



**Why the  
right creative  
is crucial  
to marketing  
success.**

The energy, time, cash, and capital you spend preparing to take a product to market represent a significant investment. How quickly you recoup your investment, how much of a return you get, or whether you recoup your investment at all may come down to the effectiveness of your advertising creative. The wrong creative can stall your product. But the right creative can actually accelerate your rate of return by giving you a head start into the mind of your consumer, thereby accelerating your selling cycle. So the right creative can act as a multiplier on the rest of your marketing efforts.

Now, this is not to say that strong creative can ever be a substitute for good strategic discipline. In fact, if you have a bad strategy, good creative will only help you fail faster. But because the creative is the point where the marketing strategy meets the market, it is the vehicle in which your value proposition reaches the consumer's mind. And once you're in the mind of the consumer, the selling begins.

**For  
Example...  
Jelly Beans**

**T**he four steps of buying are *awareness, interest, desire, and action*. (AIDA). The job of the creative is to command the awareness and interest of the consumer as quickly as possible. If you win the race to awareness, you have a head start on interest, desire, and action. Once you get to action (the actual purchase of your product), you can begin developing a relationship with your consumer. Let's look at an example:

**Say you and your next door neighbor are launching competing brands of jelly beans at the same time. You have identical (or equivalent) products, packages, prices, distribution networks, and advertising budgets. The only difference is the *advertising creative*.**

**Common wisdom says an average ad takes three viewings actually to be noticed. Let's say your competitor has a merely average ad to launch his jelly bean brand, but you have a better than average ad, one that only requires two viewings to be noticed.**

**You run your ad; your neighbor runs his. Fifty percent of the jelly bean buying public notices your ad, but only thirty notices his. All things being equal, you sell five packages of jelly beans for every three he sells, in the first purchase cycle alone. And that's just the beginning....**

**Now you can distribute in-pack coupons to your customers, drive repeat purchases, and use your early five-to-three advantage to lock your competitor out of 50 percent of the jelly-bean market. So you**

can focus your ad budget on challenging your competitor for his thirty percent, while he has to focus his budget on defending his market share.

You can see how the right creative can give you a head start in awareness and interest, which can provide an expanding sales advantage with each purchase cycle. Over time,

## OR For Example ... Real Estate

the right creative can act like compound interest on your marketing investment—like a magic multiplier.

**Y**ou have a real estate firm. In your demographic niche, people buy and sell houses every three years. So in any given month, one in 36 people is looking to sell and buy a house, or 2.78 percent.

Once again, let's say you have an above average ad, which breaks through to your target after two viewings. But your competitor's creative is merely average. So in a given media cycle, you reach three customers for every two your competitor reaches (given the same media budget). Each month, you get to sell to 1.67 percent (or 20 percent per year) of the total home-buying population, while your competitor only sells to 1.11 (or 13.33 percent per year).

Over three years, your *magic multiplier* creative gives you the opportunity to list and/or sell 60 percent of all properties sold in your market. Of course to achieve and maintain this rate requires a lot of other factors—inventory, sales force, client service, database management, ... luck. But the right creative clearly gives you the opportunity to succeed over competitors with merely average creative. And this is the kind of success that builds on itself—like a *magic multiplier*.

These are two industry-specific examples, a product and a service, which may or may not apply to your particular product category. And they make the assumption that all other things are equal (which is probably unrealistic in the real world). But you can apply the magic multiplier principle to any marketing situation.

- The right creative gets you to the consumer first, with the message that works.
- The right creative gives you the first chance to sell to the consumer.
- The right creative gives you first chance to secure a loyal customer, which is a key to establishing category dominance, since consumers in most categories are creatures of habit.
- The right creative lets you recoup your investment faster and creates momentum in the selling process that acts as a magic multiplier to generate larger and larger returns on your investment over time.



**How to build  
a strategy  
that yields the  
right creative.**

There is a lot of advertising out there that is flashy, laden with special effects, and studded with big name performers. In some categories such as athletic wear, video games, entertainment, and some consumer technology categories, these elements may be entirely appropriate. But in general, the right creative, the *magic multiplier* creative is no more expensive (and is sometimes less expensive) than the fancy, flashy, fluffy stuff that fills the air waves.

As with so much of marketing, effective creative is a product of planning. The details of a creative strategy will vary from category to category (and even ad agency to ad agency). But a great place to start when crafting a creative strategy is to look at your overall brand strategy with these *four creative questions* in mind. →

**1. Who are we talking to?** When answering this one, look at the customer as a single person. As much as possible, this should include psychographic as well as demographic information.

**What does our consumer identify with? What does she do for fun? Where does her self-esteem come from? What is she afraid of?**

**2. What do we want them to do?** This needs to go beyond, “buy more product.” What we want them to do should come directly from the strategic objectives section of your business plan. It should be things like, “entertain a call from our sales rep,” or “dump our baking soda down the drain,” or “try on our suits,” or “show up at our retail location to do a FREE make-over with our new cosmetics,”....

**3. What do they have to believe?** This question crosses over from the selling process to the buying process. It gets inside the head of the consumer, who, in order to fulfill the behavioral objectives of question one, must believe things like, “the sales rep will be unthreatening and will show me something useful to me,” or “all drains smell bad and should be freshened once a month with baking soda,” or “it would be fun to try on a fancy suit, and it would not be threatening in any way,” or “I will be even more beautiful in this new makeup.”

**4. What can we realistically expect?** Again, this question requires getting into the consumer’s head. For example, we can’t expect that anything we say in a single ad will cause consumers to commit to buying a bulldozer for their home use or quitting their job and moving to Antarctica.

The  
**four**  
Creative | Strategic  
Questions



But we can realistically expect that a certain consumer might sign up for heavy equipment school, because she always wanted to drive a bulldozer. Or we might expect that certain consumers would ask for further information that might lead them to a vacation above the Arctic Circle.

Once again, no creative execution can serve as a substitute for a strong, disciplined marketing strategy. But within the context of such a strategy, you have the tools readily at hand to create a creative strategy that is both consistent with your brand objectives and compelling to consumers.

**Engaging,  
true, and  
relevant:  
a litmus test  
for the right  
creative.**

For a lot of marketing professionals, evaluating creative concepts is a challenge. It's usually easy to see which ones are on strategy and which are not. You can readily identify the one *you like personally*. But the hard part is choosing the one which is most likely to be compelling to consumers among all the on-strategy concepts. In evaluating creative, you may find this three word litmus test helpful: engaging, true, and relevant.



**Engaging.** The first job of any piece of creative is to engage the target audience. No matter how on-strategy it is, if the ad doesn't capture the attention and imagination of the consumer, it won't work. To engage, an ad can use any number of tactics.

An old broadcast researcher's trick is a sound effect in the first few frames—a door buzzer, a dog bark, or a phone ring.

A favorite print designer approach is to use lots of white space. This also works in television. And a variation of white space, quiet production values, can be effective in radio.

The masters of direct response advertising, such as Claude Hopkins, suggest putting the product's most compelling benefit (as revealed by research) into an emotionally engaging headline.

The great creative agencies of the past thirty years were very good at focusing the most compelling benefit in a single-image "concept" that so powerfully communicated the benefit and brand, that the advertising actually became an integral part of popular culture. Recent examples of this have been the Energizer bunny campaign and the ubiquitous Nike swoosh advertising. From the past we have, "Where's the beef?" for Wendy's, "I can't believe I ate the whole thing," for Alka Seltzer, "Think small," for Volkswagen, and "1984," the introduction of the Macintosh computer, commonly believed to be the greatest television commercial of all time.

**True.** Because of the emotional/cultural environment in which advertising exists, "true" in this case means more than "factual." In fact, the great advertising addresses the deep truth that goes beyond the facts.

For example, when Levi Strauss introduced their 501 Blues campaign, they were selling a blue jean that was inexpensive to both make and buy, quick to fade, and inclined to shrink. And they were selling it in an environment in which designer jeans were king. Using vintage American pop culture



# The Creative Litmus Test



(the blues) and tapping into an individualist strain in the culture, they introduced these cheap basic jeans as the timelessly cool, shrink-to-fit, nothing-fancy uniform of the American individualist who was too cool for designer jeans. They were jeans for people who understood what jeans were for.

**Relevant.** As marketers, we're selling value propositions to demographic profiles. But as consumers, we're buying products that make our lives better and solve our problems. For creative to be compelling, it has to prove that it understands something about the consumer, at a very personal, individual level.

For example, when Saturn was launched, back in the early nineties, it was introduced in an automotive environment in which hard-sell pretty boys ruled the show room, and nuts-and-bolts gear heads ruled the service center. Detroit was run by macho hard-nosed (male) executives. Saturn introduced us to a "different kind of car company."

In their advertising, Saturn portrayed hard-working regular people, somewhere in scenic Tennessee, building cars in teams. They portrayed a sensitive, interactive selling process, where they listened as much as they talked, and where you could be comfortable getting to know the car, rather than doing negotiation battle with the sales rep.

And they portrayed a service procedure in which *professional service specialists dealt with customers while professional mechanics dealt with customers' cars.*

And, Saturn secured the family/club idea by developing a sophisticated customer database to cultivate loyalty, and by sponsoring regional and national events, where Saturn owners could come together to synergize and stoke their customer loyalty.

Saturn found a strong, relevant message, which was very appealing to women, non-negotiators, and non-mechanics. I personally own a Saturn and I hear the positive ravings of Saturn owners every time I take my car in for services. Saturn has found a way to make their product relevant by making their creative relevant.



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