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THE PERSUASIVE WORD

Strategy ABCs: audience, benefits, and creative briefs

 *Having a clear vision of what it is that you are heading for, and know it when you see it and dismiss it when you don't see it, is really, really important. Just think from the outset about what it is that you're writing because writing is not an accident.*

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In this first chapter, you'll examine a campaign's creative starting point: the strategy. You'll take an up-close look at the creative brief, which acts as the campaign's directional guide. You'll analyze the structure and function of the creative brief, see how it drives the strategy, and find out how it's based on several key aspects including market research, consumer insights, specific objectives, and product positioning.

You'll also learn how to create effective media intersections, or the best places for your message to collide with the consumer. In no time, you'll grasp how to use these "collision venues" or touchpoints to change or reinforce consumers' impression of the brand. You'll see selecting the right tactics (specific distribution vehicles, like online ads or mobile messages) helps propel your message to the targeted audience.

In addition, you'll realize that creating a two-way conversation with consumers can result in an unexpected backlash. That happens when consumers share their feelings (good and bad) about the brand. You'll quickly recognize that being able to analyze your audience through various means like VALS will help you create authentic and credible messages.

You'll soon comprehend the difference between primary and secondary audiences, be able to identify them, and know why you need to consider both. You'll gain insight into why some agencies copy test (ask consumers their opinion of ad messages) and some still conduct focus groups, surveys, mall interceptions, and other means of consumer research discussed later in the chapter. Finally, you'll be reminded of the importance of focusing on the benefit in your main idea. So, let's start looking at strategy right now.

Thinking about strategy first

Every advertising campaign needs a specific objective, a clear message, a target audience, and a "strategy." The strategy is the overall creative direction of a campaign, which is determined by the account and creative teams. They work together to develop an underlying solution that addresses a specific consumer benefit or need, clarifies the product or service, or solves a brand's marketing challenge. The strategy acts like a compass and allows the agency to double check that the campaign direction is on-course. For example, if the agreed-upon strategy was to show the whitening power of a detergent and the ad talked about a special two-for-one offer, then the message was off-strategy. It should be highlighting the whitening ability, not the price.

How does each agency decide the strategy? First it conducts research to gain consumer insights. What does the audience want or need? How can this product deliver a solution? What is the benefit, the reward for the consumer to make this purchase? The agency team looks to answer these and other questions and gain a deeper understanding of consumers and how they think. What they value. What's important to them? What solution the product offers. Why should they choose this product and not another.

The agency team uses the creative brief to answer these and other specific questions in order to develop a creative strategy statement to steer the campaign. The account team always thinks about the big picture, concentrates on the overall strategic direction, and looks for long-term creative solutions in its messaging. To gain greater insight into the creative-problem-solving process, we'll start by examining the elements of a creative *brief*. Then, we'll see how it serves as an outline for the campaign *strategy*, or basic creative destination.

But, before we get to the brief, we should take a look at how much of this strategic thinking has been changed over the years by technology and consumer behavior. Starting in 1900, when N.W. Ayer first introduced campaigns to fulfill the advertisers' marketing objectives,² agencies used to work in this way:

- 1 Brief
- 2 Creative strategy
- 3 Concept
- 4 Execution

First the brief was created based on client input, market research, consumer insight, advertising objectives, product positioning (in the mind of the consumer), competitors, product's uniqueness, tactics, main message, and so on. Then, the strategy was created based on the brief, a main concept was developed from the strategy, and the concept was executed.

Today, marketers are thinking about the execution as they're creating the brief. Why? Because the advertising isn't just about the concept; it's also about where the message and consumer intersect. These *media intersections* are "touchpoints," places where the campaign messages are seen by the target. Another key point is that consumers now participate in delivering the brand's message. They do this through consumer-created content and user-generated content. The difference between these two is that user-generated content are messages developed by people who use the product, not just the general public. With so many people involved in social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Flickr, consumers can continue a dialogue between themselves and the brand. Or they can initiate an open conversation among members of their online community.

Consumers can share their opinions, photos, videos, and even their own impression of the brand through self-created commercials. This puts the power of selling a brand's message in the hands of the consumer, without anyone's permission. Marketers have to be careful because once a negative impression is circulated on the Internet, it's difficult to change it. Advertisers have to protect their brands' images. There are several ways they attempt to do this. Notice the word "attempt," because it's not that simple to achieve. First, they need to constantly monitor their social media sites. Second, they need to immediately address consumer complaints. Third, they need to be willing to face harsh criticism in a graceful and responsive way.

Now, unhappy consumers can create damaging user-generated content. One unforgettable 2008 United Airlines incident was globally publicized online. While the band Sons of Maxwell was on tour they witnessed the careless handling of its \$3,500 guitar by the United Airlines' baggage crew. After several unsuccessful attempts to have the airline resolve the problem, the band created a video detailing the event. It posted it on YouTube where it instantly went viral. Unlike years ago, companies today that are nonresponsive to customer complaints have to face irate, public backlash. Consumers are no longer going to sit idly by when they can broadcast their poor customer service complaints. Smart marketers are wise to address problems immediately. Most likely, that would be any brand's best corporate strategy.

Taking that one step forward, Crispin Porter + Bogusky, named agency of the decade by *Advertising Age* (December 14, 2009 issue), flies over this process entirely and starts with the end in mind: press coverage. Creative talents must write a jaw-dropping press release before they begin any creative conceptualization. They must present what the press will write about.

Then, they have to find a way to make that happen. The campaign's "big idea" must transcend medium and format. It must be so powerful it cannot be ignored. In thinking about the reaction to their work, their strategic thinking teams include cognitive anthropologists (account managers), creatives, digital technologists (developers), and anyone else who would like to work on the campaign. It's a collaborative effort in which everyone shares ownership, with credit lists of possibly 75 people.

Now, let's get back to the function and format of the brief, which is more commonly used at agencies, and how that guides the strategic direction.

Examining the brief: an up-close look

Although agencies differ in their briefs, most include the same key information. Here's a template to use for your briefs. It forces you to determine the audience, product competitors, consumer opinions, product uniqueness, and other critical areas.

We will look at the basic or shorter brief (text box 1.1) and the more expanded, detailed brief (text box 1.2).

You can see there are only eight parts to this basic brief. This will give you a good start in your overall thinking. However, before you can begin outlining your creative direction, you should go through and complete the longer brief (text box 1.2). Be sure to answer every one of the questions and fill in each answer specifically.

The brief is a series of questions that need to be carefully answered before developing a solid campaign strategy. First you need to fully understand all of the terminology. First, we'll examine some of the words used in box 1.2.

The brand is advertising to say something to _____ (VERB – persuade, convince, inform, educate) the audience (SPECIFIC CONSUMERS) that this _____ (PRODUCT, SERVICE OR BRAND) will _____ (STATE THE BENEFIT) because _____ (FEATURES THAT EXPLAIN WHY AUDIENCE SHOULD BELIEVE IT. THIS ACTS AS A SUPPORT STATEMENT).



TEMPLATES 1.1 The shorter creative brief

- 1 What is the *brand's character* or personality?
- 2 Why does the brand *want to advertise*?
- 3 Who is the *audience*?
- 4 What do they (audience members) *currently think*?
- 5 What do you *want them to think*?
- 6 *Why should they buy* this product/service?
- 7 What is the *big message* you want them to know?
- 8 What *kind of tactics* (specific ad/promotional techniques) do you want to use? For example, do you want to use viral marketing, interactive online components, out-of-home messages, print ads, transit (buses, subways, taxis, etc.), new media, direct mail, or other vehicles?



TEMPLATES 1.2 The creative brief

- 1 Why does the brand *want to advertise*? What does it want to accomplish? (Use this template.)

Creative strategy statement template

To _____ that _____ will _____ because _____.

(verb) (audience) (brand) (benefit) (support statement /
reason why)

Example

To convince fastidious moms that Tide will get out the toughest stains because of its enzyme-fighting formula.

- 2 Who is the *audience*?
 - a *Demographics*– Provides insight into audience by their age, income, education, gender, occupation (employment status), etc.
 - b *Psychographics*– Examines how audience lives. Think lifestyle, attitude, personality, behavior (like brand loyalty), and value (what’s important to them). (VALS and OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH. Explained after box. See below.)
 - c *Geographics*– Explores where (location and kind of setting: urban, suburban, rural) audience lives.
- 3 Who are the brand’s competitors?
- 4 What do they (audience members) *currently think* (about the brand)?
- 5 What do you *want them to think* (about the brand)? (THINK CONSUMER BENEFIT. What the product does for the end-user.)
- 6 *Why should they buy* this brand (product or service)? Clearly answer: “WHY BUY?”
- 7 What is the *big message* you want them to know? (THINK SLOGAN.)
- 8 Determine what the brand’s positioning is. Do you want consumers to say it’s safe, cool, fun, reliable, etc.? (WHAT IS THE BRAND KNOWN FOR?)
- 9 What is the brand’s *USP*? (UNIQUE SELLING POINT OR PROPOSITION?) What separates this brand from its competitors?
- 10 What is the *brand’s character* or personality?
 - a What kind of personality does the brand have?
 - b Who would the brand be as a famous person?
 - c Who would that famous person be in relation to the consumer? (A coach, friend, uncle, sister, neighbor, dad?)
 - d How would that person (friend, brother, boss) speak to the consumer? How would a coach speak to team members? THINK ADJECTIVE. A coach would be authoritative, encouraging, concerned, etc. This is the brand’s *TONE OF VOICE*. (Use it in #11 below.)

- 11 What is the *tone of voice*? (HOW YOU SPEAK TO YOUR AUDIENCE: Think adjective. Refer to #10d, above.)
- 12 What *kinds of tactics* (specific ad/promotional techniques) do you want to use? For example, do you want to use viral marketing, interactive online components, ambient messages, print ads, transit (buses, subways, taxis, etc.), new media, direct mail, or other vehicles?
- 13 Think about what kind of campaign will generate press and create buzz.

The *creative strategy*, as shown in the brief (# 1) is a deceptively simple formula that explains the broad direction of the campaign. Although it looks like an easy-to-develop sentence, the challenge is to write it in the most descriptive and accurate language, specifically relating to the brand. Just fill in the blanks. Use the capped words in parentheses as explanatory guides.

The point here is to explain in detail why the brand is advertising; however you don't want to just say "to increase sales" or "to build awareness" because that could apply to any brand. Those statements are too general. This is where you want to differentiate your brand from any other. You must answer this general question in a very specific way: What do you want this campaign to do for the brand? Don't just rush in with the first obvious answer. Look deeper into the audience profile you'll outline before proceeding. Who are they? Why are you targeting them? What benefit will they derive from this product or service? What features explain why they should pick this brand and not one of its competitors?

The trick to writing a great brief is in drilling down the information. Think of it as if you're a chef and you're reducing the ingredients in a pan to create a sauce. You must reduce the information down to its core essence. This one sentence must act like a one-line review in a newspaper if this were a restaurant. Then, the campaign or "menu" is what will attract diners to taste the food or brand.

Gaining deeper audience insight through VALS and observational research

Two other important terms appeared in the brief under "Who is the Audience" in section 2b above, "Psychographics." These were *VALS* and *observational research*. VALS

connects consumer personality traits to future purchasing behaviors. VALS stands for Values, Attitudes, and Lifestyles and was created in the 1970s by SRI International, a research company, in Menlo, California. VALS market segmentation places audiences into easy-to-refer-to, shopping-prediction categories. Observational research is a method



The brief has a tiny hole. You must make an elephant go through it without tearing the paper. **JUAN SANTIAGO LAGOS, ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, ZUBI ADVERTISING, NOW AT ALMA/DOB**

of collecting consumer information by seeing them firsthand in a natural, everyday setting like at home rather than learning about them through their answers in a focus group. So, instead of asking them what magazines they read, they can see them usually lying around their homes. This sidesteps a common consumer desire to impress others in the focus group or tell researchers what they think they want to hear.

These are just two of many ways to analyze audiences. There are target groups by age-group titles. Some of the dates vary depending on the source, but you can get a quick idea of the various target groups here. These labels include the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964); the Generation X or “Gen X” (born between 1965 and 1976); the Gen Y or “Millennials,” “Gen M,” “Generation Next,” or “Generation Y” (born between 1977 and 1994); the Gen Z or “Net Generation,” “Internet Generation,” “Digital Natives,” or the “Verge Generation” (born between 1994 and 2004). These groups have attitudinal likeness or similar perspective. Even though it’s unfair to categorize any individual, researchers will create a one-word nickname, or short expression to act as a short cut to identify a group. For example, the Baby Boomers are the “never get old” group. Gen X are “independent.” Gen Y are team players. Gen Z are “digital savvy.”

There are ethnic groups, which you reach through their cultural similarities. There are interest target groups, which you speak to through their common interests, like technology buffs, wine lovers, conscientious environmentalists, and so on.

VALS, on the other hand, allows marketers to predict consumers’ future shopping behavior by considering different buying motivational categories based on consumer attitudes and values. The first VALS, or VALS 1, which explored consumers’ lifestyles and buying motivations, was later refined to reflect consumers’ ability to pay for products they desired. The revised VALS, or VALS 2, blended demographics into the mix and considered income, education, and health. VALS 2 answered the question of the strength of consumers’ buying power. Today all of the categories are used, to reflect different audience’s lifestyles, buying motivations and purchasing power. Let’s compare the two different VALS one after the other as they are so clearly explained in *Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture*.⁴ After this, we’ll compare these to VALS 3 (text box 1.3).

VALS 1: from lowest to highest income

Group I: Needs-driven consumers – Financially challenged.

- 1 *Survivors* – Poor and elderly, who are just scraping by.
- 2 *Sustainers* – Young and clever with a desire to succeed.

Group II: Outer-directed consumers – Representative in attitude, geography, and financial status as “Middle America”; concerned about other people’s opinions of them; want to leave a positive impression.

- 3 *Belongers* – Conservative traditionalists, who long for yesterday, and stick to what’s tried and true, rather than experimenting with something new.
- 4 *Emulators* – Eager, status-driven and competitive, these are up-and-comers on the path to financial success.
- 5 *Achievers* – Have reached their financial and material goals, community leaders.

Group III: Inner-directed consumers – Make purchases from their own desires, not to impress others.

- 6 *I-Am-Me's* – Young, self-focused freethinkers who do their own thing.
- 7 *Experientials*– More mature individualistic naturalists who seek self-improvement and personal growth.
- 8 *Societally Conscious* – Environmentalists interested in global conservation and consumer product protection.
- 9 *Integrateds* – Self-assured and confident, less responsive to advertising messages, may be unintentional trendspotters because of their good taste.

VALS 2

Starting at the lowest income group, moving to highest, we start with the Strugglers (Survivors in VALS 1) and end up with the Actualizers (Integrateds in VALS 1). Now there are only eight categories as follows:

- 1 *Strugglers* – Lowest income, those barely surviving financially.
- 2 *Makers* – High energy, lower income group who enjoy constructing things.
- 3 *Strivers* – Emulating Achievers without the income or skill set.
- 4 *Believers* – Like Fulfilleds with a lower income, conservatives who prefer name brands.
- 5 *Experiencers* – Avid shoppers, risk takers who relish unusual, novel, even wacky, items.
- 6 *Achievers* – Accomplished and structured, goal-oriented consumers whose purchases reflect their status.
- 7 *Fulfilled* – Mature, financially stable, who value durable, functional products, and are receptive to new ideas.
- 8 *Actualizers* – Wealthy individuals who reached their personal goals, their purchases reflect their sophisticated taste.

VALS 3

A third VALS segmentation also breaks consumers into eight categories (with some different labels) and three groups. At the bottom of the financial ladder are the Survivors with limited resources and little creative innovation. In the top group are the opposite. These are Innovators with deep resources who are highly innovative. In the middle are these six groups that represent the primary buying motivations based on their (1) ideals, (2) achievements, and need for (3) self-expression. In each of the middle groups (numbers 2–7) are low- and high-income subsets. For example, the “Ideals” group has Thinkers (higher income) and Believers (lower income).⁵

Group I: Survivors – Lowest income and lowest ability to innovate.

- 1 *Survivors* – Reluctant, brand-loyal shoppers, focus on needs not wants.

Group II: Ideals – Idealistic, inspired by moral principles and beliefs.

- 2 *Thinkers* – Informed and analytical, educated consumers who seek new knowledge, value structure, and appreciate durability (higher income)

- 3 *Believers* – Deep moral values, brand loyal, predictable conservative shoppers with a preference for anything familiar, strong community and religious alliances (lower income).

Group III: *Achievement* – Goal-oriented, motivated by accomplishments.

- 4 *Achievers* – Committed to success and family values, driven by career and family goals, seek prestigious products that reflect social status, conservative and risk averse (higher income).
- 5 *Strivers* – Status purchases demonstrate their need for approval, lack job skills to advance in the marketplace, have jobs not career positions (lower income).

Group IV: *Self-expression* – Stimulated by expressing themselves.

- 6 *Experiencers* – Young impulsive shoppers looking for the cool factor, attracted by novel and quirky items (higher income).
- 7 *Makers* – Enjoy being self-sufficient and making or building things themselves, more impressed with getting their money's worth than status purchases or luxury products (lower income).

Group V: *Innovators* – Highest income and ability to innovate.

- 8 *Innovators* – Strong self-image, upscale leaders, sophisticated shoppers.

The point of considering VALS categories before you begin writing is to try to actually picture your audience. To see them as people with specific lifestyles, attitudes, and different values so you can speak to them in a way that singles them out. You want the readers or viewers to feel as if you're talking directly to them. Even if you don't have the category titles perfectly in your mind, you can at least have a strong sense of the audience's way of life. Always remember to remind yourself of your audience when looking at a brief and beginning every assignment.

In thinking about the audience, Teddy Brown, senior vice president, executive creative director of the Orange County office at Draftfcb, explained that Taco Bell talks to a psychographic, not a demographic. He said:

So, it's really more about what this audience believes more than necessarily who they are. It's quite a broad target in general, so we spend more time talking about how this target audience acts and how they live their lives, than we do if they're male or female.⁶

Review all the observational research and internalize the consumer insights provided to you by the account team. Ask questions to the account and research teams if you need audience clarification. The more clearly you understand your audience, the more effective your message will be. Writing just to explain product features won't drive anyone to make a purchase, but writing to show what those features mean and how they can solve a problem or improve someone's life will. Ask yourself when you're about to create an ad in any product category what has or would compel you to buy it. Pay attention, whenever you buy anything, to your decision process. If you were skeptical at first, what did you see, hear, or read that swayed you?

It's this kind of thinking that is the backbone of the brief. It forces you to examine various aspects of marketing and fully understand the product's overall advertising goals, competitors, consumer beliefs, tactics, as well as its character, *tone of voice*, uniqueness,



USEFUL INFO 1.3 VALS comparison starting with highest incomes on top

The categories in all caps do not line up with VALS 1 groups. Subgroups are in italics. Notice that VALS 2 has no subgroups.

VALS 1	VALS 2	VALS 3	CAMPAIGNS
<i>Integrateds</i>		<i>High Resources and High Innovation</i>	
9. Integrateds	8. Actualizers 7. FULFILLEDS	8. Innovators	<i>Charitable causes, new approaches</i> <i>New, durable products</i>
<i>Inner-directed</i>			
8. Societally Conscious 7. Experientials 6. I-Am-Me's	6. Experiencers 5. MAKERS	<i>Self-expression</i> 7. Experiencers 6. MAKERS	<i>Eco-friendly campaigns</i> <i>Sky diving, hiking,</i> <i>biking, exploring, etc.</i> <i>Home Depot, Lowe's</i>
<i>Outer-directed</i>		<i>Achievement</i>	
5. Achievers 4. Emulators 3. Belongers	4. Achievers 3. Strivers	5. Achievers 4. Strivers 3. Thinkers	<i>Luxury items: Gucci, Dior</i> <i>Designers for less, T.J.Maxx, Marshalls</i> <i>Tried-and-true, reliable brands</i>
<i>Need-driven</i>		<i>Ideals-driven (higher income)</i>	
2. Sustainers 1. Survivors	2. Believers 1. Strugglers	2. Believers (lower income)	<i>Designers at deeper discounts: outlet malls</i> <i>Walmart, Costco</i>
		<i>Low Resources and Low Innovation</i>	
		1. Survivors	<i>Goodwill, thrift shops</i>

and main message. You need to consider everything when you're developing the campaign's direction and creative strategy.

Sheena Brady, creative director/copywriter at Wieden+Kennedy, explained how important the brief is in reaching client objectives this way:

I think what the brief is, is what the client is trying to do. So that's going to have a direct impact on the work. Then we, as creative people, find the best way of creatively solving that problem. Without a brief, there's no way of knowing whether we're doing our job for the client.⁷

Understanding secondary audience versus primary audience

In addition to the primary target who eventually buys the product, another audience should also be considered. This secondary audience is made up of the people who influence the primary audience: those are the people who make the purchase and use the product. The secondary audience could be a friend, relative, business associate, mentor, or anyone who affects the buyers' purchasing decisions. According to Larry Percy, there are five

different groups of people who influence purchasing decisions. They fall into the following “purchasing role” categories:

- 1 *Initiator*: person who first suggests buying the product or trying the service.
- 2 *Influencer*: someone who encourages or dissuades the buyer.
- 3 *Decider*: the actual person who makes the final decision purchasing selections.
- 4 *Purchaser*: the shopper who buys the item.
- 5 *User*: the person who ultimately uses the item or service.⁸

When creating a campaign, it’s helpful to think about how the *tone of voice* could also speak to these groups, so they’re impacted by the message. Also when you’re working on new product introductions, think about whether your audience members are early or late adapters. If they’re the type of people who would wait online for hours to be one of the first consumers to buy the latest Nike or high-tech gadget, then you might entice them with a be-the-first-to-own kind of message. If they’re late adapters, the people who wait until all the bugs are out of a new computer, smartphone, software, and so on, you might talk humorously about how this model has been “bug-proofed” with a digital exterminator.

Delving into consumer insights

There’s more to understanding the consumer than psychographic VALS categories, primary and secondary audiences, and purchasing roles. There are also insights gleaned from observational and other types of consumer research. Here’s a short list of some types of advertising-based research.

Focus groups provide information gathered from small groups of people placed together to review products and evaluate campaigns. Sometimes one person dominates and drives the discussion, thereby “tainting” or influencing the opinion of others in the group.

Pre-testing or *Copy testing* allows copy to be tested before it’s released in an ad campaign. Subjects are asked to comment on myriad ad messages. Some questions might include:

- 1 Whether they’d seen comparable ads and/or would consider buying the product (overall ad appeal).
- 2 What the audience’s overall impressions were (general impressions).
- 3 What they like or disliked about the ad, whether it seemed to be cohesive or confusing (ad consistency).
- 4 Whether they responded to the ad in an emotional way (ad emotional effect).
- 5 How they might use the product (usage effect).
- 6 Whether they’d talk to others about the ad.

Their responses are used to predict ad performance in these and other areas: (1) audience attention, (2) brand awareness, (3) purchase motivation, (4) emotional response, (5) ad recall, and (6) clarity of message.

Post-testing or *Ad-tracking* evaluates the brand’s performance by monitoring these and other results from the advertising campaign: (1) product/brand sales, (2) brand name recognition, (3) top-of-mind awareness, (4) unaided advertising awareness, (5) aided advertising message recall, (6) aided and unaided brand awareness, (7) brand preference (loyalty), (8) product adoption (usage), and (9) consumer opinion.

Mall interception reveals consumer opinions as they're going about their normal mall shopping. People are stopped randomly and asked to answer some questions.

Surveys indicate how consumers feel about the questions asked. Survey questions are designed to glean specific consumer insights. Often very lengthy surveys offer free products to the participants.

Digital Anthropology shows consumers' online behavior, including which sites they visit, how long they stay; what items are purchased; which articles, podcasts, vodcasts are viewed and shared; and so on. Marketers are looking to understand how to communicate with online communities through "tribalization" studies.

Multi-platform research tracks which media consumers prefer to consume: television, radio, print, online, and so on and helps advertisers evaluate which platforms are the most effective communication vehicles.

Observational research (or *Ethnography*) is conducted at consumers' natural settings, as they go about their everyday routines. The idea is to watch them in their own environment. It's easy to see the books or magazines they read. The kind of décor they prefer. The types of electronic gadgets they use. The brands they prefer, and so on. Understanding consumers' lifestyle is more than statistics. It's having a visual reference, an actual image of these people, so they're three-dimensionally real to the writer.

You also want to know how they feel about the brand and its competitors. Not only if they use it, but also if they do, why? And if not, why not? What do they really think about the product? If they don't like it, why not? What exactly don't they like about it? Having more insight into how consumers make buying decisions gives you more firing power so you'll hit your target with relevant messages. Think of your client's product as "your product." It will make your creative approach more personal. Ask yourself if you can answer these questions:

- 1 What do they like about "your product" (the one you're advertising)?
- 2 What do they like better about its competition?
- 3 What can you say to persuade them to choose "your product" the next time?
- 4 What haven't you mentioned before that could sway their decision?
- 5 How can you show them their personal benefits?
- 6 What need does it fulfill?
- 7 How does it enhance their lifestyle?
- 8 How can you differentiate "your product" in their eyes?

Most importantly, think like the consumer. Write that in big letters next to your computer. Before you create any promotional message, answer this: What would you need to hear to take action?

Realizing the importance of a benefit

There's no point in creating a vague campaign. The target audience wants to know why they should make a purchase. They need to find out how this brand will improve their lives, solve a problem, address a specific need, and so on. They don't have time to decipher a complicated message. Put a spotlight on your benefit or W-I-I-F-M (what's in it for me) and place it center stage.

The reason Apple sold so many iPods, iPhones, and iPads is that the advertising shows how easy they are to use and how they can simplify owners' lives. All of the messages answer consumers' objections to learning new technology by demonstrating them in use. The ads don't just say, "Here's a cool new gadget." They make consumers feel confident that the devices are user-friendly and promise a quick-to-integrate learning curve. They remove any hesitancy consumers might have about using a new device.

Try to understand what problem your product or service solves or how it fits into your target audience's lifestyle. If you don't know why they should buy it or order it, your message will be meaningless and ineffective. You must give them an indisputable reason to buy. At the same time, your creative solution must also realize the brand's objectives for advertising. Remember, you want to avoid common reasons such as generating traffic or increasing name recognition. These two goals are not definitive enough. You should be able to encapsulate the campaign message in a short phrase. Think about famous slogans and how they zero in on one sticky idea. It's important to showcase product features; just don't forget to explain how they ultimately help the audience.

For example, Taco Bell's campaigns are usually product-focused and sometimes use exaggeration to drive home a product feature. In the "Volcano Nachos" spot, an actor's face was flaming and smoke was coming out of him to show the product was hotter than other menu items. The "Grand Quesadilla" spot showed a young, pregnant woman boarding a bus. Climbing on board right after her is a young guy with an equally big belly who makes a remark suggesting that she must have enjoyed her Taco Bell lunch as much as he did. The product promises to satisfy your hunger. Brown explained Taco Bell strategies like this:

The thing with our product is "that new news drives the whole category." So, it must be newsworthy. It's always solving some sort of consumer need or problem. The point of difference is that our product stands out and is celebrated.

The difference between brand marketing and product marketing is that our work is always food-centric. It's the product that inspires the brief, but the story is always centered around the food. In that bus stop spot it's all about the main message. I'm looking at a brief here that states: "the quesadilla that actually fills you up."⁹

Whenever you create a message, you must consider the target audience. See them as three-dimensional people, not just a general group with certain characteristics or identified by a VALS, demographic, psychographic, or cultural category. How would you speak to them one on one? What do they value? What would be your *tone of voice*? Your *point of view*? What would be the main benefit most important to them? If you begin by focusing on who's receiving your message, you'll be able to tell them what you want to in the most relevant way. In the next chapter we'll talk about the strategies behind message development.

Creative strategy exercises

Exercise 1: deconstructing the thinking behind the message

Part 1 Examine one long-running, multimedia campaign like Monster.com "Monkeys," Absolut, Coke "Polar Bears," e-Trade "Talking Babies," and so on.

- a Identify the main idea in the campaign.
- b Decide the primary audience.

- c Determine the key benefit.
- d Analyze the main message.
- e Identify the *tone of voice*.

Part 2 Now create another ad in the campaign, targeting the same audience, using the same *tone of voice*, and main campaign message. What other medium could you introduce? Could you create a new place to place a message to reach the audience? Could you use an ambient ad?

Part 3 Create a message for a different audience by using the same basic strategy. Where else would you run this message to reach this audience? How would you change the *tone of voice*?

Exercise 2: where have you seen new messages?

Can you think of a new place to advertise besides luggage carousels, manhole covers, telephone wires, escalator steps, elevators, store floors, sidewalks, taxi tops, shopping bags, subway hand straps, and online? Think beyond traditional media. Consider an interactive vehicle.

Notes

- 1 Drummond Berman, personal communication, April 8, 2009.
- 2 <http://adage.com/century/timeline/index.html> (accessed November 14, 2010).
- 3 Juan Santiago Lagos, personal communication, January 12, 2010.
- 4 Arthur Asa Berger, *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 84–89.
- 5 Strategic Business Insights, <http://www.strategicbusinessinsights.com/vals/ustypes.shtml> (accessed July 5, 2010).
- 6 Teddy Brown, personal communication, October 26, 2009.
- 7 Sheena Brady, personal communication, May 8, 2009.
- 8 Larry Percy, *Strategies for Implementing Integrated Marketing Communications* (Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008), 252.
- 9 Teddy Brown, personal communication, October 26, 2009.