This chapter examines the creative brief as a key strategic tool within the campaign development process. Together the brand strategy and the marketing plan offer the starting point for developing the communication campaign. Because the brand strategy is too abstract and the marketing plan too broad, these plans are too generic to form the base for developing effective brand communication. It is the creative brief that has the ability to funnel and to translate long-term strategy into short-term activity. Indeed, creating communications to build the bridge between where a brand is and where it wants to be is the key role for the agency. Their response of what they are going to do and who they need to talk to in order to make this happen must be considered in the context of both the overall marketing strategy and specific campaign strategy.

In this chapter, we discuss key issues emerging from the last decade’s literature on creative briefing and outline best practise, as both used and abused by agencies and clients. We conclude by challenging the orthodoxy that a faultless, unchanging, agreed brief must precede the development of effective creative solutions. This chapter is not about creativity per se, but about beginning the creative process. In summary, the process needs to be stimulated by a well-honed creative brief but the brief, and therefore the benchmarks for campaign evaluation, should be allowed to evolve alongside the campaign development.

**TYPES OF CREATIVE BRIEFING**

One of the great paradoxes of creativity is that it responds well to limitation and constraint when deployed and managed well. It seems that creative minds positively feed off restrictions, boundaries and conventions, frequently using their very existence as fuel to break new ground.

By contrast, the complete removal of all restrictions in an attempt to liberate the creative process often has the opposite effect, either by instilling a kind of “stage fright” on those expected to perform or by producing a highly inefficient “random walk” process that yields fleeting and spasmodic progress.

In most studies on the campaign development process, the brief is identified as the most important part (Fletcher, 1990, 1997). It must simultaneously motivate and inspire, focus and control, expand and control. This is what makes it so difficult. Given this, what forms of briefing are most useful and effective?

**Briefing by requirement**

If creative people frequently feel anxious or blocked staring down at a blank pad of paper, imagine how Michelangelo might have felt staring up at the blank ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Where and how did he begin?

Without knowing the answer, it is enlightening to speculate on the kind of brief Pope JuliusII might have handed down to the young sculptor in 1506. It is known that the Pope had a somewhat inflexible relationship with Michelangelo and may have strongly coerced him into “accepting” the commission. Given that, it is quite possible that his brief was the firm (and none too polite) instruction “Paint the ceiling.”
Whilst this brief has the benefit of brevity and accuracy, it offers little clue or direction for the great artist to begin organising his thoughts. It offers no encouragement or inspiration. What should the artist's theme be? What feelings should he try to evoke? What colours to use? In short, where should he begin?

It may sound absurd to think that any commission is effectively briefed by giving the artist an indication of the space to be filled and instructing them to hurry up and fill it. Nevertheless, the equivalent does happen on a regular basis within the advertising and communications industry – effectively every time an instruction is issued along the lines of "We need a print execution to run in this weekend's press" or "We need a piece to mail to all prospects."

If this simplistic form of "briefing by requirement" is surprisingly common, it is because it is all too easy. It requires little commitment on the part of the commissioner, at least at the initial stage. Ironically it will require commitment from the commissioner at the stage when work is produced, something that may not be so easy to give, without any firm view or expectation of what is to be produced at the outset. It's a lot easier to issue instructions than deal with whatever response they generate.

**Briefing by execution**

Rather than simply giving Michelangelo the instruction to fill a specific space, Pope Julius would have been more helpful by being more specific on elements of the execution he was expecting. Perhaps something along the lines of "Paint the ceiling using cherubs, angels and mortals." This brief has merit over the others so far. It limits the scope that the artist can operate in. Previous briefs pretty much allowed anything that was large and ornate. This instruction directs the artist to work with specific instructions than deal with whatever response they generate.

Each of these instructions would have given the artist marginally more guidance. Specifically "lots of gold" is something of a clue that might well have steered the work, perhaps towards a classic, formal style or indeed something ornate and elaborate. It is the kind of clue that creative people seem to discern easily, whether given intentionally or not.

This kind of "briefing by execution" is, once again, not uncommon in our industry. In 1999, a brief was issued for another execution in the long series of highly creative and effective cinema and television adverts for Stella Artois in the UK, with the instruction "More of the same, with a bit more reverence for the beer." Given that the idea running throughout the campaign was people's extraordinary reverence for the beer, that is not even as helpful as it sounds. The problem with this kind of brief is that the creative minds charged with responding to the brief need a firm grasp of what their creation should be about, not just how big it should be, what colours it should use or any other executional detail.

A good brief therefore needs to be in some way directional about the content of the work, not just its format.

**Briefing by content**

Let's imagine that the Pope understood this. He certainly would have cared a great deal about the results achieved in the chapel and would have had some ideas about what he wanted to see. Perhaps then, his instruction was along the lines of "Paint the ceiling using cherubs, angels and mortals."

This brief has merit over the others so far. It limits the scope that the artist can operate in. Previous briefs pretty much allowed anything that was large and ornate. This instruction directs the artist to work with specific content. However, rather than limiting creative potential, it begins to frame and project it. It suggests some interest and drama in the interplay between mere mortals and the angelic hosts. It leaves plenty of scope within the exact depiction of the mortals and cherubs. The equivalent in our industry and our times would be something like "We're looking for a commercial that shows our product along with well dressed young people, trendy urban bars and cocktails."

The problem with briefing by content is that the more specific you are, the more limiting and unproductive the brief becomes. Mortals, cherubs and angels is reasonably flexible, but start specifying "a cross section of mortals, including all ethnic groups, ages and social backgrounds, a dozen cherubs and the following ten angels" and the creative opportunities start to shrink before your eyes. Again, the real need for creative people is less to be instructed on the content of their work as the story or message that it is supposed to convey.

**Briefing by meaning**

The content of the Sistine Chapel suggests that Michelangelo's brief may well have been closer to "Paint the ceiling depicting the creation of the world, man's degradation by sin, the divine wrath of the deluge and the preservation of Noah and his family."

Even the entirely un-creative can begin to appreciate why this is a more useful and inspiring instruction. It gives a narrative and suggests a strong moral conclusion. It invites the artist to research the storyline, to project themselves into it, to think of ways of expressing its drama, and so on. Whilst it is highly specific on the narrative, it is entirely liberating on the specific executional nature of how it best be told.

A brief for police recruitment (APG, 2001) offers a good modern day equivalent. It asked the creative team to dramatise how a police officer has to be able to do things most normal people would struggle to do, such as breaking the news of bereavement to a family, treating a suspected rapist as innocent until proven otherwise or supervising the removal of a child from its parents by social workers. This gave the creatives the scope to...
dramatise the emotional dilemmas inherent in such circumstances.

Although, not all products immediately suggest quite such powerful themes, it is the responsibility of the teams compiling the briefing to arrive at the most compelling narrative they can identify. "Shifts more stains at low temperature than other non-biological washing powders" may not at first glance sound like the most fruitful subject matter for a gripping story. But add into the mix the drama of how those stains were created (e.g., grass stains from sporting heroics, the pride of a mother in seeing their children smartly dressed, a soccer pitch, and the drama of performing at your personal best) and the potential becomes more visible.

Again, the great danger here is that of being so specific on the subject matter that the latitude for movement becomes negligible. In the previous example, it would take a sizeable creative leap not to write a touching domestic drama about a son's school football final.

So, what brief could Julius possibly have given Michelangelo that would have given both direction and inspiration?

**Briefing by creative task**

The best way to both guide and inspire the artist would have been to be as clear and challenging as possible in articulating the task his work had to achieve. A directive such as "Paint a tribute to the greater glory of God that inspires devotion in his people" would have issued a powerful and inspiring creative challenge. With this brief, the artist is not just invited to fill the space, but to provoke a certain, very specific and remarkable response in the viewer. He is left in little doubt that just showing a few mortals and a couple of cherubs would not, in itself be enough. He needs to go further to produce the desired response. It is going to require a lot more artistry, sensitivity and creative prowess.

Referring to the real world examples quoted earlier. The brief for Police recruitment asked that the advertising "Make 999 out of every 1,000 people realise they couldn't be a Police Officer, but respect like hell the one who could" – a task that issued a challenge and inspired a thought provoking response. The resulting creative showed well-known celebrities imagining in their mind's eye what a police officer has to be able to cope with, before concluding that they themselves couldn't do it. Likewise, in the soap powder example an instruction to "issue a challenge to stains that no self-respecting mother can refuse" would have been more useful than a simple directive to communicate a low temperature stain removal claim.

**The ideal creative briefing**

The main argument here is that a good brief should achieve a fine balance of being specific without being entirely restrictive. A good brief closes down options and is directionally precise. Briefs are so called because they are meant to be succinct. Many clients and agencies aim for one single page, sadly a task only the minority achieve in practice.

A good brief is precise in such a way that, at the same time as narrowing the field of play, it opens up inspiring possibilities for the directions and angles that remain. The best briefs turn the description of the task from an instruction into a challenge, and in doing so strikes a balance between direction and inspiration.

However, this is not the only role that the brief is expected to perform within the creative development process.

**MULTIPLE ROLES OF THE CREATIVE BRIEF**

As part of the bigger picture, it is important that the brief relates to, and follows the thinking of the total marketing and communications strategy and overall corporate business plan, and is consistent with the programs that are already in place. As well as measuring the success of the particular campaign that the brief will conceive, progress towards the bigger and longer-term brand and corporate goals should also be measured (IPA, 2003).

As the platform for the communications campaign, so the better the brief, the better and more accurate the results. Indeed, the better a company's corporate or brand position is defined, and the more thoughtfully its key business issues are described, the more likely the agency's creative and strategic thinkers will be able to produce great solutions.

Most creative development processes involve teams of managers on both client and agency side as well as the team(s) of creatives charged with meeting the brief. In this context, the single briefing document frequently serves three different functions: cementing agreement, aiding judgement and inspiring creative thinking.

**Cementing agreement**

The brief is the most important information issued by a client to an agency, as it is from the brief that everything else flows. Often, the creative brief fulfils a role as a contract between client and agency. It represents a summary of all current thinking on the task in hand and indicates the kind of response that is expected. It is essential from the agency perspective to ensure that client and creative teams are aligned in understanding the requirement and the rules of engagement on any project. Without it, a great deal of emotionally charged and expensive creative development time can be squandered.
For most agencies, the creative brief is the tool most frequently used by agency managers to both secure and test such agreement. As a result, every single word or phrase is typically interrogated and deliberated over at great length, often with stultifying results. Many agencies have gone as far as to develop systems that supposedly aid the account teams and client teams in completing the various pieces of analysis required to determine the communications strategy (e.g., Davies, 2000; Bech-Larsen, 2001). Whilst these systems often claim to be bespoke to the agency concerned, they essentially involve both parties working together to agree the essential elements of the creative brief. Their value tends to lie as much in the area of cementing agreement as in the strategic insight they generate.

One of the key contracts a brief should establish is the setting of concrete campaign objectives (What do we want to achieve? From what to what?) and success criteria (What will success look like and how will it be measured?). This will help establish accountability and demonstrate the effectiveness of the communications effort. A good brief will leave the agency with a clear understanding of what it is they are trying to achieve and the role that commercial communications will play in this process (IPA, 2003).

Research conducted in the Netherlands on cases nominated (or not) for the EFFIE (meaning Effectiveness) Award found a strong correlation between the proven effectiveness and the setting of clear, numerically stated performance objectives up front (Franzen, 1999; Giling et al., 2001; NieuwsTribune, 2001). In the majority of cases, however, performance objectives have not been stated up front (see also Heuvelman et al., 2002).

### Aiding judgement

The brief also fulfils a critical role as an objective touch point to assess creative ideas as they are developed. The degree to which this process is formalised varies tremendously between different agency and client cultures. In most cases it is best practice for the team to précis the brief and the thinking behind it before any creative solutions are presented or discussed. This then provides a framework for the work to be assessed against (Devinney et al., 2005). In some agency and client cultures it is common to use elements from the brief as a checklist against which the proposed creative solutions are ticked off.

An unspoken assumption behind this role is that the brief does not change in any way between the commencement of creative development and the presentation of possible creative solutions.

### Inspiring creative thinking

In the light of all that is involved in securing "sign off" in the process of creative campaign development, it is perhaps not surprising that the brief's role as a catalyst for stimulating creative thinking is frequently overlooked (Langwost, 2004). Nevertheless, as discussed with reference to Michelangelo, that should be the primary function of the brief.

With all three roles bearing heavily on the brief, it is worth examining the specific ingredients of a good, inspiring and directional brief.

### WHAT CONSTITUTES A GOOD BRIEF?

There is little published material on creative briefing, the exception being the IPA 2003 study on client briefs and some other studies more specifically focussed on developing creative briefs within agencies (e.g., Barker, 2001; Hill and Johnson, 2004; Tait, 2002; White, 2003). As mentioned before, the brief should be short and fit on one single page. Sometimes additional information is needed, but that should be added as attachment or otherwise. Aside from differences in format, presentation and the wording of headings, the basic structure of a creative brief contains the same six core elements: task, audience, proposition, support, character and requirements.

Creative people working on briefs will often claim that the only one of these that matters is the proposition, to the point that many of them claim that a single statement is the brief. Some write it in large letters, stick it on their wall or find other ways of burning it into their subconscious. Others say they reflect on it and then attempt to forget or "go away from it." Whatever their individual strategies and ways of working, most creative teams use methods that focus their efforts on the proposition.

However, it is manifestly clear from analysing successful case histories that other elements within the brief are of critical importance too (IPA, 2003; White, 2003). We therefore discuss each element of the brief separately, giving guidance on how they best be deployed to improve the chances of creating inspiration.

### Task

As we have already discussed, a succinct and directional summary of the task is critical to a good brief. It is the part of the creative brief where the marketing communication objectives are translated into communication solutions ('What should we try to achieve?'). It is also the part of the brief where it becomes clear that the client brief is understood by the agency ('What problem should be solved?).

A common mistake is to describe the task only in terms of interim communications variables, e.g., "Boost awareness of the new variant of X," "Announce the launch of Y" or "Communicate the change in policy for Z." Although advertising can cause rapid and significant boosts in awareness, that in itself is rarely of direct
commercial value. The task of advertising here is not to create awareness of the new variant, but to change people's habits and get them to try the new variant. Given this, the task might be much better stated as “to corrupt people's cosy sauce buying habits and dare them to try new spicy variant X.” This statement is not only clear in stating the objective as breaking established patterns of behaviour, but it also provides colour and direction on the unchanging, unthinking nature of that behaviour and of the audacity with which this new variety aims to disrupt that routine.

To help direct the task to be more directionally instructive, a simple but useful question that is often worth asking is “what is holding people back?” The more accurately and inventively this can be answered, the more instructive the task definition will become. For example, a 1998 government (DfEE) education campaign was given the task of encouraging parents to read to their young children (APG, 1999). The brief could simply have stated the task as “encourage parents to read to their children,” but by examining why parents didn’t currently do this, it became clear that knowing what they should be doing was not the issue. Parents were fully aware of their obligations. The problem was observed to be the book at bedtime. With busy lives, parents were frequently getting to that time of the evening feeling they simply didn't have the energy to read a book with their children, they’d much rather relax and perhaps enjoy a glass of wine. The brief therefore described the task much more usefully as “to encourage parents to take advantage of various opportunities throughout the day to read to their children, rather than just at bedtime.” This articulate summation of the task explains the strategy better than any snappy proposition.

**Audience**

A great deal of time and effort goes into determining the target audience for a brand’s communications. Whilst this may make for more efficient marketing, often the results of this analysis are expressed in a form that genuinely does not help the creative process. At this point of ten a lot of miscommunication and conflict exist between apparently totally different professionals (Barker, 2001; Burden, 2003; West, 1993).

The requirement for the creative briefing is to make those receiving the brief feel they both know and empathise with the audience. Overly technical descriptions, such as “BC1C2 emotionally involved mothers” or “men aged 25–45 who are frequent visitors to DIY sheds,” do little to bring the audience and their issues to life. Whereas “mums concerned about getting their children to eat well” creates a universally understood picture, not just of the intended target for the message, but of why they might indeed be a willing and grateful recipient of it.

Two descriptions, both applying to the male DIY example above, serve to further illustrate the value of a good audience description:

- “Meat and two veg blokes with grime under their finger nails, who smoke Embassy Regal and like to run their thumb down a cupboard doors saying “lovely bit of dovetailing that.” They regard themselves as craftsmen, the next best thing to a tradesman.”

- “Keeping up with the Jones types who believe their humble semi could one day make it into House Beautiful. They care about getting their tones to blend and their contrasts to add accent. They like to host dinner parties to show off the results of their latest project.”

Whilst technically fitting the same description of male DIYers aged 25–45, the differences in character and aspiration between the two audiences are abundantly clear. What's more, it is clear that each would respond best to advertising with different creative and strategic approaches. It is imperative therefore for creative people to have a vivid mental picture of the audience and their motivations so they can properly attune what they create. In other words, the audience description needs consumer insight.

**Proposition**

The word “proposition” originated in an age of customer benefits, selling ideas and Unique Selling Propositions (Reeves, 1961). Reeves, of Ted Bates, stated that each advertisement must say to each reader: “buy this product, and you will get this specific benefit” (cited in West, 1993). It embodied the idea that the advertiser was making a strong, unique and relevant offer or proposal directly to the consumer. If he or she took up the offer by buying the product, they would receive the specific benefit articulated in the advertising.

The meaning of “proposition” has softened considerably since then. By the 2000s, the word is more commonly understood to mean a short, succinct and snappy expression that summarizes the message and acts as a focus of the communication (see also Langwost, 2004; White, 2003).

Whilst some briefs do still use propositions based on benefits offered to the consumer, many of the propositions that circulate nowadays are expressions of fact, points of view, commonly admired values, rallying calls, slogans and not strictly offers or benefits. A fairly arbitrary selection of propositions from a generation apart illustrates this shift.

In our opinion, there are two linked reasons for this shift in emphasis. First is the growing advertising literacy of audiences in developed markets (Kover et al., 1997; White and Smith, 2001). It is widely commented that the consumer nowadays understands the conventions of advertising much better. They understand advertisers are trying to offer them some version of a superior performance benefit that only their brand delivers. With that understanding comes a greater cynicism about the nature of the claims, a cynicism compounded in many cases by an erosion of genuine performance differences between competing brands. As a result, advertising has responded by attempting to engage consumers in the way it puts its message across, more than the actual message it puts across.
In line with this, the creative teams who are effectively the principal users of the brief, have become more marketing literate, and more adept at adding a creative angle to articulate the benefit being sold. Their requirement has shifted from a mere statement of what the benefit is, to a fresh perspective or angle with which to approach the dramatisation of the brand, a need that the Account Planning community has largely fulfilled.

**Support**

Support refers to the evidence supplied to make the propositional claim more credible. The concept of “supporting evidence” from which the phrase was drawn, supposes that the nature of support is essentially factual, rational and evidential. Classically, support does take this form, as in “no other non-biological powder washes whiter at 40 degrees,” “the engine contains water and so cannot freeze, no matter how cold it gets” or “Sainsbury’s strawberry jam contains 20% more strawberries than other supermarket jams costing the same.”

However, increasingly strategists are finding that broader based forms of expression can also support the new forms of proposition discussed above. These could take the form of surprises, feelings, truths, lines of argument or even pieces of conjecture. The following are all examples:

What is important here is that the facts or expressions quoted as support do genuinely help the audience believe or feel more engaged by the proposition. Support is most often abused in practice by becoming the place to record miscellaneous features or messages that don’t support the proposition, but are deemed sufficiently interesting or important to warrant a mention somewhere in the briefing documentation.

The *Because Test* is a useful tool for exposing such inappropriate usage. Its form is deceptively simple; reverse the proposition and support expressions to form a sentence, beginning with the word “because.” The power of this simple format to reveal expressions that are self-evidently non-supporting is conspicuous. The following examples illustrate: “Because it is easier to swallow, brand x is more effective at fighting migraines,” “Because it comes in a range of engine sizes from 1.4 to 3.2 litres, it is the most reliable car ever,” “Because you should only drink in moderation, brand y is pure party fuel.”

Whilst the role of support is to support the audience’s belief in the proposition, it is not the only thing that drives brand differentiation. In an era of more parity products, making similar claims, supported by similar facts, we observe an increased focus on Brand Character to aid engagement, distinctiveness and credibility.

**Brand character**

Increasingly, the character or tone of voice of the brand’s communications is a key element of its effectiveness (see also Chapter 1.4). Some advertising agencies now declare that they spend as much time helping a brand “find its voice” as they do its message (Moore, 2003). Certainly, the much commented on advertising by French Connection UK, that notoriously deployed the acronym “FCUK,” was a lesson in attitude before message.

Ironically, for such a crucial element, the “character” section of many creative briefs is sadly lacking in much character. Descriptions like “bold, confident, uncomplicated, modern” are common. The strategist would be well advised to spend more time and find more imaginative ways of describing the brand character they want to reflect.

Adjectives are often part of the problem here. If a novelist wants to evoke a strong sense of scene or character, he does not rely entirely on adjectives. Yet it is often falsely assumed that a short list of adjectives is the appropriate way to describe the desired character. There are often more other ways of powerfully evoking the desired tone than a tired string of words.

By way of example, the briefing behind a much applauded commercial for a car stated: “we’d like to evoke the same effect and feeling as the slow and purposeful opening and closing of an expensive CD player.” More colourfully, legend has it that the briefing for a Kellogg’s commercial consisted of an old fashioned wind up alarm clock placed in a brightly striped cereal bowl. The team could (and probably did) write a brief with the words, colourful, lively, energetic, irresistible, but no-one would have remembered that.

Another part of the problem here is the established practise of determining “brand values.” Ever since the value of brands was mooted and ultimately measured, it has become best practise for brand managers to draw a circle, arrow, or other shape and invite members of the team to fill the “brand values” section with adjectives that sum up the brand. Many practitioners could testify to sitting through long sessions debating the finer points of whether the most appropriate word is “bold” or “daring.”

As with Support, there is a simple tool here to reveal unhelpful definitions of desired character. The *Opposites Test* simply invites you to ask whether it is useful to state that we would not like to reflect the antonyms of the stated tone or character. Thus, for “bold, confident, uncomplicated, modern” it is not exactly a revelation to state that we would not want to reflect a brand that is “timid, unconfident, complex or old fashioned.” By contrast, Guinness has used a tone of voice that is cryptic, enigmatic and odd. These descriptions do tell us something, because it is unusual to learn that the brand is happy not to be straightforward, easily comprehensible and obvious.

**Requirements**

We argued at the outset that the requirements were, directionally at least, not the most important element of any creative briefing. Nevertheless, the lack of enough specific guidance here is one of the principal reasons for
wasted time and effort in the creative development process (IPA, 2003). In addition, there is still plenty of scope for the requirement section to either limit significantly the potential for creative development or to enhance it. The key is to be specific when the requirements are utterly specific and to invite creative thinking about the format of the output when they are not.

If the communication has to be in black and white, 45 cm by 65 cm or must contain certain elements of legal fly-type, then the creative briefing is the time to say so, not days of weeks later, when large-scale, colour ideas have been developed. Ideally, the reasons behind any strict requirements should be self-evident or should be spelled out, they may themselves spark an idea.

MANAGING THE BRIEFING PROCESS

As mentioned, published research on the role of creative briefs in the process of campaign development is scarce. We identified three key issues in last decade’s literature on the creative briefing process: the client-agency relationship, the different “languages” within the agency, and the difficult role of research within the process. These issues all deal with managing relationships with the different parties involved: the client, the creative team, account planning and research.

The client–agency relationship

A critical element in a successful client–agency relationship, and the success or failure of any brief, is shared understanding. Advertiser and agency need to agree exactly what the advertising is expected to do for the brand and how the campaign is going to work (White, 2003; see also Chapter 3.1). In reality client and agency often have very different views, caused by the different mental models they use to evaluate creative work (Devinney et al., 2005).

One of the important factors in the client agency relationship is the risk-orientation of the client and the willingness of agencies to take risks (Belch and Belch, 1995; El-Murad and West, 2003; West, 1993; West et al., 1999). In the end, it is the client who tends to avoid risk.

Another aspect in the client agency relationship is whether client and agency perceive each other as similar or not. A survey on perceived similarity showed its impact on agency performance, communication, the client’s intention to remain with the advertising agency, and the client’s defection after departure of an agency account member (Crutchfield et al., 2003). In other words, effects of lifestyle variables and social background of the members involved had an overwhelming effect on the outcome variables.

Different “languages” within the agency

Communication problems can arise not only between the client and agency, but within agencies, different “languages” are often spoken as well. This is particularly the case when it comes to the function of brand communications and the purpose and definition of creativity, as shown by studies of Hackley (2003a, 2003b), Young (2000), and Koslow et al. (2003). Creatives for instance are accused of perceiving ads as being more appropriate when they are artistic and original, while account managers tend to perceive ads as more appropriate if they are strategic. Creative individuals are described as being different, smart, intuitive, neurotic, confident, and emotional with a touch of rebelliousness (Ewing et al., 2001), in contrast to their noncreative counterparts within the agency, who operate in a more rational and factual mode, which creatives have difficulty to understand and be inspired of. Goldenberg and Mazursky (Chapter 5.1), elaborate on this issue of creatives being different.

The role of research

The role of research in the creative advertising process is debated. Although research has always been acknowledged as an important part of advertising development in the best agencies (Ogilvy, 1985), creative personnel are often sceptic about its function and purpose (Glen, 2005). Cause of this resistance is the way in which advertising consumer research often is communicated and formulated in creative briefs. The creative requirement is less powerful in shaping research than the marketing one. In place of rationality and evaluation, creativity works by intuition, hunches or unlikely connections (Bayley, 2000). It is the account planner who is involved in distilling insights from research and integrating this into the creative development of advertising and brand communication strategies (Baskin and Coburn, 2001; Davies, 2000; Hackley, 2003a). Bayley (2000) argues that research should much more often be conducted and presented with the sole purpose of providing texture for creatives. Bullmore (2005) summarizes the importance of research as “good insight is like a refrigerator,” because as soon as you look into the fridge the light comes on.

SUMMARY

A good brief should be specific without being entirely restrictive. It closes down options, is directionally precise and succinct, i.e., a single page. It should identify the target market and the changes that should result from the campaign.

No brief can be completely right and wholly inspiring at the outset of the creative development process. Furthermore it is very unlikely to remain unchanged in substance and meaning throughout the subsequent development process, if it is to maintain its value as an objective benchmark for the output.
There appears to be little published information regarding the ways in which briefs are actually used within the briefing and creative development process. However, the Account Planning Group in the UK publishes a set of case histories biennially representing "best practice" in creative development from its Creative Planning Awards. A study of these papers reveals a few notable cases where strategy development, creative briefing and creative development follow a linear sequential process, with a "good" brief providing clear direction to the creative teams in implementing a strategy that remains fixed and consistently defined. However, these examples are in the minority. From the APG papers, it appears to be commonplace in many, if not most, agencies nowadays for creative development and strategic development to be progressed to some degree in tandem, as iterative processes.

The key, from a strategic perspective, seems to be sensitive listening for useful insights, perspectives or changes of approach that warrant a revision or modification to the creative brief. Often insights or observations arise from challenges that creative teams make to existing views about how best to achieve the objective. The traditional model of the strategist as author and sole arbiter of the strategy seems to have been dropped. In its place is an emerging role of the strategist as the collector and assimilator of all differing views and perspectives, whether they be from client, creative, consumer or the strategist's own mother. His skill is less in dictating strategy and more in assimilating it. There are clearly key implications for the way the creative brief is used in these emerging new collaborative creative development processes.

Hopefully, a well articulated brief can have great value in both outlining a clear direction and challenging creative people to pursue that direction as creatively as possible. Nick Worthington of AMV BBDO, London, explained this as "A good Creative Brief sets the basis on which ideas can be sparked off – consciously or subconsciously. It immediately inspires everyone that comes in contact with. In order to achieve this, the Creative Brief reduces the strategy to its essence. This reduction turns the small light of a torch into a kind of focussed 'laser beam', from which many ideas can be sparked off" (cited in Langwost, 2004: 121).

What matters most at the end of this process is that the creative proposals are more likely to be approved and are more likely to work against the defined objective. Being "on brief" is obviously a critical requirement for this. However, the brief can help here by evolving throughout the process, so that it ultimately sets up the creative solution that deserves to be approved because it is the one that is most likely to work.

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Further Readings

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