

Pharmaceutical Executive

CLIENT + AGENCY:

Connecting on Creative

The back-and-forth of ad review can be maddening and costly. Here's how basic process tools can save time, money, and your campaign.

by Joanna Breitstein

EVERYBODY KNOWS THE COMMON PITFALLS that can cause client-agency relationships to sour: failure to set expectations, vague contracts, unwillingness to share information, and allowing minimal opportunity for review and feedback. But even having that information sometimes isn't enough to stop the disconnect that can happen when clients and agencies set to work on developing creative.

Many agencies have been there: After days, weeks, or months of working to develop just the right creative, agency execs present it to their client. But instead of an approval, the client sends them back to the drawing board with comments like "I don't like it. Show me something else."

That is the worst thing you can say to an agency. When clients respond to a creative execution without a word about why it fits or doesn't fit into the brand's marketing strategy, it turns the creative development process into a subjective free for all. Agencies can change the execution—rounds upon rounds of presentations—without ever getting it right. And with each pass, both parties gain an increasingly bitter taste for interaction, which can ruin the relationship in the long run.

"It's like a group of people coming together to discuss specific presentation points without first clarifying the objectives for the meeting," says seasoned advertising exec Richard Czerniawski, a former director of marketing for Coca-Cola, who also held key marketing positions with Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson. Today, Czerniawski serves as managing partner of Brand Development Network International, a marketing consulting firm.

Of course, misdirected creative is systemic of deeper problems. Sometimes, clients don't share their product positioning with agencies because they never created that positioning. Or perhaps the company waited until the agency developed the creative before gaining buy-in from upper management for the cam-





Top of their class: Mark Forchette (left), global director of vitreoretinal sales and marketing for Alcon, and Vickie Spellman (right), management supervisor at Corbett Worldwide Healthcare Communications, illustrate their team's campaign ideas using rough sketches. Both executives attended the agency's Ad College in Chicago.

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paigned idea. But at the end of the day, when frustrated agency execs are standing across from unhappy clients, both sides must ask: How did we get here?

Institute Processes

Some insiders may argue that there is no such thing as a common language within organizations—much less between organizations. So client–agency relationships should, at least, be based on processes that build a common understanding. That way, everyone shares a means of understanding and evaluating ideas and campaigns.

“The way we work has a profound impact on the quality of our work,” says Czerniawski. “If we fail to employ smart practices, creative is not likely to turn out positively—at least not on a consistent basis. Instead, the work may be strategically inappropriate, overly time consuming, ineffective, and can be frustrating and

A brand positioning statement (BPS) creates value. It taps into what the brand should mean for the customer in terms of a benefit perception.

draining to the intelligent energies of all who participate.”

“A template of thought processes is like a checklist that ensures you are developing the most strategic advertising possible,” says Mark Forchette, global director of vitreoretinal sales and marketing for Alcon. The company sent 24 of its marketers to attend a three-day Marketing 101 class sponsored by Corbett Accel Healthcare Group that focused on building joint processes. (See “Building Partnerships”.)

Indeed, it's helpful for marketers to think of themselves as “markitects,” says Czerniawski. The following steps will ensure that agencies and clients design a brand that is built to specifications.

Position Together

Clients should call in their agencies to help develop the brand positioning, which is the way companies want customers to think about their brand versus the competition and which should serve as the blueprint for all promotion. That should happen, in most cases, at least two years before launch.

“Although many clients think they know positioning, most don't,” says Czerniawski. “If agencies get involved in strategy early on, they're thinking about the business early on. The last thing agencies should act like is short-order cooks. Instead of asking them to ‘write an ad or develop a campaign that is blankety-blank,’ clients should take advantage of agencies' creative thinking skills. Also, account and creative people ought to be involved because good, creative people are inherently strategic. So why wouldn't companies want to benefit from their contributions?”

Forchette believes that it is the compa-

ny's responsibility to drive the brand's positioning. “We're living with the product every single day,” he says. “But we need to make sure the agency understands it. And then—maybe they've seen a similar situation—they should take the opportunity to challenge us with a unique or better way to position the brand.”

Czerniawski says that executives should formulate that thinking into a brand positioning statement (BPS). (See “Brand Positioning”.)

“A BPS takes a product and creates a constellation of value. It goes beyond what the product can do and taps into what the brand should mean for the customer in terms of a benefit perception. For example, Starbucks is more than just a great-tasting cup of coffee—it can be a reward or a special experience. Viagra is more than a drug to treat erectile dysfunction. It enables you to enjoy a loving relationship so you can feel like a whole man again.”

The BPS should identify the:

- + target audience and their current usage and needs
- + competitive framework
- + benefits
- + reasons for those benefits
- + brand characteristics.

A BPS example would read something like this:

Target: Physicians who treat patients with life-threatening diseases who are also suffering from anemia that results from their primary condition or its treatment, which saps their energy to enjoy life.

Usage: Physicians aggressively treat their patients' life-threatening primary condition but often overlook the consequence of that condition and its impact on their patients' quality of life.

Needs: Physicians need a therapy that will remedy their patients' condition- or treatment-induced anemia in order to

enhance the patients' energy for life, without compromising treatment of the primary condition.

Competitive framework: Red blood cell generator and fatigue combater.

Benefit: Remedies anemia-related fatigue without compromising physicians' treatment of the primary condition so that patients have more energy for improved quality of life.

Reason: The compound, epoetin alfa, increases the body's natural supply of erythropoietin (a protein made in the kidneys that is critical to red blood cell production) and stimulates bone marrow to produce "progenitor" cells that mature into red blood cells.

Brand character: A nurturer who fills people in need with hope, energy, and dignity so they can realize their potential.

The "Brief" Sessions

Next, companies should create the marketing objective, which states a very specific behavior that marketers want from their customers.

"A business objective is to increase sales or gain share in the market," says Czerniawski. "A marketing objective may be to increase persistency. An example of that outside the pharma world is Jell-O. Jell-O is probably in 98 percent of all pantries. Twenty years ago, it was probably in 98 percent of all pantries. But I would be willing to bet you that Jell-O's usage has declined. So the marketing objective is to get you to use it more frequently. An ad might serve that marketing objective by reminding consumers that instead of eating a quarter of a Snackwell cookie, they can have a whole plate of fat-free Jell-O and have more enjoyment."

Those insights are easy to spot once agencies and their clients develop a creative brief (also called an agency brief.) A creative brief communicates the essential information required by the agency to produce effective advertising. For the most part, the brief is an assembly process from previous work. The brand team should already know the marketing objective, have customer insight from the company's research, and have the brand character established from the brand positioning statement. The only parts that are left include:

- + clarification of the assignment: formats, timing, and such
- + specification of regulatory mandates
- + both client and agency-side approval from senior executives.

In the end, a successful creative brief outlines how the product benefit delivers against a customer insight and achieves a

Brand Positioning

Clients and agencies should develop a brand positioning statement together, because it serves as the blueprint for all future promotional activity.

To _____, _____ is the
[TARGET GROUP/NEED] [BRAND]
 brand of _____ that _____.
[COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK] [BENEFIT]

The reason is _____.
[REASON WHY]

The brand character is _____.
[BRAND CHARACTER]

"It is the clients' job to improve the direction, which allows the agency to exploit the opportunity with their unique brand of creativity."

marketing objective.

But even after filling out creative briefs, why is the industry still cranking out misdirected creative?

"All too often clients and agencies confuse a fact with an insight," says Czerniawski. "For example, moms don't want a shampoo that can irritate their baby's eyes. That's a fact. Every baby shampoo claims it won't irritate the baby's eyes."

Instead, companies and their agencies should ensure that their customer insights fit into one of three categories:

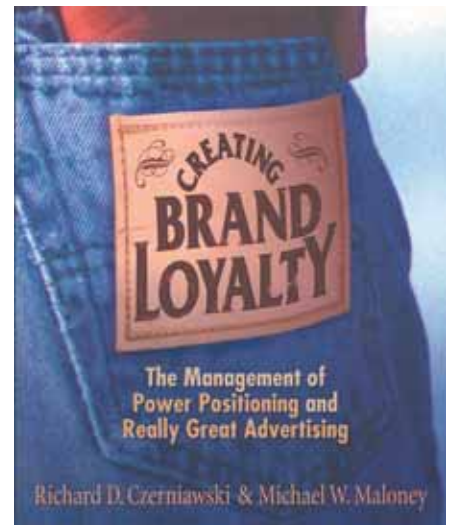
- + a competitive benefit, such as better dosing
- + a barrier to overcome in the minds of customers: People might not want anyone to know that they're trying to quit smoking—NicoDerm CQ Clear has a benefit that clearly delivers against that concern
- + a compelling belief about the product: If consumers think three blades are better than two, then the Schick Quattro is better than the Mach3.

Also, if agencies and clients don't truly develop the document together, it is likely one side won't examine it closely, and problems with the brief will surface later. Both sides must also ensure that creative briefs only include the most important information and that the language is clear.

"If we don't do it together, we will still be having strategic discussions when we're reviewing creative—an awful waste of energy and lack of focus," says Czerniawski.

Creative Development

The next step is to develop campaign ideas and execute the best idea once it is agreed upon.



Must-read: Richard Czerniawski's book *Creating Brand Loyalty* can be ordered through Amazon.com.

"At the heart of every good creative idea is a strategic direction," says John Scott, chief creative officer of Corbett Accel Healthcare Group. "We find that we don't have much difficulty selling the creative once we've agreed on the strategy because the big arguments are over with. Now it's about how you execute that strategy."

Czerniawski advises illustrating campaign ideas in a rough sketch before executing the layout. It's an easy way to cut costs for clients and manage expectations because clients will know roughly what they're getting.

"Agencies may cringe at the suggestion of doing sketches instead of full-blown comps," says Forchette. "They may say, 'Ouch! This is going to affect our billing.' But if we get those efficiencies, I'm likely to

Creative Brief

A successful brief shows how the advertising strategy delivers against a customer insight and achieves a marketing objective.

Marketing Objective:

Assignment:

Customer Insight:

Advertising Strategy:

- **Convince** [Target]
- **That** [Benefit]
- **Because** [Support]

Brand Character:

Regulatory Mandates:

-
-
-

Approvals:

Most senior client responsible for advertising: _____

Most senior agency person responsible for advertising:

Building Partnerships

FEW AGENCIES DEVELOP educational events for their clients, and even fewer underwrite them. But Bob DeBartolo, executive director of client services of Corbett Worldwide Healthcare Communications, says the payoff for the Corbett Accel Strategic Ad College comes with “clients that become better clients, which in turn will allow us to produce better work and help to move their brands. We invest in them, and they invest in us, so we become fast friends and partners in our mutual success.”

The three-day event held in Chicago and led by Richard Czerniawski and Michael Maloney of Brand Development Network International taught Alcon how to best assess creative with its partner/agency. It also worked to further cultivate the relationship between the agency and its client.

“With Strategic Ad College, we are trying to create synergies in the creative development process so that we have the building blocks to achieve communication strategy,” says Bob DeBartolo, executive vice-president for Corbett. DeBartolo was instrumental in spearheading the development of the Corbett Accel Strategic Ad College initiative.

Alcon executives shared tables with agency personnel in lectures and in interactive sessions, where they commented on hundreds of ads and were asked to design their own marketing strategy for a make-believe brand. The exercise often required Alcon and Corbett execs to role play, and many attendees came away with a clearer insight of the other side’s reality. In addition, attendees were able to walk through the creative coaching process and practice giving direction.

“Enlightened clients know that there are opportunities to learn from the agency,” says Cotherman. “It is a rich and fertile ground because we have broad exposure across many clients, therapeutic categories, brands, and even outside the healthcare industry, upon which to provide learning opportunities for their staff. We can teach them new things that, in their relatively insular world, they may not be exposed to. I would encourage the industry, in general, to make sure they work toward an enlightened point of view in how agencies can be of great value to them in this regard.

“The return will come in the future—greater confidence from the client, more brand assignments, and a broader array of services they’ll consider.”

be happier and may even bring them more products.”

When assessing a layout or storyboard, marketing managers must ensure that it fulfills the marketing objectives and that it’s going to compel customers to take action. In giving further direction, they must also ensure that they are coaching agencies in a way that adds value to the end product.

Czerniawski explains: “A coach at a basketball game can’t say, ‘They’re beating the hell out of us. I don’t know what is going on here. You guys better come up with something to put an end to that.’ That’s not going to work. Instead, a coach should say, ‘Look! They’re beating us, and the reason is they’re getting too many offensive rebounds. We have to do a better


job of boxing out. I want you moving into this position.’ That’s the kind of direction and coaching—identifying what you need to see that you currently aren’t seeing—that makes advertising stronger.”

In addition, Czerniawski notes, “It is the clients’ job to improve the direction, which allows the agency to exploit the opportunity with their unique brand of creativity. Where clients overstep the boundaries is when they begin to write the creative and say, ‘I want you to put this line in. I want you to say this and say it this way.’”

“Our mission is to make them understand that the freshest and most unexpected and most persuasive and memorable executions are the ones that are most likely to be effective in communicating the

strategy,” says Scott.

“We’re talking about how to be a better marketer, how to be a better advertiser,” Czerniawski says. “We’re talking to people not just about what they’re doing to get creative, but what they’re doing to build brands. Coaching is an important part of that. It applies not only to what happens at the agency, but with all the support groups that work with me.”

If companies want really great advertising, they must be as vested as agencies in developing the relationship. By working together each step of the way, both sides can arrive at new and different creative, faster and cheaper—while building the trust to carry out the next campaign. 

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