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The Nasuti & Hinkle Creative Brief

There are dozens of ways to do a Creative Brief. They vary from agency to agency. Many are good; just as many are not. Our Creative Brief is one we developed partly on our own and partly by borrowing elements we liked from some we admired. This is our take on it: Like that funny commercial you saw but can't remember what it was for, creativity by its own self isn't going to do anything for you.

A Creative Brief is a story. As such, it needs to tell the story of our assignment, regardless of what kind of assignment or project we are undertaking.

It is developed by the entire team on a project or account. The account manager will gather the basic factual information to jump-start the process. The development of the brief should be an energetic thing and you shouldn't show up if you don't plan to participate. A brief should be alive and somewhat exciting. It is a story and whomever is presenting it to the client should present it as such.

Although the Creative Brief is something we present to the client, it is not a client document. We need to be clear on this. It is an internal document. Is the reason correct? Is the target audience right? Is what that group believes right? Does the client agree with what we want them to believe and our take on the single most persuasive message? Do they buy into our strategy? These are the things that matter.

The brief should be just that. Brief. It is as much an exercise to force focused thinking as it is a document – perhaps more. If we cannot marshal our thoughts into a tight recitation of the situation, what we propose to do about it and why, then we haven't thought it through very well. The ideal length is no more than a page and a half or less.

A Creative Brief should be simply and clearly and plainly written. Straightforward, short sentences and simple words. We're not trying to impress anybody with our command of the language. We're trying to convey and organize information.

Not every brief is identical to every other brief, but basically, this is what is in it.

Why are we advertising at all?

"Advertising" as used here means whatever we are doing. It might not actually be an "ad". This is where we must consider what we want to happen as a result of our effort. We are not advertising to announce the opening of a new store, for example. We are advertising to *draw customers to the opening of a new store*.

Also, we are never advertising because "The client bought an ad in a directory/publication or any other thing." There always needs to be a reason for it.

What is the target audience?

Primary, secondary and – if relevant – tertiary. We



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want to include here everything that is relevant that we know about them. What positions do they hold? What motivates them? What is important to them? “White males, 18-24 years old”, for example, isn’t enough information.

“It is as much exercise to force focused thinking as it is a document”

Who is that one person we need to be talking to when we create our messaging? “White males, 18-24 years old who live with their mothers in the suburbs and spend every available dime on video games” gives us a bit more information. A bit.

What do they believe now?

This should relate, obviously, to our reason for doing the advertising, but it doesn’t have to necessarily relate directly to our client. The most critical beliefs of the target may have something to do with the market or the industry or their jobs. “They may or may not have heard of Suchandso Industries” is not nearly so valuable as “they hate single-wheeled wheelbarrows because using them hurts their backs.”

This could be considered the “consumer insight” if we want to use agency lingo. Call it whatever you want, but it should be a clue to an attitude or belief that we want to change, reinforce, overcome or establish.

What do we want them to believe?

This needs to be a marriage of our first (why are we advertising) question and the preceding one. Given what we want to accomplish and what our target audience already thinks, what belief on their part will support our objective? This should be benefits oriented, not be features oriented. We want them to believe that using Suchandso Industries wheelbarrows won’t hurt their back (because Suchandso Industries’ wheelbarrows have four wheels). The benefit, not the feature.

Getting them to believe that “Suchandso Industries makes one damn fine wheelbarrow” is not enough. “Using Suchandso Industries’ wheelbarrows won’t hurt your back” might be. “Using Suchandso Industries’ wheelbarrows lets you get more work done more easily because your back won’t hurt” is even better.

What is the single most persuasive idea we can convey?

Think of this as their “reason to believe” if that makes it easier. Note the non-accidental use of the word “single.” If nothing else, this forces us to establish an idea hierarchy.

What is our strategy?

This should have some uniqueness to it. Think of it as the first in a line of persuasion dominos. One knocks down the next which knocks down the next and so on. The first one is key.

What is our strategy for getting our target audience to believe what we want them to believe, which may or may not be what they believe now in order to accomplish our reason for advertising?



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Or: "We will employ (our strategy) to convey (our single most persuasive idea) in order to get (target) to believe (what we want them to believe), which will help us accomplish our objective of (why we are advertising)."

But you better at least go through the focusing thought process. And if you do, it's going to be a better ad. Or radio spot. Or postcard. Or whatever it turns out to be.

What are the mandates?

This may be as simple as the logo, phone number and website. It may include a requirement for strict adherence to corporate identity guidelines. Or it may include a requirement to avoid humor, not mention the competition or not be racially or gender specific. It just depends on the situation.

- Karen Nasuti

Our brief does not include many elements found in other agency briefs. There is, for example, no specified "tone". If a tone is mandated, it can go there. If a tone is part of the strategy it can go there.

There is nothing wrong with attaching background information to support one or another point in the brief. There is something wrong with going on at length with too much background information in the brief. This is one reason we open with "why are we advertising" as opposed to "situation".

In reality, sometimes in this business, we just need to get the damn ad done and out. Maybe it's for a client we've had for years and we don't need to go through all that writing of a document just to get the directory ad delivered. Or maybe nobody knows any of it and it's just one assumption after another for that single-location ice cream store that wants to introduce Cherry Coconut Nut. So maybe you don't write the entire brief.

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