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SEVEN WAYS TO MAKE A BAD COMMERCIAL

How to make a bad advertisement - and what you can do about it

ow many times have you been watching television with friends or family and, after a commercial appears, someone turns to you and asks "What was the point of that commercial?", "Are they serious?" or even "Why is advertising so bad?"

The truth is that, despite the fact that many advertisements we see today are brilliantly creative and effective in shaping our perceptions and attitudes toward the brands they represent, it is much easier to make a bad piece of advertising than a good one.

There are probably hundreds of ways to make a bad commercial, but here are seven simple ones and what you can do about them.

Don't take ownership of your brand:
Brands are assets that you own, not
your agency, not your marketing
consultants or other partners. These team
members are your consultants, advisors
and creative geniuses, essential to the
process, but the brand is on your balance
sheet, not theirs.

You must take the leadership position in the development of your brand messaging. Your agency, consultant and other partners and managers can provide sound advice and unique insights to help steer your brand's strategic direction.

However, setting that course is your responsibility. Neglecting to do so leaves the stewardship of your brand in the hands of people less familiar with it and who have less at stake in the vitality of your business.

Don't provide clear direction: The Association of National Advertisers
estimates that poorly written briefs cost companies 30% of the efficiency of their advertising budgets. You must articulate the brand's communication strategy in clear, unambiguous language. By providing a brief document to the partners on your team, you provide clear specifications for what the communication objectives for your brand should be and the direction to help guide the creative product.

Once your communication strategy is in place, it should become a living document. Each creative review should begin with a review of your communication objectives. This reinforces the importance of these objectives with everyone involved. And it establishes a touchstone against which the concepts can be evaluated.

Don't involve your consumers:

Effective messaging resonates

with consumers when they
identify with it. Knowledge of your

consumer is essential to this process and, while it may seem an obvious statement to make, it becomes easy to lose sight of the consumer when faced with daily issues that constantly demand immediate attention. Entrusting customer insights managers and their outside research partners to regularly provide in-depth perspectives on your brand ensures that your brand messaging strategy will remain vital and relevant to the target groups with whom you want to connect.

Don't verify: Setting the strategy is only half the battle. How consumers perceive advertising and the nature of the impressions it leaves behind should not be taken for granted or left to instincts. Advertising is like any other form of communication: we may have a very clear idea of what we intend to convey, but how that communication is received may not be exactly what we intended. Nor can it be assumed, in an increasingly complex advertising environment, that the message is even breaking through or leaving a lasting impression.

Furthermore, experienced practitioners of advertising testing can be valuable additional partners of your team. Often their experience and independence



enables them to see through the numbers and offer a fresh perspective on how the creative content that has been pre-tested can be enhanced to more effectively position your brand, make its message clearer, or achieve greater breakthrough.

Don't choose the copy testing tool that best fits your needs: Copy testing today is a sophisticated industry offering a wide variety of testing options that can provide a diverse range of insights into how consumers respond to your advertising.

Despite this wide diversity of capabilities, many companies rely on a single testing approach for evaluating all copy. To some extent this practice is an anachronism dating back to a time when there were fewer copy testing methods and fewer measurement options available. But it is also true that in many instances testing alternatives are not reviewed with each new piece of creative content (there are various reasons for this.)

Rely solely on qualitative research: Focus groups and other qualitative research techniques are terrific instruments to have in your research arsenal. However, as with any other type of research (and perhaps more so than with most other techniques), focus groups

can be misapplied. This can lead to poor decision-making.

Focus groups are a poor venue for making final copy decisions. Participants in focus groups do not, nor are they intended to, completely represent the broad diversity of your target audiences. There is often a momentum created in focus groups which can lead discussions in a particular direction that may provide thought-provoking interaction, but which may not accurately depict opinions actually held by the public at large.

Don't inspire your agency: Creating advertising that attracts audiences and extends the connections users have with a brand is a difficult challenge. Converting communication objectives from a piece of paper into inspired content is daunting. For these reasons alone, agencies are a tremendous resource. Moreover, the outside perspective agencies bring to your business, and the wide-ranging expertise they have in communications, enables them to spot opportunities that even the most energetic and dedicated corporate managers won't see. They can and should be full partners in the development of your brand by providing strategic advice and counsel as your communications objectives are developed.

However, brands and the advertising industry prosper when research has informed ads and ads have built brand sales. Incorporating your agency team into the strategic development process in its earliest stages, including the research phases, provides everyone with the opportunity to contribute to the process, developing a sense of ownership.

The cycle of challenges and success in creating outstanding advertising and building a brand in the process can become inspirational. **INV**



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