

8

Creative Strategy: Planning and Development



Source: Geico

Learning Objectives

- LO 8-1 | Describe the role of creative strategy in advertising.

LO 8-2 | Discuss the creative process for advertising and inputs to this process.

LO 8-3 | Describe the development of creative strategy.

LO 8-4 | Examine approaches to developing the major selling ideas that are used as the basis for an advertising campaign.

page 255

The Best GEICO Advertising of the Past 25 Years

If you have watched television lately, surfed the Internet, or read a magazine, chances are you have seen a commercial for car insurance. Automotive insurance companies face a unique marketing opportunity because regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic status, all drivers need insurance. However, this opportunity also presents a challenge because auto insurers must market their services to a wide range of consumers who represent a broad spectrum of characteristics, including age, education, and income as well as purchase motives. Many insurance companies rely on one type of creative campaign, with some minor variations, to catch the attention and interest of consumers and encourage them to compare their policies and rates. For example, State Farm Insurance uses its “Discount Double Check” campaign featuring Green Bay Packers star quarterback Aaron Rodgers and other athletes, while Progressive has been using its popular Flo character for more than 10 years. Allstate has been running its “Mayhem” campaign since 2010, which features actor Dean Winters playing a villainous character who wreaks havoc on drivers’ vehicles and property as a way of showing that many accidents involve more than your average fender bender. Rather than focusing on price, the campaign uses dry humor and mild fear appeals to show the serious damage, as well as personal liability, that can occur from an auto accident.

However, one insurance company that does things differently when it comes to advertising is GEICO, which is part of the Berkshire Hathaway empire of financial wizard Warren Buffett. The company has long been known for running as many as five

campaigns at once, which breaks a basic commandment of marketing: Thou shalt not confuse the consumer. However, while the look, style, and creative approaches vary, the core message is the same from one campaign to another, which is that consumers should take time to compare rates because “Fifteen minutes could save you 15 percent or more on car insurance.” The idea behind using multiple campaigns simultaneously is to break through advertising clutter and attract attention, as well as avoid the problem of wear-out that often results when consumers tire of seeing and/or hearing the same advertising message repeatedly. The potential for wear-out is particularly high for GEICO, which spends more than \$1 billion per year on various forms of advertising, including television, print, online, and outdoor.

When GEICO hired the Martin Agency in Richmond, Virginia, as its agency of record in 1994, it was a challenger brand competing in an industry where insurance was usually purchased through an agent. While doing research for the account, the agency learned that insurance is one of those products consumers do not like to purchase and hope they never have to use. Moreover, they hated the idea of paying for auto insurance and found shopping for it a hassle. The agency also learned that spending a little time shopping around for insurance and comparing rates could save consumers 15 percent or more on their insurance, which was the genesis of what has become one of advertising’s greatest taglines. GEICO decided to disrupt the industry by suggesting that consumers forego the use of an agent and purchase insurance on their own by focusing on two key attributes: price and convenience. The question then became how best to communicate this proposition to consumers. The Martin Agency noticed that most insurance companies were using serious emotional approaches in their ad campaigns that focused on worst-case scenarios and the importance of having insurance. Instead of taking a similar approach, the agency and its client decided they would use humor to tell them how they could save money on insurance.

Over the past 25 years, the Martin Agency has developed what seems like an endless parade of amusing commercials for GEICO that often use very different creative strategies. For example, the company first began using its popular gecko character in 1999, and the lizard with the Cockney English accent still appears in many of the company’s print and TV ads. GEICO has also used a variety of other characters, including the metrosexual caveman who is insulted by the tagline, “So easy a caveman can do it.” There have also been myriad commercials using popular clichés, fairy tales, animals, reality shows, and soap operas for creative inspiration.

Anyone who has watched and been entertained by GEICO’s commercials over the past two-plus decades probably has one or even several favorites. Numerous articles have been written debating which commercial is the best, and people have gone to GEICO’s YouTube page to put together their own best-of videos. To end _____ page 256 the debate, as well as to celebrate their 25-year creative relationship, _____ GEICO and the Martin Agency decided to run a “Best of GEICO” showdown campaign where consumers could cast a vote for their favorite commercial. Because there were so many GEICO commercials over the past 25 years, a decision was made to create a shortlist that would be more manageable for consumer to pick from. To develop the final list, GEICO personnel created their top 20 while Martin Agency staffers did the same. Fortunately, there was a lot of overlap in each side’s semifinalists, and after collaboration, the list was curated down to the top 10, which were put back into rotation on television as well as online during the campaign.

The Best of GEICO campaign ran from mid-December 2018 to early February 2019. A retro-cheesy promotional ad was created to promote it and encourage people to visit the campaign's website to view the commercials and vote for a favorite. To provide an extra incentive to vote, a "Best of GEICO Sweepstakes" was also created with a grand prize of an all-expenses paid trip to Los Angeles to appear in a GEICO commercial. Millions of consumers watched the 10 finalist spots on television as well as online and cast votes for their favorite GEICO commercial.

Once the voting was completed, GEICO created a Best of GEICO website (<https://www.geico.com/bestof/>) where people could see the results of the fan voting. The ad chosen as the best GEICO commercial by voters was a spot called "Hump Day," which shows a camel walking through an office and annoyingly asking everyone if they know what day it is. In second place was the "Maxwell the Pig" spot, which features a spokesperson pondering whether switching to GEICO could save you money on car insurance before asking if the little piggy in the children's fairy tale really cried "wee wee wee" all the way home. On queue, the pig is shown doing just that while holding a pinwheel out the window of a moving vehicle. In third place was one of the spots from the caveman campaign showing a modern-day caveman walking through an airport where he encounters one of the "So easy a caveman can do it" ads on display and stops to stare at it in disgust. The fourth most popular commercial was a spot featuring two mischievous squirrels jumping in front of a moving car and causing an accident and then celebrating with an entertaining and elaborate routine that includes high fives. Rounding out the top five was a commercial called "Spy" that shows an agent trying to escape capture from several men who have him trapped on a rooftop when he receives a call on his cell phone from his mother. The message is that mothers often call at the wrong time, that's just what they do. However, the voiceover then says: "If you want to save 15 percent or more on car insurance you switch to GEICO; it's what you do."

The success of the GEICO campaign and the ability of the Martin Agency to keep it fresh and interesting for more than two decades is a tribute to both the agency and the client. Steve Bassett, the Martin Agency's senior vice president and group creative director, sums it up quite well: "It's hard to imagine another advertiser, where the product has been so consistent, the strategy has been so consistent, and the client-agency relationship has been so consistent for so long. It's hard to imagine another client or agency that could do this."

Sources: David Griner, "How Geico Became the Advertiser Its Ok to Love," *Adweek*, February 5, 2019, <https://www.adweek.com/agencies/how-geico-became-the-one-advertiser-its-ok-to-love/>; Kyle O'Brien, "Behind Geico's Nostalgia Play: Fans Vote for Their Favorite Campaign," *The Drum*, January 16, 2019, <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2019/01/16/behind-geico-s-nostalgia-play-fans-vote-their-favorite-campaign>; Tim Nudd, "Geico Is Airing Old Ads Going Back to 1997, and They're Still So Good," *Muse by Clio*, January 15, 2019, <https://musebyclio.io/advertising/geico-airing-old-ads-going-back-1997-and-theyre-still-so-good>.

One of the most important components of an integrated marketing communications program is the advertising message. While the fundamental role of an advertising message is to communicate information, it does much more. The commercials we watch on TV or hear on radio, the print ads we see in magazines and newspapers, and the videos, banner ads, and other forms of advertising on the Internet and social media sites are a source of entertainment, motivation, fascination, fantasy, and sometimes irritation as well as information. Ads and commercials appeal to, and often create or shape, consumers' problems, desires, and goals. From the marketer's perspective, the advertising message is a way to tell consumers how the product or service can solve a problem or help satisfy desires or achieve goals. Advertising can also be used to create images or associations and position a brand in the consumer's mind as well as transform the experience of buying and/or using a product or service. Many consumers who have never driven or even ridden in a BMW perceive it as "the ultimate ^{page 257} driving machine" (Exhibit 8–1). Many people purchase Nike athletic shoes and apparel because they have internalized the company's "Just Do It" advertising slogan and ethos.

XHIBIT 8–1

Excellent advertising helps create an image for BMW automobiles as "the ultimate driving machine."

Source: BMW of North America



JOY WAS BORN FOR THE LEFT LANE.

Get the steering column and flip on your left blinker — it's time to go. Join forces. Roll like lightning this dynamically refined model in the driver's seat of TwinPower Turbo technology. A 400 horsepower, 4.4 liter V8 that can cover 0-60 in six seconds flat. Couple that with Driving Dynamics Control, which allows you to adjust between comfort and sport modes, allowing faster gear changes and heightened steering responses, and you can coast on every left-lane journey looking as memorable as this ad. Explore more at bmwusa.com/5series.

JOY IS THE ALL-NEW BMW 5 SERIES.

BMW EfficientDynamics 

©2010 BMW Group of North America, LLC. The BMW name, model names and design are registered trademarks of BMW AG. All rights reserved. Corporate internet address: bmwusa.com. Design features. ©2010 BMW Group of North America, LLC. The BMW name, model names and design are registered trademarks of BMW AG. All rights reserved. Corporate internet address: bmwusa.com. Design features.

One need only watch an evening of commercials or peruse a few magazines to realize there are myriad ways to convey an advertising message. Underlying all of these messages, however, are a **creative strategy** that determines what the advertising message will say or communicate and **creative tactics** for how the message strategy will be executed. In this chapter, we focus on advertising creative strategy. We consider what is meant by creativity, particularly as it relates to advertising, and examine a well-known approach to creativity in advertising.

We also examine the creative strategy development process and various approaches to determining the *big idea* that will be used as the central theme of the advertising campaign and translated into attention-getting, distinctive, and memorable messages. Creative specialists are finding it more and more difficult to come up with big ideas that will break through the clutter and still satisfy the concerns of their risk-averse clients. Yet their clients are continually challenging them to find the creative message that will strike a responsive chord with their target audience.

Some of you may not be directly involved in the design and creation of ads; you may choose to work in another agency department or on the client side of the business. However, because creative strategy is often so crucial

to the success of the firm's IMC effort, everyone involved in the promotional process should understand the creative strategy and tactics that underlie the development of advertising campaigns and messages, as well as the creative options available to the advertiser. Also, individuals on the client side as well as agency people outside the creative department must work with the creative specialists in developing the advertising campaign, implementing it, and evaluating its effectiveness. Thus, marketing and product managers, account representatives, researchers, and media personnel must appreciate the creative process and develop a productive relationship with creative personnel.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVITY IN ADVERTISING

For many students, as well as many advertising and marketing practitioners, the most interesting aspect of advertising is the creative side. We have all at one time or another been intrigued by an ad and admired the creative insight that went into it. A great ad is a joy to behold and often an epic to page 258 create, as the cost of producing a TV commercial can exceed \$1 million. Many companies see this as money well spent. They realize that the manner in which the advertising message is developed and executed is often critical to the success of the promotional program, which in turn can influence the effectiveness of the entire marketing program. Major advertisers such as Procter & Gamble, Verizon, AT&T, Unilever, GEICO, FedEx, Apple, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and many other companies spend millions of dollars each year to develop advertising messages that will win the hearts and minds of consumers. They also spend hundreds of millions of dollars more to purchase media time and space to run these messages. While these companies sell excellent products and services, they realize creative advertising is also an important part of their marketing success. The importance of creativity is summarized very well by Stephan Vogel, the chief creative officer of Ogilvy & Mather Germany: "Nothing is more efficient than creative advertising. Creative advertising is more memorable, longer

lasting, works with less media spending, and builds a fan community ... faster.”¹

Good creative strategy and execution can often be central to determining the success of a product or service or reversing the fortunes of a struggling brand. For example, creative advertising was able to revive Procter & Gamble’s Old Spice brand and make it the market leader in the body wash category as well as one of the leading brands of other personal care products for men. Conversely, an advertising campaign that is poorly conceived or executed can be a liability. Many companies have solid marketing and promotional plans and spend substantial amounts of money on advertising, yet have difficulty coming up with a creative campaign that will differentiate them from their competitors.

It is important to understand that just because an ad or commercial is creative or popular does not mean it will increase sales or revive a declining brand. Many ads have won awards for creativity but failed to increase sales.² For example, Anheuser-Busch InBev terminated its 30-year relationship with the DDB agency, which had created a number of award-winning campaigns for Budweiser such as the “Whassup?” ads as well as many critically acclaimed commercials featuring the iconic Clydesdales.³ Sales of both Budweiser and Bud Light had declined over the past several years and AB InBev felt that a change was needed in creative strategy for the brands. The two major competitors in the U.S. beer industry, Anheuser-Busch InBev and MillerCoors, have both experienced major sales declines in the light beer category recently as craft beers become more popular. Both companies switched agencies several times as they struggled to find ad campaigns that will help move the sales needle for brands such as Bud Light, Miller Lite, and Coors Light.⁴ AB InBev has had success for Bud Light recently with the popular “Dilly Dilly” campaign discussed in Chapter 6. However, Coors Light has seen its sales decline over the past two years as it has struggled to find a campaign that strikes a responsive chord with consumers. For several years, the brand used the “Climb On” dual-gender campaign that encouraged men and women to celebrate the mountains they climb with a refreshing Coors Light. (Exhibit 8–2) The ads focused on the cold refreshment aspect of the brand and tried to make an emotional connection with light beer drinkers. However, the campaign did not improve

sales for the brand, and in early 2019, MillerCoors announced they were switching agencies and taking the advertising for the Coors Light in a new direction.⁵

XHIBIT 8–2

The “Climb On” campaign for Coors Light was designed to make an emotional connection with beer drinkers.

Source: 72 and Sunny and MillerCoors



Many advertising and marketing people have become ambivalent toward, and in some cases even critical of, advertising awards.⁶ They argue that agency creative people are often more concerned with creating ads that win awards than ones that sell their clients' products. Other advertising people believe awards are a good way to recognize creativity that often does result in effective advertising. As we saw in Chapter 7, the success of an ad campaign cannot always be judged in terms of sales. However, many advertising and marketing personnel, particularly those on the client side, believe advertising must ultimately lead the consumer to page 259 purchase the product or service. Finding a balance between creative advertising and effective advertising is difficult. To better understand this dilemma, we turn to the issue of creativity and its role in advertising.

ADVERTISING CREATIVITY

What Is Creativity?

Creativity is probably one of the most commonly used terms in advertising. Ads are often called creative. The people who develop ads and commercials are known as creative types. And advertising agencies develop reputations for their creativity. Perhaps so much attention is focused on the concept of creativity because many people view the specific challenge given to those who develop an advertising message as being creative. It is their job to turn all of the information regarding product features and benefits, marketing plans, consumer research, and communication objectives into a creative concept that will bring the advertising message to life. This raises the question: What is meant by *creativity* in advertising?

Different Perspectives on Advertising Creativity

LO 8-1

Perspectives on what constitutes creativity in advertising differ. At one extreme are people who argue that advertising is creative only if it sells the product. An advertising message's or campaign's impact on sales counts more than whether it is innovative or wins awards. At the other end of the continuum are those who judge the creativity of an ad in terms of its artistic or aesthetic value and originality. They contend creative ads can break through the competitive clutter, grab the consumer's attention, and have some impact.

As you might expect, perspectives on advertising creativity often depend on one's role. A study by Elizabeth Hirschman examined the perceptions of various individuals involved in the creation and production of TV commercials, including management types (brand managers and account executives) and creatives (art director, copywriter, commercial director, and producer).⁷ She found that product managers and account executives view ads as promotional tools whose primary purpose is to communicate

favorable impressions to the marketplace. They believe a commercial should be evaluated in terms of whether it fulfills the client's marketing and communicative objectives. The perspective of those on the creative side was much more self-serving, as Hirschman noted:

In direct contrast to this client orientation, the art director, copywriter, and commercial director viewed the advertisement as a communication vehicle for promoting their own aesthetic viewpoints and personal career objectives. Both the copywriter and art director made this point explicitly, noting that a desirable commercial from their standpoint was one which communicated their unique creative talents and thereby permitted them to obtain "better" jobs at an increased salary.⁸

In her interviews, Hirschman also found that brand managers were much more risk-averse and wanted a more conservative commercial than did the creative people, who wanted to maximize the impact of the message.

What constitutes creativity in advertising is probably somewhere between the two extremes. To break through the clutter and make an impression on the target audience, an ad often must be unique and entertaining. As noted in Chapter 5, research has shown that a major determinant of whether a commercial will be successful in changing brand preferences is its "likability," or the viewer's overall reaction.⁹ TV commercials, videos, and print ads that are well designed and executed and generate emotional responses can create positive feelings that are transferred to the product or service being advertised. Many creative people believe this type of advertising can come about only if they are given considerable latitude in developing advertising messages. But ads that are

 creative only for the sake of being creative often fail to communicate a relevant or meaningful message that will lead consumers to purchase the product or service.

Everyone involved in planning and developing an advertising campaign must understand the importance of balancing the "it's not creative unless it sells" perspective with the novelty/uniqueness and impact position. Marketing and brand managers or account executives must recognize that imposing too many sales- and marketing-oriented communications objectives

on the creative team can result in mediocre advertising, which is often ineffective in today's competitive, cluttered media environment. At the same time, the creative specialists must recognize that the goal of advertising is to assist in selling the product or service and good advertising must communicate in a manner that helps the client achieve this goal. Despite having different perspectives on creativity, both sides are likely to agree that creative advertising is important because it often garners more attention and can lead to deeper processing by consumers.¹⁰ Marketing professor Scott Koslow also notes that "creativity gives permission to consumers to be open to what appears to be new information about a brand and brings a fresh perspective—the ultimate "new-news."¹¹

Determinants of Creativity

Advertising creativity is the ability to generate fresh, unique, and appropriate or relevant ideas that can be used as solutions to communication problems. Those who study as well as work in advertising generally agree on these two central determinants of creativity, which are often viewed in terms of divergence and relevance.¹² **Divergence** refers to the extent to which an ad contains elements that are novel, different, or unusual. Robert Smith and his colleagues have identified five major factors that could account for the ways divergence can be achieved in advertising, which they describe as follows:¹³

1. *Originality.* Ads that contain elements that are rare, surprising, or move away from the obvious and commonplace.
2. *Flexibility.* Ads that contain different ideas or switch from one perspective to another.
3. *Elaboration.* Ads that contain unexpected details or finish and extend basic ideas so they become more intricate, complicated, or sophisticated.
4. *Synthesis.* Ads that combine, connect, or blend normally unrelated objects or ideas.
5. *Artistic value.* Ads that contain artistic verbal impressions or attractive shapes and colors.

There are other ways divergence can be achieved in developing creative advertising such as through the use of humor, fantasy, emotion, and imagery, which are discussed in Chapter 9 as the basis for advertising execution techniques. In some cases the focus of the creative strategy may be to achieve *fluency*, which refers to the ability to generate a variety of messages around a creative idea. For example, the chapter opener discusses how GEICO has developed myriad humorous TV commercials as well as print and online ads around the “Fifteen seconds can save you 15 percent or more on car insurance” theme.

The second major determinant of creativity is **relevance**, which reflects the degree to which the various elements of the ad are meaningful, useful, or valuable to the consumer.¹⁴ Smith et al. suggest that relevance can be achieved in two ways. *Ad-to-consumer relevance* refers to situations where the ad contains execution elements that are meaningful to page 261 consumers. For example, advertisers may use celebrities with whom consumers identify, music that they like, or visual images and other execution techniques that capture their interest and attention. *Brand-to-consumer relevance* refers to situations where the advertised brand of a product or service is of personal interest to consumers. Relevance or appropriateness can also be viewed in terms of the degree to which an advertisement provides information or an image that is pertinent to the brand. Ads for many products such as fashionable clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, and liquor often rely on visual images to deliver their message rather than providing specific product information. However, these images are important to consumers in forming impressions and attitudes toward these brands and deciding whether to select one brand over another.

An example of creative advertising that uses originality and artistic value aspects of divergence is a campaign developed by the Ogilvy Hong Kong agency for KFC’s Hot and Spicy fried chicken. The print and outdoor ads replaced fire with different images of spicy fried chicken, such as pictures of the Space Shuttle leaving the launching pad or a rocket-fired racecar (Exhibit 8–3). The images were a simple and effective metaphoric way to communicate a message regarding the intense flavor of the KFC product.

XHIBIT 8–3

This ad for KFC Hot and Spicy chicken uses divergence based on originality and artistic value.

Source: KFC Corporation



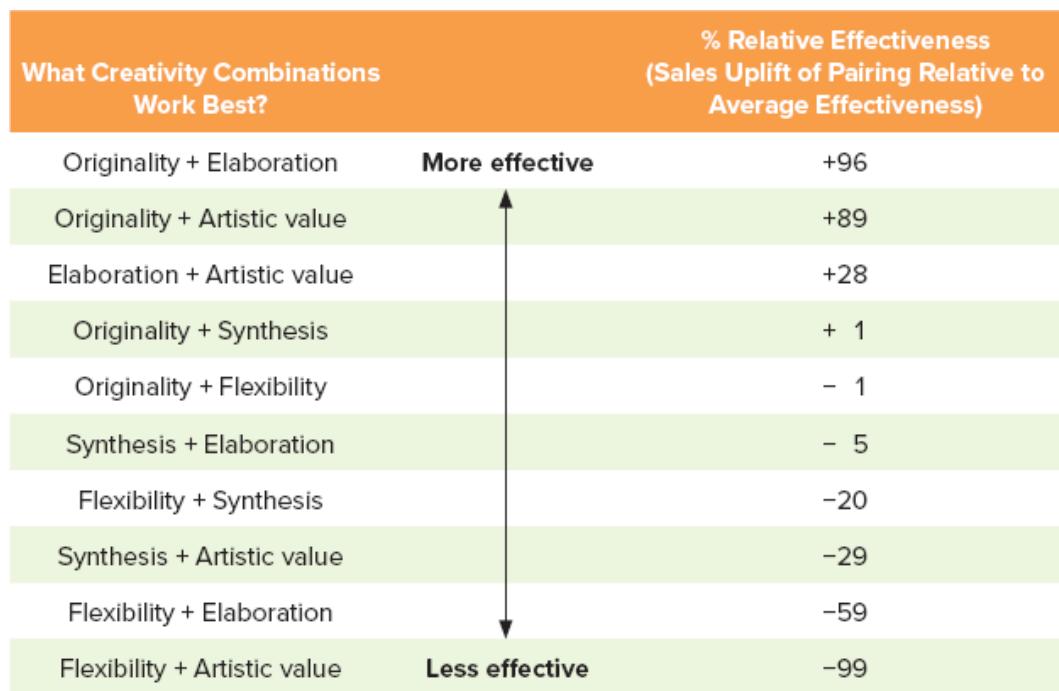
A number of studies have been conducted showing that advertising creativity impacts consumers' responses to advertising messages across various stages of the response hierarchy, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses.¹⁵ For example, advertising that is more novel has been shown to require consumer processing time, resulting in longer exposure and greater attention. Studies have also shown that creative ads draw more attention to the advertised brand, higher levels of recall, greater motivation to process the information, and deeper levels of processing.¹⁶ In addition to these cognitive outcomes, studies have also shown that creative advertising positively impacts emotional reactions including attitudes and purchase intentions.¹⁷

While most of the research on advertising creativity has been focused on measures such as attention, attitudes, and purchase intentions, German professors Reinartz and Saffert conducted an interesting study that related the five creativity factors to purchase behavior.¹⁸ They analyzed more than 400 German television ad campaigns across nine different consumer packaged-goods categories, examining the impact of creativity on actual sales figures for the products. Their findings showed that highly creative campaigns had a greater impact on sales than did campaigns that were low in creativity,

although the impact of creativity differed by product category. They also found big variations in the impact that different creative elements had on advertising effectiveness. Although all of the creativity factors had a positive impact, elaboration was the most powerful, followed by artistic value; synthesis was least important. However, an important finding from their study is that it was the combination of different creative elements that accounted for the most variation in sales. As can be seen in Figure 8–1, campaigns that combined originality with elaboration had the greatest impact, followed by those combining originality with artistic value.

FIGURE 8–1

Impact of Combinations of Creative Elements on Sales



Several studies have shown that divergence achieved through novelty/originality and/or elaboration is a particularly important component of advertising creativity. However, clients often favor relevance over divergence, as they want their agencies to create ads that communicate pertinent information such as specific product features and benefits. Smith and his colleagues suggest that clients should be less resistant to divergent approaches and note that there is a fundamental need for divergent thinkers in

the ad development process.¹⁹ Considering that most advertising messages are seen and/or heard in a very cluttered media environment where marketers must compete for the attention of consumers, it is important that attention be given to creating ads that are novel and divergent as well as relevant and meaningful. The findings from Reinartz and Saffert's research show that advertising creativity has a significant impact on sales and marketers need to pay close attention to creative elements of their ads.

page 262

PLANNING CREATIVE STRATEGY

The Creative Challenge

Those who work on the creative side of advertising often face a challenge. They must take all the research, creative briefs, strategy statements, communications objectives, and other input and transform them into an advertising message. Their job is to write copy, design layouts and illustrations, or produce commercials that effectively communicate the central theme on which the campaign is based. Rather than simply stating the features or benefits of a product or service, they must put the advertising message into a form that will engage the audience's interest and make the ads memorable.²⁰

The job of the creative team is challenging because every marketing situation is different and each campaign or advertisement may require a different creative approach. Numerous guidelines have been developed for creating effective advertising,²¹ but there is no magic formula. As copywriter Hank Sneider notes in his book *Advertising Pure and Simple*:

Rules lead to dull stereotyped advertising, and they stifle creativity, inspiration, initiative, and progress. The only hard and fast rule that I know of in advertising is that there are no rules. No formulas. No right way. Given the same problem, a dozen creative talents would solve it a dozen different ways. If there were a sure-fire formula for successful advertising, everyone would use it. Then there'd be no need for

creative people. We would simply program robots to create our ads and commercials and they'd sell loads of product—to other robots.²²

Taking Creative Risks

Many creative people follow proven formulas when creating ads because the formulas are safe. Clients often feel uncomfortable with advertising that is too different. Bill Tragos, former chair of TBWA, the advertising agency noted for its excellent creative work for Absolut vodka, Evian, and many other clients, says, “Very few clients realize that the reason that their work is so bad is that they are the ones who commandeered it and directed it to be that way. I think that at least 50 percent of an agency’s successful work resides in the client.”²³ Koslow and his colleagues have examined the influence of clients on the creativity of their agencies and found that the main reason some marketers receive better creative work than other is [page 263](#) that they are open to exploring new ideas. They also found that access to consumer research is important as it provides agencies with insights needed to produce highly creative works. They noted that highly creative campaigns do not just appear; planning and insightful research are important for agencies to develop new ideas.²⁴

Many who work on the creative side in agencies argue that it is important for clients to take some risks if they want breakthrough advertising that gets noticed. One agency that has been successful in getting its clients to take risks is Wieden+Kennedy, best known for its excellent creative work for companies such as Nike and ESPN over the years and more recently for clients such as Intuit/TurboTax (Exhibit 8–4). The agency’s founders believe a key element in its success has been a steadfast belief in taking risks when most agencies and their clients have been retrenching and becoming more conservative.²⁵ The agency can develop great advertising partly because clients like Nike are willing to take risks and go along with the agency’s priority system, which places the creative work first and the client-agency relationship second. The agency has even terminated relationships with large clients like Gallo when they interfered too much with the creative process.

XHIBIT 8–4

Nieden+Kennedy's belief in taking risks has led to creative advertising for clients such as Nike.

Source: NIKE Inc.



Not all companies or agencies agree that advertising has to be risky to be effective, however. Many marketing managers are more comfortable with advertising that simply communicates product or service features and benefits and gives the consumer a reason to buy. They see their ad campaigns as multimillion-dollar investments whose goal is to sell the product rather than finance the whims of their agency's creative staff. They argue that some creative people have lost sight of advertising's bottom line: Does it sell? There has been an ongoing debate over the artsy, image-oriented approach to advertising taken by many creative types versus the more hard-sell approach that many clients prefer.

The Perpetual Debate: Creative versus Hard-Sell Advertising

For decades there has been a perpetual battle over the role of advertising in the marketing process. The war for the soul of advertising has been endlessly fought between those who believe ads should move people and those who

just want to move product. On one side are the “suits” or “rationalists” who argue that advertising must sell the product or service, and that the more selling points or information in an ad, the better its chance of moving the consumer to purchase. On the other side are the “poets” or proponents of creativity who argue that advertising has to build an emotional bond between consumers and brands or companies that goes beyond product advertising. The debate over the effectiveness of creative or artsy advertising is not new. The rationalists have taken great delight in pointing to long lists of creative and award-winning campaigns over the years that have failed in the marketplace. Some note that even legendary advertising executive David Ogilvy, whom many consider the greatest copywriter of all time, once said: “If it doesn’t sell, it’s not creative.”²⁶

The “poets” argue that the most important thing good advertising does is make an emotional connection with consumers. They note that consumers do not want to be bombarded by ads; they want to be entertained and inspired. Indeed numerous studies have found that consumers look for ways to avoid TV commercials as well as online video and banners ads rather than watch or click through on them.²⁷ Thus, advertising has to be creative and enjoyable enough that consumers will not avoid it, yet still be able to help sell a product or service. It is the second part of this mandate that causes concern among the “suits.” They note that there are many examples of creative campaigns that moved consumers’ emotions but were terminated because they did not increase sales and/or market share and put accounts and reputations on the line. As noted earlier, a number of major advertisers have dismissed agencies that earned critical acclaim and awards for their creative work but failed to move the sales needle.²⁸

Most of the “poets” who support advertising that connects on an emotional level insist that selling product is as much a priority for them as it is for those on the rational side of the debate. One top agency executive notes that “we’ve proven that this kind of advertising works, otherwise we wouldn’t be in business, us or the agencies that practice the craft at this level.” However, Brent Bouchez, former executive creative director at the

Bozzell agency, argues the poets are losing sight of the fact that advertising is about selling things, and being really creative in advertising means solving problems and building interesting brands that people want to buy. He notes, “It’s time we stopped teaching young creative people to consider it a victory if the logo in an ad is hard to find, or if the product doesn’t appear in the commercial at all. It’s time we stopped using ‘break through the clutter’ as an excuse to say nothing about what it is we’re selling or why you should buy it.”²⁹

The issue of how much latitude creative people should be given and how much risk the client should be willing to take is open to considerable debate. However, clients and agency personnel generally agree that the ability to develop novel yet appropriate approaches to communicating with the customer makes the creative specialist valuable—and often hard to find.

Creative Personnel

The image of the creative advertising person perpetuated in novels, movies, and TV shows is often one of a freewheeling, freethinking, eccentric personality. The educational background of creative personnel is often in nonbusiness areas such as art, literature, music, humanities, or journalism, so their interests and perspectives tend to differ from those of managers with a business education or background. Creative people tend to be more abstract and less structured, organized, or conventional in their approach to a problem, relying on intuition more often than logic. For example, Arthur Kover conducted a study of advertising copywriters and found that they work without guidance from any formal theories of communication. However, those interviewed in his study did have similar informal, implicit theories that guide them in creating ads. These theories are based on finding ways to break through the ad clutter, open the consciousness of consumers, and connect with them to deliver the message.³⁰

It is important to note that creativity is not the exclusive domain of those who work in the creative department of ad agencies. Integrated marketing communications requires creative thinking from everyone involved in the planning and execution of IMC programs. Personnel from other parts of the

agency such as account services and planning, media planners, digital media specialists and researchers, as well as those on the client side, such as marketing and brand managers, must all seek creative solutions to challenges faced in planning, developing, and executing an IMC campaign. For example, awards are given each year for creativity in areas such as media planning, sales promotion, and digital and interactive media. In 2019, OMD, a division of the Omnicom Group, was named ADWEEK's Global Media Agency of the Year (Exhibit 8–5). The agency was honored for its creativity in media planning and strategy for clients such as McDonald's, PepsiCo, and Apple as well as for its development of a new technology platform and media planning process.³¹

XHIBIT 8–5

Awards for creativity are given for media planning as well as other components of an IMC program.

ource: Omnicom Group Inc.



It is also important that those working on the client side do not create a relationship with their agencies that inhibits the creative processes required to produce good advertising. Shelia Sasser and Scott Koslow point out that the most highly skilled creatives aspire to work with open-minded clients who are receptive to new ideas. They also note some of the best creative work developed by agencies does not get used because clients are resistant to taking creative risks, unless they are under pressure to perform.³² Advertising agencies as well as other IMC specialist organizations thrive on creativity because it is at the heart of what they do. Thus, agencies, as well as clients, must create an environment that fosters the development of creative thinking and creative advertising. Clients must also understand the differences between the perspectives of the creative personnel

and marketing and product managers. Differences between creative and managerial personalities and perspectives must be recognized and tolerated so that creative people can do their best work and all those involved in the advertising process can cooperate. While the client has ultimate approval of the advertising, the opinions of creative specialists must be respected when advertising ideas and content are evaluated. (Evaluation of the creatives' ideas and work is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.)

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

LO 8-2

Some advertising people say creativity in advertising is best viewed as a process, and creative success is most likely when some organized approach is followed. This does not mean there is an infallible blueprint to follow to create effective advertising; as we saw earlier, many advertising people reject attempts to standardize creativity or develop rules. However, most do follow a process when developing an ad.

One of the most popular approaches to creativity in advertising was developed by James Webb Young, a former creative vice president at the J. Walter Thompson agency. Young said, “The production of ideas is just as definite a process as the production of Fords; the production of ideas, too, runs an assembly line; in this production the mind follows an operative technique which can be learned and controlled; and that its effective use is just as much a matter of practice in the technique as in the effective use of any tool.”³³ Young’s model of the creative process contains five steps:

1. *Immersion.* Gathering raw material and information through background research and immersing yourself in the problem.
2. *Digestion.* Taking the information, working it over, and wrestling with it in the mind.
3. *Incubation.* Putting the problems out of your conscious mind and turning the information over to the subconscious to do the work.

- 4. *Illumination.*** The birth of an idea—the “Eureka! I have it!” phenomenon.
- 5. *Reality or verification.*** Studying the idea to see if it still looks good or solves the problem; then shaping the idea to practical usefulness.

Young’s process of creativity is similar to a four-step approach outlined much earlier by English sociologist Graham Wallas in his classic book *The Art of Thought*.³⁴

- 1. *Preparation.*** Gathering background information needed to solve the problem through research and study.
- 2. *Incubation.*** Getting away and letting ideas develop.
- 3. *Illumination.*** Seeing the light or solution.
- 4. *Verification.*** Refining and polishing the idea and seeing if it is an appropriate solution.

Models of the creative process are valuable to those working in the creative area of advertising, since they offer an organized way to approach an advertising problem. Preparation or gathering of background information is the first step in the creative process. As we saw in earlier chapters, the advertiser and agency start by developing a thorough understanding of the product or service, the target market, and the competition. They also focus on the role of advertising and other IMC tools in the marketing and promotional program.

These models do not say much about how this information will be synthesized and used by the creative specialist because this part of the process is unique to the individual. In many ways, it’s what sets apart the great creative minds and strategists in advertising. However, many agencies are now using a process called *account planning* to gather information and help creative specialists as they go through the creative process of developing advertising.

Account Planning

To facilitate the creative process, many agencies now use **account planning**, which is a process that involves conducting research and gathering all relevant information about a client's product or service, brand, and consumers in the target audience. Account planning began in Great Britain during the 1960s and 70s and is now used by many agencies throughout the world.

Jon Steel, a former vice president and director of account planning at Goodby, Silverstein & Partners's San Francisco office, has written an excellent book on the process titled *Truth, Lies & Advertising: The Art of Account Planning*.³⁵ He notes that the account planner's job is to provide the key decision makers with all the information they require to make an intelligent decision. According to Steel, "Planners may have to work very hard to influence the way that the advertising turns out, carefully laying out a strategic foundation with the client, handing over tidbits of information to creative people when, in their judgment, that information will have the greatest impact, giving feedback on ideas, and hopefully adding some ideas of their own."

A recent study of account planners found that they often play a very complex role in the creative development process. They search for insights using various mechanisms, such as conducting consumer research; tapping into their personal domain knowledge, including experiences and observations; and challenging conventions, such as the nature of consumer decision making and consumers' relationships with a brand. They also borrow from other sources by studying best practices and advertising problem approaches used by other brands and extend the brand narrative by having a clear understanding of the brand essence or DNA and the role it plays in future advertising executions.³⁶

Account planning plays an important role during creative strategy development by driving the process from the customers' point of view. Planners will work with the client as well as other agency personnel, such as the creative team and media specialists. They discuss how the knowledge and information they have gathered can be used in the development of the creative strategy as well as other aspects of the advertising campaign. Account planners are usually responsible for all the research (both qualitative and quantitative) conducted during the creative strategy

development process. In the following section we examine how various types of research and information can provide input to the creative process of advertising. This information can be gathered by account planners or others whose job it is to provide input to the process.

Inputs to the Creative Process: Preparation, Incubation, Illumination

Background Research Only the most foolish creative person or team would approach an assignment without first learning as much as possible about the client's product or service, the target market, the competition, and any other relevant background information. The creative specialist should also be knowledgeable about general trends, conditions, and developments in the marketplace, as well as research on specific advertising approaches or techniques that might be effective. The creative specialist can acquire background information in numerous ways. Some informal fact-finding techniques have been noted by Sandra Moriarty:

- Reading anything related to the product or market—books, trade publications, general interest articles, research reports, and the like.
- Asking everyone involved with the product for information—designers, engineers, salespeople, and consumers.
- Listening to what people are talking about. Visits to stores, malls, restaurants, and even the agency cafeteria can be informative. Listening to the client can be particularly valuable, since he or she often knows the product and market best.
- Using the product or service and becoming familiar with it. The more you use a product, the more you know and can say about it.
- Working in and learning about the client's business to understand better the people you're trying to reach.³⁷

To assist in the preparation, incubation, and illumination stages, many agencies provide creative people with both general and product-specific

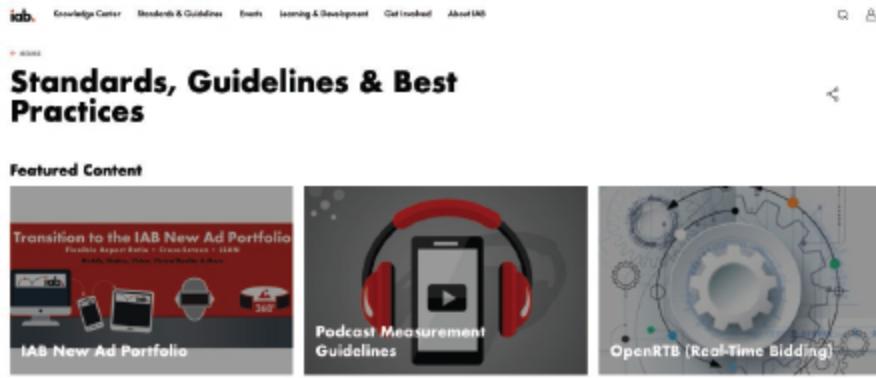
preplanning input. **General preplanning input** can include books, periodicals, trade publications, websites, scholarly journals, pictures, and clipping services, which gather and organize magazine, newspaper, and online articles on the product or service, the market, and the competition, including competitors' ads. This input can also come from research studies conducted by the client, the agency, the media, or other sources.

Another useful general preplanning input concerns trends, developments, and happenings in the marketplace. Information is available from a variety of sources, including local, state, and federal governments, secondary research suppliers, and various industry trade associations, as well as advertising and media organizations. For example, advertising industry groups like the American Advertising Federation (AAF), the 4As (formerly called the American Association of Advertising Agencies), and media organizations like the Video Advertising Bureau, Radio Advertising Bureau, and the Association of Magazine Media publish research reports and newsletters that provide information on market trends and developments and how they might affect consumers. An industry trade group that has become very important with the growth of digital advertising is the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB). Its membership comprises more than 650 leading media and technology companies that are responsible for selling, delivering, and optimizing digital advertising or marketing campaigns. The trade group also develops industry standards for online advertising, conducts research, and promotes best practices for digital advertising (Exhibit 8–6). Those involved in developing creative strategy can also gather relevant and timely information by reading publications like *Adweek*, *Advertising Age*, and *Marketing News*. Many individuals who work in creative departments read *Communication Arts* magazine, which covers topics such as design, advertising, illustration, photography, interactive media, and typography.

XHIBIT 8–6

The Interactive Advertising Bureau is an excellent source of information for marketers using online advertising.

Source: IAB



Product- or Service-Specific Research In addition to getting general background research and preplanning input, creative people receive **product- or service-specific preplanning input**. This information generally comes in the form of specific studies conducted on the product or service, the target audience, or a combination of the two. Types of product-specific preplanning input include quantitative and qualitative consumer research such as demographic and psychographic profiles of users of a product, service or brand; focus groups and/or in-depth interviews; and perceptual mapping and positioning studies.

Many product- or service-specific studies helpful to the creative team are conducted by the client or the agency. Many of these studies use a variation of an approach called **problem detection** for finding ideas around which creative strategies could be based.³⁸ This research technique involves asking consumers familiar with a product (or service) to generate an exhaustive list of things that bother them or problems they encounter when using it and how often they arise. The consumers rate these problems in order of importance and evaluate various brands in terms of their association with each problem. A problem detection study can provide valuable input for product improvements, reformulations, or new products. It can also give the creative people ideas regarding attributes or features to emphasize and guidelines for positioning new or existing brands.

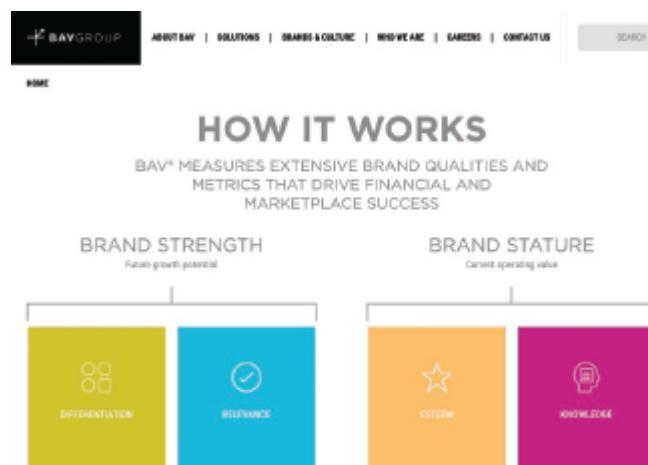
A number of advertising agencies conduct branding research to help better identify clients' customers and how they connect to their brands. For example, the Y&R Group developed a proprietary tool called the BrandAsset Valuator (BAVTM) for building and managing a brand. The model uses four pillars: energized differentiation, relevance, esteem, and

knowledge. These pillars identify cores issues for the brand and evaluate current and future financial performance and potential (Exhibit 8–7). The agency formed a separate corporate research group to handle the BAV, which is now the world's largest database of brand perceptions; it [page 268](#) contains ratings for nearly 60,000 brands in 52 countries on more than 70 dimensions.

XHIBIT 8–7

BrandAsset Valuator is used to manage brands.

ource: BAV Group, Inc.



Nearly all of the major agencies are conducting branding research and/or developing models or systems that they can use to gain better insight into consumers and develop more effective campaigns for their clients. The importance of building and maintaining strong brands is likely to become even greater in the future. This will put even more pressure on agencies to develop new and better tools and techniques that can be used to guide their clients' advertising campaigns.

Qualitative Research Input Many agencies, particularly larger ones with strong research departments, have their own research programs and specific techniques they use to assist in the development of creative strategy and provide input to the creative process. In addition to the various quantitative research studies, qualitative research techniques such as in-depth interviews or focus groups can provide the creative team with valuable insight at the early stages of the creative process. **Focus groups** are a

research method whereby consumers (usually 10 to 12 people) from the target market are led through a discussion regarding a particular topic. Focus groups give insight as to why and how consumers use a product or service, what is important to them in choosing a particular brand, what they like and don't like about various products or services, and any special needs they might have that aren't being satisfied. A focus group session might also include a discussion of types of ad appeals to use or evaluation of the advertising of various companies.

Focus group interviews bring the creative people and others involved in creative strategy development into contact with the customers. Listening to a focus group gives copywriters, art directors, and other creative specialists a better sense of who the target audience is, what the audience is like, and whom the creatives need to write, design, or direct to in creating an advertising message. Focus groups can also be used to evaluate the viability of different creative approaches under consideration and suggest the best direction to pursue.³⁹ Many marketers are now conducting focus groups online using groups of consumers who are part of an online community, as well as Internet research panels of 80 to 100 consumers organized by research firms such as Greenfield Online and Invoke Solutions. Concepts can be presented to these panels using instant-message and chat room styles, and detailed feedback can be gathered and processed in a few hours versus several weeks that are needed to get comparable results from traditional focus groups.⁴⁰ Exhibit 8–8 shows how Invoke promotes the value of its online focus groups by showing how they were used by Orbitz and its agency, BBDO, in developing the “Take Vacation Back” ad campaign, which won a David Ogilvy Award from the Advertising Research Foundation.

XHIBIT 8–8

Marketers often use online focus group services to pretest ads.

ource: *Invoke*



"The team — Orbitz, BBDO and Invoke — all sat in the room together monitoring the live feedback, which was translated into improvement ideas on-the-spot. This close collaboration made it possible for the creative team to cycle more ideas through and develop more relevant creative than previously."

— Stacey Symonds, Sr. Director of Consumer Insights at Orbitz

page 269

Agency creative personnel have long expressed concern over the idea of having their ideas and work critiqued by consumers. Many creatives insist that good ideas don't need to be tested and that testing can often weaken a creative execution. Moreover, they argue that it interferes with the creative process and limits their ability to develop innovative and breakthrough advertising messages.⁴¹ Those critical of focus groups note that highly successful campaigns such as the one featuring the Aflac duck would never have made it on the air if the company had heeded the responses of focus group participants. While many participants found the duck funny, others found it insulting. The duck survived only after executives from the Kaplan Thaler Group convinced the company to allow the Ipsos-ASI research firm to test the ad along with four others it created and four spots from other agencies competing for the account.⁴² The recall score of the spot featuring the duck was the highest score Ipsos-ASI had seen in the insurance category at the time. Kaplan Thaler won the account, and the award-winning campaign featuring the duck has been running for the past 20 years (Exhibit 8–9). It also has helped raise awareness of Aflac and led to significant increases in sales for the supplemental insurance provider.

XHIBIT 8–9

The Aflac duck did not test well in focus groups but has been the basis for a very successful campaign.

source: Aflac Incorporated



While some creative personnel may be opposed to having their ideas scrutinized in a focus group, there are, of course, numerous examples of situations where input from focus groups has proved to be very valuable and insightful. Creative personnel must recognize that companies want to ensure that the ads that are being developed for their brands have the best possible chance of evoking favorable reactions from consumers and encouraging them to purchase their product and/or services. Joe Plummer, the former chief research officer of the Advertising Research Foundation, explains their position pretty well by noting that "Any creative director worth his salt who really thinks a client is going to lay down \$100 million without a high level

of confidence of success is naïve.”⁴³ However, Digital and Social Media Perspective 8–1 discusses how pretesting of advertising messages is changing as a result of the digital revolution and marketers’ desire to develop more message content and move more quickly.

Another form of qualitative input that has become popular among advertising agencies is **ethnographic research**, which involves observing consumers in their natural environment.⁴⁴ This form of research has its roots in the social science discipline of anthropology, where it has long been used to gather information on human societies and cultures. It has been adapted for use in marketing by sending anthropologists or trained researchers into the field to study and observe consumers in their homes, at work, or at play. For example, the Ogilvy & Mather agency has a research unit which moves into consumers’ homes, follows consumers in their leisure pursuits, or trails them as they move through their daily lives. For Ogilvy client MillerCoors, Discovery staffers traveled around the country filming Miller drinkers, as well as those drinking competitive brands. They used the tapes to study group dynamics and how the dynamics changed while people were drinking. The agency used the insights gained from the study to help develop a new advertising campaign for Miller Lite beer.

Many marketing and agency researchers prefer ethnographic research over the use of focus groups, as the latter technique has a number of limitations. Strong personalities can often wield undue influence in focus groups, and participants often will not admit, or may not even recognize, their behavior patterns and motivations. However, ethnographic studies can cost more to conduct and are more difficult to administer.

page 270

**Digital and Social Media
Perspective 8–1 >>>**

The Need for Pretesting of Online Advertising

Major marketers often spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to develop and test creative ideas and concepts that are turned into advertisements for their companies and/or brands, and for good reason. Many of the commercials and videos you see on television or online for big brands cost an average of \$500,000 just to produce, while some can cost more than \$1 million when all of the preproduction, production, and postproduction costs are added up. And once a commercial, video, or print ad is produced, marketers may spend millions more in traditional and online media to deliver the ads to consumers. In addition, marketers also have to consider opportunity costs, which, from an advertising perspective, means wondering whether another creative approach might have worked better than the one chosen.

Traditionally, many marketers have used some form of copy or A/B testing to compare the effectiveness of different creative concepts or advertising messages prior to making a decision on which one to use. Various forms of copy testing are often used, and there are many examples of how marketers have relied on the test results to avoid costly mistakes and choose the best alternative. Today, most copy testing methods involve showing ads online to a panel of consumers and measuring their reactions using measures such as recall, likability, persuasiveness, and purchase intentions. Ads can be tested at various stages of production, starting with layouts of print messages and ad copy to early versions of TV commercial and videos shown in rough form such as animatics, all the way through to a finished product such as a commercial or video. Pretesting results often are analyzed by comparing them to norms of previous ads used by the marketer, industry and category averages, or other ads currently being used by advertisers.

Many companies still routinely test their advertising messages, particularly TV commercials and videos, that will be used in campaigns backed by large media budgets. However, copy testing, like so many other areas of integrated marketing communication, is changing as a result of the digital revolution. Marketers are spending more money to run their ads online than they are in traditional media, and the majority of messages are delivered to consumers on the smaller screens of mobile devices. However, people have more power than ever to decide which online display ad or video they want to read or watch, and most consumers choose to ignore nearly all of them. Web surfers click on less than 2 percent of online banner ads that appear on their computer and/or mobile devices and choose the skip option for 95 percent of pre-roll video ads. Given these factors, one would think that pretesting would be used by marketers to increase the likelihood that consumers will notice and attend to their digital ads and that they are communicating the intended message. However, the amount of money marketers invest to pretest digital ads in no way corresponds to the proportion of the media budgets allocated to online and mobile ads.

There are a number of reasons marketers are less likely to pretest their digital ads versus a TV commercial or print message. First, many of the large agencies that handle the advertising for major brands have traditionally focused their attention on high-profile TV commercials or video rather than online display ads or the small format

images that appear on social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter. Creatives in many advertising agencies are accustomed to developing a limited number of assets for a campaign, such as a few TV commercials, print ads, radio spots, and out-of-home ads such as billboards or transit ads. However, in the digital world, the creative team may be asked to come up with multiple iterations of an ad in different sizes and formats that can be inserted programmatically into myriad environments. Creatives also do not always appreciate the constraints of digital advertising such as the context in which the message is delivered and/or consumed. A digital ad may be seen on devices with varying screen sizes, ranging from the large monitors on a desktop or laptop computer to the small screen of a mobile device such as a smartphone.

Another reason for the lack of pretesting is the challenges associated with digital advertising, such as the rapid turnaround time often needed for digital campaigns. Marketers want to move more quickly online, which makes it difficult to spend the time required by traditional pretesting methods to test digital ads. Many digital campaigns utilize a number of messages in a variety of formats, including banner ads, pop-ups, interstitials, text video, and pre-roll videos. Thus, marketers do not have the time nor the budget to test all of the digital ads they develop and often launch them without any pretesting, crossing their fingers and hoping for the best.

As marketers spend more of their advertising budgets online, they are recognizing the importance of pretesting digital ads, and many are devoting more resources to do so. Many are turning to research companies such as those that specialize in pretesting of digital advertising. Leading market research companies such as Ace Metrix, Ipsos, and Millward Brown are adapting their testing methods and developing ways to produce commercials, video, and other forms of online advertising more quickly, as well as incorporating new types of measures such as biometrics and online behavioral data. For example, MetrixLab is a research firm whose services include digital ad copy testing for online videos, social media ads, and mobile advertising. The company tests digital creative work ranging from initial concepts to near-complete ads across all formats, including online videos, social media ads, and mobile advertising. Its pretesting method includes testing ads in a natural environment using unforced exposure to measure an ad's ability to breakthrough online clutter and determine whether the message is communicated and retained in memory.

Data-driven programmatic advertising has become the dominant form of digital advertising and is here to stay. It offers marketers the opportunity to target their online advertising message more effectively. However, anyone who has ignored or closed a pop-up or banner ad or hit the skip button to avoid an online pre-roll message knows that consumers are being bombarded with irrelevant messages. Perhaps pretesting can help them deliver more relevant ads to the right people at the right time.

Sources: Mike Kaput, "What You Need to Know about AI and the Future of Advertising," Marketing Artificial Intelligence Institute, September 25, 2018, <https://www.marketingaiinstitute.com/blog/ai-in-advertising-what-you-need-to-know>; E. J. Schultz, "Fired Up," *Advertising Age*, September 14, 2015, pp. 21–23; Molly Soat, "The Case for Earlier Insights," *Marketing News*, July 2015, pp. 16–17.

Generally, creative people are open to any research or information that will help them understand the client's target market better and assist in generating creative ideas. The advertising industry is recognizing the importance of using research to guide the creative process. The Advertising Research Foundation initiated the David Ogilvy Awards, named after the advertising legend who founded Ogilvy & Mather. These awards are presented to teams of advertising agencies, client companies, and research companies in recognition of research that has been used successfully to determine the strategy and effectiveness of ad campaigns.

The Grand Ogilvy Award Winner in 2018 was a campaign developed by the Leo Burnett agency for Procter & Gamble's Mr. Clean household cleaning product. The 60-year-old brand was losing its leadership position in the cleaning category, and the iconic Mr. Clean character was showing his age. The agency conducted both quantitative and qualitative research, including surveys of more than 500 consumers as well as online and in-home discussion with more than 60 people who were responsible for purchasing cleaning products and cleaning the house. The results of the research studies showed that the Mr. Clean brand lacked distinctiveness and was seen as generic, old-fashioned, and unworthy of a premium price. However, the agency also analyzed brand tracking studies and sales data and found that correlations between the spikes in publicity involving the brand and sales. For example, a Facebook video of his muscles bouncing to the Mr. Clean jingle set records on the social media site for engagement. A particularly interesting finding was that the Mr. Clean character has a page 271 surprising but enduring sex appeal, and there was still a rather bizarre attraction to him. Secondary research also revealed another important insight: Although 61 percent of women still assume sole responsibility for cleaning, 37 percent of men now share the task. Moreover, sharing household chores was one of the three highest-ranking issue associated with a successful marriage, third only to fidelity and good sex.

Armed with the consumer insights, Leo Burnett came up with the creative idea to change perceptions of cleaning chores from dreaded to dreamy through the portrayal of the Mr. Clean character. The agency created a commercial called "Cleaner of Your Dreams" that opens with a woman in the kitchen dreading cleaning chores when suddenly Mr. Clean saunters onto the

scene and begins cleaning the home as he dances suggestively (Exhibit 8-10). At the end of the commercial, it is revealed that Mr. Clean is just a fantasy and it is her husband who has been doing the cleaning chores. The spot ends with a scene showing the tagline “You gotta love a man who cleans” and the woman embracing her husband in a heap of passion. The spot first aired during the Super Bowl and was rated one of the five best commercials during the big game. It also was run online and generated a tremendous page 272 amount of earned media and was covered by a variety of media outlets, including news shows; daytime and late night talk shows; and articles in *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Huffington Post*, and *The New York Times*. Sales of Mr. Clean products included in the spot, Liquid Cleaners and Magic Eraser, also increased after the ad was run.⁴⁵

XHIBIT 8-10

The Cleaner of Your Dreams campaign for Mr. Clean won the Grand Ogilvy Award for an MC campaign based on consumer research.

Source: Procter & Gamble



Inputs to the Creative Process: Verification, Revision

The verification and revision stage of the creative process evaluates ideas generated during the illumination stage, rejects inappropriate ones, refines and polishes those that remain, and gives them final expression. Techniques

used at this stage include directed focus groups to evaluate creative concepts, ideas, or themes; message communication studies; portfolio tests; and evaluation measures such as viewer reaction profiles.

At this stage of the creative process, members of the target audience may be asked to evaluate rough creative layouts and to indicate what meaning they get from the ad, what they think of its execution, or how they react to a slogan or theme. The creative team can gain insight into how a TV commercial might communicate its message by having members of the target market evaluate the ad in storyboard form. A **Storyboard** is a series of drawings used to present the visual plan or layout of a proposed commercial. It contains a series of sketches of key frames or scenes along with the copy or audio portion for each scene (see Exhibit 8–11).

XHIBIT 8–11

Marketers can gain insight into consumers' reactions to a commercial by showing them a storyboard or an animatic.

Source: Courtesy of The Lambesis Agency

TV/Video: Water Brand Spec Creative "Splash of Life"



VIDEO: Close up of a drum being played and splashed with water.
AUDIO: Upbeat, cinematic music throughout.



VIDEO: Close up of a trombone splashing through water against a seamless background.



VIDEO: Close up of a bottle of branded water being opened, surrounded by clear splashing water.



VIDEO: A trumpet player marches and dances through the splashing water and enthusiastically raises his branded water bottle.



VIDEO: Pull back to reveal that following behind him are more musicians playing and splashing through the water.



VIDEO: Close up of a beautiful female dancer carrying an umbrella and drinking branded water.



VIDEO: Pull back to reveal a ballerina suddenly dancing across the scene while people join the march and splash through the water.



VIDEO: Close up of a branded water bottle thrust into the air.



VIDEO: Now a policeman joins the parade of dancers splashing through the water.



VIDEO: Close up of the drummer drinking branded water.



VIDEO: Pull back to see a whole range of interesting people dancing through the splashing water to the music and celebrating the exhilarating feeling.



VIDEO: down
A bottle of branded water enters frame and splashes filling frame with refreshing water.

AUDIO: Music fades out.

Testing a commercial in storyboard form can be difficult because storyboards are too abstract for many consumers to understand. To make the creative layout more realistic and easier to evaluate, the agency may produce an **animatic**, a videotape of the storyboard along with an audio soundtrack. Storyboards and animatics are useful for research purposes as page 273 well as for presenting the creative idea to other agency personnel or to the client for discussion and approval.

At this stage of the process, the creative team is attempting to find the best creative approach or execution style before moving ahead with the campaign themes and going into actual production of the ad. The verification/revision process may include more formal, extensive pretesting

of the ad before a final decision is made. Pretesting and related procedures are examined in detail in Chapter 18.

CREATIVE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Advertising Campaigns

LO 8-3

Most ads are part of a series of messages that make up an IMC or **advertising campaign**, which is a set of interrelated and coordinated marketing communications activities that center on a single theme or idea that appears in different media across a specified time period. Determining the unifying theme around which the campaign will be built is a critical part of the creative process, as it sets the tone for the individual ads and other forms of marketing communications that will be used. A **campaign theme** should be a strong idea, as it is the central message that will be communicated in all the advertising and other promotional activities. The theme for the advertising campaign is usually expressed through a **slogan (tagline)** that reduces the key idea into a few words or a brief statement. The advertising slogan should serve as a summation line that succinctly expresses the company or brand's positioning, as well as the message it is trying to deliver to the target audience.⁴⁶ The slogan usually appears in every advertisement and is often used in other forms of marketing communications to serve as a reminder of, and to reinforce, the marketer's branding message. Kohli, Leuthesser, and Suri note that slogans are a key element of a brand's identity as they can enhance a brand's image, aid in its recognition and recall, and help differentiate it in the minds of consumers, thus contributing to brand equity.⁴⁷ They note that while a brand name and/or logo cannot say much in a literal sense, slogans can bridge this gap and say something about the image of the product or service. They can also serve as a "hook" or "handle" that helps capture the meaning of a brand and help relay what makes it special.⁴⁸

Digital marketing manager Kumail Hemani has developed guidelines for creating effective slogans, which include recognizing that a slogan is a shadow for a brand as it is used everywhere along with it and thus has a key role in communicating the essence of a brand. He also notes that slogans should be simple, catchy, and predictable as well as connect with the consumer on an emotional level. Other characteristics of good slogans/taglines that he recommends are shown in Exhibit 8–12.

XHIBIT 8–12

Guidelines for advertising slogans.

Source: Kumail Hemani



While some marketers change their campaign themes often, a successful campaign theme may last for decades. Philip Morris has been using the “Marlboro country” campaign for over 50 years, General Mills has positioned Wheaties cereal as the “Breakfast of Champions” since 1933, and BMW has used “the ultimate driving machine” theme since 1974. Even though BMW has changed agencies several times over the past four decades,

the classic tagline has been retained. Figure 8–2 lists some of the advertising slogans currently being used by marketers that are recognized as being very effective because they are memorable and communicate a unique message for the company or brand.

FIGURE 8–2

Examples of Effective Advertising Slogans

Company or Brand	Slogan
1. Nike	Just do it.
2. Home Depot	More saving. More doing.
3. Gillette	The Best a Man Can Get
4. McDonald's	I'm Lovin' It!
5. Chipotle	Food With Integrity
6. Walmart	Save Money. Live Better.
7. Bounty	The Quicker Picker-Upper
8. Gatorade	Win From Within
9. Under Armour	Protect This House. I Will.
10. Dunkin	America Runs on Dunkin

Marketers and their agencies often develop campaign themes with the intention of using them for many years. Unfortunately, many last only a short time, usually because they are ineffective and do not communicate a distinct identity for a company or brands. While many marketers and page 274 their agencies spend a great deal of time and effort developing slogans, some experts argue that taglines are becoming less important, because many companies and brands do not use them. Brand-building consultant Denise Yohn notes that admired brands such as Starbucks, Whole Foods, and Lululemon do not use slogans, and Apple has not used its famous

“Think different” tagline for many years.⁴⁹ Yohn maintains that advertisers relied on slogans more in the past as a way to summarize lengthy ad copy with a memorable catchphrase. However, many marketers are relying more on targeted digital advertising and word of mouth and running fewer big campaigns that require taglines. She also points out that taglines work best when a brand’s differentiation is derived from a product or service attribute. However, today many brands try to distinguish themselves by connecting with consumers’ values and personalities, which can be difficult to convey through a tagline.

Like any other area of the marketing and promotional process, the creative aspect of advertising and the development of the campaign theme is guided by specific goals and objectives. A creative strategy that focuses on what must be communicated will guide the selection of the campaign theme and the development of all messages used in the ad campaign. The creative strategy is based on several factors, including identification of the target audience; the basic problem, issue, or opportunity the advertising must address; the major selling idea or key benefit the message needs to communicate; and any supportive information that needs to be included in the ad. Once these factors are determined, a creative strategy statement should describe the message appeal and execution style that will be used. Many ad agencies outline these elements in a document known as the copy or creative platform.

Creative Brief

The **creative brief** is a document that specifies the key elements of the creative strategy for an advertising campaign and serves as the basis for communication between the client and the advertising agency. Some agencies and/or companies have a different name for this document, such as *creative platform* or *work plan*, *creative blueprint*, or *creative contract*. Just as there are different names for the creative brief, there are variations in the outline and format used and in the level of detail included. Recently, the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), the trade association that represents more than 600 of the leading advertisers in the United States, published a report titled “Better Creative Briefs” that provides guidelines for developing

effective briefs.⁵⁰ The “must have elements” of a creative brief are shown in Figure 8–3.

FIGURE 8–3

Key Elements of a Creative Brief

1. Basic problem or issue the communication must address or solve
2. Communication objectives
3. Target audience
4. Insights to drive creative work
5. Key benefits or major selling idea to communicate
6. Reason to believe/supporting information
7. Tone and manner/brand personality
8. Deliverables (what is needed and when)
9. Measures of success (should be tied back to objectives)

The ANA report notes that the traditional way of developing the creative brief has been a two-step process. The client first creates the *assignment brief* (sometimes called a *business* or *marketing brief*) that includes what the client wants the agency to do, as well as what the agency needs to know to succeed. The second step is the development of the *creative brief* by the agency, which is usually done by the account planner and/or representative assigned to the account. Those from the agency team or group assigned to the account—including creative personnel as well as representatives from digital, media, and research departments—may have input. The advertising and/or marketing and brand managers from the client side ultimately approve the creative brief, and it then becomes the roadmap to guide the creative process.

The ANA notes that some clients and agencies are moving to one collaborative brief rather than a two-step process, where the client takes the

lead and develops the brief collaboratively with a representative from the agency, such as the account planner or representative. The agency can then rework and refine the brief and work with the client to ensure alignment on the changes.⁵¹

Several components of the creative brief were discussed in previous chapters. For example, Chapter 7 examined the DAGMAR model and showed how the setting of advertising objectives requires specifying a well-defined target audience and developing a communication task statement that spells out what message must be communicated to this audience. Determining what problem the product or service will solve or what issue must be addressed in the ad helps in establishing communication objectives for the campaign to accomplish. Two critical components of the brief are the development of the major selling idea and creative strategy development. These two steps are often the responsibility of the creative team or specialist and form the basis of the advertising campaign theme.

Many creative briefs also include supporting information and requirements (brand identifications, disclaimers, and the like) that should appear in any advertising message. This information may be important in ensuring uniformity across various executions of the ads used in a campaign or in meeting any legal requirements. Exhibits 8–13A and B show an example of a creative brief used by the Lambesis agency to create a print campaign for Tacori and an ad that was created based on the page 276 brief. As noted in the brief, the primary objective of the advertising for Tacori is to establish the Tacori collection as a more accessible fashion jewelry line.

XHIBIT 8–13A

Creative brief for Tacori jewelry.

Source: Lambesis Agency

Lambesis

2800 Roosevelt Street, Gardena, California, 90248 Main 700.547.2333 Fax 700.547.2301 lambesis.com

Creative Brief

Client: Tacori

Assignment

Develop new print concepts for the launch of the 18K925 line by Tacori

Objectives

- Support the long-term goal of growing 18K925 to become 50% of Tacori's business by clearly establishing the new Tacori collection as a more accessible, fashion jewelry line

Target

- Women, Age 25-49, HHI \$75K+, Urban dwellers, Brand driven consumers, in market for fashion jewelry for self or as a gift for someone special.
- What do they currently think?*
I know and love Tacori as a high-end jewelry brand that's gifted for special occasions (=expressions of love)
- What do we want them to think?*
Tacori is also a brand with bold, statement-making, accessible designs that still have that distinctly artisanal Tacori touch (=expressions of style)

Product positioning

Tacori's 18K925 designer jewelry line is the ultimate expression of passion, with modern, accessible style and lasting quality.

Reasons to believe

- Accessible price points between \$400 - \$3000
- Bold, fun, wearable designs fuse colorful gemstones and gold+silver metals, with classic Tacori design cues
- Distinct Tacori brand name and image

Tonality

Modern meets heirloom, bold, aspirational, unique

Creative considerations

- Develop concepts within the Iconic Passion campaign
- Creative requirements:
 - Demonstrate aspirational, yet attainable luxury
 - Accommodate a variety of product imagery including necklaces, bracelets and/or rings to showcase the range of jewelry
 - Use the Tacori logo
- Other considerations that need be addressed:
 - Concepts must be able to work for print and horizontal OOH and B&W newspaper
 - Concepts need to ensure that retailer tags added to the bottom of the ad are legible

XHIBIT 8-13B

Print ad created based on creative brief to establish Tacori as an accessible fashion jewelry line.

Source: Tacori



Obtaining information regarding customers, the product or service, and the market that can be used in developing the creative brief is an important part of the creative planning process. While it is important that this basic information is provided to agency creatives, this may not always occur due to breakdowns in communication on the client as well as the agency side or between the two.

John Sutherland and colleagues conducted an extensive survey of agency creative directors, copywriters, and art directors on the specific types of marketing information that is made available to them for use in developing and executing a creative strategy.⁵² They identified six specific types of marketing information: the demographic profile of the target audience, customer product usage information, client's product performance

information, competitors' product performance information, marketing strategy information, and the main selling point supplied by the client. Their study showed that agency creative personnel often lack the information needed to effectively design and execute creative strategies. They found that information in these specific categories was provided to creatives only around one-half to two-thirds of the time. Even the most basic target demographic profile was not provided 30 percent of the time. This study indicates that there is a gap in the information that creative personnel need to develop effective advertising and what they are being provided, which points to the need for better communication between clients and agencies.

An ANA survey conducted among member clients and agencies also found a gap between how each side rated the quality of creative briefs provided by client to their agencies. While the majority of clients felt they provide clear assignment briefings to the agency, only about a quarter of agencies agreed.⁵³ Another recent survey conducted by the World Advertising Federation on creative briefs found that most agencies feel that clients are briefing their work with specific media channels and outputs in mind rather than taking an integrated communications perspective. The survey also found significant misalignment between clients on key elements of creative briefs. While nearly three-quarters of clients believe they have a single-minded proposition or single view of the customer in their briefs, the vast majority of agency representatives did not agree with their assessment.⁵⁴ Clearly, there is room for improvement in the development of creative briefs as well as communication between clients and their agencies.

The information contained in the creative brief provides the agency with important background information and the basic elements of the overall advertising strategy. The next step in the creative process is the development of the message strategy and begins with the search for the *big idea* that will build on the creative brief and bring it to life. One of the major challenges for the creative team is determining the major selling idea that will be used as the basis of the campaign. We will examine some approaches often used for determining the major selling idea and campaign theme.

The Search for the Major Selling Idea

LO 8-4

An important part of creative strategy is determining the central theme that will become the **major selling idea** of the ad campaign. As A. Jerome Jeweler states in his book *Creative Strategy in Advertising*:

The major selling idea should emerge as the strongest singular thing you can say about your product or service. This should be the claim with the broadest and most meaningful appeal to your target audience. Once you determine this message, be certain you can live with it; be sure it stands strong enough to remain the central issue in every ad and commercial in the campaign.⁵⁵

Some advertising experts argue that for an ad campaign to be effective it must contain a big idea that attracts the consumer's attention, gets a reaction, and sets the advertiser's product or service apart from the competition's. Well-known ad executive John O'Toole describes the *big idea* as "that flash of insight that synthesizes the purpose of the strategy, joins the page 277 product benefit with consumer desire in a fresh, involving way, brings the subject to life, and makes the reader or audience stop, look, and listen."⁵⁶

Of course, the real challenge to the creative team is coming up with the big idea to use in the ad. Many products and services offer virtually nothing unique, and it can be difficult to find something interesting to say about them. The late David Ogilvy, generally considered one of the most creative advertising copywriters ever to work in the business, has stated:

I doubt if more than one campaign in a hundred contains a big idea. I am supposed to be one of the more fertile inventors of big ideas, but in my long career as a copywriter I have not had more than 20, if that.⁵⁷

While really great ideas in advertising are difficult to come by, there are many big ideas that became the basis of very creative, successful advertising campaigns. Classic examples include Nike's "Just Do It" campaign, the "Intel Inside" campaign that positioned the company's microprocessors as

the key component in personal computers, the “Got Milk?” theme used to promote milk consumption, and the “Priceless” campaign for MasterCard that focused on special moments and experiences that money cannot buy.

A number of more recent campaigns are examples of successful big ideas as well. In 2015, *Advertising Age* had a panel of influential and acclaimed advertising creatives and executives pick the best campaigns of the new millennium.⁵⁸ The campaign selected as the best of the 21st century up to that point was Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty,” which was discussed in Chapter 6. Other campaigns on the 21st-century list included Apple’s “Get a Mac” series of comparative ads that included nearly 70 TV commercials over a three-year period poking fun at Microsoft’s Windows operating system. The ads featured actor Justin Long as the cool, hip, and unflappable Mac and *New Yorker* magazine writer John Hodgman as the uptight and somewhat nerdy character representing Windows-based PCs.

Several of the top campaigns capitalized on the popularity of social media and viral marketing such as Burger King’s “Subservient Chicken,” which included a website where users could submit more than 300 different commands and a character dressed as a chicken would respond. Another integrated campaign that combined paid, owned, and earned media was “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” effort for Old Spice Body Wash. The humorous ads developed for the campaign included a well-built, handsome, and bare-chested character telling women that Old Spice body wash will make their male partners smell like him if they stopped using lady-scented body wash and switched to Old Spice (Exhibit 8–14). The Wieden+Kennedy agency built on the popularity of the ads with the “Responses” campaign, which involved having questions solicited for the Old Spice guy via Twitter and Facebook and having him answer them with short video clips. The videos made Old Spice the most popular brand online and helped it become the market leader in the body-wash category.

XHIBIT 8–14

The Man Your Man Could Smell Like campaign for Old Spice is one of the best campaigns of the new millennium.

Source: Old Spice by Procter & Gamble



Most of the examples of big ideas discussed above are for consumer products and services where there is often a great deal of interest among consumers. However, a topic that many consumers do not like to think about is income taxes. IMC Perspective 8–1 discusses how Wieden+Kennedy developed a big-idea-led campaign for Intuit's TurboTax software as part of the company's strategy to attract consumers by showing them how they can use its software to file their taxes for free.

Developing the Major Selling Idea

It is difficult to pinpoint the inspiration for a big idea or teach advertising creatives an easy way to find one. As noted earlier, Arthur Kover conducted a study of advertising copywriters to understand how they approach the creative process and search for big ideas. He found that they view the purpose of a big idea as breaking through the advertising clutter and delivering a message.⁵⁹ Advertising professor John Rossiter argues that most copywriters focus on communicating the *key benefit claim*, which refers to the benefit thought by the copywriter to be the key to selling the page 278 advertised product. He notes that most creative ideas are based on finding ways to dramatically and effectively convey the key benefit claim.⁶⁰ As noted earlier, the key benefit claim is often explicit in the tagline that is used as the basis for the advertising campaign, such as the “Quicker Picker Upper” theme for Bounty paper towels or “The Ultimate Driving Machine” for BMW. However, the creative team must still work to develop effective ways to communicate this message in the executions of the advertising and other components of the IMC program.

IMC Perspective 8-1 >>>

Turbotax Shows Consumers a Better Way to do Their Taxes

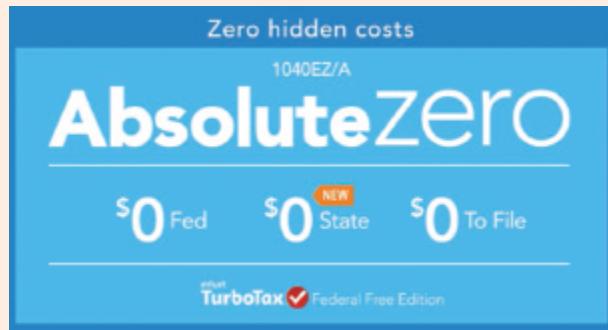
If you were to ask most people what things create the most anxiety in their lives, many would put filing tax returns at or near the top of their list. Even though more than 75 percent of all taxpayers get a refund each year that averages around \$3,000, filing their own taxes is scarier than speaking in public for most people. Even for digitally savvy millennials, fear rules during tax season. A survey of people who planned to file taxes commissioned by the financial information site NerdWallet, found that 80 percent report concerns such as making a mistake, not getting a full refund, or paying too much. And, of course, there is always the fear of getting audited by the IRS if your taxes are not done properly and/or you did not pay your fair share of taxes.

Today, there are companies and services to aid in tax preparation and help reduce people's anxiety. The tax preparation business historically has been divided into two major segments: the assisted or do-it-for-me (DIFM) segment and the do-it-yourself (DIY) segment. Consumers in the DIFM segment use a tax preparation service or tax professional, while those in the DIY segment use manual forms, software, or online services. For the past 25 years, TurboTax has been the leader in the DIY segment of the market; its products have been continuously ranked as the best-selling tax software. TurboTax is a division of Intuit, a company that creates business and financial management solutions for small businesses, consumers, and accounting professionals and whose other flagship products include QuickBooks and Mint.com.

While online tax preparation services have made tax filing much easier, fear, uncertainty, and doubt persist. Intuit has been on a journey the past few years to reinvent the TurboTax brand and transform the way taxes are done through product innovation that makes it superior to all other tax preparation methods. TurboTax has identified a core target segment called "On My Way" that it focuses on to grow the DIY category. This is a large segment consisting of 17 million early life-stage filers who are the most open to doing their taxes online but still use DIFM services. Most of these people are millennials who are younger, optimistic, and confident as well as generally early adopters of, and who are very comfortable with, technology that gives them a sense of control over their financial lives.

TurboTax has set course on a business model transformation that directly addresses the needs of the On My Way consumer by building familiarity among prospects and disrupting the tax preparation category. One key strategy for doing this was through the introduction of TurboTax Absolute Zero, which disrupts the category by offering federal and state tax preparation free of charge for the 60 million value-conscious 1040EZ/A Simple Filers in the United States who can least afford to pay to

have their taxes prepared for them. TurboTax monetizes these customers by offering a value-added bundle of services that they can voluntarily choose to add. By offering these filers a completely free solution, TurboTax is betting that it can build trust and familiarity with them so that, as their tax situation becomes more complex, they will come back to the company and pay for one of its higher-end solutions.



Source: Turbo Tax by Intuit, Inc.

When the Absolute Zero was first introduced several years ago, Intuit's advertising agency, Wieden+Kennedy, created a big idea-led campaign titled "It Doesn't Take a Genius to Do Your Taxes." The campaign included seven 30-second TV commercials featuring some of the world's greatest minds showing that TurboTax is so simple and intuitive that even real-life geniuses can't make it any easier to use or understand. Among the brainiacs appearing in the amusing spots were a physicist, a mathematician, and a computer scientist. TurboTax's integrated marketing campaign not only leveraged the product innovation in its TV ads, but also promoted it on social media as well as on the TurboTax.com website.

At the peak of the tax season, Intuit ran a clever commercial during the Super Bowl featuring Sir Anthony Hopkins being interviewed as an award-winning actor who has resisted the temptation to sell out in his illustrious career. However, as Hopkins explains that he would never impugn his integrity or tarnish his name by selling a product, he lifts a teacup to his mouth with the TurboTax logo on it. He is also shown wearing blue slippers promoting the tax service, and his dog is wearing a TurboTax sweater. Hopkins notes that he has "way more integrity" than to sell out and rationalizes that he really is not doing so since it's free to file taxes with TurboTax Absolute Zero, noting that "It's free, there's nothing to sell." To leverage its Super Bowl ad message, Intuit also utilized digital and social media to extend the Absolute Zero message across online channels and keep it in the forefront of consideration during the offer period. TurboTax took home the Merkle Digital Bowl crown given each year to the brands that best leverage digital marketing tools such as social media, search engine optimization (SEO), paid search, and e-mail marketing to support their Super Bowl advertising.

Over the past three years, Intuit has continued to target a segment of the do-it-yourself filers by promoting its TurboTax Free Edition. For example, during the 2019 tax season, Wieden+Kennedy created the Power of Free campaign, which was designed to drive home the message that Turbo-Tax Free is indeed free. A series of commercials was created focusing on special moments and situations such as a spelling bee, a

70s-style game show, a courtroom drama, and a father-son talk where the only word used throughout the ad was “free.”

People will continue to dread doing their taxes as well as paying them. However, Intuit is making the process less painful as well as alleviating the fear, uncertainty, and doubt that many taxpayers face each tax season. And for many taxpayers, they are doing it for free.

Sources: Internal communications with Intuit Inc.; “Millennials Fear Filing Taxes More Than Most Americans”; Doug Zanger, “Wieden+Kennedy Keeps the ‘Free’ Going With New One-Word TurboTax Ads,” *Agency Spy*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.adweek.com/agencyspy/wieden-kennedy-keeps-the-free-going-with-new-one-word-turbotax-ads/152797/>; Davide Gianatasio, “Physics Geniuses Illustrate the Mind-Bending Simplicity of TurboTax in W+K’s New Ads Campaign,” *Adweek*, January 4, 2016, www.adweek.com/adfreak/physics-geniuses-illustrate-mind-bending-simplicity-turbotax-wks-new-ads-168817.

There are myriad ways that creative personnel can approach the search for big ideas and how to execute them. However, over the years several classic approaches have emerged that can guide the creative team’s search for a major selling idea and the development of effective advertising. Among the four best-known approaches are:

- Using a unique selling proposition.
- Creating a brand image.
- Finding the inherent drama.
- Positioning.

page 279

Unique Selling Proposition The concept of the **unique selling proposition (USP)** was developed by Rosser Reeves, former chair of the Ted Bates agency, and is described in his influential book *Reality in Advertising*. Reeves noted three characteristics of unique selling propositions:

1. Each advertisement must make a proposition to the consumer. Not just words, not just product puffery, not just show-window advertising. Each advertisement must say to each reader: “Buy this product and you will get this benefit.”

2. The proposition must be one that the competition either cannot or does not offer. It must be unique either in the brand or in the claim.
3. The proposition must be strong enough to move the mass millions—that is, pull over new customers to your brand.⁶¹

Reeves said the attribute claim or benefit that forms the basis of the USP should dominate the ad and be emphasized through repetitive advertising. An example of a brand that uses a USP approach for its advertising is ThermaCare heatwraps (Exhibit 8–15). The brand has patented heat cells that penetrate to increase circulation and accelerate healing as well as provide relief from back pain, which is a problem for many people.

XHIBIT 8–15

This ThermaCare ad uses a unique selling proposition.

Source: ThermaCare

**WHAT MAKES
ThermaCare[®]
DIFFERENT?**

IT HEALS.



Unlike creams and rubs that mask the pain, **ThermaCare[®]** has patented heat cells that penetrate deep to increase circulation and accelerate healing.

HEAT + RELIEF + HEALING = THERMACARE[®]
The Proof That It Heals Is You.

Like us on facebook.com/thermacare and visit us at thermacare.com.

page 280

For Reeves's approach to work, there must be a truly unique product or service attribute, benefit, or inherent advantage that can be used in the claim. The approach may require considerable research on the product and consumers, not only to determine the USP but also to document the claim. As we will see in Chapter 20, the Federal Trade Commission objects to advertisers' making claims of superiority or uniqueness without providing supporting data. Also, some companies have sued their competitors for making unsubstantiated uniqueness claims.

Advertisers must also consider whether the unique selling proposition affords them a *sustainable competitive advantage* that competitors cannot easily copy. In the packaged-goods field in particular, companies quickly match a brand feature for feature, so advertising based on USPs becomes ineffective. For example, a few years ago MillerCoors introduced MGD 64, a 64-calorie version of its Miller Genuine Draft brand and the lowest-calorie domestic beer on the market. However, within a year its major rival Anheuser-Busch launched Bud Select 55, which contained only 55 calories, after noting the success Miller had with its ultra-low-calorie beer.⁶²

Creating a Brand Image In many product and service categories, competing brands are so similar that it is very difficult to find or create a unique attribute or benefit to use as the major selling idea. Many of the packaged-goods products that account for most of the advertising dollars spent in the United States are difficult to differentiate on a functional or performance basis. The creative strategy used to sell these products is based on the development of a strong, memorable identity for the brand through **image advertising**.

David Ogilvy popularized the idea of brand image in his famous book *Confessions of an Advertising Man*. Ogilvy said that with image advertising, “every advertisement should be thought of as a contribution to the complex symbol which is the brand image.” He argued that the image or personality of the brand is particularly important when brands are similar:

The greater the similarity between brands, the less part reason plays in brand selection. There isn’t any significant difference between the various brands of whiskey, or cigarettes, or beer. They are all about the same. And so are the cake mixes and the detergents and the margarines. The manufacturer who dedicates his advertising to building the most sharply defined personality for his brand will get the largest share of the market at the highest profit. By the same token, the manufacturers who will find themselves up the creek are those shortsighted opportunists who siphon off their advertising funds for promotions.⁶³

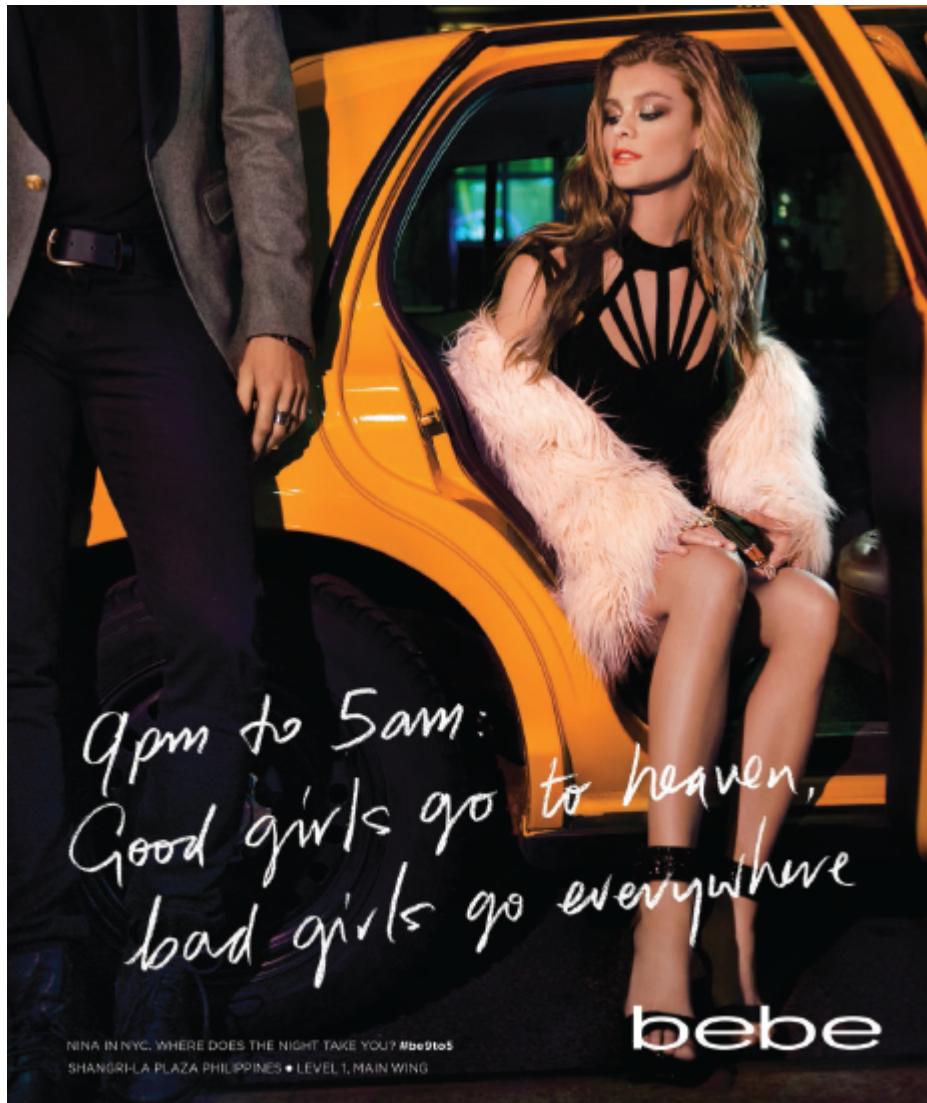
Image advertising has become increasingly popular and is used as the main selling idea for a variety of products and services, including soft drinks, liquor, cigarettes, cars, airlines, financial services, perfume/colognes, and clothing. Many consumers wear various brands of designer jeans, such as True Religion or AG, and drink certain brands of beer or soft drinks because of the image of these brands. The key to successful image advertising is developing an image that will appeal to product users. This is often done by associating a brand with certain symbols or artifacts that have cultural meaning. For example, Marlboro became the leading brand of cigarettes by using advertising that associates the brand with the cowboy, who is perceived as rugged, individualistic, and a symbol of freedom and independence. Many fashion brands build an image by using ads that feature attractive models and visual appeals that convey psychosocial associations and feelings such as sexy, stylish, glamorous, and sophisticated. Advertising for bebe embodies many of these image characteristics as a way

page 281 of building an emotional connection with young women who are interested in style and fashion (Exhibit 8–16).

XHIBIT 8–16

bebe uses advertising to build an image as a sexy and stylish brand.

ource: Bebe Stores, Inc.



9pm to 5am:
Good girls go to heaven,
bad girls go everywhere

NINA IN NYC. WHERE DOES THE NIGHT TAKE YOU? #bebe5
SHANGRI-LA PLAZA PHILIPPINES • LEVEL 1, MAIN WING

bebe

Finding the Inherent Drama Another approach to determining the major selling idea is finding the **inherent drama** or characteristic of the product that makes the consumer purchase it. The inherent drama approach expresses the advertising philosophy of Leo Burnett, founder of the Leo Burnett agency in Chicago. Burnett believed that there is almost always something about a brand that separates it from all other brands and keeps it in the marketplace. He argued that this inherent drama “is often hard to find but it is always there, and once found it is the most interesting and believable of all advertising appeals.”⁶⁴ Burnett believed that good creative minds know how to bring inherent drama to life through advertising that is based on a

foundation of consumer benefits with an emphasis on the dramatic element in expressing those benefits.

Burnett advocated a down-home type of advertising that presents the message in a warm and realistic way. Some of the more famous ads developed by his agency using the inherent-drama approach are for McDonald's, Maytag appliances, Kellogg's cereals, and Hallmark cards. Leo Burnett has created a number of poignant and dramatic advertising campaigns for Hallmark cards over the past 25 years based on the approach. A recent example was the "Put Your Heart to Paper" online campaign for Mother's Day, which encouraged people to express how they feel about their moms by going beyond the usual stereotypical expressions such as "I Love You" and "Thank You." To capture how much their words meant to them, the participants were interviewed on camera and were unaware their mothers were secretly listening to their loving words in another room. The moms were then invited to join them and the emotional reactions were recorded in a series of videos that became the basis for the ad campaign.⁶⁵ Digital ads were used to promote the message: "Don't say, 'I love you ...' say something more," and put your heart to paper with a Hallmark card. Visitors to a Hallmark website, YouTube channel, and social media sites were encouraged to join in using the hashtag #PutYourHeartToPaper. Leo Burnett has also created versions of the campaign for other holidays such as Valentine's Day, as shown in Exhibit 8–17.

XHIBIT 8–17

Advertising for Hallmark such as the "Put Your Heart to Paper" campaign often uses inherent drama.

Source: Hallmark Licensing, LLC



Positioning The concept of *positioning* as a basis for advertising strategy was introduced by Jack Trout and Al Ries in the early 1970s and has become a popular basis of creative development.⁶⁶ The basic idea is that advertising is used to establish or “position” the product or service in a particular place in the consumer’s mind. Positioning is done for companies as well as for brands. Many of the top brands in various product and service categories have retained their market leadership because they have established and maintained a strong position or identity in the minds of consumers.⁶⁷ For example, Crest has built and maintained the success of its page 282 toothpaste based on the position of cavity prevention, while BMW’s positioning as “the ultimate driving machine” transcends and helps differentiate its entire product line.

Trout and Ries originally described positioning as the image consumers had of the brand in relation to competing brands in the product or service category, but the concept has been expanded beyond direct competitive positioning. As discussed in Chapter 2, companies and brands can be positioned on the basis of product or service attributes, price/quality, usage or application, type of user, cultural symbols, or product class. Any of these can spark a major selling idea that becomes the basis of the creative strategy and results in the brand’s occupying a particular place in the minds of the target audience. Since positioning can be done on the basis of a distinctive attribute, the positioning and unique selling proposition approaches can

overlap. Positioning approaches have been used as the foundation for a number of successful creative strategies. In some situations marketers recognize that they must adapt their positioning strategy for different market segments or modify it to respond to connect better with their target market.

For example, the Kellogg Company has changed its marketing strategy for its Special K cereal brand by moving away from using diet-based appeals to touting its positive nutrition benefits and repositioning it as the brand that provides the nutrition women need in their daily lives. For years, ads for Special K used images of scales and diet challenges. However, Kellogg recognized that women no longer want to count calories, but rather are more interested in the nutritional benefits of the foods they eat. The agency for Special K in Europe, Leo Burnett London, developed a campaign called “Powering You” to reposition the brand so women see it as a source of nutrition and one that will empower them through their everyday lives.⁶⁸ The campaign, which began in the United Kingdom and then expanded throughout Europe and the United States, includes TV, print, and online ads as well as 10-second videos for social media and the brand’s website (Exhibit 8–18).

XHIBIT 8–18

Kellogg has repositioned Special K cereal using the “Power of You” campaign.

Source: Kellogg Co.



Contemporary Approaches to the Big Idea

The USP, brand image, inherent-drama, and positioning approaches are often used as the basis of the creative strategy for ad campaigns. These creative styles have become associated with some of the most successful creative minds in advertising and their agencies.⁶⁹ However, agencies are by no means limited to any one creative approach. For example, the famous “Marlboro Country” campaign, a classic example of image advertising, was developed by Leo Burnett Co. Many different agencies have followed the unique selling proposition approach advocated by Rosser Reeves. The challenge to the creative specialist or team is to find a major selling idea—whether it is based on a unique selling proposition, brand image, inherent drama, position in the market, or some other approach—and use it page 283 as a guide in developing an effective creative strategy.

While these classic approaches are used by many creative specialists, many other styles are available and are indeed necessary given the changes that have occurred in media and technology over the past two decades. Some of the more contemporary advertising visionaries who have had a major influence on modern-day advertising include Hal Riney of Hal Riney & Partners, Lee Clow and Jay Chiat of TBWA/Chiat/Day, Dan Wieden of Wieden+Kennedy, and Jeff Goodby and Rich Silverstein of Goodby, Silverstein & Partners. In describing these creative leaders, Anthony Vagnoni of *Advertising Age* writes:

The modern creative kings don’t write books, rarely give interviews or lay out their theories on advertising. They’ve endorsed no set of rules, professed no simple maxims like Mr. Ogilvy’s famous “When you don’t have anything to say, sing it.” If pronouncements and books are out the window, what’s replaced them is a conscious desire to lift the intelligence level of advertising. Today’s leaders see advertising as an uplifting social force, as a way to inspire and entertain.⁷⁰

Goodby and Silverstein note: “Advertising works best when it sneaks into people’s lives, when it doesn’t look or feel like advertising. It’s about treating people at their best, as opposed to dealing with them at their lowest common denominator.” They describe their creative formula as doing

intelligent work that the public likes to see and that, at the same time, has a sales pitch.⁷¹ Lee Clow says, “No rule book will tell you how to target the masses anymore. The best of us understand the sociocultural realities of people and how they interact with the media. If we didn’t, we couldn’t make the kinds of messages that people would be able to connect with.”⁷²

Advertisers are facing major challenges in their search for the big idea in today’s world. They must develop creative ideas that can differentiate their brands and extend beyond traditional mass media. Most marketers and their agencies recognize that they must come up with big ideas that can be used across a variety of media, engage consumers, and enter into a dialogue with them. Many of the approaches that have worked well in the traditional media-centric world of print and television advertising may not be effective in the complex, multiscreen world in which consumers live today. Jean Lin, CEO of the digital network Isobar, argues that technology and accessibility to information has forever changed people’s relationship with brands along with how they form perceptions and opinions. She argues that the role of a contemporary creative agency must change, and notes: “In this new world, how we come up with creative solutions has to change. We must embrace interactive and nonlinear messaging. Hand-held devices and mobility means everywhere; stories need to be told seamlessly across screens. And business ideas need to be nurtured through creativity, innovation, and imagination.”⁷³

The challenge of developing creative advertising that captures the attention of consumers and impacts them has clearly become even greater with the proliferation of new media. Lee Clow, now the chair of TBWA/Media Arts Lab, which is Apple’s lead creative agency and a recipient of the prestigious Lion of St. Mark Award given to an individual for his or her contribution to creativity in advertising, was asked to comment on how advertising has changed over the past several decades and the creative challenge facing agencies. Clow responded: “Brands have the ability to connect with people in all kinds of ways and have an ongoing dialogue and relationship with them as opposed to the monologue, how it used to be. We haven’t come close to figuring out how to use all these new-media opportunities and most clients are very conflicted about what media they should use and why. They keep thinking there’s some new silver bullet in the new media world that will allow them save money or find a new way to

twist consumers' arms.”⁷⁴ Clow summarizes the challenge facing those who work on the creative side in the new world of advertising quite well. However, marketers will continue to challenge their agencies, as well as themselves, to find innovative ideas and creative solutions for advertising and other forms of marketing communications.

page 284

Summary —

The creative development and execution of the advertising message are crucial parts of a firm's integrated marketing communications program and are often the key to the success of a marketing campaign. Marketers generally turn to ad agencies to develop, prepare, and implement their creative strategy since these agencies are specialists in the creative function of advertising. The creative specialist or team is responsible for developing an effective way to communicate the marketer's message to the customer. Other individuals on both the client and the agency sides work with the creative specialists to develop the creative strategy, implement it, and evaluate its effectiveness.

The challenge facing the writers, artists, and others who develop ads is to be creative and come up with fresh, unique, and appropriate ideas that can be used as solutions to communications problems. Creativity in advertising is a process of several stages, including preparation, incubation, illumination, verification, and revision. Various sources of information are available to help the creative specialists determine the best campaign theme, appeal, or execution style. Many companies use research for input to the creative process including qualitative techniques such as focus groups and ethnographic studies. Research is also used to pretest advertising messages to determine how consumers evaluate and will respond to them, although some companies are foregoing copy testing, as the changing media consumption environment of consumers requires them to develop more content and move more quickly.

Most advertising is part of a series of messages that make up an IMC or advertising campaign that is based on a central theme or idea. The campaign theme is usually expressed through a slogan or tagline. Creative strategy development is guided by specific goals and objectives and is based on a number of factors, including the target audience, the basic problem the advertising must address, the objectives the message seeks to accomplish, and the major selling idea or key benefit the advertiser wants to communicate. These factors are generally stated in a copy platform, which is a work plan used to guide development of the ad campaign. An important part of creative strategy is determining the major selling idea that will become the central theme of the campaign. There are several approaches to doing this, including using a unique selling proposition, creating a brand image, looking for inherent drama in the brand, and positioning.

Advertisers are facing major challenges in their search for big ideas that extend beyond traditional mass media. They must develop big ideas that can be used across a variety of media, engage consumers, and enter into a dialogue with them. Many of the approaches that have worked well in the traditional media-centric world of print and television advertising may not be effective in the complex, multiscreen world in which consumers live today.

Key Terms

- creative strategy** 257
- creative tactics** 257
- advertising creativity** 260
- divergence** 260
- relevance** 260
- account planning** 266
- general preplanning input** 267
- product- or service-specific preplanning input** 267
- problem detection** 267
- focus groups** 268
- ethnographic research** 269
- Storyboard** 272

animatic 272
advertising campaign 273
campaign theme 273
slogan (tagline) 273
creative brief 274
major selling idea 276
unique selling proposition (USP) 279
image advertising 280
inherent drama 281

Discussion Questions

- 1.** The chapter opener discusses the various creative approaches used by GEICO in its television advertising over the past 25 years. What is the goal of advertising for an auto insurance company such as GEICO? Why has the company used a variety of creative messages for its TV commercials rather than staying with one consistent approach? (LO 8-1)
- 2.** Discuss the role and importance of creativity in advertising. Do you think advertising agencies often emphasize creativity at the expense of developing ads that can help generate sales for a product or service? What can clients do to avoid this problem? (LO 8-1)
- 3.** Advertising creativity is viewed as the ability to generate unique and appropriate ideas that can be used as solutions to communication problems. This definition suggests that a creative ad is one that is novel but also relevant or appropriate. Find an example of an advertisement (either a print ad, TV commercial, or online ad/video) that is novel but not necessarily relevant to the product or service. Discuss why the client would have approved this ad. (LO 8-1)
- 4.** Discuss the various factors that account for the way divergence can be achieved in advertising creativity. Find an example of an advertisement that reflects these various factors and explain how it does so. (LO 8-1)

- 5.** What are the various stages in the creative process for developing advertising messages? Discuss how an advertising agency developing an ad campaign for a consumer product or service might go through the creative process and what would be done at the various stages. (LO 8-2)
- 6.** Assume that you have been hired as an account planner by an advertising agency and assigned to work on the advertising campaign for a new brand of bottled water. Describe the various types of general and product-specific preplanning input you might provide to the creative team. (LO 8-2)
- 7.** Digital and Social Media Perspective 8-1 discusses the pros and cons of pretesting advertising creative work and how it is being impacted by the digital revolution. Discuss the pros and cons of the pretesting of creative work done by agencies and how the shift to digital media is impacting the pretesting of advertising messages. (LO 8-2, 8-3)
- 8.** Discuss the role of an advertising slogan in an advertising campaign and some of the factors that should be considered in developing an effective slogan. Find an example of a good slogan or tagline as well as one that does not communicate effectively. Discuss the reasons why you view these as either good or bad examples of advertising slogans. (LO 8-3)
- 9.** What is a creative brief? Discuss the various elements that should be included in a creative brief and why they are important. (LO 8-3)
- 10.** Discuss the creative challenges Intuit and the Wieden+Kennedy agency face in developing advertising campaigns for a tax preparation software product such as TurboTax. Evaluate the creative strategy W+K used for the “It Doesn’t Take a Genius to Do Your Taxes” and “Power of Free” campaigns that are discussed in IMC Perspective 8-1. (LO 8-2, 8-3, 8-4)
- 11.** Find an example of an ad or campaign that you think reflects one of the approaches used to develop a major selling idea such as unique selling proposition, brand image, inherent drama, or positioning. Discuss how the major selling idea is reflected in this ad or campaign. (LO 8-4)



connect

Available only through your Connect course, help make key advertising and IMC concepts more meaningful and applicable:

- SmartBook 2.0
- Connect exercises, which may include: click-drag, video cases, and case analyses.

9

Creative Strategy: Implementation and Evaluation



Source: Yum! Brands, Inc.

Learning Objectives
