Establish a Creative Development Process that Works

Successful marketers know that people engage with ideas that are meaningful so they try to create powerful, insights-based campaigns that resonate with their target audience. Achieving success isn’t easy, and game changing work can be thwarted by any number of pressures. But marketers who develop a consistent, disciplined approach to creative development increase their probability of generating stronger brand value and business performance—the ultimate success criteria.

There is no single right or wrong process for creative development. It all depends on what works for your business. But make no mistake process is necessary if you want to unlock the full power of creativity. The creative development process should not be thought of in linear terms but instead as a collection of the necessary ingredients that marketers use to generate great content.

SET CLEAR OBJECTIVES

All great campaigns start by addressing the question how will this campaign drive brand growth?

Every brand faces different challenges and contexts. One brand may need to focus on raising their salience in relation to specific needs. Brands that are over reliant on functional benefits may need to build brand affinity. Some may need to attract users of a competing brand. Others will benefit by bringing new users into the category or by focusing on improving conversion rates among shoppers. Each opportunity to drive growth will require a different creative solution. The more specific you are about the opportunity the more likely you are to realize that value.

INSIGHT

Insight is the key that unlocks the power of a great campaign. Often referred to as the universal human truth, insights are consumer-based, not brand or product based. An insight is not a specific feature or the “reason to believe.” This may seem obvious, but marketers often don’t spend enough time looking for a transformational insight and default to “messaging” instead.

Identifying the right insight is critical. Some product oriented brands may define an insight as a problem as opposed to a human truth. Brands that take this approach tend to be more focused on getting a person to take an action as opposed to creating a higher sense of purpose for the brand. In a world where ideas are meant to have a long shelf life, focusing on a problem or behaviour may only address short-term results. Although understanding the problem is important, the root cause of the problem must be understood to uncover a big idea, and to build a great campaign.

CREATIVE PLATFORM

The creative platform is the unifying and overarching idea that sparks engagement and is the basis for creative content across channels and cultures. Done properly, a creative platform inspires great content and can be used for years. A great creative platform always knows the unique role that the brand plays in addressing the key insight.

A great creative platform is pliable and can spur ideas for content in channels that may have never been considered before.
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**BRAND EXPERIENCE**

Many creative development processes include considerations for how and where the idea will be realized and activated across the brand experience, including advertising, retailers/dealers, promotions, public relations and more. Elements of channel planning and consumer journey work should be addressed to understand the role of different touchpoints and maximize the potential of creative in each placement. Effective campaigns include myriad creative adaptations to serve different viewers with content to which they will respond.

**EXECUTION**

This is where the development process comes to fruition and is when you will appreciate having a solid creative development process in place. Executions are the individual activations of the creative platform within and across channels. If all the right elements are considered along the way, you’ll end up with executions that are engaging and more likely to overcome the receptivity problems that lead to increased ad blocking and avoidance. Good advertising means that you don’t need to shout or stalk your audience to be heard.

**BEST PRACTICES**

Cultural Shift: A common theme across effective development programs is not a step or a protocol, but rather an attitude. Great ideas require both the marketer and the agency to be brave. Expect some discomfort and accept that mistakes may happen along the way. This requires a shift in mindset to one that unlocks opportunity, embraces taking risks and is more co-creative in nature.

Adaptive: The process can be adapted. It doesn’t need to be undertaken in its entirety in every situation. Some marketers adapt their starting point and actions based on the stage of the brand or communications development. For example, a marketer might create a different process for one of these four scenarios:

- a) New brand or re-inventing existing brand
- b) Surfacing the creative platform
- c) Refreshing the executional approach
- d) Deploying the idea in new channels.

Global or Local: It’s best to put a stake in the ground as to whether the process will be driven globally or locally. A common approach for global brands is to develop a global platform, but execute through relevant channels, and with customized executions, in market. In this scenario, the goal is to balance global consistency with local relevancy. However, for some marketers where perceptions of the brand and its relative stage of development vary by market, the creative platform and executional work are done at a regional level.

**PITFALLS TO AVOID**

Black Holes: While it is important for the marketer to let the agency “do their thing,” it’s equally important for all key stakeholders to stay involved throughout the process. The best creative is developed when all parties have a vested interest but remember it is ultimately the response of the target audience that defines success.

Silver Bullets: There are no silver bullets. We all know that while there are certain principles around how brands are built, how advertising works and how people think, developing brand communications isn’t like painting by the numbers – it’s about fusing art and science.

Rethink Time: The above process may seem labor intensive and time consuming but it doesn’t have to be. Linear processes typically take time because each step needs to occur in sequence. They also typically feature “hand-offs” between the agency and marketer that can add time and don’t always yield the best work. If a process is developed correctly as an ongoing, iterative engagement using agile solutions, it can be much faster.