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Don't go to market with a substandard, poorly planned campaign, or else, says **Simon Rowell**, you may just be doing your competitors a big favour.

Communication planning... a structured approach to success

"Know your enemy, know yourself and your victory will not be threatened. Know the terrain, know the weather and your victory will be complete."

Sun Tzu

Reading those words from *The Art of War*, I have often thought that if Sun Tzu were around today he would have made a great strategist for an ad agency. It is almost a definition, albeit a little abstract, of what strategy planning should be all about.

The benefits of strategy planning with relation to communication development are generally well-understood by most professional marketers. Strategy planning allows for clarity of focus with regard to branding and communication elements, and allows marketing teams the potential to share a common view regarding the direction and aspirations for the brand. Planning leads to improved inputs into the communication development process, which in most cases leads to better creative being developed.

At the very least, for a piece of advertising to be truly successful it must do a number of things. It must involve and engage the target audience, it must contain simple mes-

sages that convey benefits and it must have the brand at the heart of the creative. If you can take your product out of the creative, slip in a competitor's product and still run the ad, think again – you may well just be advertising your category and saving your competitors some of their budget.

For it to be declared a success, advertising must also cause its target market to respond in the desired manner, be it functionally (by buying something) or emotionally (by feeling something).

To achieve all of these things, a degree of strategy planning needs to be undertaken with the marketing team. It has generally been my experience that whenever a new product or campaign is about to be launched, the marketing team has trouble finding time to communi-

cate with each other, much less see the wood for the trees. Planning sessions allow for the collective focus required to move forward successfully.

SIMPLIFYING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Strategy planning usually incorporates a combination of workshops, one-on-one sessions, analysis of primary and secondary research, and strategic modelling techniques. Executed correctly, strategy planning should always simplify, not complicate, the decision-making process.

But how should planning occur and what should marketers expect from strategy planners in terms of process? Below I have outlined a structured and methodical six-step framework that I believe planning

should follow in order to get the maximum out of the process.

STEP 1: ASSESSING THE ENVIRONMENT

The first step is to undertake a thorough assessment and analysis of the operating environment. This involves interrogating internal issues such as the product/service offering, USP, key benefits, brand strengths and weaknesses, brand personality and attributes, resources and priorities. External issues that should be investigated include target markets, opportunities and threats, brand saliency and understanding, competitive brand mapping and environmental trends.

Only once agreement has been reached on these issues should you move on to the next step.

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