

Advertising Campaign: Building Creative Ideas

By *George Cosmin Tănase*



Abstract

Advertising is the most visible and most important instrument of the marketing communications mix. Large sums of money are spent on advertising, and no other marketing phenomenon is subject to so much public debate and controversy. Huge amounts of research are devoted to the question of what makes advertising effective and to the role of advertising characteristics on its effectiveness. As is the case with other communications instruments, special attention has to be devoted to the different steps in advertising campaign development and to the fit between the strategic marketing plan and the advertising campaign. The most crucial step in this process is translating the creative idea in an advertising execution. To this end, it is important to devote a lot of attention to different formal and content techniques and their effectiveness in advertising. But first of all, an overview is given of the different types of advertising.

Keywords: creative strategy, effective advertising, brand, positioning, communication, purchase behavior, rational and emotional appeal, media

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A year ago, in April, it was argued (Bobowski, 2014) that today, in order to win back the audience scattered across multiple media and many channels, brands have to be more strategic. That is why the marketing departments are trying, for instance, according to his opinion, to harness the social buzz around must-see television by tying together television ads and social strategy. On the

other hand, as shown (Jarsky, 2015) in March this year, marketers should care, for example, about real-time bidding (RTB, that lets website owners sell ad impressions through an advertising exchange platform), because of RTB advertisers getting more control over their campaigns performance and more targeted results for their clients.

Developing an advertising campaign, like any other communications plan, consists of a sequence of steps. The starting point is the marketing strategy, on the basis of which a specific advertising strategy needs to be developed. The three main points in the advertising strategy are: the target group (to or with whom are we going to communicate?), the advertising objectives (why are we going to communicate or what are we trying to reach?) and the message strategy (what are we going to communicate?). The most difficult step is translating the advertising strategy into a creative strategy or, in other words, going from 'what to say' to 'how to say it'. Afterwards the media strategy is developed. The different ideas will be evaluated on the basis of the creative brief and objectives stated, and the winning idea will be produced and implemented. In the process, the ads in the campaign may be tested, and often the effectiveness will be assessed after the campaign.

Message strategy

What are we going to say to the consumers? The message strategy or advertising platform is a very important element of advertising strategy since it has to convince consumers. They have to know why they should buy the product, to learn in what way it is special, how it is beneficial or advantageous for them, how it can help them, what characteristics it has or what benefits and value it offers, etc. In order to answer the question 'what to communicate?' the advertiser has to know and understand the target group very well: he or she has to know what the product can do for the target group, what the product can mean to them and how the product can help the consumers to reach their goals. Indeed, advertising can only be effective if it benefits the consumer. Therefore, the message cannot be focused on seller objectives, but has to start from the target consumers' motives. 4 Some customers see a car just as a functional vehicle, a means of getting them from A to B. This target group can perhaps be convinced by communicating the brand's attributes (airbag, engine, etc.) or benefits (reliability, safety, etc.).

Other customers do not want to buy a car; they want to buy an image, a status. Obviously, communications to the latter group should be different from those to the former group. Communicating a lifestyle, an image or a product's identity might be more suitable than telling customers about attributes or benefits. Knowing the problems, preferences and aspirations of the target group may be essential for deciding on the right message. Furthermore, it is important not to confuse consumers. Therefore, most companies stick to promoting one unique benefit of their brand, which can be functional or non-functional.

A functional benefit, also called a unique selling proposition (USP), usually refers to functional superiority in the sense that the brand offers the best quality, the best service, the lowest price, the most advanced technology. For example, Gillette is 'the best a man can get'; there is 'no better washing machine' than Miele; Durex Avanti 'gives the most natural feeling'; no card is more accepted than MasterCard, etc. A non-functional benefit usually reflects a unique psychological association to consumers and is referred to as an emotional selling proposition (ESP). Center Parcs is a state of happiness, you buy L'Oréal because 'you are worth it' and you buy a PlayStation 3 because 'this is living'. Other examples of brands that are promoted on the basis of non-functional benefits

include Porsche, Rodania, Rolls-Royce, Louis Vuitton, and Van Cleef & Arpels. In order to know which USP or ESP to go for, the advertiser needs to have a clear consumer insight. These are often revealed by qualitative research. For example, for Dove a consumer insight was that tiny, perfect models in advertising lower women's self-esteem. Therefore, Dove came up with its real beauty campaign showing normal women of all ages, shapes and sizes in an attempt to inspire consumers to feel comfortable with themselves.

Creative idea

Before an advertising agency can start thinking of a creative strategy, the advertiser must give the agency a creative brief. The creative brief or the document that forms the starting point for the advertising agency should contain not only information on the target group, advertising objectives and message strategy, but also sufficient information concerning the background of the company, the product, the market and the competitors. This implies information concerning the past, present and future in order to give the agency as accurate a view of the brand and its environment as possible. Some examples of necessary elements are the long-term company and brand strategy, past, current and desired positioning, former advertising campaigns, message strategies and execution styles, desired media, available budget and timing of the different steps (creative idea, execution strategies, campaign running, etc.).

The first step of the creative strategy is to develop a creative idea. But what is a creative idea? It is hard to give an accurate definition, but let us consider some attempts. A creative idea can be defined as an 'original and imaginative thought designed to produce goal-directed and problem solving advertisements and commercials'. According to others, a creative advertising idea has to be attention-grabbing and should work as a catalyst in the sense that it should create a 'chemical reaction' of immediately understanding the brand's position. According to the jazz musician Charlie Mingus, 'Creativity is more than just being different. Everybody can play weird, that's easy. What's hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple complicated is commonplace, making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.' In essence, a creative idea seems to boil down to a proposition which makes it possible to communicate a brand's position in an original, attention-getting, but easy-to-catch way. Several researchers argue that creativity probably is the most important aspect of advertising. An expert panel even held the opinion that 'the selling power of a creative idea can exceed that of an ordinary idea by a multiple of 10'.

Besides the need for a creative idea to develop effective advertising, one can question how creative the ad itself has to be. Indirect evidence of the belief in the success of creative ads might be the fact that advertising seems to be more creative than a few decades ago. However, attention-grabbing, originality and imagination do not suffice. In the end, advertising must help to accomplish marketing objectives. The existing studies do not convey consistent results. Some studies claim creativity has a positive impact on ad likeability, brand awareness, brand liking and purchase intentions, but other studies could not find a relation between ad creativity on the one hand and attitude towards the ad, brand attitude, purchase intention or firm profitability on the other.

Although it is clear that a creative idea is needed to express a brand's positioning statement attractively, the question remains as to how creative the ad itself should be. Also, research indicates that practitioner views on advertising creativity differ from those of consumers. It often happens that consumers rank commercials differently to creative directors. The latter are often quite surprised that

the public do not select the ads perceived as most creative by themselves. The foregoing illustrates that more research is called for to find out how important creativity is in the eyes of consumers and what creativity means to them.

In trying to generate the established advertising objectives, agencies or creatives can use a multitude of appeals, formats and execution strategies to express or translate their creative idea. Broadly speaking, two different types of creative appeals can be distinguished: rational appeals and emotional appeals. Emotional advertising appeals are advertisements whose main purpose is to elicit affective responses and to convey an image. Rational advertising appeals, on the other hand, contain features, practical details and verifiable, factually relevant cues that can serve as evaluative criteria. Referring to the difference between action and image communications, many image communications make use of emotional appeals, while most action communications use rational appeals. Also, with respect to the difference between product performance and imagery communications, most product performance ads use rational elements, whereas imagery communications most often consist of emotional ads. However, mixed appeals also exist, employing both rational and emotional elements. Both for emotional and rational appeals, different formats or execution strategies and different types of endorsers can be used. Also, it has to be added here that several of the formats that can be used for rational appeals could just as well be used for emotional appeals, although they are discussed only once. For example, a comparative ad can be purely factual, describing own and competitive prices, but could also be humorous, such as Virgin Atlantic's campaign featuring large billboards in airports with the message 'Enjoy your overpriced flight'. Comparative advertising can be used as a means to differentiate a brand from a competitor.

A direct comparative ad explicitly names the comparison brand (often a well-known competitive brand) and claims that the comparison brand is inferior to the advertised brand with respect to a specific attribute. An indirect comparative ad does not explicitly mention a comparison brand, but argues to be superior on a certain attribute compared with other brands ('Gillette, the best a man can get'). For a long time, directly comparative advertising was an American phenomenon. However, the European Commission has decided to allow comparative advertising in certain circumstances. A study points out that consumers in countries in which comparative advertising is not allowed, or is used infrequently, have a much more negative attitude towards comparative ads than American consumers. Taylor Nelson Sofres found in 2001 that two-thirds of UK consumers find comparable ads unacceptable; women were most opposed and youngsters aged between 16 and 24 minded least that brands criticize competitors. Research in France showed that direct comparative ads led to more positive brand attitudes than indirect or non-comparative ads. However, French advertisers remain unconvinced of the effectiveness of comparative advertising on French consumers and do not intend to use it more often in the future. Also in Spain, comparative advertising does not seem to be well received. A study revealed that the more intense the comparative claim, the less consumers believed the propositions, the more counter-arguments were formed, and the more negative attitudes and brand intentions became. This seems to suggest that advertisers should be careful about using this technique in Europe.

Consumers seem to devote more attention to a comparative than to a non-comparative ad. The reason is that since at least two brands are being compared, the ad is relevant to more consumers (users of both the sponsored and comparison brand). Because of more attention, comparative ads lead to a better message and brand awareness, evoke more cognitive responses

and, as a consequence, enhance a more central communications processing. However, it should be noted that consumers perceive comparative advertising as less credible. A recent different for men and women. For men, comparative advertising seems to increase brand evaluations and purchase intentions because it increases their brand involvement and enhances processing. For women, on the other hand, comparative advertising leads to heightened persuasive intent perceptions and these perceptions decrease brand evaluation and purchase intentions.

Concerning product positioning, positive effects can be observed. With new brand introductions, advertisers often stress the superiority of the new brand over a more familiar competitor on a typical attribute. By doing so, two desirable goals seem to be reached: (1) the new product is associated with the comparison brand and, as a consequence, more easily included in the consideration set of the target consumers; (2) the brand advertised is different from, and is more likely to be preferred to, the comparison brand. The attitude towards the brand usually is positively influenced by comparative ads, while the contrary holds for the attitude towards the ad. The latter is perceived to be less personal, less friendly and amusing, less honest and more aggressive. Although conative or behavioral effects have not been extensively studied, it seems that comparative ads have a positive influence on purchase intention. Furthermore, comparative as opposed to non-comparative ads seem to enhance purchase behavior, as indicated by coupon redemption. Although the balance of advantages and disadvantages turns out to be in favor of comparative advertising, one should also take into account the following threats. The use of comparative advertising may lead to aggressive, competitive media wars when the comparison brand feels attacked (the so-called boomerang effect). Furthermore, comparative advertising may be misleading and confusing for consumers. One should try to avoid promoting a competitive brand. This occurs when, as a result of the ad, the consumer wrongly thinks the ad sponsor is the comparison brand. Costs may also rise because of lawsuits etc. Finally, remember that comparative ads are not appreciated to the same extent in different cultures and countries. The findings reported in US studies may not hold at all for Europe, Asia, etc.

Campaign implementation

After advertising agencies have come up with creative and executional ideas, the advertiser has to evaluate the different alternatives on the basis of the creative brief. This means that the idea ultimately chosen needs to be suitable for and appealing to the target group, be capable of reaching the advertising objectives, and be a kind of catalyst, making the brand's position immediately clear in a simple, eye-catching manner.

The idea must also fit with the company's and the brand's long-term strategy and with previous campaigns. It has to be adaptable to the different media to be used, and financially implementable within the given advertising budget and within the given time limits. When agreement is reached on the creative idea to be used for the different media, the ads need to be produced. Since ad production needs special skills, this job is typically carried out by technical experts. Photography, typography and sound recording need to be well thought through, so that headline, baseline, copy, background music, pack shots, presenters, characters, the set, etc., form an integrated and consistent ad. As soon as the advertiser approves of the ad proposal, the ads are produced and handed over to the media. After the campaign has run, it has to be evaluated for its effectiveness. In order to do this, it is very important to have clear, measurable objectives at the

beginning of the campaign development process, as well as accurate data of the situation prior to the campaign launch.

Conclusions

Creativity is hard to describe, but bringing the message in an original, novel and appealing way comes close. In general, two broad types of creative appeals, rational and emotional, can be used to develop a campaign, although mixed forms also exist. Emotional appeals are ads whose main purpose is to elicit affective responses and to convey an image. Rational appeals, on the other hand, contain information cues such as price, value, quality, performance, components, availability, taste, warranties, new ideas, etc. For both rational and emotional appeals, different formats or execution strategies can be used. Rational appeals may, for instance, make use of a talking head, a demonstration, a problem solution, a testimonial, a slice of life, a drama or a (direct or indirect) comparison with competitors. Emotional appeals may be based on humor, fear, warmth, eroticism, music or the like. Rational and emotional appeals may further feature different types of endorsers: ordinary people, experts or celebrities. None of the execution strategies works in all situations and for all target groups; for example, although everyone agrees that emotional techniques are capable of attracting attention, it is by no means certain that they get the message across in the manner intended. Therefore caution should be taken to select the right technique. In cross-cultural advertising campaigns, substantial differences in cultural characteristics have to be taken into account.

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