Chapter 2

Strategy and Branding

Putting a Face on a Product

Congratulations! Your agency has been invited to pitch the Gilmore Gizmo account. Your job is to develop a creative strategy and build an integrated marketing communications (IMC) campaign that will knock the socks off Gilmore management. You really need this account. If you don’t win, half of your agency will be laid off, including you. Right now, you know nothing about the company, its products, its customers, its competition, or its market. How will you develop something that differentiates Gilmore from the competition? Something no one else has done before. And something that might even win some creative awards. By the way, you’ve got 2 weeks until your presentation. Once again, congratulations!
Let’s Review the Basics

The scenario in the introduction happens every day somewhere. The good news is you’re invited to the dance. But unless you’re a close relative of the CEO, you’ll have to earn the business with a lot of hard work and a lot of luck. There are few things more validating than winning a new business pitch. But the euphoria quickly dissolves into the daily grind of trying to keep the business.

Most textbooks say you can’t just start creating an ad from scratch. Of course, you can. And you just might get lucky the first time. But can you repeat that success? That’s why we need to discuss the foundations of marketing communications. First, let’s review a few definitions.

Advertising, Marcom, IMC, or What?

Everyone knows what advertising is, right? Science fiction author H. G. Wells claimed, “Advertising is legalized lying.”1 Humorist Will Rogers declared, “Advertising is the art of convincing people to spend money they don’t have for something they don’t need.”2 Advertising professor Jef Richards said, “Advertising is the ‘wonder’ in Wonder Bread.”3

You’ve probably learned that advertising is paid communication to promote a product, service, brand, or cause through the media. Is direct mail advertising? Well, if you consider mail a medium, yes. How about a brochure? Probably not. However, it can be mailed or inserted into a magazine as an ad. The Internet? Yes and no. A website by itself is not really advertising, although a banner ad on that site is. Social networks? They can be a platform for ads. But they are usually more effective without advertising. Public relations? No, because the advertiser is not paying the editor to publish an article. PR professionals talk about earned media—where the quality of their content and relationship with editors earn mention of a product without a direct media payment. With earned media, you’re asking permission to share information rather than hitting them over the head with a commercial. Then there’s native advertising—when the ad message is blended with other content. Does it also become PR, product placement, branded content, sales promotion, sponsorship? Or something else? Confused? Don’t feel alone. Many marketing professionals can’t make the distinction between advertising and other forms of promotion.

Randall Rothenberg, CEO of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, described the dilemma of defining advertising: “Today’s media landscape keeps getting more diverse—it’s broadcast, cable and

“Our business is infested with idiots who try to impress by using pretentious jargon.”

David Ogilvy, copywriter and founder, Ogilvy & Mather
streaming; it’s online, tablet and smartphone; it’s video, rich media, social media, branded content, banners, apps, in-app advertising and interactive technology . . .”

MarCom to some people takes in every form of marketing communication. Others describe MarCom as every form of promotion that’s not traditional advertising. “Traditional” advertising usually covers newspapers, magazines, television, radio, banner ads, and outdoor. Those media easily fit the textbook definition of advertising. And that’s where most of the money still goes.

“Non-traditional” promotion is a little harder to define. It may include direct marketing, sales promotion, point of sale, content marketing, SEO, mobile, social, experiential, and specialty advertising. And anything else you can stick a logo on. It’s all marketing communication to be sure. But it’s not advertising. IMC unites traditional and non-traditional elements into a single campaign. Smaller agencies and in-house departments have been doing it for years. It’s called “doing whatever it takes.”

Advertising’s Role in the Marketing Process

Many people describe a clever TV commercial or a slick catalog as “good marketing.” Actually, they’re subsets of promotion—one of the four Ps of marketing. The others are place, product, and price. Many marketing directors can’t control the product, its distribution (place), and its price. They can only deal with the promotion side of the marketing mix. Any director of marketing worth his or her salt also takes into account a fifth P—people. If you don’t take the time to understand what motivates people should pick a new career.

The buying process for some products may take a couple seconds, such as picking out a sandwich at the drive-through. Or it may take years, as with buying a multimillion-dollar piece of industrial equipment. No matter the time frame, there is a process that starts with awareness and ends with the sale. One of the best ways to describe the process is using the acronym AIDA, which stands for attention, interest, desire, and action. Understanding AIDA helps you, as a creative person, guide a consumer from just recognizing your brand to demanding it.

Swedish furniture retailer IKEA has a long history of featuring the LGBTQIA community in a positive and inclusive light. Here is an example from a recent campaign: “All homes are created equal.”

This deeply emotional spot from Volvo tells a story that spans a lifetime while demonstrating the product benefit—in this case, Volvo’s automatic braking system. It’s a message that resonates with anyone who loves their family.
Here’s how AIDA works in advertising:

1. **Attention:** How do you get someone who is bombarded with hundreds if not thousands of messages a day to look at your ad or commercial? If you’re a writer, one way is to use powerful words, or if you’re an art director, you need a picture that will catch a person’s eye.

2. **Interest:** Once you capture a person’s attention, he or she will give you a little more time to make your point, but you must stay focused on the reader’s or viewer’s wants and needs. This means helping that person quickly sort out the relevant messages. In some cases, you might use bullet points and subheadings to make your points stand out.

3. **Desire:** The interest and desire parts of AIDA work together. Once people are interested, they need to really want the product. As you’re building readers’ interest, you also need to help them understand how what you’re offering can help them in a real way. The main way of doing this is by appealing to their personal needs and wants. Another component of desire is conviction—the willingness to buy when the opportunity is right. So even if your message does not result in an immediate sale, keeping your messages on track and on time could eventually trigger a sale.

4. **Action:** Okay, they’re hooked. Now what do you want them to do? Visit a website? Take a test drive? Call for information? Plunk down some cash now? You should be very clear about what action you want your readers or viewers to take.

Calling consumers to action, the fourth step in the AIDA process, is the one that drives the bottom line. The Call to Action is the little voice you’ve planted in the consumer’s head that keeps saying, “Do something.” But it’s up to you to plant what that “something” is. If you can get the reader or viewer to contact the advertiser, most of your work is done. Although you will continue to reinforce the brand and encourage future sales to consumers who take action, your primary job is to connect buyers to sellers. It’s up to them to close the deal. The main idea is to connect the reader, viewer, or listener with the advertiser. Make it easy to get more information if it’s needed. If personal selling is critical to a purchase, find a way to connect the prospect with the salesperson.

Let’s consider seven surefire ways to engage consumers in action:

- Begin with a strong command verb.
- Choose words that provoke emotion or enthusiasm.
- Give the target a compelling reason to take action.
- Build in a fear of missing out on something big.
- Know the platform your message lives on or in, and leverage it.
- Spice it up with tantalizing details.
- Add numbers that translate into a tangible value.
The most popular ways to connect include:

- **Toll free phone numbers**: Most of the good 800 numbers are taken. But they keep adding toll free area codes, which allows you to spell a 7- or 10-digit number to make it more memorable. This comes in handy for radio or billboards. Example: 877-BUYTHIS.

- **Website**: The first place most people look for more detailed information. Of course, a link in an email, blog, app, social post, or website instantly connects an online visitor. For print and broadcast messages, you need to mention the URL. In the interest of saving space and not insulting readers, you can delete www. You need to develop a unique, memorable, and easy to use URL. This sometimes means a separate URL that points to a corporate site, microsite, or landing page.

Don’t forget all the other ways to connect:

- SMS interface for text marketing, such as Kurt’s Koffee: Text “FreeKoffee” to 54234 to receive a free coffee on your next visit
- Hashtags that convey a message as well as connect
- Email address
- Mobile apps encouraging continued interactivity
- Social platforms
- Encouraging test drives, taste tests, and free samples
- Prepaid reply cards to request more information or an appointment
- QR codes leading to mobile sites
- Live chat in a website

Think about the many ways customers can take action, and then make it easy to connect them with the advertiser. An effective Call to Action is based on knowing what makes the consumer tick and converting that into an easy way for them to connect with the advertiser.

**Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics**

The difference between strategy and tactics stumps a lot people. It’s usually a tangled mess. About as specific and realistic as wishing for world peace. Without clear
objectives, failure is guaranteed. Don’t get us wrong. A creative person needs to follow a strategy. Otherwise you’re working for the sake of creativity rather than solving a problem.

**Objectives:** Marketing communication objectives establish what you need to accomplish so you can achieve sales or marketing goals. They should be (a) specific, (b) challenging, (c) achievable, and (d) measurable.

**Strategies:** How are you going to achieve your objectives? What’s your position? Who are you targeting? How will you segment markets? What is your brand strategy? Creative strategy? Media strategy? Digital strategy? Strategies deal with the big picture. They should be quantifiable in terms of time and money. In summary, the strategy describes what you want to do.

**Tactics:** Once you know what you want to do, you need to figure out how. Those are tactics. They are narrower in focus and outline specific action items that fit into the strategic plan. If strategies are the blueprints, tactics are the tools.

This analogy comes from the military. The objective speaks to the big picture, like winning a war. Strategies deal with large-scale actions: capturing cities, blocking ports, and hacking into power grids. Tactics are the means to achieve the strategies. Tactics for taking a city could include close air support, flanking maneuvers from infantry, frontal assaults by tanks, and constant bombardment of artillery.

Another way to look at it is building a house. The objective is to build a home for a family of four, in a nice neighborhood, with good schools, and not too far from your place of employment. The strategy involves designing the home, deciding how many rooms are needed, and figuring the square footage. The architect is the strategist, and the blueprint and budget are his strategies. Tactics involve what materials to use. How much lumber to buy, what kind of windows, doors, shingles, and siding are needed? And a million other details, including hiring specialized subcontractors who have their own set of strategies and tactics.

So, it’s objective, strategy, and tactics. It all starts with what you’re trying to accomplish. Then how are you going to get there and what action items are required to make it happen? One, two, three.

**Account Planning—Solving the Client’s Problem**

Strategy relates to continuity, growth, and return on investment (ROI). It should be specific and measurable. It begins with account planning.

If you were working on the Gilmore Gizmo account, where would you start? The first thing to do is ask: What’s their problem? Every client has a problem. Otherwise they wouldn’t need to promote their
“Brilliant creative isn’t enough. You must be creative and effective. It’s a time for the strategic thinker, not just the creative rebel.”

Helayne Spivak, former global chief creative director, JWT

Some clients state the problem in general terms, such as sell more Gizmos in the next fiscal year. That’s not the problem. The problem is: What’s going to make it difficult to sell more Gizmos, and how can we overcome those difficulties?

The client may tell you, but these may not be the only problems. You have to identify the pain points. Such as product shortcomings. Weak warranties. Non-competitive pricing. Cultural barriers. Often the client doesn’t have an in-depth understanding of the target audience. An even more challenging situation emerges when the client can’t even identify the problem.

Account planning is how agencies begin to solve a client’s problem. It’s about finding consumers’ sweet spot. Account planning lays a foundation before you get to the strategies and tactics. All strategy documents and the subsequent strategies and tactics emerge from account planning.

Here’s a little background. It developed in Britain in the late 1960s to create an environment where creativity flourished. Before account planning, advertising research was marketing oriented, quantitative, and often detached from both the creative team and the consumer. Account planning brings the consumer’s voice into the strategic process. This often involves qualitative research as planners seek a consumers’ sweet spot and nail the key insight.

Stanley Pollitt, of London’s Boase Massimi Pollitt, was a pioneer of account planning. He paired a researcher, representing the voice of the consumer, with every account person in his agency. In the 1980s Jay Chiat, of the original Chiat/Day in Los Angeles, brought account planning to North America. By the mid-1990s, account planning was common practice in ad agencies across North America.

Today, algorithms define consumer behavior in nanoseconds. Marketing messages and media change directions in an instant based on online choices. If you don’t believe it, check native content, banner ads, emails, and social feeds minutes after you search for any given product.

Get the Facts

The first step in planning for any type of research is gathering and organizing information. You have to answer the basic questions listed in Table 2.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing Tasks</th>
<th>What They Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define the target audience.</td>
<td>Who are we talking to?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify features and benefits.</td>
<td>What makes this product better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify the current position.</td>
<td>What do people think about the product?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Align wants and needs with the product.</td>
<td>Why should people buy it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine Call to Action.</td>
<td>What do we want people to do?</td>
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</table>

Table 2.1. Marketing Tasks and What They Mean
Notice that the above creative development questions include some of the basic journalism questions—who, what, and why. Where and when are media questions, which may also influence your creative strategy.

**Where to Look for Information**

Research can be divided into two basic categories: primary, where you gather the facts directly, and secondary, where you assemble research done by others. We’ll look at secondary research first, because it’s usually more accessible.

**Secondary Research**

You can find a wealth of information about markets, products, and consumers. Most of it is quantitative. Learning how to read and understand statistics benefits anyone going into advertising. A lot of it is available for free on the Internet. However, most of the really good stuff comes from subscription services. University libraries offer the same information that companies pay thousands of dollars for, although it’s usually a little out of date.

**Primary Research**

A lot of the primary research that will help you as a planner is qualitative. Most people think of focus groups or mail surveys. But primary research can be very informal and personal. Ethnography and projective techniques are hot right now and with good reason. With ethnography, you’ll find yourself immersed in the consumers’ world. There’s no faster way to find consumers’ sweet spot than spending time with them. With projective techniques, you’ll use psychological tools to find out how people feel about or perceive your product. This can help you define your insight and develop a strategy that really connects with consumers. Start thinking like an anthropologist or a psychologist. Then you’ll learn what

This fun outdoor campaign created by Spotify’s in-house agency was based on their user’s streaming data.
links your consumers’ desire with your product. As you might imagine, these kinds of techniques pose some ethical considerations. Not the least of which is, how far is too far? So before you begin your research, take the time to know exactly how far is too far—and don’t cross that line.

- Check out the competition. Review ads and other promotional material for your product. Study their visual structure and symbolism. Study their claims. Where are they weaker or stronger compared with your product?
- Check what media your target uses, especially social media. Analyze when, where, and how they use media. What does that tell you about your target? What might this tell you about the competition?
- Talk to the people who buy, or might buy, your product. Observe them using it. Why did they buy it or not buy it? Would they buy it again? If not, why not?
- Talk to people who considered, but did not buy, your product. Why didn’t they? What would make them change their mind?
- Immerse yourself in the fine-grained details of your consumers’ everyday life. Where do they live, work, and play? What makes them tick and why?

Ethnography—Immerse Yourself in Their World

- Visit a store, and check how they display your product and its competitors. How does the shelf appeal of your product compare? Watch how consumers interact with your brand and its competitors. What does that tell you about their expectations?
- Observe the salespeople who sell your product. Eavesdrop. What do they tell customers about it, and how do consumers respond?
- Sometimes it’s helpful to take a factory tour. Observe with all your senses. Is there a key insight waiting to share with consumers?
- Hang out with the consumers. Go to their homes. Explore the rooms in which they will use your product and how they use it. Observe them at play. Where are they playing, and who are they playing with? More important, what does their play look like? What do you observe that can help you successfully pitch this product?
- The devil is in the details.

Projective Techniques—Eliciting Inner Feelings

- Provide some images or words related to the product, and ask consumers to make associations. What can you learn about how they feel about your brand?
- Ask them to draw pictures or create collages that remind them of your product or something you’re trying to find out. What images begin to repeat themselves? What’s happening inside your consumer?
- Give them sentences to complete based on what you want to find out. Do you notice any word patterns, and what do they tell you about the emotional state of consumers when they think of your brand?
- Show them a storyboard about the product, and ask them to tell you what they think about the main character (the consumer) within the story. Do you think they might be projecting themselves into that story? Chances are you’re right.
You can find subjects to observe or interview in a number of places—malls, restaurants, sporting or music events, chat rooms, online games, trade shows, basically anyplace where members of your target audience may gather. You might even consider conducting more traditional research, such as focus groups with members of the target audience. These groups, professionally moderated, can explore attitudes and opinions in depth. And, of course, there are always the tried and true surveys. Whatever you decide on, the goal is to find the sweet spot—without crossing ethical boundaries.

**Interpreting Research Findings**

There’s a funny thing about research—if it confirms the client’s opinions, it wasn’t really needed; if it contradicts the client’s opinions, it’s flawed. While the “facts” may be gathered and presented objectively, the interpretation is often subjective. But remember the client hired you for that subjective knowledge of advertising and consumer behavior. So, as long as you keep your subjective knowledge balanced with an objective look at their consumers, you should be in good shape.

Sometimes research reveals information about something you’re not even measuring. For example, a survey for a business-to-business (B2B) client revealed a strong negative opinion of the brand in the Southeast. Why did they love them in Ohio but hate them in Georgia? The client considered running some image ads in the South to build a more favorable opinion. Further investigation revealed that the problem was not with the brand but with the distributor representatives selling it. In this case, no amount of brilliant advertising could solve the problem. A quick realignment of the sales force did. Another observation we’ve seen from years of gathering information and testing concepts is this: Clients focus on verbatim comments rather than numbers. They pay attention to a few video interviews rather than a mountain of statistics. Clients, like consumers, want to see and hear real people. They may analyze all the facts and figures, but a few memorable quotes usually help them form an opinion. Knowing how clients respond to research can put the agency in the driver’s seat.

No matter how much research you gather, always remember . . .

- Research does not replace insight.
- Facts are not always emotionally true.
- Objective research is evaluated subjectively.
- Data are perishable commodities.

“Some of the biggest advertising mistakes are made by people who imagine they know what the problem is . . . they’re just coming up with that brilliant idea and trying to force the problem to fit it.”

Mary Wells Lawrence, copywriter and founding partner, Wells Rich Greene
Who Is the Target Audience?

Who are you talking to? If you’re lucky, marketing objectives will be very specific—such as increasing brand recognition among 35- to 65-year-old married men, living in the top 10 markets, earning $100,000 or more. Usually, though, a client tells the creative team about the product. Period. It’s up to the agency to find out who is most likely to buy it and why. Why is the keyword. Unless you know why the consumer is buying the product—or not buying it—your creative strategy is likely to fail.

Features and Benefits

You may not be selling a tangible product. It may be something you can’t hold in your hand, like the local bus company, an art museum, or a government agency. It may be about corporate image to promote the integrity or strength of a company. Good examples are hospitals, utility companies, and multinationals like General Electric. You could also develop creative for an organization, such as the American Cancer Society or Amnesty International. For the sake of simplicity, we will call the object of promotion the “product.”

From the Inside: Features

Products have characteristics and personality traits just like people. By themselves, these features are not good or bad. They’re just there. That’s why listing product features without putting them in context usually is not effective. Sometimes the benefit is so obvious the reader or viewer will connect the dots. But other times, writers just include a list and hope people will figure out what’s important.

Sometimes the benefit is much more emotional and woven into a branded story. On a luxury car, for example, features can be technical (collision avoidance), aesthetic (hand-stitched leather), or functional (keyless ignition). The overriding benefits? Safety, luxury, convenience. The more technical and abstract the feature, the greater the need to tie it to a tangible benefit to the consumer.

From the Outside: Benefits

Not all products have features you can promote, but all have benefits. A benefit leads to the satisfaction of a consumer’s wants and needs. “Cool, crisp flavor” is a benefit (it quenches thirst and tastes good). “Firm, smooth ride” is a benefit (it pleases the senses and gives...
peace of mind). “Kills 99.9% of household germs” is a benefit (you’re protecting your family’s health).

Anyone can write a feature ad. But to make an impact, you have to translate those features into benefits that resonate within the customer. Sometimes it’s as simple as listing a feature and lining up a benefit. That’s the old FAB (features, advantages, and benefits) approach, used for years in industrial brochures. However, we encourage you to think of more subtle and clever ways to promote the benefits. Edward de Bono, a cognitive expert, suggests that marketers pay close attention to the UBS, or unique buying state, of consumers.

So how do you take those features and spin them into benefits? Laddering can be a handy tool and one that can quickly add new options to the concepting process. Think of laddering as taking a single feature and climbing up a benefits ladder. Plus, laddering can set you up for great brainstorming.

Some older textbooks talked about aperture—the moment when consumers are most receptive. Think of the opening in a camera lens. When you’re considering how to leverage a benefit, consider finding the UBS that fits that opening.

Another approach came from a client. He uses the formula SW2C (So What? Who cares?). If you can answer those questions, you’re halfway there.

Table 2.2 gives some examples of features, benefits, and how they satisfy a consumer’s wants and needs.

As we’ll discuss shortly, you should think of an overriding benefit. Remember the adjective you need to tack on to the brand name—if that adjective is positive, it’s likely an overall benefit. And don’t be afraid to work with the account planners to connect your key benefit to the UBS. You might also consider the fact that many of the choices consumers make today are based on symbolic product attributes. Don’t discount intangible emotions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Wants and Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contains fluoride</td>
<td>Prevents tooth decay</td>
<td>Saves money, saves time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatic shutoff</td>
<td>Shuts off unit if you forget</td>
<td>Safety, saves money, convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic ignition</td>
<td>Easier starts in cold weather</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow nutrients release</td>
<td>Greener plants, more flowers</td>
<td>Aesthetically pleasing, convenient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2. Features, Benefits, Wants and Needs

“The core belief [is] that if you want to create anything new, you must always look outside your own work or industry for inspiration.”

Simon Mainwaring, freelance creative director

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For example, Subaru has owned the safety position for years. Other cars may have as many bells and whistles. But Subaru keeps finding simple, believable, and clever ways to show they are the safe choice. One classic ad showed the journey of a horribly managed wagon from the accident scene to the junkyard. In each vignette, people simply stated, “They lived.”

Finally, when spinning your benefits, think back to your brand—to its promise. Can your benefit engender positive emotion leading to trust? If so, you have leveraged the feature to its maximum potential, creating great strategic advantage.

Assembling the Facts

You’ve gathered a lot of information. Now it’s time to organize it into something you can use. The following are four basic ways to turn data into creative content.

The Brief

Some clients deliver a detailed brief with everything a creative team needs to start developing concepts. The most helpful briefs have a narrow focus with specific objectives. But the brief should not be so restrictive that the creative team feels handcuffed. As we’ll see in the chapter about developing concepts, a million-dollar idea may come out of the blue, regardless of the brief. On the other hand, too many briefs are vague, undeveloped, and open ended. Which means either the planner, account team, or creative team needs to do a lot of homework. Because briefs can vary so much, we can’t give you a template. But we can provide a simple outline. One of the best we’ve seen was used by the Virginia Commonwealth University Brandcenter. If these basic questions are answered in the brief, you’ve got a good road map to developing ideas.

1. What do we want to accomplish? (objective)
2. Who are we talking to? (target audience)
3. What do they think now? (current position)
4. What do we want them to think? (reinforce current or reposition)
5. Why should they think this? (features or benefits)
6. What is our message? (What is the One Thing?)

The following is a sample creative brief written by a student for Q-tips.

Who are we talking to? We are speaking to people who value a good product and want the best. More important, we are targeting the emerging Millennial crowd to sway their future buying habits.

What do they think now? The majority of our new audience is indifferent to Q-tips cotton swabs. They consider this a very menial purchase and usually pick the cheapest package on the rack. They have always depended on others to pick up this item, so this will be a brand-new purchase for them.

What do we want them to think? We want to instill a brand image into their minds, when they walk into a grocery store for personal care products; we want them to think Q-tips. We want them to pass over the generic products and choose Q-tips because Q-tips are a personal product as well as a practical one.

Why should they think this? Because Q-tips will be presented in a very edgy and fun way, we will be able to connect to our audience. This will carry over to the point of purchase and influence their buying habits. We want them to realize the importance of taking care of themselves with the highest quality of cotton swabs.

What is our message? Q-tips cotton swabs are a personal item with practical applications.

Copy Platform

The copy platform is also known as a creative strategy statement and by several other names. It can be as simple or as detailed as you’d like. No matter what you call it and how complicated it can be, a good copy platform should cover the product features and benefits; competitive advantages and weaknesses; information about the target audience; the tone of the message; and a simple, overriding statement about the product. We call this the One Thing. It can also be called the Central Truth, the Big Idea, or the Positioning Statement.
The best way to start—ask this simple question:

“If you could say just One Thing about this product, it would be _____________________________________________________.

It’s not an easy sentence to complete. When we begin working with new clients, we sometimes ask them to complete that statement. You’d be surprised how many times they struggle with an answer. The most common response is “Gee. Nobody really asked that before. It’s really so many things. I can’t think of just one.” Then they provide a laundry list of features. No wonder they needed a new agency!

Another way to think about a copy platform is to distill the essence of the consumer’s identity. Then distill the essence of the brand. Then find the sweet spot that marries both of these. It’s hard to do, and every agency has its own way of getting there. (Note: None of this is possible without a lot of research.) Here’s one example using this technique: Corona. The consumers are urban professionals seeking an escape. The brand is a premium, smooth Mexican beer. The One Thing: Corona takes you away.

A copy platform is essential to getting you to the positioning statement. You’ll find an example copy platform in the Appendix. It’s a compilation of several forms used by different agencies. Each firm will have its own way to organize information, but this one will do a pretty good job most of the time.

To summarize, we use copy platforms for the following reasons:

- Provide a framework for your ad: You have all the basic facts about the target, the product, the competition, and the marketplace. If you have some blank lines, you know you need more information.
- Identify the One Thing that’s most important: You could use a positioning statement. Or use a single adjective attached to the brand. Or it could be a sentence that describes what you want the consumer to believe about this product.
- Support that One Thing with believable information: This could be features and benefits that support product claims. In the case of a copy-free ad, only the visual supports that overriding image of the product.
- Connect people with the product: In your copy platform you should ask the following: What do you want the reader, viewer, or listener to do? What is the desired conviction and action step? Do you want the consumer to take a test drive? Ask for more information? Visit a website? Or do nothing?
- Organize the client’s thoughts: A good copy platform is a collaborative effort between client and agency. The client can provide a lot of information, and together you can clarify and prioritize it. This should not be done by a large committee—at least not by a committee larger than one or two people per client and agency. When completed, both the agency and the client have the same road map for creative strategy.
- Justify your creative decisions: If the client signed off on the copy platform, they will be less likely to criticize your creative efforts if you can prove you’re on strategy. If the client says you’re off target, you can ask where and why, based on your collaboration on the copy platform.

**Consumer Profile**

The consumer profile takes the copy platform and creative brief a step further by putting a human face on the target audience. Think of journalism’s five Ws in terms of the consumers: Who are they? What are their wants and needs, their buying intentions, their attitudes toward the product and competitors? What do they do for a living? What are their hobbies? Where do they live and work, and how does that affect their buying patterns? When are they planning to buy? When do they watch TV or use other types
of media? Why should they consider your product or the competitors? Based on the demographic, psychographic, lifestyles and values, and other research, a consumer profile puts some flesh on the bare bones of the copy platform. You might consider summarizing the demographics in the first paragraph and include the psychographics in the second paragraph while you weave the lifestyles and values through the whole profile.

The following list should help you develop some basic information about the product and potential customers:

- Who is the prospect?
- What does she do, and what does she want?
- Where does she live?
- When does she buy?
- Why would she be interested?
- How does she buy?

The following example was written by a student to describe the ideal prospect for Excedrin Migraine. You can see how by focusing on demographics and psychographics, you can create a personal portrait of the ideal person within the target audience. From this profile, thanks to attention to her media habits, we know that an advertiser can’t reach Maria very effectively through traditional media. She might notice billboards along her commute, but she’s not listening to the radio. She doesn’t read newspapers or magazines, and her television viewing includes a lot of non-commercial programs. Through demographics and psychographics we know our approach must be intelligent (she’s smart and successful) and to the point (she doesn’t have a lot of spare time). The benefit of a non-prescription remedy that could relieve her symptoms without taking time out for a doctor’s visit may be the main selling point.

**Value Proposition**

A value proposition can be a long, detailed statement that explains why a consumer should buy a product or service. Or it can be a short sentence. No matter how long it is, everyone in the creative team should know why a product will add more value or solve a problem better than the alternative. Or at least know why the advertiser believes it. The ideal value proposition is concise and appeals to the customer’s strongest decision-making drivers. In other words, their wants and needs.
Meet Maria

Maria Sanchez is a modern 35-year-old working mom with a husband and two children, ages 10 and 3. She graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in management, which helped her get a job in the human resources department of a large insurance company in Chicago. She has steadily advanced to become assistant department manager. She earns $65,000 and expects to continue moving up the corporate ladder. Her husband, Carlos, is a sales representative for a large manufacturing firm. His income varies greatly from year to year, so Maria’s large and stable income is extremely important to their family. Maria and Carlos live in a four-bedroom home in Hoffman Estates, which is a 45-minute commute one way (when traffic is moving). Maria loves her job, but the stresses of caring for a family, commuting, and handling the usual pressures of a human resources department can sometimes trigger a migraine headache. With her busy schedule, Maria can’t take time off from work and family when she has a migraine. The increased frequency of her migraines creates even more stress, but she doesn’t have time to visit a doctor or make an extra trip to the pharmacy.

In her spare time, Maria likes to ride her bicycle, play tennis, and shop. She and Carlos enjoy traveling, with and without the kids. They try to set aside at least one weekend a month as “date night” to recharge their marriage. Throughout her workday, she sneaks a peek at Instagram and Pinterest on her cell phone and spends at least an hour every night updating and responding to social media at home. At work, she’ll find a little time to catch up on social media. At home, Maria and Carlos will stream shows from Netflix, and when she’s with her mom and sisters, they’ll occasionally watch telenovelas on Univision. When commuting in her car, she’s plugged into satellite radio and almost never tunes into a local radio station. She’ll scan junk mail but never reads the newspaper, checking news online, and she’s canceled most of her magazine subscriptions. Most nights she’ll try to read a chapter or two on her Kindle in bed, but she usually nods off after a few minutes.

We like this simple formula for a value proposition. If you can fill in the blanks, you’ve got the foundation for building a campaign.

For _______ (target customers)
Who want ______ (specific desire)
We offer _____ (a new product or service functional benefit)
Instead of ______ (inadequate competitive offering)
We deliver _______ (emotional benefit)
Here is a value proposition a student prepared for Halo Top ice cream.

For college students transitioning to a healthier lifestyle, who want a satisfying but lower fat treat, we offer Halo Top ice cream, instead of fattening snacks like cake or cookies. We deliver all the taste of fattening desserts without the guilt.

Decide What’s Important

The ad will not write itself based on a compilation of facts. Sometimes a great creative idea stems from a minor benefit and blooms into a powerful image that drives a whole campaign. David Ogilvy wrote one of the best headlines ever by focusing on a Rolls-Royce clock rather than the whole car. Our advice: Get the facts and use them, but don’t be a slave to data. When you see a feature or even a rather vague benefit, be sure to ask this question:

So What?

What does that feature do for the consumer? Keep asking “So what?” until you get to the benefit that satisfies a basic want or need. Think about the questions you’d ask if you were buying something. You may not get something for the body copy. But if you keep probing, you might get an idea for a whole campaign.

For example:

Dove soap is one-quarter cleansing cream.

- So what? It’s creamier, less harsh to the skin.
- So what? Your skin looks younger, less dry.
- So what? You feel better about yourself.

Now you’ve got a hook. Don’t tell her about your soap, talk to her about feeling young, beautiful, free, and sexy. The Dove brand was launched in 1957, and while it’s changed a lot over the years, its core value is still there. Put yourself in the target customer’s shoes. Luke Sullivan says, “Ask yourself what would make you want to buy the product? Find the central truth about the product . . . hair coloring isn’t about looking younger. It’s about self-esteem. Cameras aren’t about pictures. They’re about stopping time and holding life as the sands run out.”

Tone: Finding Your Voice

You know what you want to say: You just have to figure out how to say it. Whether you create a formal tone statement or just think about it, you need to define the tone. Another way to think about

“The part I love is the process is when you cark the idea and suddenly all the possibilities come flooding forward . . . like a mental orgasm mixed with a sense of relief.”

Ross Chowles, cofounder, executive creative director, The Jupiter Drawing Room, Cape Town, South Africa
it is finding your voice. Is it loud and obnoxious? Soft and sexy? Logical and persuasive? Fun and carefree? Melodramatic and sensational? Or some other characteristic?

For example, if you did advertisements for a hospital, you wouldn’t make jokes about kids with cancer. You’d be hopeful, respectful, empathetic, and maybe emotional. In 2017, Pepsi set a new standard for tone-deaf advertising. In the middle of an intense nationwide discussion about police brutality, they chose to show Kendall Jenner giving riot cops a Pepsi. That’ll solve the problem!

The tone or voice of an ad is more than the concept. It’s reflected in the selection of talent, music, editing, direction, and voice inflection. The concept guiding a campaign for Spectrum was that satellite competitors were “evil.” How do you show evil? Vampires. Mad scientists. Mummies. Horned devils. But the twist is they’re like normal folks living everyday lives. Playing cards. Riding the bus. Holding garage sales. But they’re all frustrated by the evils of dish television. The subtle tone made the series much more fun than an in-your-face attack of evil beings. If you just read the script, you’d miss it. As with everything else, know the target audience. Then find the right way to connect with them.

Think Like a Planner, But Write Like a Creative

You’ve done your homework on the audience, the product, and the competition. Now you’re ready to talk to a prospective customer. It’s your job to give voice to that product or brand. Imagine you’re talking to a neighbor over the fence. Could you tell...
him or her the One Thing? Do you have answers to objections or misperceptions? Could you convince that neighbor to seek more information? It’s all about making that personal connection.

Here are a few samples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective: Introduce new hybrid crossover utility vehicle</th>
<th>Type of Product: Considered purchase, high-involvement durable goods</th>
<th>Target Audience: 20- to 30-year-old women in top 25 markets, $45,000 to $70,000 income</th>
<th>Possible Creative Strategy: Lots of pictures to show features, styling, captions to explain benefits (environmentally friendly, dependable, lots of space, mileage)</th>
<th>Tone: Convey fun, independence, adventure, and social responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective: Encourage contributions to animal rights group</th>
<th>Type of Product: Emotional issue, high involvement for select few</th>
<th>Target Audience: 18- to 64-year-old women</th>
<th>Possible Creative Strategy: Show animal suffering in lab tests, long copy tells story of animal and how you can help</th>
<th>Tone: Tap into caretaking emotions with urgency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Objective: Introduce new style of brace for arthritic knees | Type of Product: Considered purchase, high involvement | Target Audience: 45- to 80-year-old men and women with arthritis | Possible Creative Strategy: Position as alternative to surgery and drugs, show active seniors, testimonials, and before/after stories and images | Tone: Create peace of mind, tapping into dreams of reengaging in an active |

**Resonance and Positioning**

You’ve gathered, organized, and prioritized the background information on the product. You’ve identified the target audience. You’ve set the tone. What’s missing? How about your branding strategy? How do you put a face on that product or service that connects with consumers? Two key factors that help formulate branding strategy are resonance and positioning.
Resonance: Did You Just Feel Something?

When you achieve resonance, your external message connects with internal values and feelings. It connects to consumers’ emotional sweet spot. Tony Schwartz comments, “Resonance takes place when the stimuli out into our communication evoke meaning in a listener or viewer . . . the meaning of our communication is what a listener or viewer gets out of his experience with the communicator’s stimuli.”

Resonance requires a connection with feelings that are inside the consumer’s mind. You don’t have to put in a new emotion—just find a way to tap into what’s already there. You’ll see what we mean in Chapter 4. Your communication must trigger some internal experience and connect it with your message. Your brand story must be relevant. Relevance leads to resonance, which will strengthen awareness, begin building comprehension, and lead to conviction and possibly action. How’s that for connecting multiple streams of psychobabble? Want a simpler explanation?

\[ 1 + 1 = 3 \]

Resonance is connected to branding because a brand can make an emotional connection; it makes consumers feel something—sometimes that is good, and sometimes it’s bad. A harried mom with a carload of cranky kids sees those Golden Arches and rejoices, “At last—cheap food, Happy Meals, and relatively clean restrooms.” The next driver turns up her nose and thinks, “Ugh—greasy food, indifferent service, and a restaurant full of cranky kids demanding Happy Meals.” Both views are relevant and color the thinking about the brand.

The convergence of brand strategy and resonance theory succeeds best in brands that make consumers happy. Marketing professor Pierre Chandon states, “People align themselves with a brand that reflects what they see when they look in the mirror.” Meghan Casserly at Forbes.com listed the world’s happiest brands. Here’s our take on some of her selections.

**Apple:** I belong to a special group of creative non-conformists. Actually, I want to look as cool as the other people who want to look cool, and I don’t even want to know if another brand is better.

**Campbell’s Soup:** It brings back warm feelings after coming in on a cold day. Actually, I’m too lazy to make anything from scratch, and I don’t care about all that extra sodium and fat.

**Coca-Cola:** I remember all the good times when Coke was the ultimate refreshment. Actually, I would love to have a Coke with every meal, but other than childhood memories, there isn’t one redeeming thing about this sugary carbonated beverage.

**Facebook:** I’m in control of my own brand story. Actually, I’m creeped out by people looking at my page, my mom bugs me constantly about helping her with updates, and it’s turned into another advertising medium.

**Johnson’s Baby Products:** My mom used it on me. I use it on my kids. Actually, if there’s anything wrong with something this pure and innocent, I really don’t want to hear about it.

**Kraft Macaroni & Cheese:** It’s easy, cheesy, and sometimes the perfect food. Actually, it usually tastes like crap, but most of the time I’m too burned out to make anything else.

**Assume the Position**

Al Ries and Jack Trout revolutionized marketing in the late 1970s and early 1980s with their theory of positioning. Their book *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* introduced a new way of thinking about products and how they fit into the marketplace. This is the best definition of positioning we’ve found:
Simply stated, positioning is the perception consumers have of your product, not unto itself, but relative to the competition.¹⁶

The key to understanding and using positioning lies in the consumer’s mind. The consumer files product considerations into two broad categories: garbage (“nothing there for me”) and maybe-I’m-interested. In the second category, consumers use subcategories for different products, often aligning those positions with heavily promoted brand images. For example, BMWs are fast. Volvos are safe. Jeeps are rugged. And so on. So if you asked most consumers to “position” or rank those brands in various categories, you’d probably find some resistance to the idea that a BMW is as safe as a Volvo, or that a Jeep can be as fast as a BMW, or that Volvo can be as rugged as a Jeep. All true in some cases, but not universally believed. Once a position is established, it takes a lot of effort to change it.

Before you develop the position of your client’s product, you have to ask:

- What is the current position?
- What is the competitor’s position?
- Where do you want to be?
- How are you going to get there? (That’s strategy.)

Repositioning and Rebranding

If you don’t like your product’s position, you can try to change it from the top down. Here are the main reasons to consider repositioning and rebranding a product or service.

- Society and marketing environment has changed: It’s not enough to avoid social issues. Consumers want to know what a brand stands for. Or against.
- The competition has changed: Legos.
- Sales are lagging: If you don’t have the right products or competitive pricing, consider changing your image: Sears.
- Your brand has had a recent crisis or negative publicity: Facebook.
- Your brand is no longer relevant: Blockbuster.

Change is inevitable, so a company should always be evaluating its brand to remain current and connected.

Here are a few examples:

**Barbie:** Other than hairstyles and cosmetics, Barbie hadn’t changed much since she debuted at the 1959 Toy Fair. She was all about clothes, beauty, and an impossible-to-achieve body image. Today, empowerment is the new standard for beauty—growing up strong, confident, independent, and smart. The old Barbie didn’t reflect this shift, and sales were dipping. In 2015, Mattel offered new Barbies with more realistic body types and different ethnicities. Mattel encouraged girls to imagine the possibilities of meaningful careers, instead of settling for Ken and a Malibu Dream House. Since the branding refocus, sales have increased more than 20%.¹⁷

**Buick:** After GM axed Pontiac, Saturn, Hummer, and Saab, a lot of people wondered why Buick survived. First, they were becoming a huge luxury brand in China. Next, they introduced some good-looking crossovers when a lot of people were dumping their minivans. But the biggest reason was a new marketing campaign aimed at style-conscious and tech-savvy Millennials.
The campaign showed young people who could not believe “That’s a Buick?” A heavy advertising schedule on sports and awards shows stressed the brand’s new attitude. Buick moved its demographics even younger and more female, touting luxury interiors, 4G LTE Wi-Fi, and Apple Play. The Encore “cute ute” is now their biggest seller. As of this writing, Buick is one of the fastest growing domestic car brands.

Judith Aquino notes, “Rebranding a company’s goals, message, and culture is hard—many have tried and most fail. A successful campaign requires more than a revamped logo. It demands a vision that inspires customers, investors, and others to see the company in a new light. Through savvy marketing and better quality control, some companies discovered new ways to revive their brands and in some cases, made them stronger than ever.”

While Ries and Trout opened a lot of minds to the idea of positioning, we don’t agree with their premise that creativity makes no difference. Sometimes it’s the only difference. Another caveat is that Ries and Trout analyzed successful campaigns in the past tense and made them fit their theory. Did the 7UP creative team really think about positioning when they launched the “Uncola” campaign, or did they just want to do smart comparative advertising? Often the creative is the only thing that makes a brand memorable, and it usually takes time for it to stick.

The Power and the Limits of Branding

For years we’ve been firmly entrenched in what marketing guru Scott Bedbury called “a new brand world.” Today as social media and word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing mold more opinions, fewer people accept what advertisers say about their brands. In fact, more consumers, especially Millennials, have formed a significant anti-corporate sentiment that has severely eroded the once powerful brands of their generation.

Before you start supporting a brand with marketing communication, you have to understand the strengths and the challenges of branding. Luke Sullivan takes the traditional view: “A brand isn’t just a name on the box. It isn’t the thing in the box either. A brand is the sum total of all the emotions, thoughts, images, history, possibilities
and gossip that exist in the marketplace about a certain company.” Companies marketing brands that have positive images experience billions of dollars in extra brand equity, worth far more than the physical assets of their firms. They protect those brands and all the symbols associated with them like a mama bear. Put an unlicensed NFL team logo on a jersey and you’ll see how sharp those claws can be. Brands that are losing their luster have backed away from the most blatant identification on their products to stop their losses.

In May 2016, Belgian-based AB InBev hatched a scheme to introduce their flagship Budweiser brand to Millennials. They changed the name and all the packaging to “America” and expected the campaign to run through the Summer Olympics and up to the November election. The first couple of weeks generated a lot of buzz. But it didn’t take long for perception metrics in all categories to slump. The switch did little to improve brand image or boost sales. It also didn’t help that Donald Trump took credit for the name change.20 Despite the disappointing results, the campaign won a 2017 Gold Clio.

**Brand Image**

Brand image advertising and promotion sell the personality, the mystique, and the aura surrounding or emanating from the product or the company that makes it. Think of the old cliché “Sell the sizzle,
not the steak.” Every product has a brand image, whether weak or strong, negative or positive. Consider these two aspects of branding:

What it is: A brand is a promise. It’s shorthand for all the product’s attributes, both good and bad.

What it does: A brand makes its promise personal by conveying the product’s personality, which reflects on the people who buy the product. It’s really about relationships.

How does the brand image of BMW differ from that of Cadillac or Lexus? They all cost about the same but have different characteristics, as do their customers. How did Apple differentiate its computers from PCs? Not as a technically superior and more expensive computer, but rather as a computer with an easy-to-use operating system favored by cool creatives. IBM told people to “Think.” Apple said, “Think different.” Luke Sullivan states, “Most of the time we’re talking about going into a customer’s brain and tacking on one adjective onto a client’s brand. That’s all. DeWalt tools are safe. Apple computers are easy to use. . . Volvo are safe. Porsches are fast. Jeeps are rugged. Boom. Where’s the rocket science here?” To support a brand’s image, advertisers use simple, unique, and easily recognized visuals. Over time, the brand (and all its attributes, good and bad) comes to mind when a consumer even catches a glimpse of these visuals.

**Branded Storytelling**

Every brand has a story behind it. A marketer’s job is to make sure it’s a good story, one that can be told over and over again by satisfied customers. Advertisers are searching to create a “unique story proposition.” Alain Thys writes, “Great brand stories stem from the reason a brand exists. Apple wanted to free creative spirits while slaying the Microsoft dragon. Coco Chanel set out to reinvent fashion and liberate women from tradition. Pepsi wants to be a catalyst for change for every generation. Dig into the history, people and promises of your brand to uncover its Unique Story Proposition (USP). Make this the anchor for every story you tell.”

Self-described marketing heretic Mark Di Somma states, “Stories are the backbones of powerful brands. Every strong brand is backed by a powerful brand story that weaves together all the brand elements into a single and compelling tale packed with truth, insights and compelling ideas.” Stories are driven by emotions, and consumers are expressing these emotions through their consumption choices. Think of how Nike has managed to direct all its communications toward one underlying message—the will to win. They have to do this through telling the story of individual athletic success, but always in the context of the athletic community—the Nike community. In the process, consumers see themselves within these stories and thus within the Nike community. They, too, dream of winning, and Nike’s stories represent their stories—or at least their mythological possibility. Nike’s advertising provides the context for this mythology to grow. It also demonstrates how branding and the USP shape consumers’ experiences.

Perhaps no brand was a greater reflection of its CEO than Apple. Steve Jobs’s fanatical control over everything, including advertising, resulted in some of the greatest campaigns of all time. As a struggling upstart and later as a market leader, Apple’s
brand story was consistent: Create simple, easy-to-use, elegant products that make the
user a better person and, as a result, the world a better place. Jobs’s brand message
of technology as a humanizing force was eloquently stated in the introduction of the
iPad 2, his last big product launch. Even with Jobs’s passing, the ethos of control
remains visible in the continued dominance of the Apple brand.

This is what we believe. Technology alone is not enough. Faster. Thinner. Lighter. Those
are all good things. But when technology gets out of the way, everything becomes more
delightful, even magical. That’s when you leap forward. That’s when you end up with
something like this.  

**Parent Brands and Their Relatives**

Even with changes in how brands are perceived, marketers still need to establish
recognition, differentiation, and relevance for their brands. In earlier times, the
solution was to saturate every advertising medium and slap that logo on anything
that won’t move. However, advertising funds are limited, even for huge companies,
so a more sophisticated approach was required to make that brand stick in the minds
of consumers.

David Aaker, brand consultant and author of more than 14 books, suggests that the
value of a brand is often rooted in the parent brand. Subbrands are the value brands.
Marriott is the parent brand, while Courtyard by Marriott is a value-based subbrand.
Aaker suggests there are three types of relationships between parent brands and
subbrands: endorser, codriver, and driver brands. Let’s use Nike to walk you through.
Nearly every extension of the Nike brand, from Nike Golf to NIKEiD, carries with it the
cache of the parent brand. Now let’s see how it plays out.

- **Endorser brand:** This brand is endorsed by the Nike parent brand.
- **Codriver brand:** This brand is equal to the parent brand in terms of its influence
  with consumers and sometimes appears as a competitor.
- **Driver brand:** With this brand, the parent maintains primary influence as
driver, and the subbrand acts as a descriptor, telling consumers that the parent
company is offering a slight variation on the product or service they have come
to know and trust.

**Brand Extensions**

Also called line extensions, brand extensions can be a great way to build loyalty
to the parent brand. And brand loyalty means long-term profitability, sometimes
from generation to generation. Financial analyst Larry Light says, “A superior brand
extension gives current customers an additional reason and way to interact with the
parent brand.”

He uses consumer package good giant Procter & Gamble (P&G) as an example. “Tide is a bigger, more profitable, more exciting, modern brand because
of all its extensions: Tide PODS® with Downy™! Tide PODS® Odor Defense™! Tide
PODS® plus Febreeze™! And, there is Tide Liquid, Tide Powder, Tide Liquid HE. Crest
brand has toothpaste with Scope, toothbrushes, whitening products. By innovating and
renovating and extending their big brands, P&G has kept brands like Tide, Gain, Ivory,
Pampers, and others current. If you are an athlete, a weekend warrior or just a devotee
of the gym, there is a Tide for sports clothes. To compete with Huggies Pull-Ups, there is a Pampers Pants. For people who cannot afford prices on some P&G brands, there are ‘Basics’ versions. P&G has created new and interesting ways in which you and I can experience their brands.” Robert Sprung, partner of a major branding services company, says, “A good line extension takes a brand with a solid core of values and applies it to an area where the brand has permission to go.”

The Branding Strategy Insider website lists some guidelines for successful brand extension:

- Have you identified what your brand owns in the consumer’s mind? [In other words, what is your brand’s position?]
- Have you identified all the areas in which the consumer gives your brand position to operate?
- Have you identified all the ways your brand and others in its category have made compromises with the consumer?
- Have you found ways to redefine your business to break those compromises?
- Have you explored ways to make your brand more relevant to the next generation of consumers?
- Do you have a way to screen all new brand extension proposals for their congruence with the brand promise and impact on brand equity? [A fancy way of asking if you’ve done your homework.]

**Brands Can Take a Stand**

As brand specialist, Molly DeWolf Swenson states, “A brand isn’t a bystander. It’s an 800-pound gorilla that has an opportunity—or, dare I say, the responsibility—to leverage not only its corporate social responsibility (CSR) dollars, but also its products audiences, media, and yes, advertising, in support of the side of history it wants to be on.”

Consumers want to know more than what the product will do for them. Brands like Airbnb, Chipotle, Dove, Subaru, Oreo, and many others take a stand. Often at the risk of alienating some potential customers. One popular regional beer company supported the recall of a governor. The governor won the recall and the next election. But the beer brand lost a lot of customers in its home state.

It takes more than a quick shot of cause marketing to establish a brand position that sticks. It makes the most sense when a brand supports a cause directly connected to its products. For example, Patagonia protested strongly against the removal of protection for national monuments in Utah. As we’ll see in the next chapters, advertisers can no longer “expect to play Switzerland while the rest of the world takes sides.” The good news is they can do well by doing good.

**Reverse Branding**

Millennials have the reputation of being brand adverse. They reject capitalism and focus on acquiring experiences rather than material goods. That’s a common Boomer misperception. Josh Ong from app developer Cheetah Mobile (and a Millennial by the way) has a different idea. “Millennials are more likely than any other demographic to
be brand loyal. But... they are highly attuned to the story that a brand tells, as well as the values that the brand exhibits. Generally, Millennials choose... brands that tell inspiring stories, conduct business ethically or contribute to their personal brands. At the same time, millennials have been gravitating away from established corporate brands and toward newer companies with less name recognition. It's become less about the logo and more about the product itself.\(^{31}\)

A Kickstarter campaign raised funds to manufacture and market “non-branded” consumer package goods. The new Public Goods products feature sleek, white packaging with plain black lettering—the antithesis of their glitzy competitors. They say they're all about the quality of the product inside the bottle rather than the packaging. Trader Joes, Target, and Walgreens have all introduced generic equivalents as part of a reverse branding strategy. But by the strict definition of branding, these non-brands take on their own unique identity.

Josh Ong continues, “Reverse branding, therefore, has little to do with the recognizability of the logo. Instead, it focuses on the quality of the product and ethos of the brand as a whole. It's not hard to see why brands that take this tactic can resonate so strongly with millennials, as it incorporates three of the elements that are most important to them: namely quality, social responsibility and value. As this type of branding becomes more popular and millennials become more familiar with these strategies, brands will have to become more authentic and embrace corporate social responsibility as part of their overall narrative. Millennials might be more likely to be brand loyal, but they're also very sensitive to corporate speak; it's all about striking the right balance.”\(^{32}\)
Converse has been a teen shoe staple since, well, forever. Marty McFly wore them in *Back to the Future*. Ally Sheedy danced on school library tables in them in *The Breakfast Club*. Maybe you’re wearing them RIGHT NOW! Whatever the case, other shoes come and go, but Chucks are here to stay. Keeping them top of mind, however, is still vital. So, to keep Chucks top of mind for back-to-school, we honed in on the most universal experience of all, the first day.

“First day feels” are a thing. Everyone who’s ever been a kid knows the butterflies that build up as they sit down on the school bus or walk up the school’s front steps on the first day, the worry that springs up when a certain teacher steps to the front of the room. Everyone’s been there, adults included—whether starting a new career, or moving to a new place; it’s endlessly relatable.

So how do you evoke the feels without making it cliché? Or worse, look like it’s trying too hard?

First, you get the most relatable, of-the-moment teen to be the face of the campaign: Millie Bobby Brown. As the star of Netflix phenomenon *Stranger Things*, a show that adeptly captures the awkwardness of being a teen, she was primed in bringing all those first day feels to life.

But day one is unpredictable, and teens want fresh ways to express themselves in that moment, just like they express themselves in a fresh pair of Chucks. We already walked the walk; we just needed to talk the talk. So we turned to the ultimate form of modern teen speak: the reaction GIF.

We turned to psychology to map out all the different emotions people share about on social media. From there, we created 32 GIFs that each expressed a different, unspoken feeling from the first day of school. Shock, excitement, curiosity, fear, confusion—it became a shareable, relatable language that teens, and the entire internet, could use, for whatever, whenever.

We translated those GIFs to 22 memes to inspire usage and cut them together into two longer-form videos to tell a bigger narrative. But we left the rest open for interpretation. Because the campaign was really about reminding teens that Converse is a brand for self-expression—in our apparel but also in the way we get you to connect with it, each other, and the world.

Together, those 32 GIFs were viewed more than 276 million times. The memes got 42.8 million eyeballs on them, and the videos garnered 10.2 million views. The real kicker? Since GIFs never truly disappear, our campaign is technically still going, long after its short shelf life, with no signs of stopping.

Not bad for a tiny campaign, launched during one of the busiest times of year for teens.

*Michael Lebowitz, founder and CEO, Big Spaceship, New York*

*bigspaceship.com*
I got laid off from my first job in advertising. It was about three months in, and the account I was working on slashed their retainer with the agency. Being the newbie, I was the first to be let go. As a fresh grad, this was crushing. I was embarrassed, and my confidence was shaken.

On a risky whim, I decided to move with a friend of mine to Chicago. We had no jobs, no money, and we’d never even been to Chicago. We sublet a studio apartment together and lived there for about 3 months on air beds. I took temp jobs to get by and spent most of my time applying for full-time jobs. We couldn’t afford Internet, so I quickly learned the value of a public library. One of the jobs I applied for led me back to Missouri.

I was offered a job in non-profit marketing from a downtown partnership in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Some of my main duties included planning downtown events, marketing downtown as a whole, and serving as a liaison to business owners. I learned tons about internal marketing that gave me tremendous patience and respect for clients in my current role on the agency side. Decisions take time and thoughtfulness, so I focus on being empathetic and finding the best way to help a client move forward. One way is to make decisions easier for them. Instead of asking “What do you think about the color scheme?” I show a client that I’ve put a lot of thought into the color scheme by saying this: “We are in love with the blue color scheme and think it’s so in line with your company ethos and brand. Do we have your approval to move forward?” This shows the client that the decision to go blue has been thought through and makes it easier for them to come to a conclusion.

Two years into my role at the downtown partnership, I worked with a digital agency to redesign the organization’s website, and shortly after I applied to work with that agency: Element 74. I got the job! Seven years later and I still work at Element 74. I started out as a project manager and worked my way up to my current role, vice president of digital strategy. We’re a small firm of 20 that’s really passionate about making a mark in the digital industry through website development, application development, and content marketing. During my time here, I’ve helped launch over 70 websites and worked on several retainers. I’ve worked with clients big and small and from all walks of life, from construction companies to Catholic nuns to condos in the Cayman Islands!

So you may find yourself laid off one day like I did, but keep looking, keep putting out applications, keep allowing yourself to dream—you’re worth it, and the world won’t be the same without you at your best!34

Toni Keesee, vice president of digital strategy, Element 74, Cape Girardeau, MO
@tonikesee
Chapter 2

Margaret Johnson

Named the 2017 Agency Executive of the Year by Ad Age, Johnson is an enigma. She's been at the same agency, Goodby Silverstein and Partners (GS&P), for 21 years and has risen to chief creative officer and partner. While she's thought about leaving, it always comes back to, “I love San Francisco and Rich (Silverstein) and Jeff (Goodby).” Who wouldn’t. GSP has won more awards than most agencies and, year after year, is always at the top of the list when the industry press searches for the top agencies of the year. A North Carolina native, Johnson has led the agency on experiential activation for Xfinity to social statements on Stacy’s pita chips to Tostitos bags that could be used as Breathalyzers. Johnson also has the ear of Pepsi’s chief marketing officer, who says, “She’s exactly the person you want running your account.”

Shirley Polykoff

When the vast majority of copywriters were males, Polykoff began working as a teenager for Harper’s Bazaar magazine. After a career of retail copywriting, she took over the Clairol account at Foote, Cone & Belding (FCB), where she penned the classic “Does she . . . or doesn’t she?” Polykoff reached the position of executive vice president and creative director at FCB and left to found her own successful agency.

Jason Norcross

Nearly 25 years ago, Jason Norcross graduated from Boston College and moved from Boston to Los Angeles. He wanted not just to move geographically but wanted to move to an edgy start-up instead of an established agency. He joined 72andSunny, as a writer, and got just that. Today, he’s a partner and executive creative director. The result is that Norcross has created an award-winning powerhouse that has redefined brands such as Coors, LG, Adidas, and Carl’s Jr.

Keith Weed

A graduate of the University of Liverpool, Weed is now Unilever’s chief marketing and communications officer and leads a team committed to sustainability and transparency. His team delivers a digital experience that empowers consumers with better, faster, and more relevant content. This year he raised expectations on two fronts—first to transform the digital ecosystem and second to stamp out stereotypes. To achieve the latter, he’s formed a partnership with UN Women to create brands with purpose. Weed fundamentally believes that sustainable, living brands mean faster growth. And, he’s right. He and his team of package goods marketers at Unilever have seen 60% growth recently.

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A Distinctive Brand With a Generic Name

Heart Inc. is a growing non-profit organization that connects senior citizens with therapy dogs in their homes on a weekly basis. The idea is to give the senior citizens, many of whom live alone, the opportunity to connect with a therapy dog for an hour or two during the week. In addition to providing some fun with the dog and conversation with its human trainer, time with the dogs has been proven to lower the seniors’ blood pressure, lower their overall physical pain, and improve heart health.

When Heart Inc. was founded in 2006, it was a small organization that provided services only in its local area. By 2015, Heart Inc. had grown to have a broader, more regional geographic focus that increased services by more than 125% and attracted a significant amount of media coverage and subsequent donations. With the influx of revenue, Heart Inc.’s board of directors decided to expand nationally. With this decision came the necessity of protecting the brand, including filing for trademark protection.

One of the requirements of a trademark is that it be somehow distinctive in order to be registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). Registration with the USPTO ensures the fullest legal protection for trademarks from infringement and counterfeiting, but it is not required of brand owners.

Heart Inc. decided it would register its name and logo—a simple red heart that accompanies the name on official documents but stands alone on marketing materials—with the USPTO as a strategy. After hiring an attorney to research the trademark and file with the USPTO, at a significant cost to Heart Inc.’s bottom line, the USPTO rejected the trademark as being too “generic” for federal trademark protection.

With the disappointing news from the USPTO, Heart Inc. had a decision to make: Should it pursue trademark registration, which would necessitate a change in name and logo, or should it simply continue with business as usual and not concern itself with trademark protection? The decision has a number of dimensions to consider, including the following:

- Changing the name would require additional cost, but it’s the only way to get full legal trademark protection.
- Not changing the name and logo means there is no legal protection, so there is no legal and financial recourse if another organization uses the name or logo.
- The name and logo are generic, so how much equity does the organization have in them?

These were the three main issues the board was asked to consider before it voted on how to move forward.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is having a generic brand name and logo a problem for any organization?
2. If you were on the board of directors at Heart Inc., what would you recommend: a name change and subsequent trademark registration, or going about business as usual without the legal protection afforded by trademark law?
3. In what ways is trademark protection a bigger consideration for a national organization than for a local or regional organization?
4. If Heart Inc. decides to forego trademark protection, what are some of the potential implications of this decision?
5. If Heart Inc. decides to change its name and logo, suggest some alternatives and the reasons for your choices.

Susan Westcott Alessandri, associate professor, Suffolk University
1. Marketing Problems

Every brand has a problem; otherwise, there’d be no need for advertising. This is an exercise on developing the strategy before the creative ideas start. After a short discussion on marketing challenges in general, collectively identify three or four brands that are struggling. Once they are selected, take one of them and provide information for the following:

- What are their overall marketing problems and why?
- Who should they be talking to?
- What does their target audience believe about the brand?
- What do we want them to believe about the brand?
- How do we reach the target audience?
- What’s the One Thing we want the target audience to think about the brand?

This exercise can be done as a written assignment in class, as a homework assignment, or as an open class discussion.

Suggestions for brands have been as follows:

- Sears
- Office Depot
- Calvin Klein
- Pizza Hut
- Miller Lite
- Subway
- Facebook

But there are dozens more to choose from, preferably a brand that’s currently in the news.

2. What’s the Big Idea, Buddy?

(Contributed by Kimberly Selber, PhD, associate professor, University of Texas–Pan American)

This exercise is all about finding the Big Idea or the One Thing and linking it to strategy.
• Find several campaigns with at least three ads. (Try using Archive magazine for this assignment; the online version—http://www.luerzersarchive.net—is great, because you can easily grab all the ads together.)

• Write a copy platform or creative brief for each campaign. End with one sentence describing the overarching concept in the campaign—the One Thing.

• Compare how other students or groups interpreted your message. If the messaging is tight, the briefs should be similar. This works great as an in-class exercise or as homework in teams or solo.

3. Brand Stretching

• As a class, generate a list of five brands, from five different product categories. Now, individually generate a list of brand extensions for each product. Consider what areas the parent brand already owns and in which areas of the brand you find growth opportunities.

• Now pick one brand. Post your brand and list of potential brand extensions. Explain the rationale for each brand extension choice.

• Then, as a class, generate other possible brand extensions.

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