Advertising Campaign Design
Just the Essentials

Robyn Blakeman
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Introduction

Advertising campaign development is a complex creative process that fuses a strategic business plan with a great idea—an idea that can be easily used and consistently recognized across a diverse mix of media vehicles. This formula has been around for more than a few decades, so you would think there would be dozens of books available on the subject, right? Many large texts do offer individual chapters on advertising design, but few, if any, provide comprehensive coverage of campaign design or explain how to adapt a concept to a strategic business plan or to varied media vehicles.

*Advertising Campaign Design: Just the Essentials* fills the informational gaps in other texts by offering a straightforward yet extensive look at the varied issues concerning campaign design and development. My simple step-by-step approach dissects the creative process necessary to design a successful Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) campaign one topic at a time, creating an invaluable research tool that small business owners, professors, and students alike will refer to time and again for information on both the strategic development and design of campaigns. Furthermore, this qualitative study helps break down the campaign development process into smaller, more manageable and digestible chunks of information, thereby erasing the fear and prejudice that typically surround the design process. It is my hope that readers will find this text an invaluable research, business, and design development tool.

Because today’s advertising campaigns are multifaceted, creative teams need to possess more than just basic design skills: they need a comprehensive mixture of business knowledge and an abundance of creative ingenuity. Both must be harnessed to visually and verbally manipulate the various media vehicles used to deliver a brand’s overall message.

Topics for discussion in this volume are organized into four separate development issues. The first focuses on how to develop a business plan that will lay the foundation for the creative development stage.

The second focuses on the development of a creative idea. This idea must be imaginative, memorable, and designed to resonate with the target audience.
Emphasis is placed on how the development of a good idea is not subjective but rather a precisely planned and executed visual and verbal experience that strategically accomplishes the objectives set forth in the overall business plan.

The third topic aims to simplify the design process and identify those components that, when repetitively used across multiple media, help an idea consistently maintain its visual/verbal voice. The use of repetition and consistency gives each campaign an individualized look and sound that can successfully establish or enhance a brand’s image and build equity.

Finally, we will take an in-depth look at the multitude of traditional and alternative media vehicles that, when employed strategically, will deliver the strongest message to the right target at the right time. This media specific examination will dissect the creative nuances associated with each medium and look at how each visual/verbal component can be used to exploit the strengths of various vehicles.

To take even more of the fear out of design, student examples have been used throughout the text to demonstrate varied design options, as well as to show wide-ranging approaches to style, the process of developing an idea, and what is possible when first learning design. Most of the apprehension generated by the term “design” stems from the assumption that, to be successful in the field, you have to be able to draw; however, good design is actually the result of a great idea that solves a client’s communication problem. The layout of the idea is the easy part!

I would like to dedicate this book and these ideas to every student or businessperson who has ever sworn they had no talent, or claimed they have never had a good idea. Each figure used throughout the text shows creative and business types alike that a good idea is based more on knowledge than on well executed technique. Power is in the construction of the details in a strategically pleasing way. Working from a strong knowledge base ensures a good idea is just as powerful when shared verbally as when drawn physically on the page.
Part I

Understanding What Drives a Campaign
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Chapter 1

Advertising and the Campaign Process

Figure 1.1  Sample Ad: Sharpie

Source: Created by Caitlin Bradley, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
Defining IMC and Its Role in Advertising

In this saturated world of advertised messages, the only way to reach the targeted consumer or those buyers that research has determined are most likely to purchase the product or use the service is to take an integrated approach. *Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)* is all about creating a relationship with the intended target audience and delivering one coordinated message through multiple media vehicles.

Customized advertising efforts like those used in IMC are a far cry from the simple sales-oriented approaches used in traditional advertising efforts. It is no longer feasible to send out an impersonal, generalized message to a mass audience. IMC works to build a long-term one-on-one relationship between buyer and seller by engaging the target in a two-way exchange of information.

IMC makes the traditional mass-advertised message personal. Computerized databases have given the consumer a name and an identity, allowing marketers to personalize advertising efforts based on interests and/or past purchase behavior. This knowledge also helps to isolate those media vehicles most likely to be heard, read, or viewed by the targeted consumer.

Consumer driven, IMC works to build a long-term brand-loyal relationship with the target. In order to do this successfully, IMC relies less on traditional vehicles such as print (newspaper and magazine) and broadcast (radio and television) and more on alternative media vehicles, including direct marketing, *out-of-home media* (outdoor, transit, or point of purchase advertising), sales promotions, various interactive vehicles, and *guerrilla marketing* tactics. These methods reach the target where they are and with a message they can relate to.

The use of traditional vehicles alone requires frequent repetition before a message is remembered and acted upon. A customized IMC campaign is individually targeted, requiring less advertising to encourage repurchase. This highly targeted approach encourages *brand loyalty*, employs less media waste, and allows the advertised product or service to be individualized to fit the target’s overall lifestyle.

It took marketers a long time to understand the lifetime value of existing customers. Research proves that it is more expensive to advertise repeatedly than it is to retain existing consumers: a loyal consumer will buy without the repeated urging of advertising and without special promotions.

Many argue that IMC is popular only because the recession of 2008–2010 has caused marketers to use more media outlets to reach a more fractionalized target. Although recessionary times do call for better-managed advertising budgets, it is IMC that has put a greater amount of emphasis on relationship-
building tactics by personalizing the overall visual/verbal message. More important, the more diverse the choice of vehicles collectively delivering a cohesive visual/verbal message, the better the return on investment (ROI) will be. In simpler terms, the marketer or client will make more money than he or she spent.

The recession may have temporarily altered buying habits, but it has not changed consumer media habits. Buyers are still searching the web, blogging, tweeting, chatting on social media sites, and talking and texting on their cell phones. These interactive media outlets engage the consumer in a way that traditional media vehicles cannot. Because of this, technology has forever changed how corporations market their brands. Thanks to the Internet and other forms of electronic media, consumers can check on the prices and quality of goods from the comfort of their own homes or offices, by using any number of interactive options to compare and contrast user experiences. Today’s savvy consumers have taken control of the buying experience by managing whom they buy from, as well as when, where, and how they do their buying.

**Traditional Advertising versus IMC**

Traditional advertising—also known as mass media advertising because it concentrates on communicating to a mass, mostly unidentifiable audience—relies on a generalized message delivered through mass media vehicles such as print or broadcast. Although not highly targetable, it is still great for launching or reinventing existing brands, creating brand awareness, and building image.

Traditional advertising used alone is not consumer focused, does not encourage feedback, and thus does not create a relationship with the target. In today’s diverse media environment, traditional vehicles will not even be employed if research has determined that alternative media options will more successfully reach the target with the most engaging message. IMC on the other hand, uses a diverse media mix and focuses directly on the consumer. Using databases or computerized lists that electronically catalog the target’s personal information and buying habits, advertising efforts can address the target by name, identify target interests and needs, and allow for more individualized and personalized messages.

When the promotional mix employs both traditional and alternative media vehicles, the message has a greater chance of reaching the target with an integrated message. To create more interactive and engaging opportunities, consider employing both media options simultaneously. For example, research has shown that many consumers watch television or listen to the radio while using their computers. Consider turning listening—a passive activity—into an interaction
with the message—an active and more memorable activity. Simple examples of this tactic involve the inclusion of website names in television advertising or directing radio listeners to a website for contest information or coupons.

Successful engagement must also ensure all internal and external contacts are working from the same page and are integrating knowledge in three key ways: (1) by offering quality products the customer needs and wants; (2) by using the talents of educated employees who both understand and know how to market the product or service; and (3) by presenting a brand that offers the target a relevant reason to buy. Internal or corporate employees such as customer service representatives need to know what the external advertising efforts are saying and promising. Any problems can affect the brand’s or service’s image.

Alan Mitchell, in an article appearing in the *Journal of Marketing Management*, sums up coordinated internal and external messaging this way: “An organization can only ‘walk the talk’ when its managers deliberately shape its internal reality to align with its brand promise. . . . [The brand’s] values must be internalized by the organization, shaping its instinctive attitudes, behaviors, priorities, etc.”

**What Makes a Campaign a Campaign?**

Basically, an advertising campaign can be defined as a family of ads that shares a visual/verbal identity and promotes a single idea to a defined target audience. Multiple targeted media vehicles are used to reach the intended audience with a specific message about a particular product, service, or company. A multimedia campaign’s job is to introduce a project or service, create an identity, build increasing awareness for the product or service, and promote a sale.

A campaign can be directed at either a business or a consumer. Either way, it is safe to say that research has already identified the target’s needs and problems: The goal of all advertised messages—and the first step in engaging consumer interest—is addressing those needs and solving those problems. Ineffective messages often recognize the problem yet fail to offer a solution.

Although the visual/verbal style of a campaign is delivered through multiple media vehicles, it is defined by a very individualized and personalized repetitive voice and creative style. The tone set by this voice and style will reflect the brand’s identity, use, and reputation—often for years.

It takes more than a good idea and a coordinated look to ensure a campaign’s success. Good timing, appropriate media use, and a bit of old-fashioned luck are also required. While it used to be common to see almost every campaign launch use traditional media, today’s inventive and highly targeted campaigns may ignore traditional vehicles altogether. Quite often, media choices will rely on vehicles more customized to reach the target, among them the Internet, direct mail, sales promotions, and mobile or social media outlets.
In twenty-first century advertising, nothing is traditional. The most successful campaigns go where the target is and capture their attention with unusual and engaging devices such as intercept teams, mobile advertising, and cinema, as well as guerrilla events and product placement, to name just a few of the hundreds of media options available to today’s advertiser.

Every product or service needs advertising in order to stand out from competing brands. A good ad campaign gets a product’s name, logo, and purpose in front of an apathetic public that sees well over a thousand or more advertising messages every day. To help break through the advertising haze, it is important for every campaign to have its own look, style, and personality. The total effect of a successful ad campaign is greater than any of its individual parts. The combined impact of the visual/verbal identity employed can push the key consumer benefit to the right target, stand out from the competition, and accomplish a set of communication objectives with the right strategy, in the right media. Success takes time—most campaigns will take anywhere from 90 days to a year to complete—and the length of a given campaign is typically determined by what needs to be accomplished, the product’s life cycle, and the overall strength of the competition, to name just a few key factors.

Over a product’s lifetime, a consistent theme is established, developed, and molded into a lasting image. Apple has always promoted its hipness, ingenuity, and innovative spirit to those target members who would rather be on the cutting edge than simply one of the crowd. Allstate wants you to know “You’re in Good Hands,” and Capital One wants you to think about “What’s in Your Wallet?” Traditionally, advertising campaigns often lasted for years, but today this trend has become less and less common. Why? Because in a world of multiple media options, disinterested targets, and product parity, it is important for campaigns to be ever evolving, ever ramping up their image and goals. When adjustments are warranted, it is important that they be integrated into the campaign slowly and that they avoid any abrupt changes that might confuse or even anger loyal brand users. To avoid the appearance that messages lack brand integrity or clear direction, many campaigns will tweak their messages while retaining slogans or taglines and/or character representatives indefinitely. Familiarity, after all, suggests quality, longevity, and reliability.

The Life Cycle of an Advertising Campaign

A campaign’s life cycle will assume several different incarnations as it launches, evolves, is improved upon and eventually put out to pasture to make room for the look and sound of a new generation of consumers. When to toss or evolve a brand’s message often depends on where it is in its life cycle stage. Most successful brands will go through three stages: (1) a new
product launch, 2) a mainstream or maintenance phase, and (3) reinvention. Each stage requires a different message and often employs different media vehicles to reach the target. Let’s take a quick look at each one.

A new product launch typically employs traditional media vehicles that provide broad reach and the ability to build brand awareness and promote image. As the brand reaches phase two, mainstream popularity in the marketplace, it requires not only less advertising, but the use of less traditional advertising vehicles. At this point, the campaign can make use of alternative media to reach loyal users by name, wherever they are, and with a message they will respond to. The goals during this phase are to remind users, to strengthen the relationship with the buyer, and to build or maintain equity. The third phase, reinvention, comes into play when a brand (1) needs a face-lift to update its image or promote a new and improved feature, or (2) must overcome a damaged reputation.

There are no individual media vehicles or outlaw messages in an IMC campaign. Each vehicle must convey the same look and message. Any contact points, such as customer service representatives or sales clerks, must be aware of the campaign’s message and promotional efforts, in order to personally convey or represent the advertised message and accomplish the campaign’s overall objectives.

Campaigns can run into the millions of dollars, so why use them when you can run an ad or two as needed? Good question. Advertising today bombards consumers, so in order for a brand to be top of mind, or the first brand people turn to, a product needs to keep its name and reputation in the public arena. A single ad buy is successful only if it can guarantee the target will see that particular media vehicle and need that particular item on that one day or within that one week when it is advertised. Repetition, reliability, and quality are what make a brand memorable. One ad cannot build an image, promote reliability, or guarantee quality. To ensure the ad is recognizable, understood, and acted upon requires the synchronization of all images and all messages.

If a single ad is needed, for whatever reason, it is important to make sure the ad uses the same imaging and messaging devices used in the campaign. Even though it may seem like an anomaly in what was an orderly pattern, it is important it be seamlessly integrated into the campaign, matching both the existing voice and style as closely as possible.

Marketers employ a campaign for several reasons, but the four most common are to: (1) increase brand awareness; (2) launch a new product; (3) create name/brand recognition; and (4) bring attention to a reinvented or improved product. To accomplish any of the above it is important to employ a diverse array of media vehicles that not only reach the target but also promote trial with action devices such as contests and sweepstakes, free trials samples, or coupons. The timing of an advertising campaign is also very important. What kind of message will be used and when? What kind of media vehicle(s) will
deliver the message and when? Will more than one message in multiple media be running at the same time? Will public relations be used to create interest? Will sponsorships, coupons, or sample promotions be used to encourage trial and/or feedback?

The answers to these questions and more will be found in the multiple media options and unlimited creative options available to both traditional and alternative media vehicles. The goal is to create a memorable visual/verbal identity for products even in the most saturated brand categories, by making them stand out from competing products.

Campaigns use a single voice or key consumer benefit, talk to a single target audience, and employ a consistent set of cohesive images and messages throughout multiple and very different media vehicles. These unifying images include headlines, layout styles, typefaces, photographs, illustrations or graphics, color(s), and perhaps employ the services of a spokesperson or character representative or jingle. Longevity describes a successful campaign, as does its ability to build or improve a brand’s image and create equity while fostering a long-term relationship with the targeted consumer. A campaign is only as good as the product or service, its customer service efforts, and a brand’s reliability to perform consistently with each and every purchase.

Each touchpoint that members of the target audience have with the product or service must engage them by requiring them to do something, whether it is going to a website for coupons, visiting a showroom, taking a test drive, trying a product sample, or attending a sponsored event.

Deciding on the Type of Campaign to Employ

The type of campaign that will be used for a given brand is nowhere near as diverse as the creative methods available to bring them to life. Choices generally fall into one of five basic categories: national, local, service, corporate, and retail. Let’s take a quick look at each one.

National Campaigns

National campaigns are usually undertaken by the corporate elite. They have large enough budgets to create spectacular ads that are seen across the country and often employ a diverse array of media vehicles. The main job of these vehicles is to attract the target’s attention—wherever they may be. These are the clients who can also afford to dip their toes into new media and participate in creative guerrilla marketing events. Clients are seen in the news and at events large and small across the United States. Most national campaigns
represent brands that are so well known and trusted that creative efforts need be little more than a reminder of the name, quality, service, and longevity.

**Local Campaigns**

Local campaigns feature local businesses in a specific area. They are often tied to local events or tout their length of time in a community. Such campaigns usually feature a special price or some type of sales event to encourage immediate action on the part of the consumer. National brands can run local campaigns if they are involved in local sports or other events, or if sales are sluggish in a particular area.

**Service Campaigns**

The job of a service campaign is to sell a service—something not as tangible as a product. Everybody sells customer service, but few offer it on a consistent basis. We can’t eat or wear a service; instead, we experience or participate in it. The best service campaigns use an *inside out* approach, where employees at every level know what the promotion is, what the company’s policies are, and how to solve potential problems. Service campaigns must guarantee that what is being said in advertising and promotional efforts is understood and practiced by every employee who has contact with the target. There is nothing more aggravating than for a consumer to call in about a promotion, only to find out the customer service representative has no idea what they are talking about, puts them on hold, or worse yet, cannot help them at all.

Successful advertising, then, works from the inside out. Suppose an insurance company assures the target that if they remain accident free for the first six months of their policy, the second six months will be free: it’s important that the target not be billed for those second six months or told after the fact that they didn’t qualify for the promotion in some way. Good service campaigns should promote positive word of mouth while offering the same security, knowledge, and customer care the campaign says it will. Selling a service like carpet cleaning, car repair, or insurance is no different than selling a product. However, it is more difficult to ensure its success, because service campaigns deal with some type of customer service or customer contact issue that cannot be controlled. Any two-way dialog or interaction between buyer and seller is about service.

**Corporate Campaigns**

Corporate campaigns are all about what the company or organization is doing to help the community or the planet. Being a “green” product these days is
an important political and social issue and is an advantageous way to stand out from competing products. During economic or weather-related hardships, many products become active in national or international projects. International efforts frequently offer money, medicine, or food to undernourished children or war-torn communities around the world. Hair care product giant Paul Mitchell, for example, uses print ads to focus on his Food4Africa project. National projects such as the one sponsored by Tide supplied washer and dryer facilities to areas ravaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Advertising that focuses on repairing a damaged reputation is something all corporations hope to avoid. The loss of brand-loyal consumers, and thus brand equity, can often be very expensive and time-consuming to remedy. However, in our technology-driven age of blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, corporations can respond quickly and publicly to situations or rumors before they become a major crisis. For example, when Domino’s Pizza employees in a YouTube video were seen adding disgusting items to a pizza, the president of Domino’s quickly responded to rumors by reporting that it was nothing more than a hoax, heading off any further discussions.

**Retail Campaigns**

Retail campaigns sell price or promote image. Merchants such as Wal-Mart, who sell inexpensive products, tend to push price or volume buying. It is often the only thing that separates them from competitors. The job of a price-based retail campaign is to sell a product, and sell it quickly, not “wow” customers with cutting-edge creative ingenuity.

Image-based retail advertising is most often used by high-end dealers to sell reputation, quality, and so on. This type of retail advertising is typically more creative and emotionally focused, since most of the products in this category are “wants” rather than “needs.” Both work at getting the consumer to act now—due to a sale, limited time offers, a coming holiday, or an on-site designer visit. Retail advertising promotes quick action for some kind of reward.

Selling is the ultimate goal of a retail campaign. Techniques may include customer service efforts, store ambiance, sales stickers, coupons, or even the way a purchase is boxed, bagged, or wrapped, to name just a few. Retail campaigns have to do more than just remind the target about their existence. Product parity makes retail advertising about more than shampoo or diamonds: it’s about great buys, customer service, social status, the shopping experience, or quick, no-frills service. Retail advertising must inform, entice, and initiate action on the part of the consumer.
Making the Message Last

“Unless a product becomes outmoded,” explains Randall Rothenberg in the book *Where the Suckers Moon: An Advertising Story*, “a great campaign will not wear itself out.” A lengthy life span will have a long-lasting effect on brand equity and brand loyalty, so it is important for a campaign’s cycle to outlive
those of its competitors. New technology, scientific discoveries, new flavors, sizes, and colors are no reason to change the overall look of a campaign. In order for a brand to be trusted, it must be consistent and have longevity. Pillsbury for example, holds its varied brands together with one consistent character representative (the Pillsbury Doughboy), as does Energizer batteries (with its pink Energizer Bunny).

Brand awareness attaches itself to a consistently used audio or visual cue such as a jingle, a slogan, a character representative, or an easily recognizable spokesperson. Campaigns that are on-target and on-strategy do not need to compete against a competitors’ consistently changing message.

The reusability of visual/verbal design elements depends largely on the media vehicles employed in the campaign. Some media vehicles—magazine ads, the Internet, or direct mail pieces, for instance—have a lot of room to talk about the brand. Broadcast vehicles like television only have 30-second spots, but they can make them memorable using sight, sound, and motion. Other vehicles, including out-of-home or mobile advertising, have to get the same point across as those used in more copy-heavy media with as few as five to seven words. How can this be done effectively? Personalize it. Each product or service will have one key consumer benefit or feature/benefit combination that research has shown is important to the target and that the competition is not pushing in their advertising efforts. This one idea is featured in headlines and screamed out in broadcast or other digital media. It’s the one point hammered home in seven-hundred words or five.

The media vehicle(s) selected for the campaign should reflect the target audience’s lifestyle. If they drive to work, think radio placing the ad during morning and afternoon drive times. If mass transit is the way to and from work, then ads on bus sides or within transit shelters or stations would work well, as would other varied out-of-home vehicles. If they are into gaming, think product placement. If they live in large metropolitan areas, think of guerrilla marketing events. The options are endless.

What Makes a Campaign Fail or Succeed?

It is hard to say what makes one campaign fail and another successful when all things are equal. Sometimes, faulty research techniques are employed, and the message is not strong enough or direct enough to hold the target’s attention. Perhaps the message is too complicated to understand or oversimplified to the point that it does not seem special. It is also possible that the media vehicle employed didn’t reach the target. Whatever the problem, advertisers keep trying to stand up and stand out against the message sent by their competi-
tors. Failure requires more research to define direction and more one-on-one contact with the target to improve the message.

A good campaign is not based on budget; it is based on a good idea. A larger budget offers up more creative options, but a good idea that’s correctly targeted will reach the target no matter what the size of the budget. Great creative is not for every product. In fact, it works best for products we already know intimately, such as Coke, Budweiser, and Apple. This type of advertising simply reminds us about the brand. The ads that do not “wow” creatively are not necessarily unsuccessful. Campaign goals vary: Some products need to introduce who they are, tell us how they work, or show us how they differ from competing products. Others, like direct response ads, overwhelm us with information-heavy ads and fast-talking—often screaming—announcers who not only inform, but also educate their viewers.

So what makes a campaign successful?

1. It is highly targeted.
2. Each ad strongly represents the key consumer benefit in both the imaging and verbal messaging chosen.
3. All advertising and promotional devices strategically accomplish the communication objectives.
4. The key consumer benefit clearly addresses the target’s lifestyle.
5. A consistent image and message appear across multiple media vehicles.
6. The brand’s identity is clearly and easily recognizable in all advertising and promotional vehicles.
7. The creative package delivers a message differently from that of the competition and talks to the target in a language they can understand.
8. It appears in media vehicles the target is sure to see.

The Look and Sound of a Campaign

For a campaign to be recognized as a series of coordinated messages, it must have both a repetitive visual appearance and a cohesive verbal message, no matter where it appears. A coordinated message consistently uses the same types of visual images, such as similar layout styles, a color or combination of colors, a slogan or tagline, and spokesperson or character representative. Attention to detail is critical to maintaining a visual/verbal identity: all visuals must be similarly sized, cropped, and displayed; all typetstyles and logos should be the same size and similarly placed when possible. Elements such as a key consumer benefit, typeface(s), headline style, and copy tone of voice must remain the same throughout the campaign. Determination of the
visual/verbal devices will depend a great deal on the media mix employed in the campaign. For example, how would you turn a copy-heavy direct mail piece into a copy-light text or mobile message? The easiest way is through a consistent key consumer benefit. If the consumer benefit is weak, perhaps a great slogan or tagline is more memorable. The whole point of consistent visual/verbal messaging is to make it memorable through repetition and set it off from the competition.

**Employing the Best Media Vehicle to Reach the Target**

Once the account, creative, and media teams understand the target to be reached, the problem to be solved, and the feature they need to promote, they can more accurately determine the most appropriate promotional mix that will strategically reach the intended audience. The *promotional mix* or category of vehicles employed in the campaign most commonly includes: public relations, traditional advertising, alternative media, out-of-home, direct marketing, sales promotion, and the Internet. The mix that will be employed depends on how much the target already knows about the product or service.

The *media mix*, on the other hand, dissects the promotional mix down into individual vehicles such as direct mail, TV, magazines, outdoor boards, bus wraps, blogs, text messaging, and so on. The media mix can be either concentrated or assorted. A *concentrated mix* uses one or two single vehicles, whereas an *assorted media mix* uses a variety of vehicles. The choice of mix depends, ultimately, on the budget, the target, and the overall strategic direction of the campaign. Once the creative team knows which promotional and media mix they will be using, they can begin determining how the varied creative ideas will translate between vehicles.

**Advertising: A Business First and a Creative Idea Second**

If asked, most people would define advertising as a creative process. However, the creative element is really only a small part of the advertising process. Advertising is more about generating revenue than generating a great idea. Determining the right message requires strong business knowledge. Rooted in research, advertising is a business that strategically combines the study of trends, economic cycles, research analysis, idea testing, and media analysis into a creative idea that attracts attention, makes a sale, or encourages further inquiry. Creative output is a by-product of a great deal of research.

These ideas are not just a creative showcase, but also a creative solution to a business problem. They are more than clever slogans or funny television ads; they must be interactive, memorable, relationship-building, informative
devices. Beyond that, campaign efforts must also ensure the target sees the ads, acts on the ads, and then talks about them to friends and family. Giving a campaign life takes a lot of work, time, and people of varied talents.

Successful campaigns are all about education, timing, and flawless execution. Every good idea begins with research on the brand, its target, and its competitors. Before the creative team can even begin the brainstorming process, research must first be analyzed and organized into a marketing plan and then dissected, simplified, and presented in a creative brief. Brainstorming sessions must ignite that one great idea. Ads must be designed before photo and television shoots or any events can be planned and then executed. The appropriate paper stock must be bought, promotions announced and developed, and printers and production teams hired. Media must be analyzed and purchased, and a timeline must be laid out to ensure everything happens not only on a budget but also on schedule and without any surprises or hitches.

A well-oiled campaign machine begins by organizing stacks of data into two separate business plans known as a marketing plan and a creative brief. Let’s take a quick look at each one.

**It All Begins with a Marketing Plan**

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” A definition as it applies to the relationship between marketing and advertising is probably worded best by marketing strategists Al Ries and Jack Trout, who claim that “marketing is simply ‘war’ between competitors.” It is advertising’s job to be sure the competition keeps its head down.

Basically, both marketing and advertising need to have the product and/or service defined in the clearest and simplest way so that the most clearly defined target market can be paired with the product or service being advertised. The best way to do this is to dissect the marketing process into digestible parts.

**Businesses Use Marketing Plans to Define Action**

Great ideas can grow only after the product or service (i.e., the brand) has been thoroughly researched. The client’s business plan of action is laid out in a marketing plan that defines sales initiatives, usually for the coming year.

This lengthy, detail-oriented plan of action is prepared by the client. The document looks at the brand’s overall strengths and weaknesses compared to the competition; it also examines any opportunities and threats the brand
might want to capitalize upon or avoid in the marketplace. The business plan of action is vital for getting a campaign on track: it introduces the target, determines a set of marketing-related (usually sales-oriented) objectives or goals that need to be met, defines a marketing strategy for accomplishing the objectives, analyzes competitors, projects a budget, and finally looks at varied implementation and evaluation techniques.

Because IMC is consumer-centric, a strong marketing plan needs to incorporate a customer feedback mechanism. Such a mechanism makes it easier to determine a single selling point or key consumer benefit that research has guaranteed will attract the target’s attention. It will also assist in defining the overall visual/verbal tone of voice to be used throughout the campaign so that an integrated communicated message is mimicked in all advertising and promotional vehicles as well as at any customer contact points.

Once the marketing plan is complete, the creative team will receive a smaller, more concise document known as a creative brief, which focuses on communication initiatives.

The Creative Brief Adapts the Marketing Plan into a Communications Plan of Attack

A creative idea begins life buried under a pile of research. Each image used, and every word spoken, lies somewhere in the dry statistics that make up the creative brief, so before the creative team comes up with one idea, draws one image, or places one word on the page, they need to review the creative brief.

The account executive or agency representative handling an account uses the marketing plan to develop the creative brief. A much smaller document, usually no more than one to three pages, the creative brief defines the communications plan of attack. It offers an abbreviated look at what the client wants to accomplish via creative efforts.

Bill Bernbach, in his book *Bill Bernbach Said . . .*, believes the creative team uses the brief to “bring the dead facts to life.” Such an undertaking requires that the team undergo a thorough education on the focus of the communication efforts: the goal is not only to solve the client’s business problem, but also to strategically reach and talk to the intended target.

The brief, then, is a document that concerns itself with facts, not creative direction. It does not describe or suggest what the creative efforts should say or show. Instead, it serves as an informational springboard the team will use to generate ideas and solidify the campaign’s visual/verbal direction.

Briefs, like marketing plans, vary in length and content, but most will include all or some combination of the following: a target audience profile,