

# CATALYST

the **MARXGROUP**

Business Strategy | Marketing Communications

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## There is Power in an Effective Strategic Creative Brief

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The old adage "Garbage In-Garbage Out" is especially true when it comes to communicating effectively with your creative team, or any other project team for that matter. By providing your team with enough basic information about the strategy, messaging, timeline and financial resources from the get-go, you can ensure a more effective, efficient – more powerful – outcome.

A Strategic Creative Brief is usually written by a marketing person/team and delivered to a creative person/team. An effective briefing document is a statement of the strategy, specific communication objective, key messages, benefits and target audience. Its primary purpose is to provide complete enough information about a campaign or project that the creative team can go off and do their magic.

You will know how effectively your Strategic Creative Brief has been communicated by:

1. Whether your Communication Objective has been met
2. If the visuals and messaging are on-strategy
3. The results require minimal revisions - your creative team 'nailed it' from the beginning

***A well-written Strategic Creative Brief is a tool that can give you highly measurable results.***

### **The Process Itself Makes a Difference**

A significant benefit to your team is in the design of the document itself. The process of writing the document gets the marketing people focused on the strategy, key challenges and goals. This helps create a powerful alignment within the marketing team.

Some of these steps may sound obvious, but we have found that when pulled together, they really make a difference.

#### *The Process*

*Determine objectives*

*Gather support materials*

*Write a draft of the brief*

*Review and simplify the brief*

*Get sign-off by both the internal and external "client"*

*Present the brief to the creative team*

*Set up feedback schedule and feedback loop*

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If you follow these practices you will find the creative process to be far more fulfilling, effective and efficient.

### **Components of a Strategic Creative Brief**

When delivering the brief, provide as many supporting materials as possible, including examples of past creative, competitor's programs, market research, etc. Ideally, the brief and supporting information is emailed in advance to the creative team, so people come prepared with questions.

#### **A. Project Description**

This is where you bottom-line the scope of the project. Simply state what it is: an ad, a brochure, a web page, a promotion, etc. Choose a 'title' for the project that is short and to the point, as this will be the 'phrase' your team will use when speaking of the project, i.e. "Acme Racing Ad Campaign."

There may be specific criteria, including a high-level timeline, which should be mentioned. For example: "This promotion will be launched June 1 and run for 6 months. Basic needs for the Acme Racing Ad Campaign include direct mail, POS, PR and trade ads."

#### **B. The Challenge**

State the main obstacle (not a list of lesser or all obstacles) that stands in the path of a successful marketing communications program, and a resulting improvement in sales. This obstacle, or challenge, may be a result of competitive pressure, product/service weaknesses, or negative perceptions.

#### **C. Campaign, Project or Client Strategy**

This is the most important section and often the one that causes the most debate. The sliced-and-diced version of the strategy is delivered here, stating the overarching goals and objectives of the campaign. You must provide specifics, but NOT overload your creative team with useless information.

#### **D. Communication/Project Objective**

What would a successful marketing communications program be expected to achieve in the context of The Challenge (B)? This section states the goals for the campaign/project. Measurable, quantifiable objectives are best, i.e. increased inquiries/appointments with salespeople, changes in public perception, a significant up-tic in bottom line sales, or even noticeably more website traffic. The more measurable the objectives, the more your team will remain accountable.

#### **E. Target Audience**

Specific geographic, demographic and psychographic parameters will focus the creative effort. Be sure that these elements are in line with the strategy. Include any research to support the audience description.

#### **F. Key Benefits**

Key benefits include unique characteristics, user benefits, channel opportunities and vital attributes/differentiators when compared to your competitors' products/services. Developing this section is another opportunity for your team to be aligned and to achieve buy-in from others in the company.

#### **G. Key Messages**

Key messages are distinctly different than key benefits. These are the marketing communication messages you want your audience to remember the most. Important phrases and specific product language will help guide the copywriter.

#### **H. Practical and Executional Considerations**

This is where you state specific tactical guidelines or parameters. These executional considerations may include logos, tagline usage, pre-existing or pre-determined color schemes and formats, corporate marketing guidelines, dimensional limitations or considerations, etc. – those elements that are required as a part of your brand.

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## **I. Timeline**

A clear timeline will guide the entire future of the project. Include strategic review dates and final delivery date. Make note of whether the project delivery coincides with a trade show, project launch or some other special event, and be sure to take into account important team member travel dates.

## **J. Budget**

Carefully articulating the budget is indispensable. If the sky is the limit, then the creative team will know no limitations, and may plan on custom photography, special effects, Flash web design and other more costly techniques. On the other hand, a lower budget may require using stock photos, black and white rather than 4-color, a flat mailer rather than a dimensional mailer, etc. Best to set practical expectations at the beginning. However, if appropriate, it is wise to include language that leaves some room for budget adjustments as the scope and the strategy evolve over time.

### ***Example:***

The budget to complete this project has not been fully developed, but is estimated to be \$xxxx (+/- 10%), based on the following Scope of Work / Project Specifications.

1. xxx
2. xxx
3. xxx

A detailed estimate for this project will be presented as soon as final concepts, specifications and schedules are approved.

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