enough money to do it properly; (3) they’ve got to believe in the people they’re working with and (4) they’ve got to enjoy the process. ”

TIM DELANEY, LEAGAS DELANEY

The client’s involvement in production can be either too much or not enough. The best approach to this dilemma is to be very careful in pre-production, where everyone gets very detailed on exactly what is needed and envisaged for the production process. Once this is determined, the client side of the team must stand back and give the professionals space, respect, and trust to do the job. Clients that get too involved by checking in constantly, attending the shoot, pestering the production team with endless questions etc. will get in the way of great work.

“ It’s tough for a client to let go because during the conceptual phase the client’s very involved in that concept. Once it’s approved they have to let go a bit, and we demand they let go. If the client stays in on a daily basis it’s not fair. ”

DAVE LUHR, WIEDEN & KENNEDY

There will always be big egos involved in the production phase. Treat the 'artistic creators' with respect but never be sycophantic. There are times when you have to be firm and remind people of the project's intentions, along with what the budget and timelines are. Ultimately, everyone should be able to put the brand and the big idea first and their personal issues second.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Is everyone clear about what has to be produced and what is expected of them?
- If that's been done properly, are people being given enough space and freedom to get on and do their jobs?
- Is there enough flexibility and budget to allow the idea to grow in the execution and to back ideas that emerge at this stage in the process?

STEP 5: Brilliant Brand Activation

“ Brand activation is all the activities that a brand does to communicate with its consumers. Brand activation could include everything from the promotion that you see in a pub, the clothing that the bar staff are wearing, television commercials or sponsorships and events. It could even include, and I think should include, displays at the point of sale in supermarkets and packaging. ”

CHARLIE HISCOCKS, SABMILLER PLC

Brand Activation is a crucial stage in the Brand Comms process where you plan how to use the creative idea in media or other communication tools. This spreads much wider than just 'the ads'. There is packaging, presentation, customer service, events, PR and a host of methods available to bring everything together. It helps to take a holistic approach to this; looking at everything available to you first and ruling things out, rather than starting with a list and deciding what can be added. As noted above, brand activation does not necessarily fit neatly before or after the production stage. It can be a little more iterative (or even messy) than that.

Even without all the new media channels available these days, there are many channels to choose from and it's best not to approach this with any pre-conceived ideas. In fact, one test of a great creative Brand Comms idea is that it inspires lots of thoughts as to how creatively it can be used.

“ You cannot have any preconceived notions about what media you're going to use. You have to go into each circumstance and be open-minded and objective. The most fun we have these days is figuring out how to use all the new media that's available to us - to figure out how to get to a client's business objective. ”

SHELLEY LAZERUS, OGILVY

Communicating with smart consumers

Consumers are more aware of their value than ever before, as well as being more perceptive and demanding. They reject intrusion unless there is something in it for them and expect a degree of personalisation. Less and less, are people compelled to watch or take part – you have to make them want to. You have to make it so good they tell their friends, maybe even email them the ad and want to ask you questions. Pestering them or using the 'interrupt and repeat' model no longer works anything like as well as it used to. The key word today is 'engage'.

“ In a post-modern consumer society people need more convincing. Ideally they want four or five points of contact with the brand - see an ad, talk to a friend who says, “actually it’s half decent this new mobile phone”; get an offer in a shop which says you get a month’s trial free and have probably read something about it by an independent witness in some style magazine. That seems to be the general pattern. Repeating the same message on TV and expecting people to buy doesn’t happen. They need four or five points of contact. ”

CHRIS SATTERTHWAITE, CHIME COMMUNICATIONS

Ideas must be communicated in a variety of different and complementary ways (branding is not about how often you show the logo). Today, the so-called 360-degree approach is mandatory. Great brands maintain a consistent tone of voice and story, however many messages, media and touch-points are used to connect the brand with the consumer.

Get it right internally too

Unfortunately, many clients and agencies structure their businesses in 'silos'. The digital team don't talk to the broadcast media team; or are a separate agency altogether. The sales and merchandising team don't talk to the brand marketing team. The senior client person must do all they can to break these barriers down so to reveal clearly how to integrate all the brand activation options. It may be at this point – to develop the full brand activation plan – that your 'tight' team will need to expand and include other key individuals.

Very importantly, all brands these days have a service element to them; some, like banks or retail brands are almost entirely about service. Therefore, the brand activation must also include the internal activation. There should be a co-ordinated plan to communicate and enrol people within the business in defining what is required to deliver the brand experience and the Brand Comms

plan. This could be the single most important element and may need to precede the external Brand Comms plan.

“ I try to counsel my clients to make sure that the brand is activated internally first and widespread. We had a great campaign where the biggest healthcare company in the United States held off advertising for a year; there was a great campaign position ready to go but 140,000 employees needed to live the brand before it was actually spoken about. So the “walk before you talk” is critically important. We seem to be in a rush to activate the brand across every channel and often we forget about the most important channel, which is the internal one. ”

SCOTT BEDBURY, BRANDSTREAM (FORMERLY NIKE AND STARBUCKS)

Bring it together - keep it consistent

There's a lot to think about in brand activation. As well as being the most expensive stage in the process it is arguably the most important. This is what customers will actually get to experience and it is certainly where most of the budget goes. But done well it can have a turbo-charger effect where everything is given added momentum.

The outcome of effective Brand Comms is two fold:

- Firstly, when you look at great brands and everything they do, the Brand Comms become 'like a stick of rock' – every way you cut it you see the same brand DNA written through the middle.
- Secondly, all the various elements work together to produce a real shift, not only in consumer attitudes but also in their behaviour. For example, you see an ad and then an in-store display, you read an independent review, you get a chance to sample the brand and a friend tells you about something positive they have heard – all of this comes together to get you to a tipping point where you join the brand's community of customers.

Finally, a word on budgeting. Communications plans are best viewed in two to three year chunks, because this is typically the timeline they work over. This can be a problem as companies tend to work to annual budgets, but it's worth finding a way around this constraint. Moreover, budget setting should, first and foremost, be task-related – what does it cost to do what you want? - not, what do we have? or what did we spend last year? Then and only then should you look at the competitive context and the anticipated return on investment.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Have you assembled the right team for the brand activation phase of the process and considered whether it should now be expanded?
- Have you considered and understood all the options available and then ruled out unsuitable ones?
- Does your budget look far enough ahead?
- Is your budget decided in terms of the task and not just the precedent or the competition?
- Do you have enough consistent touch-points to achieve overall impact and a change of behaviour?

STEP 6: Developing the campaign

“ It’s too easy these days for people to get lazy with their brands, lazy with their communication. Everything’s working fine and so why rock the boat? Well, in my view, the paranoid are the ones that survive. You always need to be looking out for a fast-moving market place. Who’s coming up next? Who’s behind you? What are the competition doing? What are new launches doing? What was your last piece of communication? Where are your customers going? What else is new out there? ... if you’ve got an eye on all that you will do well as a brand. If you haven’t and you get fat and lazy, that is when other people will take your market share. ”

ADRIAN COLEMAN, VCCP

So, your campaign is running and it reflects your brand perfectly. It's hitting all the right touch points and is integrated through all the right communications tools. Is it time to relax? Not at all! Now you have to start thinking seriously about how you will keep your Brand Comms fresh, relevant and in touch (if you haven't already). You have to challenge yourself continually to find new and better ways to get the message across as well as seeking out new ways to deliver it.

As you move on through a campaign you'll need to keep abreast of all kinds of new developments, both internally and externally. At this stage, Brand Comms can be thought of like the newsroom of a successful news channel, where you're constantly aware of new developments both internally and externally and stay on the hunt for ways to relate news to your audience. The team will continually work closely together and think of how to refresh Brand Comms messages that support the truths of the brand with new places, people, situations etc. Of course, the core of the brand will remain but it's your job to keep it top of mind with the consumer by delivering its messages in as many new and exciting ways as possible.

If your positioning is right and you have a successful campaign running the last thing you want to do is to slip into the trap of becoming complacent. Things will change, probably quicker than you

expected. In fact, today, change happens faster than ever before. If you make a conscious effort to stay on top of what's happening in the world and how events will affect your brand you can respond promptly and make the most of opportunities. Alternatively, sitting back and basking in the glory of a great campaign can lead to the brand losing touch with its market all too soon.

It's also very important to be careful that personal agendas are not allowed to bend the brand out of shape. Brand managers are primarily custodians of the brand and should act always in its interests - not use it as an opportunity to make a mark before moving onto other things. Of course, a focused cultivation of brand messages is essential for survival but senior management must not allow too much tinkering with the fundamentals. It can be a delicate balance but one that must be maintained if you are to keep the brand close to its audience and nurture it through external pressures and challenges from competitors.

“ These days a great brand idea will often have a shorter life. Things change so fast, attitudes change so fast, that it's often difficult to come up with a great brand idea that really has a tenure. It might only be a great brand idea for two years. ”

MARK AUSTIN FORMERLY MEDIAEDGE CIA

Ongoing development of Brand Comms should be a perpetual undertaking - a repeated stage in the process where you systematically review and evaluate what's happening to your brand, learn what opportunities and threats are present (or will be) and apply the lessons as part of an ongoing strategy. It's all too easy to doze off and then awake to find competitors have got the jump on you. Stay vigilant and keep it creative!

KEY QUESTIONS

- Do you have the process in place to maintain the campaign's performance and to evaluate it systematically?
- Is your first reflex to keep the idea and core brand truths intact while refreshing its delivery?
- Have you established ways to constantly come together as team and make it your mission to find new news for the brand?
- If and when you decide to make changes, are they the right changes – made for the right consumer-based reasons (more on this in Part 2)?

MAKING USE OF THE 6 KEY STEPS

To remind you, the 6 Essential Steps are based on the views of real experts, industry gurus, in many cases, legends, with collectively over 400 years experience of producing world-class Brand Comms – work that really has persuaded people to change their behaviour, work that has built some of the most famous brands in the world.

Everyone has their own particular view on precisely how to define the key steps and some of the subtle nuances. However, everyone agrees that you can increase your chance of success if, at the very least, you understand and respect these important areas; although they would all acknowledge that a) it is easier to describe than do and b) the process will be somewhat messy.

To summarise, let's just recap on the key steps and the really important messages.

1. You have to start the process with a clearly articulated and expressed idea of what the brand is, what you want it to be and what the milestones that connect the two are. The journey towards great Brand Comms starts with a clearly understood role for the communications.
2. This is a team exercise. The rules of what makes a great team (tight as possible, clear leadership, mutual trust and respect, highly motivated etc.) apply big-time because the task - to produce persuasive Brand Comms that build an enduring and differentiated brand - is really hard. Give this the time, honesty and attention it deserves (and use this eBook to help you in an active way).
3. The quality of the brief (short, focused, inspiring) and the briefing meeting (personal, enthusiastic) are obviously crucial. Remember, it may take some discussion and challenge to

get from the first initial brief to the final brief, one that is agreed and bought into by the whole team. And MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL – he or she who briefs (the client leader) decides. You can't have senior people coming in at the end of the process and undermining it with uninformed criticism.

4. The production of the actual materials requires a further leap where good ideas can become great and great ones can become amazing. Be clear what you want from production but hire the best and let them do their job.
5. Brand activation is all the ways you will use the idea, the various media and channels available to you - in other words, the consumer touch-points. There should be several of them that reinforce each other to get real impact. By all means start with an early hypothesis about brand activation, even in the original brief, but be prepared to develop your views. Get the opinions of experts; be as creative as you can, rule things out, not in.
6. All campaigns develop - you need to be hyper-alert to changes in the market place and changes in society. But your first reflex should be to refresh the way the message is put across and not change the fundamental idea - either the brand idea (positioning) or the communications idea that came from it. Make changes for sound, consumer-based reasons, not personal agendas.

These are the key steps and the advice of experts. If your brand communications fail to deliver or underperform, the reason will lie in something having gone wrong in one or more of these areas. Use the questions posed to help align the team in advance and give yourself the best chance to succeed (or use them to understand exactly where the problems were and apply the lessons in future).

Throughout this first section, we have talked about ideas and the creative communications idea at the heart of persuasive Brand Comms. The stronger the idea, the more persuasive the output will be in terms of the Brand Comms. Realistically there are no 'steps to having a great idea' per se (not every play Shakespeare wrote was great). But there are insights the experts can give you that increase your chances to encourage, identify and nurture great ideas.

The next section tackles this, again based on the views of successful practitioners who have not just won the awards but have had the commercial success to prove it.

PART TWO

6 ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS

Ideas can change the world. Creative brand ideas can change the fortunes of companies!

As already noted, at the heart of persuasive brand communications is an idea, often a very simple idea but one that is fresh, powerful and inspiring; an idea based on some truth that is an authentic and original insight about the product, the user, the market, or life that can, itself, often be expressed very simply.



THE MASTERCARD EXAMPLE

The brief for MasterCard was to persuade us that it is the card that can be used everywhere, to buy everything - not just big purchases but everyday things like groceries or music.

The creative idea was to focus on the truly priceless things in life (like time with a loved one) and acknowledge that some things are indeed priceless but for everything else there's MasterCard. In other words, to focus on the things we cannot acquire with a MasterCard to convince us that it can be used for just about everything else.

Great creative ideas have to be strong, emanating from an authentic and sincere truth about the product. If they're not, then the investment behind them is largely wasted. Some examples of product truths that have been successfully turned into great ideas are:

Guinness: *'Good things come to those who wait'*
(it takes 113 seconds to pour a pint of Guinness)

Nike: *'Just do it!'*
(from their brand mantra, 'Authentic Athletic Performance')

Dove: *'Real beauty products for real women'*

BMW: *'The ultimate driving machine'*

Stella Artois: *'Reassuringly expensive'*

Walkers / Lays: *'No more Mr Nice Guy'*
(so irresistible, even nice guys will steal them)

Often it takes time and a few wrong turns to get to this understanding of what the idea really is. However, once they show themselves great ideas will become evidently capable of working across lots of different media and over a long period.



Nike were on the ropes and struggling when they bet everything on a new sports shoe with air in the sole. The idea was to present 'Nike Air' as a true 'revolution', using the Beatles music of the same name and only montages of athletes performing while wearing the shoe. This was a real risk, but one that paid off. It turned the tide for Nike and saw them re-establish themselves as number one ahead of Reebok and Adidas.

Coming up with creative ideas, nurturing, protecting and then activating those ideas is what singles out the first-rate creative agencies – agencies clients pay top dollar to work with. Knowing how to help and support the agency in this process is what singles out the great clients.

There is no formula for coming up with great ideas. Everyone acknowledges that it is extremely hard and true success is rare. Learning from the experts (those who have collectively come up with some of the world's greatest brand ideas and turned them into campaigns generating billions in sales) will help you build much stronger insights into how *the best creative ideas shape great Brand Comms*.

There are many insights throughout this second section to help you produce the best and most creative Brand Comms - grouped under six broad headings:

1. **Ideas are precious – the nature of creative ideas in Brand Communications.**
2. **Learn to trust and take risks – the challenge of seeking to be 'great' and the importance of the agency/client relationship**
3. **Ideas must be nurtured – how to develop and how to kill ideas.**
4. **Handle research with care – the best and worst use of consumer research**
5. **Keep it fresh – how and when to evolve ideas**
6. **Ideas for a changing world – how a more fragmented world and empowered consumer are changing the rules**

INSIGHT 1: Ideas are precious – the nature of creative ideas in Brand Communications

“ Ideas are the most exciting thing we as human beings do and have, because we make things happen through ideas. Ideas are what drive the world. Ideas are what change people’s thinking. Ideas are how we progress. Essentially, they’re the easiest things in the world to do. It just takes a person sitting down, having a thought, or two people or three people It takes no equipment. You don’t need a pen, you don’t need a pad, you don’t need a computer ... you can just have ideas, They’re the most brilliant thing that we do and that’s why they should be respected. ”

JOHN HEGARTY, BBH

Ideas are fantastic. They are at the heart of progress, they make things happen and make things better than ever before. You need to have a healthy respect for ideas and the people who have them. Ideas can be simple, but there has to be something authentic about them, something that relates to some truth that touches people, resonates with them. In Brand Comms, they must go beyond just the benefits and connect with people on an emotional level. Ideas will often reveal a lot about the personality of a brand, what it cares about, stands for, what its vision is on the world.

“ ... it’s not just giving you the benefit anymore. You need to connect with me more than just providing the benefit. You need to give me an emotional reason to buy that car or even to buy that skin cream, or that shampoo. It’s not just about the ingredients anymore. ”

DAVE LUHR, WIEDEN & KENNEDY

However, Brand Comms is not an abstract creative artistic process – art for arts sake. It's an applied creative process, which starts with what the brand is trying to achieve. The creative idea must be a solution to the brand's problem or the key to its opportunity.

Ideas often start out incomplete – half-ideas that need space and encouragement to grow. A fundamental quality needed in all those involved in developing that idea is optimism. Get excited about what you like about an idea and how to build it. In fact, any idea can be improved and built upon and most often, they should be. But it requires leadership and good judgement to know when an idea is 'there' and to stop the process.

It helps in the endeavour to have no barriers between client and agency or between the agency team. Only uninhibited interaction creates the conditions for the unexpected connection, the basis for a fresh idea. It also helps to become a magnet for great ideas – the brand that everyone wants to come to with new inspiration on how and where to communicate.

“ ... creativity is a collision. It's chaotic and it's about the chaos creating chaos from that - then you'll get something interesting. ”

STEF CALCRAFT, MOTHER

Ideas can come from anywhere. Most often, they will come to people outside the office – in the shower, on a run, while sleeping etc. A thought from one member of the team can spark another idea from the rest of the team. An idea can be a melding of the previously unconnected, or a new thought altogether, but it will always require a leap beyond everyday thought. That means there has to be enough 'air' in the process to allow the leap to happen. Deadlines may be necessary, but ideas won't always jump to meet them. Trust that if you have the brand problem or opportunity clearly in mind and translated in the ultimate tight brief, it will allow you to spot and get excited about the right idea when it comes along.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Agencies. Are you being honest about the nature of the idea(s) presented? Does the idea represent *The Answer* or do you think it needs more time to develop before you present it for approval?
- Clients. When do you give time? When do you give judgement? Are you engendering a culture that fosters ideas or destroys them? Are you being honest?
- Is it truly fresh - capturing your imagination and promising to capture others'?
- Does it represent some truth about the brand and about the brand's role in life?
- Does this idea do more than answer the brief, does it move you, excite you, make you want to speed up and tell other people? (Maybe it makes you want to change the brief – that's okay, but be honest and open about this.)

INSIGHT 2:

Learn to trust and take risks
– the challenge of seeking to be
'great' and the importance of the
agency/client relationship

Risk

Like it or not, you have to accept that Brand Comms, especially the first-rate variety, come with risk - some possibility that you will fail. There really are very few exceptional ideas out there and even less truly differentiated brands as a result of this.

The so-called 'great' idea, as well as nailing the brief, should have some freshness about it and offer some new step into the unexplored. It's therefore, by its very nature, a risky undertaking. Good ideas should scare you a little, as should bad ones; the trick is recognising the difference between them!

“ Great brand communication should be a risky process because if it isn't you're unlikely to get the rewards of it being truly great. It's relatively straightforward to do brand communication as though it is a science and check at every stage and follow through with the book. Usually what you end up with then is something relatively dull. The great stuff is risky and the biggest risk is not knowing when you've got it wrong. ”

DAVID WHELDON, VODAPHONE

There's a downside of 'great'

Sometimes you have to accept that good is good enough. If the idea meets the commercial aims of the brand, then that can be sufficient. Some people say good is the enemy of great but the reverse can also be true. The pursuit of great – which may never happen – can stop you getting on with what would have been adequate to do the job. Then the focus turns to making the execution of that idea magnificent.

And be careful in the pursuit of greatness - often it can also come with time and development. An idea may start out just 'okay' but as it is built, developed and used over time it can become more distinct and powerful.

But still try to make a difference

Notwithstanding the above, however hard 'great' may be to find, it's worth the effort for the team to strive for it. It is so hard to get noticed out there in the midst of all the noise of so few really well differentiated brands. It will involve real risk and discomfort because you will be breaking new ground in order to be fresh and innovative. By definition, this will take you out your comfort zone and should make you feel very excited and a little nervous at the same time.

“Everybody's expectations should be to strive as hard as they can to get to great. In my experience if you try that you'd probably only get there once in a while. There's a very important reason for it, and it comes back to this whole idea that there are very few differentiated brands. If you don't try extremely hard to do something that is really, really striking, different, and innovative, you have very little chance of building a brand for the first time.”

PETER STRINGHAM, HSBC

Because this is such an uncertain venture, the relationship between client and agency is vital. There must be trust and the conditions for that trust should exist – getting to know each other, having mutual respect and, hopefully, a track-record of previous success. Senior people have a big role to play in this; they need to know when to give a little more time or space for the germ of an idea to be developed. And they need to know when good is good enough - if it meets the commercial brief. It is a delicate balancing act where experience goes a long way.

Taking chances on delivery

Communications planning also comes with some risk. It requires flexibility and open-mindedness and is as open to creativity in approach as the development of ideas. If you try something and it doesn't work, it probably only means it was not cost-effective. It won't have damaged the brand and you will almost certainly have learned something.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Is there an appetite for, and acceptance of, risk within the team?
- Do you have an atmosphere of mutual trust and have you put a conscious effort into building that trust?
- Is there a shared sense of what 'great' really is and what you are striving for?
- Do you have a clear sense of exactly what job needs to be done?
- Does this thinking also apply to communications channels as well as the idea?

INSIGHT 3: Ideas must be nurtured – how to develop and how to kill ideas

“ I think nurturing an idea is inherently a process of making the idea better, making it bigger, making it stronger and getting widespread support for the idea. It’s important to always accept that the idea, no matter how great you might think it is on one day, will get better and it can get better. You can’t, as a client, force an agency to limit themselves to the idea at any one point in time - the understanding is they will make it better. ”

SCOTT BEDBURY, BRANDSTREAM (FORMERLY NIKE AND STARBUCKS)

Idea generation is a delicate process. It may take several attempts and some perseverance before you start to uncover the gold you’re looking for. At the outset, the initial idea is exceptionally precious and fragile. It needs to be nurtured and given time to grow, to see how it can evolve and how it will work in different contexts.

This is where the client has to have a little faith. If you hired the right agency, then you must occasionally stand back and give them space to follow their instinct and time to develop what might not appear to you to be a promising tack.

“ If someone has what they think is such a crazy idea that they almost can’t say it, and you go, “oh, come on, come on, tell me, say it”, and you hear it. You have to use all your power to make sure it lives from that very first moment, because that’s when it’s most fragile. If people go, “oh no, that’s too showy”, “that’s too

stupid”, “that’s too wild”, you’ve got to say, “no it’s not, let’s just keep it, let’s try to develop it, let’s try to make it bigger and more interesting”. Once you can do that, then ideas can live. ”

SHELLEY LAZARUS, OGILVY

How to murder ideas

To understand how best to nurture an idea and give it time to show potential, it may be helpful to look at what it takes to kill an idea.

The best ways to kill ideas are:

- Pessimism - to start by only seeing the problems, the reasons why it could not work and to give a very rational, intellectual response to something that is meant to have emotional appeal. To nurture an idea you have to approach it with optimism and imagination and say this could be a great idea, it's up to us to see *how* great.
- Criticism - you can kill an idea with a thousand cuts of criticism from lots of people who don't understand the brief and its aims. Equally, you must be honest in your reaction. If it doesn't work say why, but try to express this as 'this is what I like, now how could we improve this aspect?' rather than 'it won't work because ...'
- Lack of conviction – lack of real conviction for an idea will always find you out, especially if you are not being honest. It's at this stage in the process that the level of trust in the team will become most evident.
- Disregard for customers – patronising your consumers as being unable to recognize a new idea is very dangerous. If you get it, they will get it.
- Vacillation - more time will not necessarily make an idea any better – it may just give people more time to cover their backs and avoid risk. If you have a great idea, get going and avoid needless discussion. The clock is ticking and two years of development and tweaking will not improve it. By all means, get reactions out on the table but keep moving forward. If the idea is not right, then accept it and rebrief, but if it seems to be on the right track then move forward to more examples of it working in practice, in different ads, different media and in different ways. Speed can really focus the mind so take the idea forward with a sense of urgency.

“ All ideas, whether they’re great or mediocre ... are killed by vacillation, lack of conviction and a lack of true understanding (that you want to talk to consumers in an interesting way), that you don’t actually believe that consumers are capable of accepting ideas. ”

TIM DELANEY, LEAGAS DELANEY

In truth, the initial instinctive response to an idea - the response that comes from the heart and not just the head - is the most reliable. After all, your audience is not going to get the opportunity to discuss the idea or the strategy behind it – they are just going to experience it and react, or not!

Finally, a client will often have various levels of executives involved in the process. Although this is not ideal for nurturing ideas, it is often the reality - especially in large companies. Notwithstanding, it's important that this is not treated as a training exercise. Again, don't send junior or inexperienced people to give their feedback to the agency first. The most senior person should take the lead with other views taken in a measured way.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Have you created an environment of trust where ideas can be nurtured?
- Clients: are you giving the agency enough time and space to develop ideas?
- Is your most senior person the one who will see and feedback on the idea first?
- Are your reactions based on an emotional response, or more on business logic?
- Is there a sense of speed and urgency to want to develop the idea and make use of it?

INSIGHT 4: Handle research with care – the best and worst use of consumer research

Lots of research at the outset of a project, to help uncover insights, is a good thing. Research among the target audience can be helpful too. However, research can often do more harm than good. Don't just use focus groups and expect consumers to tell you what they think and do – get out there and observe them, talk to experts and experience things yourself.

“ If you allow yourself to fall into the trap of saying, “well, we’ve tested the commercial, let’s go to 4.2 on whatever scale” – it’s a very dangerous way of looking at things. First of all, if you are constantly pushing ahead and trying to innovate and push your brand out to the edge so it is truly different, by definition you’re measuring territory that nobody’s measured before. Using techniques that are absolutely linear is going to get in your way. ”

PETER STRINGHAM, HSBC

Research is (not) the objective

The purpose of research is to help you get your ideas more right, more often. After all, you can't progress unless you have a way of knowing where you are along with some inspiration about what to do next. But the goal should always be insight and learning - not research per se.

“ One of the worst things about research is that you let research or research models tell you what success looks like. That’s clearly back to front ... it’s not necessarily that research tells you the answer, it’s the thinking through that really matters. ”

MARK EARLS

Research, evaluation, information and data have never harmed a brand. The danger lies in people who want to 'evaluate the evaluation'. If research has 'killed' creativity, it is probably because the researchers didn't do a good enough job (e.g. the approach was incorrect or the wrong questions were asked) and that may well be because they were not briefed correctly!

Research works best if you have a working hypothesis. It can then help you evaluate to what degree the assumptions underlying the hypothesis were right or wrong. Use whatever tools are available to find out what is going on with your brand, your target consumers and, indeed, society as a whole. This is where ideas – the working hypotheses – come from.

Researchers would also say that if you don't know where you are it is hard to measure how far you need to go, or have travelled. That is true but it is also true that it is hard to measure feelings, especially compared to actions.

That's why many experienced people prefer to carry out evaluation at the end of the project (after the advertising has been launched), based on changes in consumer behaviour, rather than relying on what potential consumers say to researchers beforehand.

“ We didn't have a consumer research department at Nike. We had an insights department through which we did lots of research, but the goals were always insight. The challenge or the opportunity for most companies in a traditional setting is to focus on evaluation. We did a lot of post-testing (no pre-testing at Nike) in terms of running material by key consumer segments against the best advertising in the world, not just some of the sneaker ads, and asking consumers what resonated - what techniques, what things in this really made them sit up and notice? ”

SCOTT BEDBURY, BRANDSTREAM (FORMERLY NIKE AND STARBUCKS)

Sadly, research is often used to convince senior managers, or worse still, to 'cover your backside'. Companies have shareholders and shareholders like numbers. But numbers are not

often helpful in a creative process - albeit an applied creative process. If you can express the brand objective in terms of measurable changes in consumer behaviour then you can measure whether you have achieved it. But it is hard to take an idea and measure whether it is *likely* to achieve your objective.

“ Research is very often there to provide the rationale to your boss. It feels a whole lot more comfortable to have numbers that you can pluck out and say, ‘see, we did the research and this is what consumers say’. The smart bosses don’t accept that, in my experience. ”

SHELLEY LAZERUS

Sometimes, in the absence of a convincing track-record and good analogies, research can play a role in convincing others. But it should be a tool for the whole team and not a way of settling arguments between one side and the other.

“ Researchers’ justification for senior management is a complete waste of money - if any of my people do that I’d be absolutely horrified. Research has its place and it’s important to check that consumers are taking out what you wanted them to. It’s an opinion in the room. It’s an opinion alongside my opinion, alongside the agency’s opinion and it’s part of the debate. But use it to make better decisions. Don’t use it to persuade your boss. That’s a really dodgy road to go down. ”

ANDY FENNELL, DIAGEO PLC

Note – there can often be a research loop here where clients use consumer research to get reactions to planned material using mock ups, e.g. a storyboard of an ad. This is a very controversial area. Generally, the experts feel that it is better to leave research to the end where you evaluate the effect of the actual campaign, or research upfront to feed into getting the right brief, based on the right insights. Everyone is agreed though that if the motivation for the research is to produce ‘numbers’ to convince senior managers, it is not only a waste of time, it also brings the potential to kill creativity during the delicate ideas stage. Mozart, Shakespeare and Picasso did not use research to assess whether their ideas worked with potential consumers.

It's far easier to use research to say 'no' to something than to say 'yes'. Remember that 100% of all new products are researched, but more than 80% of all new products fail. Good research takes time. Even when it is accurate, it should only be used as another tool to support the development of ideas - not as the primary basis for decisions. A more intelligent thing to do is engage experts to help you with specialist insights and opinions (although Mozart, Shakespeare etc. didn't commission research, they certainly sought the guidance of their peers and mentors).

One advisable approach is to commission detailed research once you have the idea. This can actually improve research data because you know which questions to ask and that is what leads to useful data. However good the research data, never be afraid to use judgement and experience. Sometimes you have to stand firm in the face of research.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Have you agreed within the team the role of research?
- Does your research approach match the questions you are looking for (accepting that some questions cannot be answered with research, e.g. consumer attitudes)?
- Have you set out clearly your hypothesis of how you think this piece of communication is going to work - the assumptions it is built on?
- Are you maintaining a healthy balance between respect for data and valuing judgement?

INSIGHT 5: Keep it fresh – how and when to evolve ideas

“ I think the best and the biggest campaign ideas can evolve over time and look as fresh today as they did the day when the first ad appeared. Big long-running integrated campaign ideas are what all clients and all agencies strive for. ”

CILLA SNOWBALL, AMV BBDO

Almost by definition, a big idea has longevity. It will be based on some simple truth and powerful insight that will resonate with people for years. It is also worth remembering that consistency of message is what creates durable and positive (if it is the right message) brand associations.

‘The truth is out there’

A good example of how to keep your brand messages fresh is to compare the process to a successful TV series. Take *The X-Files*. Although each episode is based on the same overall plot (aliens visiting Earth, government conspiracy etc.) the concept never became dull because the producers constantly introduced new and more interesting subject matter, characters, sub plots and situations. *The X Files* is an enduring brand because of the diversity and imagination, applied behind the scenes, that has kept it alive.

“ I try to think of a brand in many ways as a wheel, where the centre of this brand, the basic values, are unchanging, but the expressions of those values through time and circumstance and audience on the rim will change and be different all the time. But the heart of the brand is completely consistent - always. ”

DAN WIEDEN, WIEDEN & KENNEDY

Beware unnecessary change

Change is a certainty in Brand Comms. Life moves on, new competitors arrive and ideas have to evolve; sometimes they have to transform altogether. Knowing the difference – when to evolve and when to change – starts with a reflex that drives new ways of keeping the brand relevant. You should only throw out the old and bring in the new as a last resort. The right reasons for change are when the brand and /or the big communications idea have lost relevance.

“ Why brands change their advertising is often more to do with a new marketing director or a new creative team than what consumers want. People who make the changes, who do the zigzagging, are people who are there on their personal missions, not their company missions. ”

ROBIN WIGHT, WCRS

Generally, the client will get bored with their own advertising long before the audience does. Often ideas are ditched and new ones developed for reasons more to do with the career agenda of a manager than the needs of the brand. It can take years to create a consistent and differentiated position in the market and the minds of your target customers. But in a very short time that can be thrown away by a new client or agency trying to prove a point. It's worth mentioning again that senior people have an important role to play in this - by staying close to the brand and checking that those lower down are not allowed too much freedom to mess with it unnecessarily.

Great brands bring surprises

A strong brand with a strong idea, just like a strong individual with a strong personality, has the ability to surprise - to do something unexpected - not to change who they are but to show you an aspect of them you have not seen before. You can be consistent. Better still, you can be inconsistently consistent. Occasionally you can and should be spontaneous and surprising because a strong brand will be able to carry it.

“ You can usually tell whether it's Honda or Nike or any other client that has a sense of themselves. They may address you one way one day and another on another, but there's something consistent about the voice behind it. ”

DAN WIEDEN, WIEDEN & KENNEDY

KEY QUESTIONS

- Do you need a completely new idea or just a new expression of the idea?
- Can you recognise the difference between when to evolve and when to change the creative idea?
- Do you trust in the strength of your brand and your creative idea to deliver out-of-character surprises?
- Has your creative idea actually lost relevance or does it just need a makeover to remain fresh?

INSIGHT 6:

Ideas for a changing world – how a more fragmented media and empowered consumer are changing the rules

“ This era, this next five to ten years is going to be, more than any other era, where creativity and great ideas rule, because it’s the only way you can deal with the situation we are facing. How do you stop people avoiding an ad? Well, you make it an ad that they go and find because they like it so much. ”

RUPERT HOWELL, FORMERLY McCANN ERICKSON

Flat to fragmented

Since the early days of soap powder commercials watched on black and white televisions or ads in limited numbers of magazines and other print media, the world has changed dramatically. There has been an explosion of media, the birth of the internet, devices that let you skip broadcast ads and the increasing ability of people – consumers – to flex their personal power, find out more about companies and avoid your brand communications.

“ Consumers have become far more aware of their value. They’ve become far more conscious of being intruded upon by marketers. ”

MARK AUSTIN, FORMERLY MEDIAEDGE CIA

In this new world, is there any place now for a mass message, aimed at a mass audience and delivered through mass media? The answer is yes, but to a much more limited extent than we

have known before. Ideas now have to work in a much broader, more fragmented range of media; they have a greater need to be personalized to both the media and the audience. Yet they still have to work in some kind of integrated way - a way that adds up to more than the sum of the parts.

Fragmentation is now a fact of life. The days of mass media - so very poor at intimacy and involvement - if not gone, are fast declining. Media buying is certainly dead – today, it truly is about media and channel planning.

People power

The behaviour of the company behind the brand is becoming more transparent and more relevant. Trying to hide mistakes or bad practice is futile because consumers will find you out eventually. As a result, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and branding go hand in hand. There will always be special interest groups who want to peer into every aspect of your business with the power of the internet and other channels to bring their findings to everyone's attention. If you are employing child labour in your far-away factories or polluting the atmosphere; if there is any inconsistency between your brand messages and how your company actually behaves it will be discovered and exposed to the world in record time.

“ The fact that many consumers are prepared to use their consumer spending power on a political platform increasingly is going to affect the way that brands behave. Integrity is going to be crucial and it will not be a case of glossing over. If consumers find out that brands are misbehaving, like any manufacturing propaganda not telling the truth or consistently abusing people that need to be protected, then the consumer will react by not buying the products. ”

MARK AUSTIN, FORMERLY MEDIAEDGE CIA

Such enthusiasm that compels consumers to be so interested in the behaviour of brand owners should be seen as an opportunity and not a threat. Increasingly, the consumer is becoming a collaborator, moving inside the brand team (both physically and virtually) to help stimulate or even create innovations and content for communications. The primacy of the consumer will inspire new levels of creativity, as we try to create communications that people actively seek out rather than have forced upon them.

Brands will have to pay even more respect to their consumers and avoid unwelcome intrusions into their time and attention by using more and more of the touch-points available. In an ever

more complex and fragmented world, the core idea will need to be even more simple, consistent and powerful to drive these multiple touch-points.

Good will need to become Great.

“ If you don't get people's attention then you're not going to get your message through, but how you get their attention I think is going to change; engaging people in-store, engaging people in activation activities that cut right across the line from broadcast to narrow cast. Engagement will be the challenge for all of us going forward. ”

KEITH WEED, UNILEVER PLC

The world is more transparent and if people can avoid your ads then there is a much greater need to make ads that people enjoy, that they positively want to see and share with each other.

Of course, good companies welcome this. If you have a great product and are proud of the way it is made, if the corporate values reflect the brand values portrayed in your Brand Comms then more transparency will work for you.

“ I think brands that have integrity are quite happy about the transparency. If you have integrity, you know that the quality of your product is good, you know what you say is sincere and you want to have a relationship with consumers, then you have nothing to fear. They're going to find out everything there is to find out about you, but that's great, because that gives them lots of reasons to love you, so why don't we just let them in? ”

ANDY FENNELL, DIAGEO PLC

A story for the future

In the old days until even a few years ago, Brand Comms, was one-way – the brand talking at you and not with you, interrupting and repeating the message whether you wanted it to or not. Now it has to be more two-way. Brand communications must not just grab attention it must demand it and reward it. It must not just capture, it must engage. In some cases you may even be able co-create brand communications with your target audience.

So what does all this say about creative ideas? Is there such a thing as 'the big brand idea'

anymore? What else, other than the points noted above, needs to change in terms of how we see ideas, how we nurture and develop them and how we execute them?

The experts believe it's getting harder and will continue to be so. That makes it even more important to focus on simple, clear powerful ideas – ideas that can indeed work across an ever-wider range of media and formats. It means that the great ads, based on the idea, must work even harder - not just to get the message across but also to make them viral so they spread across society.

Brand Comms is, and always has been, about story telling. Advertising was once famously described as 'truth, well told'. Brands therefore need to become even better storytellers while paying greater respect to the truths and realities of their world.

“ ... there's an enormous amount of provocative thought and anticipation about what the new world is bringing in terms of all these new options to communicate with people. But quite honestly, I think the riddle of this business is pretty simple. It's been the same since people gathered around a campfire to hear a story: are you a good storyteller or a bad storyteller? Make me laugh, make me cry, make me do something. Whether you do it on the Internet or on a balloon floating above me, I don't care, just move me dude! ”

DAN WIEDEN, WIEDEN & KENNEDY

In this new era, creativity - the power of ideas - has never been more important. It is, in fact, now vital. Good is no longer good enough; it really does have to be Great. If the world is exponentially more complex, cluttered and noisy, what price a simple, authentic, engaging idea?

KEY QUESTIONS

- Are you up-to-speed with everything that is happening (or will be) in your brand's world?
- Have you truly looked at all the options available to you, including new media and up-to-date trends?
- Have you considered all of them before ruling out, even forcing a conclusion on those that will not work for you?
- Are your Brand Comms so good, with complementary touch-points that work together, that people want to engage with the brand?
- Do you know how to make your Brand Comms more two-way – to involve consumers, maybe even co-create messages or enable people to put their own spin on your brand?

APPLYING THE 6 ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS

The definition of an insight is a deep and helpful understanding of a complex problem or situation. The fact is they are not so easy to 'apply' but it helps if at least you know and appreciate them. It helps make you a better creative agency and it helps make you a better client. A shared appreciation helps you to be a better agency and client team.

The insights are not an exhaustive list. The nature of creative ideas will be talked and written about as long as stories are told – what makes a great story and a great storyteller as Dan Wieden would say. And they are not so easy to summarise succinctly since to do so can make them sound trite, and they are anything but.

One of the contributing Giants offered the advice that the agency/client team should spend some time at least talking about creative ideas - what they think about them, what they think makes for a great idea (and great brands, great execution and great brand activation).

So perhaps the best way to apply the insights – using the questions at the end of each insight – is as a discussion guide for the team.

1. Ideas are precious, rare and to be respected. They don't arrive to order and there needs to be 'air in the process' to allow for the unexpected to happen.
2. There also needs to be an appetite for risk and a high degree of mutual trust and honesty. You are trying to change the rules – that takes you out of your comfort zone.

3. Ideas grow and improve – if you let them. But they are fragile and can be easily killed off. They, and the people tasked with coming up with them, need to be treated with optimism and encouragement. That doesn't mean being soft. An evaluation has to be made at some point, but experience teaches you how and when. This is an applied creative process – any idea will not do.
4. Research can be very dangerous, especially in the middle of the process (as opposed to research at the outset to get insights and at the end to evaluate actual performance). Research is an opinion, but it is just one opinion alongside judgement.
5. If you have a great idea, it will inspire lots of different ways to use it. The idea can and should develop and evolve like a great TV show. Strong brands and strong ideas can and should have the capacity to surprise while still being consistent.
6. The world is more complex and fragmented – but that makes the power of a great brand and a great creative communications idea even more valuable. The response to the consumer-empowered, new media world should be to make Brand Comms even more engaging, rich and varied in the delivery of the idea, NOT to keep changing the idea. Shakespeare's plays are still popular and meaningful but their production has developed a lot since the Globe theatre! Why? Because Shakespeare wrote great stories and was a great storyteller.

Looking at both sections of this title – Persuasive Brand Communications: 6 Essential Steps and Creative Brand Communications: 6 Essential Insights – there should be one overall reaction. It should inspire all of us to 'raise the bar', to treat Brand Comms as a hard but potentially highly rewarding way to build brands and therefore shareholder returns - something we are determined to do really well. There is a sound business logic for this. Even if it requires some magic.



info@SOGiants.com