

getting the most from your creative agency



Every marketing and product manager is looking for an agency that will creatively contribute to the achievement of their brand's strategic objectives. A good creative agency will know the brand and the competitive environment almost as well as the manager, and be able to develop campaigns and promotional material that will turn that indistinct little white tablet into something that prescribers perceive as having relevant, unique benefits that best fit their needs.

Whether you are looking to develop an advertising campaign for a new product launch, or a leave piece for an existing product, the first step to a successful outcome is a good brief.

The brief is the information an agency requires prior to commencing work on a creative project. A good brief will focus the agency's creative energies. A poor one starts the agency off in the wrong direction, and wastes everyone's time and resources.

Spend time getting the brief right

"A problem well stated is a problem half-solved" – Charles Kettering

It is worth spending time getting the brief right as effort put in at the early stages will be rewarded later. It is essential that both

client and agency agree the brief's content. This assures the client that the agency has understood the brief, and the agency in turn are confident they understand the client's expectations, allowing the creative team to explore the possibilities for the product, pushing the creative boundaries without fear of wandering off-brief.

Most briefs are simply a list of questions which will vary depending on what is to be produced (see sample opposite). If the brief is to develop a new advertising campaign, or if it is the first time you have worked with the agency on a particular product, it is important to address the following questions:

- Why choose my brand rather than any of the competitors?
- What are the rational/emotional benefits that make my brand promise more credible or desirable than the competitors?

Obviously, the simpler the answer to these questions, the easier it will be to communicate the message. The answer however, must be more than a list of product attributes. If possible you should seek insights or truths about your brand which will make your communication more relevant.

Dealing with the agency

It is important that your agency has access to the information that will enable them to create the best solutions for your brand – clinical papers, market research, etc. Share your thoughts on the strategic development of your brand, not just the next set of promotional material.

Where relevant, get the creative agency to liaise with other outside agencies involved in the brand's strategic development (PR, market research, etc.).

The best creative work comes from blood, sweat and tears (and not just the agency's). If you want a memorable campaign then you are going to have to work hard yourself!

Where to from the brief?

The agency will need time to 'immerse' in the brand and to brain-storm ideas. This is a critical time (particularly if a new advertising campaign is being developed), and you should be on hand to answer any queries from the agency.

Once the creative ideas have been



developed into concepts (creative proposals), the agency is ready to present to you. When it comes to the initial presentation of work, you should aim to have all relevant members of the marketing team attend the presentation. If there are others in the company you need to 'buy in' to the creative proposals, for example the medical or managing director, they should also be asked to attend.

When assessing the proposals the most important questions to ask are:

- Does the creative work match the brief?
- Will it engage the target audience?
- Does it have 'legs', ie. will it still look good in a year's time – or longer?

Schedules

When developing the initial brief it is important that timelines are included and agreed. Give the agency adequate time to work on their proposals – remember, genuine creativity takes time. Allow time for

unforeseen issues to arise – copy can take time to get through medical approval and of course signatories can take off to conferences for a week or more...

Budgets

This can be a thorny issue for both sides! Agreeing a general budget with the agency before work commences is important. It means the client gets no 'surprises' when the work is completed and the agency can in turn gauge the amount of resources they are in a position to allocate to the project. There are numerous agency models for charging, from fixed project budgets to retainers to hourly billing – often, it's a combination of these.

And finally, to get the most out of your creative agency a good working relationship is vital. However, like any relationship it has to be worked at; there has to be honesty and trust between both parties – and it also should be enjoyable.