

CLIENT BRIEF

THE MAJOR SOURCE OF EFFECTIVE CREATIVITY IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

There is no doubt that an adequate amount of valid and comprehensive information provided by a client to a communication agency through a client brief is the key prerequisite for an effective creation of communication strategy, for the development of main contents of advertising communicates, for the choice of relevant advertising tools and all other forms of communication not implemented through the mass media. The paper is looking into an important precondition for a quality and effective activity in the stage of preparation and incubation in creative process and analyses some approaches of advertising agencies and more prominent advertising creators and copywriters to cooperation between an agency and its client on the basis of the typical characteristics of a client brief used in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Keywords: advertising, client brief, communication agency, creativity, marketing communication

1. Introduction

The analysis of historic and contemporary literature not only on advertising but also in a broader context of the whole marketing communication in the commercial and non-commercial use in the life of our society shows a number of generalizing views of some aspects of influences, functions and effects of this activity in various spheres of life not only of an individual or larger target groups but also of the entire society. It is about literature that based on a thorough theoretical reflection on the communication events of that time studies more general aspects of the development, execution and measurement of the effectiveness of such communication activity from the point of view of various scientific disciplines like, e.g., Sociology, Psychology, Economics, Theory of culture, Arts and humanities, Theory of communication. It is a relatively significant paradox of the times – and it doesn't matter whether we are speaking about the end of the 19th century, about the first half of the 20th century

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or about the new millennium that the main attention in these books is usually paid to the technology of communication and only to a small extent to the creative process preceding the actual development of an advertising communicate. And it is clear that the future success of communication effectiveness is based on this creative stage: the relevant input information and the definition of commercial and communication goals are crucial to be able to determine the communication strategy for that project, create the content and form of a communicate, formulate the tactics for using that communication in the media – mass and group media, determine the proportion of interpersonal communication activities, etc. Only few professionals in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia are dealing with this creative stage of developing and forming marketing communicates in great detail and with respect to the specificities of marketing communication processes.

2. Stages of creative process

Many national and international statistics indicate that the marketing communication industry is one of the major employers in the commercial sphere and so plays a vital role in the life of our society; it is an important part of distribution processes and of the production and commercial strategy on a national and international scale [1, 2]. It is an integral part of the ways of thought that with the help of communication tools will form the public opinion, contribute to the formation of value systems of consumer behaviour, organize movements of large target groups in space and time (visits to fairs, cultural sights, sales promotions and events, etc.). Public opinion is understood as an integral part of social awareness. Public opinion can have many functions in society in which it reflects the persuasive effect of marketing communication: evaluating, articulating, regulative, identification, conforming and uniting functions manifested in everyday life of people as a system of certain types of information and behaviour patterns [3].

At the same time it is logical to mention in this context non-commercial advertising and promotional activities developed by state institutions aiming to form the behaviour of citizens as well as the whole sphere of social advertising of the non-profit sector, etc.

K. Fichnová says that according to the EU statistics for 2010 the advertising sector was the fourth most numerous in the creative industry. The creative industry as a whole accounted for 4.5% of the European GDP and employed 8.5 million people. It is also worth noting that even at the time of economic stagnation this sector has a higher level of growth than most of the other industries + 3.5% against + 1% in 2000-2007 [4].

The train of thought about the Czech concept Industry 4.0, which is fundamentally embedded in the organic integration of new, unusual creative solutions associated with the processing and use of electronic data indicates that creativity in the broadest sense of the word supported by the knowledge about the real status, possibilities and the meaning of new solutions will be one of the

main ways of the future development of industry and subsequently of the living standard and quality of life of our society. It will also be a prerequisite for competitiveness in all areas of human work on a national, European and global scale.

For me personally the key factor for the future development in our society and the actual opening of the flow of original, creative solutions is the concept of interdisciplinary connection of findings from individual disciplines, education of today typically narrowly specialized professions towards creative thinking in teams, initiation of the environment for creative thoughts, education of methods and techniques to help manage creative processes. Table 1 clearly documents different approaches to making marketing communications in a standard and creative concept.

Table 1. Differences in creative processes.

No.	Conventionally understood creative process	Creative process in an advertising and communication agency
1.	Largely an individual matter	Largely a team job
2.	Typically, not limited in time in advance	In time limited
3.	The criteria the final product should meet are not defined in advance	Exactly defined criteria the advertisement should meet (based on a consumer research survey, pre-tests, eye tracking tests, etc.)
4.	The target group is typically not clearly defined (sometimes it is not defined at all)	The target group the product/idea/service promoted and the advertisement (or market communicate) is for is defined
5.	Procedures are not/or don't have to be defined	Working procedures – e.g., the methods used for stimulating the production of ideas – are defined.
6.	The start of the creation process is indicated from inside of the person, autotelic	The process of creation is indicated from the outside, directed towards the purpose
7.	Spontaneous	Guided
8.	According to R.D. Gehlbach (1987): closeness – openness at the level process -product – it is about creativity in both dimensions open	According to R.D. Gehlbach (1987): closeness – openness at the level process -product – it is about creativity at least in one dimension closed

Source: K. Fichnová, *Inaugurační přednáška na FF UKF Nitra*

K. Fichnová observes: „*The creative process represents a sequence of ideas and actions leading to a creative product; at the same time it is the process of experiencing the internal stimulation of the subject and processing of the stimuli coming from the external and internal environment*“ [K. Fichnová, *Inaugurační přednáška na FF UKF Nitra- (Inauguration speech)*, delivered on 2016-02-18, p. 1]. She also presents her own view of the main differences between the conventionally understood creative process and that in a

communication agency which, for obvious reasons, shows the specific differences coming out of the specific conditions for creation.

The author describes a three-stage model of creative process (Table 2) as a linear sequence of the individual stages of creative activity when working, e.g., on the creation of a communication strategy or slogans, in media planning, in thoughts about other possible interpersonal and contact activities in the context of a communication campaign, etc.

Table 2. Three main phases in the creative process.

Stage 1	Preparation - the stage of preparation
Stage 2	Incubation and illumination – the stage of incubation and the onset, discovery of an idea, of a solution
Stage 3	Verification – ideas, solutions are tested

1. It is a preparation stage for the creative team not only to gather all information and data they need from the client brief but also examine, sort out these resources in order to confront the task – to find what can be used for the marketing communication, in the message conveyed and compare it with the previous information about that subject of an offer, goal, target group, content and form of argumentation. In this stage they also look for parallels in other communication strategies and executions with the aim to gather as much relevant information on that topic as possible; the quantity and quality of these resources play an important role in the creative atmosphere and thus in the whole creative process.
2. It is an incubation stage when drawing upon these resources consideration of the problem is internalized and becomes a largely subconscious activity. The mind makes connections more freely and abundantly. This stage encourages the creative potential of content creators and copywriters towards the intensive stage of the creation of new communication strategies and new creative solutions to be later materialized in advertising and promotional tools and activities. Illumination is the moment of insight and optimism, when a creative idea, a new solution to the problem transition from subconscious to conscious thought come to life.
3. It is a verification stage when the creative solution is tested, so the creative team or an individual responsible for the project analyses a possible solution primarily in the aspect of its correspondence with the set criteria formulated by the client in the client brief or re-formulated by the client helped by the creative team members from the communication agency when commissioning the work.

It is beyond doubt that a well-written client brief is an indispensable and determining element to be able to successfully carry on with creative preparation. K. Fichnová in a recent article in *Marketing & Communication* points out at some important aspects of team creation, at some characteristics of team communication and their impact on the creativity of the resulting advertising product [5]. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that, typically, the

entire creative preparation of a communication strategy and its gradual materialization takes place in time and space largely determined by some limiting factors:

1. First and foremost, it is the quality of input information contained in the client brief: rich in content information and resources, their quantity, the clear assignment of a quantifiable goal of the planned communication activities, etc.
2. Time is a strong limiting factor. Time would be clearly defined in the client brief as the deadline for the execution of a communication campaign, and it actually defines the amount of time we have for the creative process – usually, not enough.
3. The creative process is not a limitless “factory” for unusual, catchy, surprising, showy and, in terms of impact, effective communicates – actually, the process is also restricted by the volume of money available.
4. The factors like, e.g., simultaneous work on several creative projects also enters into the creative process when the attention is usually paid to the individual cases at the same time.

There are naturally other factors and phenomena like experience, professional erudition of creative people, support of their superiors, recognition, etc., that can enter into the creative process too.

3. Personality of the creator through the prism of history

History has often proved that the creative person – a communication creator – is often indispensable and, in fact, irreplaceable because of their absolutely unique personal creative characteristics that enable them to see things and the world in a different view, with a different perspective, in a different context – in a broad sense of the word – than the consumer population the information created by this professional and his/her team is for. The creative activity as such brings new original values which make the subject of an offer in the marketing communication and its message special and so it is easy to understand why the interest of advertising professionals in the interwar period is concentrated not only on the creative outcome but also on the personality of the creator. In the Czech circumstances we could name, e.g., artists Alphonse Mucha, Ladislav Sutnar, Andy Warhol, Adolf Hoffmeister, photographers František Drtikol, Josef Sudek, and others. All of them thanks to their peculiar creativity significantly changed the professional discourse about advertising of that time [6, 7].

David Ogilvy, a guru of modern advertising called the Father of Advertising, in his book *On advertising* made a list of qualities and skills needed for the position: creative director, i.e., the determining person able to very well stimulate creative process on the one hand, but on the other hand build a very non-creative atmosphere for it: many of these parameters can be related to the personality of creative executive professional [8].

Ogilvy says: „You need to be:

1. Good psychologists;
2. Willing and able to set a high standard;
3. Competent clerks;
4. Able to think strategically – determine brand position, etc.;
5. Able to use the results of research surveys;
6. Equally good at creating TV and print ads;
7. Equally good as regards advertising for the manufacturer of consumer goods or that for any other types of clients;
8. With experience in graphics and typography;
9. Crafters – and able to work fast;
10. Able not to argue unless absolutely necessary;
11. Ready to share with others recognition for a job done well and accept responsibility for a job done poorly;
12. Able to make good presentations;
13. Good teachers with a good nose for talents – who to hire for positions in the agency;
14. Full of **joy of life** – nothing is as contagious as enthusiasm.“

Ogilvy wrote this book in 1983 and it is almost certain that today – after 33 years - he would add many other personal traits of character to reflect the current dynamic of developments in our society.

At the time of the first republic the main content creator in advertising was called advertising advisor. The Czech professional literature of that time reveals several texts aiming to specify the characteristics of this profession.

Václav Radoměský in his book on advertising is looking for answers to the question: What qualities should a good advertising advisor have? [9] And he comes to the conclusion the advertising advisor should be:

- **Businessman** – *who has to well manage the capital of the client who wants to make money on the investment. He pays attention to generate return on the invested capital through good proposals and the careful execution of an advertising plan.*
- **Psychologist** - *who conscientiously, from the point of view of the shopper, studies all good aspects of the goods to be advertised and the circle of those possibly interested in buying.*
- **Teacher** - *who attracts attention of his listeners to be able to instil his ideas into them, win their heart and mind. Therefore he chooses the form of all appropriate advertising tools a man is not likely to overlook in the everyday hustle and bustle and to attract attention presents to those interested in his line activity the item being advertised.*
- **Poet** - *who in a poetic form gives us life in its Sunday clothes.*
- **General** - *who can make a good plan to gain victory... is able to compile a strategic plan to outline the operation to the very detail.... would study the outline of that operation several times to check it doesn't have any weaknesses through which money and success disappear.*

- **Lawyer** - *who represents the interests of his client well. Is supposed to defend his client in the advertising well against competitors and, if applicable, against objections of those interested.*
- **Engineer** – *who builds a perfectly constructed structure and executes the advertising and promotions meticulously worked out, flawlessly joined in a huge, compelling and convincing whole.*
- **Farmer** – *who sows good seed and is then aware that this seed makes a good crop.*
- **Sportsman** – *who shows unique tenacity and endurance aiming to be the first in his class. The success of an advertising advisor is the success of an entrepreneur and is his best reference to get another job.*

One of the most important creative persons of the Czech interwar advertising, Jiří Solar, published a book titled Advertising Guide [10] profiling the characteristics of creative advertising process by formulating a Ten Commandments (set of rules) of good advertising professional.

1. „Advertising is not only a science. Advertising is not only an art. Advertising is not only a matter of reason. Advertising is not only a matter of heart. Advertising is a synthesis of science and art; it is created by reason and by heart, by the knowledge of facts and experience as well as by enthusiasm and festive mood.
2. Advertising helps only good products marketed by good salesmen at reasonable prices and through a good sales organization.
3. Advertising is a relatively long-term investment to bear fruit for three or even more years.
4. It is only and only the sales result that decides whether it was good or less good.
5. Advertising doesn't have to appeal to the client who commissioned it or his wife or to the board of directors, etc. Advertising is supposed to sell, support sales, and attract favourable attention, trust and liking of customers.
6. The factors to decide on the impact and sales strength of your advertising are, in particular:
 - a) Study and analysis of a company, goods, customers -
 - b) Leading idea resulting from that -
 - c) Choice of the right tools (media), good timing schedule, careful execution – well - chosen appeals, that is., calls for action – reasons to buy based on the knowledge of goods, markets and customers – appropriate, well thought-out, demonstrative, clear, convincing and dynamic language as well as original and bold graphic layout and execution (illustration, choice of type and size of font, colours, paper, cleanliness of print and general appearance, etc.).
7. Good advertising doesn't cost anything, in fact: the enterprising businessmen are paid for it by their idle and lax competitors that don't adapt to the times.

8. Good advertising doesn't make goods more expensive but the opposite – by increasing the turnover it enables a lower percentage of the sales margin and so a lower price.
9. Advertising ideas and drafts of a conscientious and experienced studio won't actually increase the spend on advertising but by its professional execution save the client ordering the advertising campaign and drafts a lot of money because they achieve a bigger result with a smaller spend.
10. Who believes his goods, his company, who loves his goods, his customers, who want to go ahead and up makes advertising, good advertising, and professional advertising. And advertising 'makes' him.“

Jan Brabec, the founder of modern Czech advertising theory, in his fundamental work published in 1927 analyses the aspects of creative work of advertising authors, in particular, the *central idea – message* – of the communication, and by that he means the situation when the text „*after reading the text has to leave a certain and consistent impression on the reader's mind; therefore, all the text has to represent a consistent idea*”. Describing an advertising office, its position in the process of creation and execution of a client brief, he reveals: „*The manager of the advertising office who, from the bottom of his heart believes, that advertising is legitimate and economically beneficial can't passively wait for the time when the business comes to its senses and complain that no one understands him – in this case he would not be the right person for advertising at all. Advertising is an art to influence people, guide them.*“ [11] He also describes the structure of an advertising office – agency, which, in his opinion comprises four organizational units:

1. The sales department which has to make ideal advertising for its office (agency), that is, present the office and acquire orders.
2. The department whose activity is to examine markets – a market research department.
3. The third department is the core of an office (agency) and comprises creative and executing sub-departments.
4. The last organizational unit is typical of routine jobs like “gathering information and awareness of the data on advertising tools, checks on advertisements, making payments and sending the post, keeping the records, doing the statistics and accounting for the company's activities“.

4. Client brief

We strongly believe that creative team work requires not only a clearly stated client brief, which because of a specifically defined and quantified goal, time schedule and financial plan defines the basic strategic direction of creative activities. For the work of a creative team of a communication agency, an advertising department, a creative shop or a similar creative unit of that agency it is also necessary to get an adequate amount of real, unequivocal facto-graphic data and information so that their copywriters and other creative professionals can use it as resource materials and background for their activity. These

resources and information build the factual framework for creative thoughts, the knowledge background and starting point for the creative process as such. Communication agencies usually obtain these data through a client brief typically defined as a summary of essential information about the communication and marketing task formulated by the client, by the company commissioning the project or by the investor.

Generally speaking it is evident that the brief contains the background and starting points for effective communication (including the data from market research surveys, opinion polling, etc.), the goals to be achieved in the communication sphere (e.g. to change the attitude towards the brand, strengthen trust in the producer, etc.) and in the commercial sphere too (e.g. to increase the sales of a product by 5%), the set of arguments or claims that can be used to achieve this goal and the overall, summarized information about the relevant market where the client operates [12]. The goals should be quantified to be able to measure the effectiveness achieved. The communication agencies define their requirements on a client brief in a different structure and level of detailed information, nevertheless, we can agree that the quality of creative work and the final creative product – in other words, the quality of communication activity – is to a great extent influenced by the quality of the assignment, i.e. that of the client brief.

4.1. Approaches of our predecessors to client briefs

Our predecessors were fully aware of the above and the major agencies did try to create sort of templates for briefs or lists of requirements on information their clients – companies commissioning advertising campaigns should fill in. This fact was mentioned, e.g., by C. Hopkins in his book *Můj život v reklamě & Reklama jako věda (My life in Advertising & Scientific Advertising)* – this publication as early as in the 30s of the last century presents information needed to be able to formulate a communication strategy: *„It is often necessary to find for certain goods the total expenditures. We need to find how much the user has spent in a year – otherwise we won't know whether the user is worth winning. We need to find the total consumption – otherwise we spend pointlessly. We need to know the percentage of readers addressed by our product. We need to collect this information from different social classes. The percentage can be different between farms and towns. The cost of advertising depends largely on the percentage of losses. Any advertising campaign is usually preceded by gathering a lot of information and details.... A censor is appointed for every type of goods where specialized details are important. The advertising copywriter – regardless of how well informed – can deduce wrong conclusions from the given data and so every advertisement is assessed by the expert.“* [13]

In the Czech conditions it was the already mentioned Jiří Solar who paid detailed attention to the questions of preparation of creative process and client brief. As the owner of an advertising consulting office (advertising agency) he

felt an urgent need to have for his own creative activity – and he was an active advertising copywriter, creator of advertising strategies and their implementation in successful advertising campaigns for major national firms and companies – enough relevant information and facts about the product, producer, competitive environment, consumer habits, etc. And exactly these data and information formed the background and starting point for his creative thought. He compiled – in his times a completely unique - *Questionnaire of the Advertising consulting office ing. J. Solar* with the aim to get useful and unbiased information, the resource material he needed for his own creative activities. In his publication titled *Reklamní příručka* (Advertising Guide) he asks the key and basic question and gives his explanation: „**WHAT SHOULD THE ADVERTISING PROFESSIONAL KNOW ABOUT A CLIENT COMPANY** to be able to give really good advice and service? If he is supposed to work for you, he needs to know you – the better he gets to know you, the better he can serve you. That is why the advertising advisor sends to the company he is to work for a thorough questionnaire or, preferably, can fill it with the client company together during a face-to-face meeting. As an example of this questionnaire you can see the *Questionnaire of the Advertising consulting office ing. J. Solar*.“ [10, p. 37-43]

He tells the client – company owner – not to be surprised to see how thorough and detailed the questionnaire is and understand that the content of some questions may seem unimportant for that purpose but in fact these questions are very important for advertising work. The questionnaire comprises 73 questions and 25 of them printed in bold; according to J. Solar, exactly these questions in bold are especially important when determining an advertising strategy. These questions were designed to elicit the following information:

- When was your company established?
- Do you personally sell, serve customers? Do your customers know you?
- How many customers does your company have?
- Do you have your own window dresser to arrange displays of goods in shop windows or within a shop itself?
- What kinds of products does your company sell (main types of goods)?
- The sale of which type of goods/product line of your company is most important, what matters most? For what reason?
- When is/are your main season/s? When is your dead season?
- Which classes of customers are your main customers?
- Do you have the majority of your customers regular or random?
- Do you have (maintain-update) an address book of your customers?
- How do you handle complaints?
- Do you sell only for cash or also on credit, on instalments?
- How – in what way do you face your competition? Primarily by price – primarily by quality – primarily by responsive service – by advertising?
- Have you run advertising for your business and how? Advertisements – leaflets – posters – slides shown in the cinema – letters, etc.

- What has worked best in your advertising? And when was it? Please, enclose, if possible, examples of your advertising.
- How do you train your staff? (Regular daily, weekly, monthly conferences, excursions, foreign trips).
- Approximately, how much per year can – want to - see as necessary to spend on your advertising without increasing your overhead costs too much?
- Which type of advertising are you particularly interested in?
- Do you have any ideas, pointers of your own to improve your sales – selling - turnover: (i.e., ideas, improvements, suggestions coming out of your own local need and experience) – please, specify?
- What extra services or advantages (use of the telephone for free – we do recommend this free service!, lavatories – playground for children – rest area – music, etc.) do you offer or can provide in the future with respect to other companies active in your line of business?

J. Solar would also ask some identification questions like the place, name of the owner, address, etc., and other questions regarding, e.g., the amount of annual turnover of a business, classes of customers the client would like to win, number of branches, competitive environment, role of sales representatives, professional orientation of the company owner, foreign experience of the owner, ownership of a car and his advertising concept, shipping service, trademarks and character of sales premises, outer design of points of sale, window and display dressing activities, advertising elements on facades, advertising light boxes, characteristic of the existing clients of the company, possibility to buy on instalments, providing discounts and everything associated with the advertising of other subjects in the vicinity, specialized periodicals and publications the company subscribes to, reaction of clients to humour in advertising, rhymes used in advertising, etc.

5. Conclusion

A glance into the Czech history of advertising is educational for all involved in the world of advertising today [14]. It gives evidence that our professional predecessors were people with broad horizons who, likewise our contemporary professionals, understood the importance of an adequate information background – a client brief for their qualified and effective creative work. They were fully aware that only the quality and comprehensive structured information could give stimuli for new ideas and creativity.

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