



Creating Breakthrough Advertising Campaign Ideas

The average American is now exposed to somewhere between 200 and 6,000 selling messages a day, depending on lifestyle and who is doing the estimating. The vast majority of these selling messages are ignored, a few are hated, and a tiny, tiny portion of the total are noticed. If a message manages to get our attention and get into our heads, it must still compete with an average of 50,000 thoughts per day, most of which are about ourselves.

A part of our brain constantly and subconsciously scans our environment for anything new or different and anything useful or important. (In advertising parlance, anything “unexpected” and “relevant.”) If this part of the brain notices something new or useful, it tugs on another part of our brain, and a half second later, we believe we are consciously paying attention to something. But the decision has actually already been made subconsciously. This process is continuous and virtually instantaneous. It is a hard-wired human behavior.

Stand Out in the Clutter

What this means is that your communication must stand out immediately in a sea of clutter. It must be new and different. That is the purpose of a *campaign idea*.

PLAYING IT SAFE IS PLAYING TO LOSE

If you have something important to say, but you fail to get noticed because you say it in a way that doesn't stand out, you have wasted your advertising dollars. Ads that don't get noticed are a big waste of money. Playing it safe creatively is one of the consistently stupidest mistakes that companies make. Consequently, most ads are ignored or hated, a terrible waste of money.



HAVE THE GUTS TO STAND OUT

Here are a few examples of how brands have used creativity to stand out among competitors using conventional ads and achieved a better return on their advertising investments.



Breeding Product

Conventional Marketing: Show food preparation. Use actors. Emphasize ease of preparation.

Creative Marketing: Show authentic documentary photos of families enjoying traditional Southern meals, set to a traditional Southern blues song.

Results: Sales up 20 percent.

Introduction of Music Software Product

Conventional Marketing: Use trade show booths to reach retailers with the message that they can make more money because this new product will sell well.

Creative Marketing: Reach retailers at airport with graffitied luggage, fake limo drivers, and fake rock stars carrying the message. Stage protest at trade show to encourage retailers to boycott booth.

Results: Successful sell-in. Record booth traffic. International publicity. Stock value increase. Forty percent market share within one year (nearest competitor 21 percent).

Home Equity Credit Line

Conventional Marketing: Emphasize great rate and creating your dream home. Show a large amount of money and a picture of a luxurious home.

Creative Marketing: Fix what's bugging you, like the avocado-colored refrigerator from the 1970s or the pliers on the broken stove dial.

Results: Sales up 40 percent.

Accounting Firm

Conventional Marketing: Partnership, professionalism, and technology. Images of multiethnic teams working hard at computers, handshakes between silver-haired executives, and mahogany boardrooms.

Creative Marketing: Use black ink (a metaphor for financial success) on white on everything from ads to walls to business cards. Show Rorschach ink blots to emphasize ability to spot data patterns.

Results: Sales up 70 percent within one year.

Business Meeting and Convention Center

Conventional Marketing: Show rows of chairs neatly arranged inside meeting rooms, speakers doing PowerPoint and executives sitting, catered lunches. Talk about architecture, amenities, and service.

Creative Marketing: Show beautiful picture of lakeside view at sunrise, make fun of how much people hate being cooped up in business meetings, and talk about how inspiring this setting is.

Results: Highest reader attention ratings in trade pub, second only to back cover ad. One out of three phone prospects ask for more information.

Prevention of Teenage Date Rape

Conventional Marketing: Parent-pleasing “Just say no” posters with scary statistics about rape, warning teens not to be “bad.”

Creative Marketing: Use mirrored posters showing a teen’s face as a mug shot, stating, “Force her to have sex and you’re screwed.”

Results: 14 pre- and post-measurements of teen attitudes and behavior shift for the better. Posters torn down regularly, not ignored.

Automotive Repair

Conventional Marketing: Show clean-scrubbed neatly pressed mechanics using computers to repair engines and handing back bags of used parts as proof of “no rip-offs.” Show brand-sponsored race car.

Creative Marketing: Show customers with extreme stories that prove how good the dealer is (driving 100 miles, keeping a vintage car running for 450,000 miles). Dare people to call a phone number that proves the commercial is true.

Results: Sales up 11 percent. 10,000 phone calls. Free publicity.

What Is a Campaign Idea, and Why Do You Need One?

An idea is a new way of looking at an old thing. Most of the points you will want to make in your ads are old things that humans have wanted for centuries: quality, convenience, technical superiority, great taste, fun, less effort, saving money, improved performance, dependability, security, etc. Your challenge as a market-

ing communicator is to find a new way to communicate them, a way that no one has yet seen.

But as hard as it is to come up with a new idea, you must go a step further and create a new idea that will remain new



KEY TERM

Campaign idea A new way of looking at an old thing—quality, convenience, technical superiority, great taste, fun, less effort, saving money, improved performance, dependability, security, etc.

over and over again, no matter what product or topic you tackle. The Holy Grail is an idea that can remain the same, so that it builds equity through consistency, and yet can be constantly refreshed and updated so that it is always unexpected. You need a theme big enough to have variations. In advertising speak, this is known as the “big idea.” Like algebraic formulas that stay the same but the variables change in values, big ideas always have two elements: something that always stays the same and something that changes. This gives the advertiser two important business advantages: it builds equity in the brand through repetition, and it stands out from a sea of advertising and attracts attention.



Big idea A new way of looking at an old thing that has elements that stay the same and elements that change, so that it builds brand equity and stays continually fresh enough to capture attention.

KEY TERM

Relevant and Unexpected—You Have to Do Both

It is easy to be relevant and expected. Just look at the ads in your business category. They are probably all making similar points about the same relevant topics. In food, taste is relevant. In vacations, fun is relevant. In investments, safety is relevant. In discount retail, savings is relevant.

It's not enough for an ad to be relevant. Your customers expect to hear about the relevant benefits of your business category, so they don't pay attention to your ads. They've seen it and heard it before.

Your Competitors Are Remarkably Predictable ... and So Are You

There is tremendous pressure in American business culture to take no chances. Employees are rewarded for eliminating surprises, creating predictability, fitting in, getting along, not rocking the boat, and not calling attention to themselves. Humor, silliness, sexiness, childishness, forbidden truths, entertainment, provocation, and passion are considered unprofessional and bad for businesses. Anyone who stands out or offers a different point of view is labeled “not a team player.”

**ANATOMY OF A BIG IDEA:
SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW**



Here are some big ideas from the past. The big ideas are so powerful and ran for so many years that you may recognize the brands.

Something Old—What Stayed the Same in Every Ad	Something New—What Changed in Every Ad
A repairman who never has any work to do because the machine he repairs is made so well.	Improvements in the dependability of the product that make him even less needed. Ways he tries to cope with boredom.
Humorously exaggerated situations in which someone runs out of milk at a critical time and bad things happen.	Different people in different situations with different exaggerated bad outcomes.
Black-and-white fashion photography of a celebrity wearing a brand of sunglasses. A question that invites the reader to see who is hiding behind the glasses.	Change the celebrities. Change the glasses.
Ordinary people returning to their ordinary lives from vacations in a city renowned for wild behavior. They are attempting to hide what they did while on vacation. A tagline emphasizes the importance of keeping the details of a trip to this city a secret.	Different ordinary people at different moments of return to ordinary life. Different wild behavior they are trying to hide. Different people they are trying to hide it from. Different extreme methods of keeping their recent behavior secret.
A backpack so durable that it outlives its adventurous owners. An image of a skeleton being discovered wearing a perfectly preserved backpack after a lot of time has passed. A line that draws the conclusion that the product will have a longer life than the owner.	Different humorous and dramatic ways for a person to die while his or her backpack survives, such as starved to death on a raft and discovered by a helicopter, eaten by a dinosaur and discovered during an archeological dig, skiing into a tree and discovered when snow melts.

Companies mostly just look at the advertising their competitors are doing and try to keep up by creating their own versions of what the others are doing. This is not fiscally prudent behavior. The only ads that get noticed are the ads that stand out because they are different. For the smart businessperson, the predictable similarity of most advertisers is a golden opportunity to stand out from the crowd and get a higher return on advertising investment.

DON'T BE A COWARD: INSIST THAT YOUR BRAND STAND OUT

SMART



MANAGING

As a brand manager, you have a fiduciary responsibility to your company to insist that your advertising stand out or be different in some significant way. Otherwise, you are wasting the company's money.

Try doing a zig-zag analysis, as presented in Chapter 4, to come up with a radical new idea. When it's time to present your idea, show your zig-zag board, point out that ads must stand out to be effective (this is hard to argue with), and then unveil your new ads.

How to Spot an Idea

Finding great ideas is not as easy. Ideas almost always start out in rough form, sometimes even as rough as a spoken phrase or a doodle. Like newborn babies, new ad ideas are kind of small and squishy and messy and they require love and cleaning to grow into their full potential. On the flip side, there are executions that are worked out perfectly in every detail—great writing, great photography, great layout—but that contain no extendable idea at all. In the course of looking at thousands of ads in every medium for over a decade, I developed a set of criteria to help marketers spot potential big ideas. The checklist on the next page summarizes these criteria and provides a tool for evaluating big ideas.

Extendability The ability of an idea to be continuously refreshed with new twists or variations on the main theme. The idea can extend into the future, across media, across target markets, across subjects. The greater its extendability, the bigger the idea.



KEY TERM

BIG IDEA EVALUATION CHECKLIST			
Rate each campaign idea from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest) for each criterion.			
	Campaigns		
Criteria	A	B	C
Unexpected	_____	_____	_____
Relevant (strong reason to care, compelling)	_____	_____	_____
Extendable across media	_____	_____	_____
Extendable across markets	_____	_____	_____
Extendable across products	_____	_____	_____
Extendable over time (long life)	_____	_____	_____
Simple and clear	_____	_____	_____
Has an unchanging element for brand equity	_____	_____	_____
Has a changing element for freshness	_____	_____	_____
Can be described in one sentence or image	_____	_____	_____
Halo effect (says less, means more)	_____	_____	_____
On strategy (on positioning, brand personality, Pitchperfect™ Message Strategy)	_____	_____	_____

Let's examine these idea evaluation criteria and why they are important.

Unexpected: This means something new, different, shocking, surprising, fresh. The unexpected compels attention. Most people do not like to be surprised. Tell your creative staff you want to be surprised by the ideas they bring you.

Relevant: It does no good to catch the attention of prospects if the topic is of no use or no interest to them or to your business. They must find your message useful, even if the use is to be entertained and amused. If your idea is inspired by a good Pitchperfect™ Message Strategy, then it will have a relevant main point and a powerful reason to care. Who needs brilliance if it's irrelevant?

Extendable across media: Your idea transcends the limitations of any particular advertising medium. It can be done on radio without visual images.

It can be done on a billboard without sound or music. It can be done in a stationary medium like print without relying on a sequence of images or stories revealed over time. Your idea is not limited to one advertising medium.

Extendable across markets: Your idea has consistent themes and elements that are so strong that you can use it to reach different target markets.

Extendable across products: Your idea has consistent themes and elements that are so strong that you can use it for different products.

Extendable over time: Your idea can have a long life and be used well into the future without becoming dated. This is one of the truest tests of a big idea. Some advertising campaigns have lasted over 50 years.

Simple and clear: An idea can be stated in one simple sentence. As a creative director, I used to require my creative teams to give each campaign a

name and a one-line description of the idea before they presented it. If the idea was indescribable or fuzzy, then it was a sign I was not looking at a true idea, but rather at an executional tactic, which could not be extended.

LONG-RUNNING CAMPAIGN

The longest-running campaign I ever personally helped create has lasted for over 17 years: the “Jazz It Up” campaign with the silhouetted clarinet player for Zatarain’s New Orleans dinners. But the client gets the most credit for continuing to stick with it, instead of changing for the sake of change. If you are fortunate enough to have a campaign idea that works, you’re crazy not to stick with it.



STICK WITH YOUR WINNERS

A great campaign idea can have a long life. Research can measure wear-out with consumers. And a marketing idea will wear out with you long before it wears out with consumers.

There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, that Henry Ford called in his advertising director and told him he was tired of the latest ad campaign—and the director had to tell Ford the campaign had not yet started running. On the flip side, there is research that indicates that if your campaign does not generate results in the short term, it is unlikely to generate results in the long term. The moral? If you have a loser, change it. If you have a winner, stick with it.




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ONE-SENTENCE CAMPAIGN IDEAS

Here are some one-sentence idea descriptions from famous ad campaigns that you may recognize.

- Visual puns in the shape of an alcohol bottle based on wordplay using the word “absolute.”
- Exaggerated scenarios in which running out of milk has bad consequences.
- An appliance so well made that the repairman is bored and lonely.
- A rabbit that tries and fails to steal a sugar cereal from kids.
- An overnight delivery service so fast that everyone in the commercial talks at lightning speed constantly.
- An athletic drink that shows famous athletes sweating the juice from the product.
- Two very different people representing two different computer brands discuss their respective abilities to accomplish tasks.

Has an unchanging element for brand equity: There are several continuous and unchanging elements about the ad, no matter how it is new and different. In the sugar cereal commercial, the animated rabbit looked and sounded and moved the same, always went silly over the cereal, always concocted a scheme to steal the cereal, and was foiled every time by the kids, who shouted a tagline at the end that the cereal was for them, not for rabbits.

Has a changing element for freshness: In the sugar cereal commercial, the settings, the schemes, and the disguises were always different. Everything else was the same. Yet this campaign has continued for over 40 years.

Can be described in one sentence or image: The list in the sidebar above gives examples of one-sentence ideas. It is also sometimes possible to express an idea in a single image or a single piece of music. Most great TV commercials can be reduced to one key frame or snapshot.

Halo effect: A big idea always says more with less. I once created a TV commercial for a breading used in frying Southern foods like chicken and fish. In communications tests, the target market played back a long list of copy points that were never mentioned in the commercial: tastes good, easy to make, made from the finest ingredients, premium quality, affordable, and so on. What happened is that we successfully made the point that this was authentic Southern breading in a way that triggered happy childhood

memories. Once the memories were triggered, a whole host of positive thoughts and emotions came forth. There was a halo effect from the ad.

Make one key emotional point well and you won't have to list product selling points. The associations in your customers' brains and hearts will do all the writing for you.

On strategy: Any marketing communication you do should be built on the foundation of your relatively unchanging position in the market. It should be true to your brand personality. And it should be inspired by your Pitch-perfect™ Message Strategy. Your message strategy will tell you what the key emotional takeaway should be and provide an important reason to care. Staying on strategy helps keep your communication relevant and build a clear, strong brand equity. Remember this: A message strategy is *what* you want to say. A campaign idea is *how* you want to say it.

MESSAGE STRATEGY AND CAMPAIGN IDEA

Know the difference between message strategy and campaign idea. A message strategy is *what* you want to say. A campaign idea is *how* you want to say it.

Message Strategy: A technologically advanced dairy show.

Campaign Idea: A dairy show so good your cows will want to sneak in. Extensions include cow disguise kits, cows hijacking truck, letter addressed to **dairy farmer's cow**.

Message Strategy: Our doctors are really good.

Campaign Idea: The person with the most to lose is not the patient, but the person who loves the patient. Extensions include a son talking about his father with brain cancer, twin sisters talking about each other's hospitalization, a daughter talking about her father's stroke.

Message Strategy: A really durable long-lasting backpack.

Campaign Idea: Your backpack will have a longer life than you. Extensions of skeletons discovered wearing perfectly good backpacks after owner starved to death, owner was eaten by a dinosaur, owner skied into a tree, etc.

Message Strategy: Financial success for your business through smart accounting.

Campaign Idea: Accounting is about staying in the black ink and avoiding red ink. Extensions include printing everything in black ink on white paper, Rohrschachk inkblot test, black-and-white ink pen drawings, fingerprints in ink.

Message Strategy: Our bankers understand you and you can understand them.



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Campaign Idea: Mortgage bankers speak a language no one understands. Extensions include banker speaking pig Latin, using semaphore, being a mime, using smoke signals, speaking a foreign language.



DON'T CONFUSE A GLITTERING EXECUTION WITH A BIG IDEA

Sometimes ads have no extendable idea. There is only provocative language—"super" and "awesome" and "inspiring" and "raz-zamatazz"—and jazzy computer graphics of happy people. Often it is not possible to describe the idea in one line because there is no idea. There is nothing to extend or refresh. There is nothing unexpected or original. Ads of this type are like a bright shiny piece of fake jewelry, a triumph of execution over idea. Don't be suckered by glitz.

How to Create Ideas

Creativity requires the ability to conceptualize while ignoring the practical limitations of time, money, and people. Creativity requires the ability to make mistakes often and well and to be imperfect at first. Ideas can be very rough when they first appear. Creativity requires that we turn off our judgmental critical mind and just play and have fun. Creativity requires not knowing the answer in advance, not following a formula or rules, and being open to happy accidents. Creativity can even require redefining the problem to be solved or solving an entirely different problem. All these characteristics of creativity are punished by the rewards and control culture of our schools and businesses.



IMPROV COMEDY TRAINING

Use improv comedy training to stop your business culture from killing creativity.

TOOLS

Through Corprov™, Nell Weatherwax and I teach improvisational comedy games to people in corporations around the country, specifically for the purpose of enabling them to reclaim their creativity, flexibility, innovation, leadership, teamwork, and communication skills. It's amazing how serious professionals can reclaim their sense of fun, play, and creativity in a business setting. Improv comedy training not only makes companies more open to change and competitive, but also builds morale.

How to Create Ideas: Five-Step Process

To create original ideas, it helps to follow a five-step process:

1. Separate
2. Prepare
3. Incubate
4. Generate
5. Evaluate

Paradoxically, it is important that you take each creative step in order, one step at a time. For example, don't attempt to evaluate your ideas as you are generating them, and don't start generating ideas until your brain has had an opportunity to incubate your thoughts on the subject.

Step One—Separate. When I was a creative director at an advertising agency, I used to tell my creative teams to get out of the office, turn off their phones, and find a fun place to hide in order to conceptualize ad ideas. For some reason, sitting in a bar on a pier overlooking a beautiful lake on a sunny day as pleasure boats come and go leads to bigger and better ideas than sitting in a dark office cubicle being continuously interrupted by phone calls, irritating people, and deadlines.

It is not enough to separate from the grim daily grind physically; you must also separate emotionally. This requires some decompression time. I've known members of creative teams to tell jokes, play pool, eat pie, visit art museums, play practical jokes, or talk about romance as a way to separate from the grind of business deadlines and problems. The most productive teams usually spend most of their time lounging and laughing until a great idea comes. It may appear that they are being lazy, but they are not. Once you find the right headspace and attitude, the quality and quantity of your ideas increase dramatically. The best ideas often come when you least expect them: in the middle of the night, in the shower, or while washing dishes, exercising, or driving a car.

Above all, it is important to separate yourself from the creative killers: the individuals you work with whose very attitudes and styles work against creativity. You must avoid the naysayers, the devil's advocates, the people panicked by deadlines and consequences, the pragmatics, the logical, the critical thinkers, the literal, the controlling, the political, the

angry and burned out, the creative wannabes, the committees, the reviewers, the envious, and the pessimists. And you must avoid those voices in your head that have the same effect as those people. We all have an internal critical judge. Tell those voices to get lost. Keep them from destroying your joy and inspiration.

One advantage of separation is that you open yourself up to new inspiration. Maybe a walk in the woods, a song, a comedy show, a magazine story, or a conversation will inspire a new idea. Get out of your grind and get new stimuli. One consistent way to build this skill is to do one new thing a day, even if it is just driving to work a different way. Separate yourself from your routines.



PREPARE—YES!
 “Prepare” is a made-up word that means “Prepare your mind to create.” If you balk at using this word, you may not be ready to use this process. If you’re a stickler on language, consider this linguistic logic: separation, separate; incubation, incubate; generation, generate; evaluation, evaluate; and ... preparation, prepare.

Step Two—Prepare. Prepare your mind to create. We all have a creative zone, and we all have unique ways of getting into that zone. Maybe you have a lucky pencil or you like to sit by the fire with a glass of wine or you like to look at advertising awards books for inspiration. Do whatever it takes to put yourself into a creative

mood. One of my creative mantras was to simply tell myself, “Have fun!” I have also found the following mental preparation techniques helpful.

- Get exposure to art, nature, or kids.
- Gag your inner judge. Don’t evaluate quality while creating. Go for quantity.
- Make yourself laugh. Forget the consequences. Play.
- Redefine the problem to solve by asking stupid questions.
- Do a rough mental flyover of potential areas of exploration before you dig in and start conceptualizing.
- Dare to look foolish. Set your pride and ego aside in order to try bold new things.
- Dare to be imperfect and to create ideas that are “quick and dirty.” Work rough.

- Surround yourself with creative and inspiring people, especially a conceiving partner.
- Study the best for inspiration.

Step Three—Incubate. Your subconscious is a creative powerhouse. When it comes to generating new ideas, your subconscious mind can run circles around your conscious willpower. But you must feed your subconscious first and give it time to work offline. This is known as “incubating” an idea. Eventually, with time and care and feeding, your subconscious will hatch a new idea or many ideas.

To put your subconscious to work, you must first define the problem you want to solve. You must define it with as much focus as possible. Message strategy is a great way to do this. Then do a brain dump of your most obvious ideas, to clear the path for the arrival of newer, more original ideas. Divide your conceiving into at least two sessions—an early rough one, to prime the pump, and a later one, after incubation.

Before you begin conceptualizing, feed your mind as much inspiration as possible. Look at past ads or successful competitive ads or awards books. Read books, look at pictures, watch films and TV, listen to music, or go where the target prospects live to “get the scent” of your target market. Hold the problem to solve in the back of your mind as you go about your daily business. Give yourself a break from working on the problem.

The solution will often appear when you least expect it. Thanks to your incubation period, your new ideas will hatch. Make sure you carry a notepad and pencil or a tape recorder with you at all times to capture the ideas when they hatch.

Step Four—Generate. Set aside a time and place to generate ideas. If the assignment is complex, involving multiple media, pick one simple medium

GAG YOUR INNER JUDGE

We all have an inner voice that judges us, our creativity, and our ideas harshly. The judge often works subconsciously, just below the surface, to sabotage our motivation and inspiration. This self-talk is very damaging to the creative process: “You’ll look stupid,” “You’re not creative,” “That’s a dumb idea,” “We tried that and it didn’t work,” “You’re running out of time.” To be productive, you must gag your inner judge while you create. This gets easier with practice. Psychotherapy can also help.



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to conceptualize in, such as a billboard with headlines and visuals. Don't worry about writing the entire ad; just go for the headline and main visual scrawled or doodled with a black marker on a white piece of paper. Later, when you have selected a rough idea to "blow out," you can create more finished versions of that idea in other media. But first, though, concept as many different rough ideas to choose from as possible.



CONCEPT ROUGH AND FAST

When you conceptualize ads, work rough and fast. Just do enough to get the idea down on paper. Usually this means a headline and a visual. Here's an example:



Here are some other tactics that might help:

- Get the idea on paper fast. Go for quantity over quality. Paper the walls with ideas.
- Conceptualize with a partner. Say, “Yes, and ...” to automatically build on each other’s ideas.
- Work rough. Don’t perfect. Don’t fill in details.
- Think in pictures instead of words. Free-associate images instead of thinking logically.

BOOST GROUP CREATIVITY THROUGH BUILDING ON IDEAS

Organizations can no longer afford to depend on the solitary genius who comes down from the mountain with the amazing new solution. Today’s creativity is group creativity.

The secret to group creativity is to automatically build on the ideas of others without critical evaluation. A good way is to use “Yes, and ...,” a Corprov™ exercise.



USE “YES, AND ...” TO BOOST GROUP CREATIVITY

You can develop creativity with an improv comedy game called “Yes, and ...” Each person in the group contributes to building a story, one sentence at a time. Each sentence must refer to one thing in the previous sentence and begin with “Yes, and ...”

So, for example, if I say, “Once upon a time there was a blue rhinoceros,” you might say, “Yes, and the blue rhinoceros liked to read *People Magazine*” or “Yes, and the blue rhinoceros was promoted to vice president.” The next person in line then refers to one item in your sentence (e.g., “Yes, and the vice president declared war on all hippopotami”) and so on around the room.

No arguments or questions are allowed. “Yes, and it wasn’t a blue rhinoceros, it was a purple monkey” or “Yes, but what kind of rhinoceros was it?” would both be mistakes. As team members learn to build on each other’s ideas, their ability to innovate under pressure improves. For added fun, you can ask the group to “buzz” anyone who forgets to say “Yes, and ...” or argues or asks a question. Eventually, “Yes, and ...” can become part of your business culture. This Corprov™ exercise can be used to warm people up before a brainstorming session or at the beginning of a corporate retreat.



TOOLS

- Change your perspective. Look at the problem through the eyes of a kid, a Martian, a customer, a dog, a molecule.
- Find an unusual metaphor. For example, “The scented candle is like a cup of coffee, because it smells good but it can burn you.”
- Do the opposite of everyone else. “Everyone else shows a picture of the hardware in their ad, so we won’t.”
- Conceptualize against random stimuli. Flip through a dictionary or encyclopedia or picture book as you hold the main message in your mind. See if any new combinations result. Unexpected juxtaposition is a great source of new ideas.
- Follow your joy and your fear. Notice which concepting directions delight you or scare you. Chase those directions rather than options that feel safer.
- Exaggerate to ridiculous levels. Is the customer problem bad? Make it worse. Is the product solution surprising? Make it shocking. Push your idea too far. You can always pull it back later.
- Think like a comedian. What is it about this situation that makes you laugh? What are the obvious human truths? Don’t be afraid to use dark humor to find fresh insights.
- Take breaks. Generate ideas. Then evaluate them. Then take a break. Then do it again. This gives your subconscious the opportunity to incubate on the problem.
- Use the Idea Generator (sidebar) to stimulate a variety of creative approaches to the problem.

Step Five—Evaluate. The important point here is not to evaluate while you are generating ideas. It is the mental equivalent of hitting the brakes and the gas at the same time. Instead, keep the two phases separate. Generate ideas. Then evaluate those ideas. Which ones do you like? Why? Why are certain ideas stronger than others? Look for useful principles to guide further areas of exploration.

Then, take a break. Then, start generating ideas again. At some point, you decide when you have enough good ideas (perhaps because the time has run out) and you choose which ideas to develop further for presentation.

IDEA GENERATOR

Take the creative problem you're working on, and try to create rough ad ideas using these different proven approaches or techniques.

- Demonstration
- Dramatization
- Testimonial
- Expert
- Celebrity
- Exaggeration
- Humor
- Question
- Music/jingle/sound/rhyme
- Advertorial
- Character
- Shocking statement/image
- Animation/cartoon
- Involvement device (e.g., mirror, game, sound chip, paper airplane)
- Slice of life
- News
- Promotional offer
- Borrow another genre (e.g., TV commercial as a newscast)
- Personalization/localization trigger
- Helpful hints
- Three-dimensional gift
- Free sample
- Consecutive series (e.g., Burma Shave)
- Teaser
- Flag the prospect
- Cause marketing
- Sponsorship
- Premium item
- Anti-advertising
- Guerrilla tactics



TOOLS

How to Evaluate Ideas

There are four kinds of genius in advertising:

- The genius to *create* a great idea
- The genius to *recognize* a great idea
- The genius to *improve* a great idea
- The genius to *execute* a great idea

Very rarely does any one person have all four kinds of genius. Most creatives have the ability to create and execute a great idea. They can invent the idea and write the words and design the images as part of their craft. However, creatives are notorious for being unable to recognize the quality of their own ideas. They tend to think their work is either complete trash or complete genius. The line for the most famous Super Bowl TV spot in history, Apple's 1984 introduction of the personal computer, was allegedly discovered in a writer's trash can by a desperate creative director after everyone had gone home. The writer had discarded it as worthless.

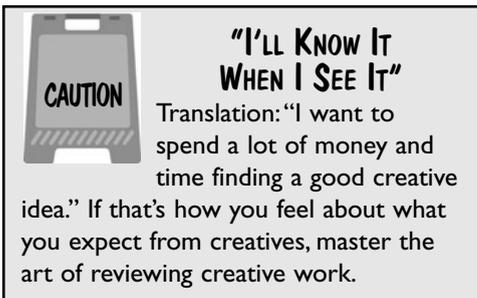
Creatives are also notoriously resistant to suggestions for improvements in their work. As with a mother and her newborn baby, it is impossible for a creative person to be objective about the ideas to which he or she has given birth. It is a part of that person, who cannot accept that his or her baby is less than perfect. This is true of anyone who creates something, not just artistic personalities.

That is why creative reviewers and creatives must always be two different people. Reviewers should never try to create, and creatives should never try to review.

As a creative director or as a client, your skill set must include the ability to review creative work, identify the best ideas, and articulate the kinds of changes and improvements you want to see. Saying "I'll know it when I see it" is a waste of money and time—and proof that you don't know what you're doing. It is the creative equivalent of playing the game "Battleship." You are requiring your creative team to be telepathic in

order to hit the battleship of your expectations.

Creative review is about the genius to recognize a good idea and the genius to improve it. The great challenge is how to do this without demotivating the creative team.



The Two Schools of Creative Review

There are two general approaches to reviewing creative work. The Sculpture School of Creative Review is about cutting away all the parts of an

idea that are bad, leaving the good stuff. This is very demotivating to creatives. The Gem School of Creative Review is about finding the gem of an idea and polishing it to perfection. This motivates creatives.

The purpose of creative review is not to cut away all the bad stuff, like carving a sculpture. The purpose is to find the gem of an idea and polish it.

So as you undertake your review, remember the following:

- Find the best idea.
- Make it even better.
- Inspire the creative team.
- Discover useful principles about what works creatively and what does not, to guide future creative development.

The “gem” approach to creative review has six steps:

- Control your expectations.
- Get into a receptive frame of mind.
- Experience the ideas without judgment.
- Choose the best idea(s).
- Inspire the creatives to improve the idea(s).
- Agree on clear next steps (who, what, when).

Let’s take a look at each one in a little more detail. Note that the “choosing best ideas” step is the only one that involves critical judgment. Note also that the focus is on what works, not on what does not.

AD EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The criteria listed in this checklist are proven to make ads more effective. You may want to add a few criteria specific to your category, brand, or product.

- On strategy?
- Unexpected?
- Made me notice?
- Made me feel?
- Made me care?
- Stand out from competitors?
- Ownable? (only my logo may go there)
- Believable?
- Compelling promise?
- Has a big idea?
- Extendable idea (over time)?



TOOLS

- ___ Extendable idea (over products, markets)?
- ___ Extendable idea (over different media)?
- ___ Simple, clear point?
- ___ Consistent with positioning and brand personality?
- ___ Does it work in rough form?
- ___ What are its limitations/problems?

Just as physicians use differential diagnosis, tapping here and there and getting different combinations of reactions, so you can diagnose what areas of an ad need improvement by isolating the four chief dimensions of any ad:

- **Is it on *strategy*?** (Pitchperfect™ Message Strategy, Chapter 7)
- **Does it have a strong campaign *idea*?** Is the idea unexpected, relevant, extendable? Or is it merely an execution?
- **Is the *execution* of the ad well crafted?** For example, how well executed are the words, graphic design, photography, illustration, Web design, music, acting? Where is the emotional power in the ad? Can the power be exaggerated even more? Is there clear dominance and simplicity? Does everything work together? Is something missing? Is something unnecessary? Do the words have the right content, voice, and brevity? Do the visuals have story appeal, the right personality, and usefulness?
- **Can *production* of the ad take place in the real world?** For example, can the ad be produced within the limitations of cost, politics, turn-around time, technology, and graphic standards?

Manager's Checklist for Chapter 8

- ✓ The average American is exposed to 200-6,000 selling messages a day. You usually have less than half a second to capture their attention.
- ✓ To capture attention, you must find a way to be unexpected. If your ad fails to stand out, you have wasted your money.
- ✓ A message strategy is *what* you want to say. A campaign idea is *how* you want to say it. Message strategy makes it relevant. A campaign idea makes it unexpected.

- ✓ An idea is a new way of looking at an old thing. A *big idea* is a campaign idea with a consistent theme and new variables that keep it fresh. A big idea is extendable in many directions: customers, products, media, and time.
- ✓ Most business cultures kill off creativity, so you are generally better off going outside for unexpected creative ideas.
- ✓ To create ideas, use the five “ates”: separate, prepare, incubate, generate, and evaluate.
- ✓ To evaluate ideas and motivate creatives:
 - Control your expectations.
 - Get into a receptive frame of mind.
 - Experience the ideas without judgment.
 - Choose the best ideas.
 - Inspire the creatives to improve the ideas.
 - Agree on next steps.
- ✓ Any ad can be diagnosed by looking at the strategy, idea, execution, and production issues.