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5 things I wish I had known 10 years ago

Gary Bembridge
Johnson & Johnson

Johnson & Johnson

YOU GET WHAT YOU DESERVE



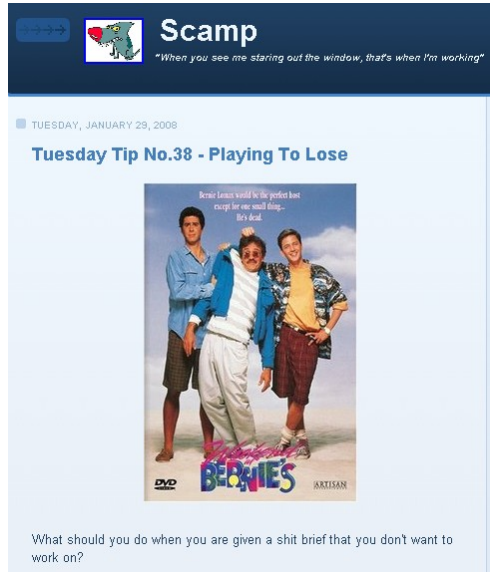
In my view, we as clients generally get exactly the copy we deserve.

Clients that bash up their agency, as they get lousy creative work, remind me of a saying an elderly supply history teacher at school used to say. He would say: "When you point one finger at someone, you point 3 at yourself". (If you don't understand this: physically when you do a pointing action with your hand, 3 of your fingers are pointing at you). So if your copy is lousy you could be at least 3 times more responsible for it than the agency (as shown by people moving accounts and still get appallingly bad ads).

You get the copy you deserve when: The very best people with the best ideas in the agency want to work on your business. It never ceases to amaze me that so many marketers as clients seem to brow beat, use muscle and treat agencies with disdain and "command and control" type management styles. This will never bring out the best in people, especially creative people. You need to invest time and love in the relationship. Like dating, you will never have a fulfilling relationship with infrequent and fractious dates. That only comes with quality and deep time spent to understand each other. You need to work on the basis that the best people in advertising actually do want to sell product, as it brings in more business and more money for them in the end. Many marketers I have worked with and observed seem to assume agency people do not actually want to sell products to consumers. If the people on your account don't want to sell product in the best way but only do what you want, then they are not the best

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The posting talks about the lengths that creatives will go to in order to avoid working on rubbish briefs for clients who will only buy average and safe work.

The point made, which I thought was absolutely key, is that it is too risky for a creative team to work on bad briefs for clients who will only ever buy so-so work. It may kill their career as their show reel will be terrible. A bit like marketers only ever working on and launching products that they know will fail - it is a career suicide.

I loved the anecdote where they spoke about creatives trying to avoid P&G Oil of Olay by writing an ad about a woman who is dead but no-one realises as her friends keep applying the product. Inspired by the Weekend at Bernie's film.

The point of the posting: creatives are not wanting to play to lose. Give them a really tight brief where the only way out is to be creative - and then have the guts to be bold.

BRIEFS NOT BOXERS



Most copy strategies are just plain unhelpful as they are too long. When writing a brief it is best to be like briefs themselves - covering the bare essentials unlike boxers covering much more.

A long copy strategy brief is dangerous as it allows the creatives the opportunity to make strategic choices instead of marketers. Marketers should be closest to the consumer, brand and market and making the choices. The best thing to give a creative person is a highly constraining brief so the only escape is for them to engage their creativity to escape. Put them in a tiny box and let them create a way out.

I insist on the teams I work with to write their creative brief/ copy strategy on a post-it note. I am trying to make that the small post-it note instead of the 2 or 3 pages usually written. Recently when out with the Creative Director of DDB Paris, he really made me think even more about this as he said all he and his teams need is 2 things:

- (1) What do you want to say?
- (2) How do you want to say it?

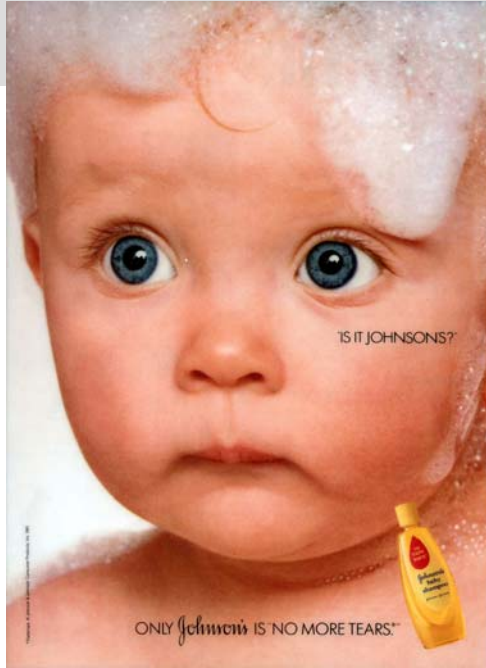
I argued you needed to add a 3rd: WHO do you want to say it to? He felt that was part of (1).

Every time I look at ad test results or brand health monitors/ tracking it always reminds me that consumers take out one clear thing really about the brand and so make sure you do that and be it the post-it note or the 2 or 3 approach make sure it is just one.

A team wanted to say, for example, something like: fresh, shine free skin all day. I wouldn't sign it off until they chose one thing (shine free all day) as if they had Fresh and Shine Free the creatives could have chosen which to play up.

Another team got in a rant as the agency internal creative brief they got back was not "on brief". But looking at the original brief and the creative brief all the agency had done was pick one of the three reasons to believe and focus on that one. It happened to be the one the brand team liked the least - but they were the ones that were at fault by not being more focused.

The post-it note approach works as it forces choices. It also checks if the story all links and flows...that is why when thinking of writing a creative brief we should be thinking small just covering the bare essentials rather than thinking of covering a lot of ground (like boxer shorts do!)



IS IT JOHNSONS?

ONLY Johnson's IS NO MORE TEARS.™



YOUR WIFE IS NOT AN IDIOT



Clinique Anti-gravity firming eye lift



Clinique Total Turnaround Visible Skin Renewer



Your wife, husband, mother, partner and you are all idiots.

That is, at least, what many marketers seem to think when it comes to creating and evaluating communication and copy. It is so much easier to assume that your consumer is an idiot, and then to develop and use copy that basically is your copy strategy set to some images. The more explicit and basic the better.

However, this is also probably the dumbest way to approach copy and communication. Although I am sure there are examples of copy that works by treating their target as an idiot (incapable of understanding anything other than the most explicit and basic approach), it is though unlikely to engage your target and build something more significant in their minds about the brand.

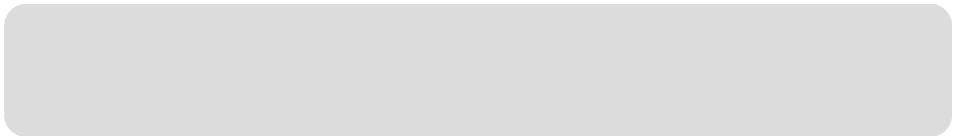
I try and use the thought that I first came across in one of my most favorite books on advertising as a guiding principle when looking at copy proposals from the agency. The book is "[Ogilvy on Advertising](#)" by the talented (and I am also guessing very egotistical but insightful) David Ogilvy. In this book he spoke about how "the consumer is not an idiot, she is your wife". This thought really made an impression on me.

I realized that I needed to avoid drifting towards the comfortable, which was to lean towards copy proposals that spelt out my strategy in a linear fashion. But instead to look at what the out-take of the ad was. And if the ad is engaging people, intriguing people and getting them to think about the brand then it should have a better and more lasting impact and effect.

I think about ads that I like as a consumer. The ones I like are always one that engage, intrigue, impress or make me think. They interest me. They are not the linear ones that talk me through the strategy.

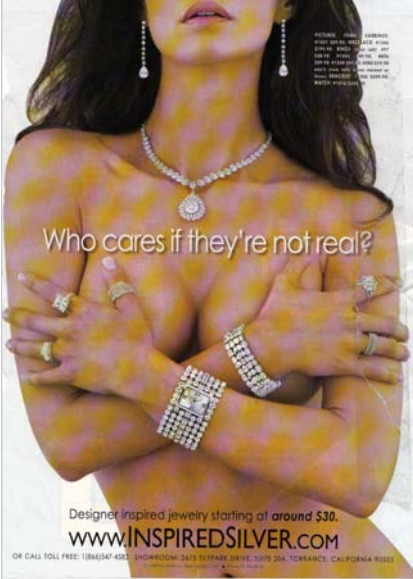
Why is it when we are presented with copy we think as a marketer, are are more comfortable treating our consumers as idiots? Why don't we try and evaluate and choose copy with more of our consumer filter on?

This is why when I see copy for the first time from the agency, the first thing I always note and feedback on is "my gut feelings" and how the copy made me FEEL. Then I go into thinking with a more rational hat on (is there an idea? Is it on brief? Is it talking to the right target?)



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NOT JUST THE CATEGORY BEST



We were talking with the agency today about what makes great beauty advertising. In the set-up for the review, the agency made a point that really resonated with me that I think is important for all marketers and advertisers.

This was the following.

(1) Be careful of asking the question, what makes good beauty (or whatever category you are in) advertising, as this may take you down a path of aping, emulating or following a path that is not really brilliant. You may have advertising that is as good or bad as the rest.

(2) Your ads are being seen in the context of everything and if the consumer is seeing 2000, 3000 or more messages a day - you need to stand out among that first and foremost. Never forget that great ads need to stand out and be great "full stop", and not just be the best or good in your category.

The point made was that universally, even if you are not in the market for sports shoes, people talk about and recognise Nike ads as great. People who do not even have a license will notice perhaps VW ads even if they do not notice any other car ad. I really like the point.

Don't strive great advertising in your category, strive for great advertising full stop!





NO VISIBLE PENALTY FOR MISSES



One of the things that I keep telling my teams and the agency is that the most stressful part of my role in marketing is creative presentations.

The reason is that there is a chance that I let go the creative idea and execution that could not just grow the brand but double the business or more. It is always easy to choose the option that feels and looks comfortable. It is easy to go with something that does not push the boundaries or is a lot like what has been done before, or feels like an improvement on what someone else has done. But it is terrifying to do something that makes your heart or pulse race. It could be the very thing that could make a real difference.

The equivalent is the story that I heard about how all of the program commissioners at each of the main TV channels in the USA turned down "American Idol" as they thought it had little potential. Fox eventually picked it up (after some influence by Elizabeth Murdoch who helped her father Rupert Murdoch understand the potential) and it has become one of the most profitable and biggest brands on TV. The fact is that none of the commissioning editors was penalized for turning the money spinner and great idea down. But they did turn down something that was huge.

I worry every time I see new creative work that I am about to do the same. I will never be penalized for missing the BIGGER idea if I chose copy that will give some incremental growth as no-one will ever know the crime of turning away the big one.

What do you do to make sure you do not miss the best idea?

5 THINGS I WISHED I HAD KNOWN

- ▶ YOU GET WHAT YOU DESERVE
- ▶ BRIEFS NOT BOXERS
- ▶ YOUR WIFE IS NOT AN IDIOT
- ▶ NOT JUST THE CATEGORY BEST
- ▶ NO VISIBLE PENALTY FOR MISSES





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