

Above and beyond advertising planning

John Griffiths, freelance planner, shows how planning must adapt to each discipline, and should be the integrator for multi-discipline campaigns

ACCOUNT planning has been in existence for over 30 years, and despite the different styles typified by advertising agencies such as BMP and JWT that have been so instrumental in its development, there is now an accepted core of theory and practice.

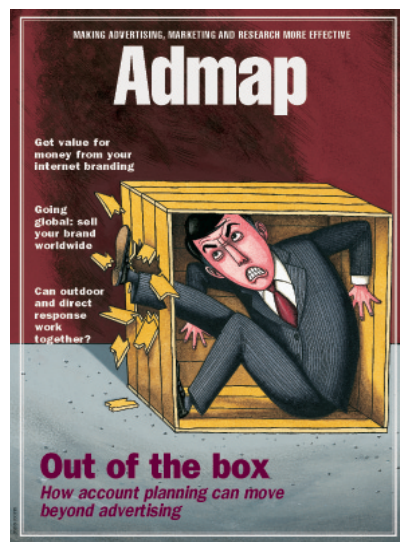
However, virtually all of this lies in the area of advertising. In the last ten years the majority of the top 20 direct marketing, sales promotion and design agencies have either started an account planning department, have a planning director on the board, or claim to offer planning as one of their services. In spite of this there is virtually no written account of how planning functions in these areas: the second edition of *How to Plan Advertising* (1) contains a single chapter on the subject. As I will show, account planning needs to be adapted to work with disciplines other than advertising.

The first discovery made by a planner crossing the border between advertising and other disciplines is that much has to be *unlearned*. Planning developed specifically for advertising has a number of assumptions as a consequence, due to its specific needs. And, before planning can work in a multi-disciplinary framework, it is essential that the planner services each communication discipline effectively on its own terms.

Planning and other disciplines

Planning is not essential to the production of ads, so it plays a qualitative role in adding value to what is made. To function well outside advertising, planning has to add value to what is being produced, and it needs to align itself with the business model for the appropriate discipline – because they all make money differently.

Taking two weeks to write a creative brief, two weeks to bond with the



creative team plus another two weeks to write up the results at the end of the campaign is the quickest way to get fired in any agency other than an ad agency! In the majority of agencies not directly involved in advertising, the planner's time is charged directly by the hour, and has to be accounted for.

So what is the business model?

Advertising makes its money through commission or fees still linked, however distantly, to the media spend. The larger the account, the more profitable – theoretically. In fact, large accounts subsidise smaller ones, which may offer greater creative possibilities (Exhibit 1).

Direct marketing makes its money by constructing its own medium, rather than renting somebody else's. Every campaign requires the creation, operation and dismantling of a medium. That is why DM agencies have larger account teams, why account handlers present strategy, and why the headcount and the hours spent on the account are critical. In DM, complexity rather than size is profitable, since size can provide economies of scale but complexity carries its own mark-up. The planner has to contribute to the effectiveness of this medium, whose success derives from much more than the construction of the message.

Sales promotion earns its income from implementing one of a basic range of ➤

EXHIBIT 1

How each discipline makes its money		
Discipline	Making money	Making profit
Advertising	Media commission/fees related to media spend	Biggest accounts
Direct marketing	Construction and operation of bespoke medium: account handling/targeting	Complex accounts
Sales promotion	Construction and operation of bespoke mechanic: account handling	Complex mechanics (any size)
Public relations	Through labour of account handling	Biggest accounts
Sponsorship	Fee proportionate to size of sponsorship	Biggest accounts
Web based	Construction and operation of bespoke medium: account handling/targeting	Complex accounts

COVER STORY

EXHIBIT 2

How each discipline adds value

Discipline	Adding value
Advertising	Effective creative work that creates mass awareness/involvement
Direct marketing	Effectiveness of targeting, and ability to solicit response and conversion
Sales promotion	Effectiveness of mechanic and appeal to the trade and the client
Public relations	Quality and synergy of message with publication's audience
Sponsorship	Leveraging higher awareness at lower cost than advertising
Web-based	Reducing interaction costs or leveraging higher involvement

mechanics, in a sufficiently attention-grabbing way to ensure that the mechanic is effective. The choice of mechanic is the greatest contributor to the success of the promotion. The scale of the promotion and its complexity create profits.

Sponsorship is often used as a more cost-effective way to increase salience, without paying for the space outright as in advertising. The fee is proportionate to the size of the sponsorship. Profitability comes from scale, but also from the implementation of tie-ins.

PR, like advertising, borrows media, but can only influence what is written through direct briefings and event management. Income derives from the size of account, the number of handlers required to service it and, to an extent, the complexity of the account.

Web-based communications are also constructing a medium rather than borrowing one, although its distribution costs are massively lower. It generates income (and maybe even profit) through complexity.

How is value added to each discipline? (Exhibit 2)

Advertising adds value through great creative: the same space can achieve disproportionate results simply through the power of an idea. Advertising is also still the cheapest way to create awareness and involvement with a mass audience. Unsurprisingly, advertising planners have a lot to do with creative work.

Direct marketing also depends on good creative. But targeting is all-important. An indifferent execution sent to the right

people will generate more response and pay back quicker than a brilliant mailing to the wrong audience. So from the timesheets of a DM agency you will see much more time allocated to targeting and implementation than to creative development. The benefit goes straight to the bottom line. Planners in a DM agency do better to devote their time to more effective targeting – spending too much time polishing the creative product may win awards but will not necessarily improve the ROI.

In sales promotion the planner's job is particularly difficult. The account handlers are perfectly capable of selecting the right mechanic. However, they appreciate planning support in tailoring the concept to the target audience, ensuring the mechanic delivers a branded rather than a generic benefit (when did you last remember a promotion?), and building arguments to sell the promotion to the client and then the trade. There may also be a need for research that generates insights into how people will interact with the mechanic and so improve the effectiveness of implementation.

In sponsorship the trick is to secure high awareness at a lower cost than through advertising. In broadcast sponsorship the relationship between programming and the brand can trigger audiences into reconsidering the brand and their relationship with it. So planning's role will be much closer to audience research and insight than writing surgically accurate briefs for programme 'bookends'.

In PR, value is added by maximising the value of the audience of a particular medium. By understanding the overlap between the medium audience and the brand audience, and by providing insights into how the audience for each publication sees the brand and the category, the planner can help to provide tailored briefs for each publication. These are likely to be more effective than divvying up the by-lines and handing them to different feature writers as 'exclusives'.

On the web, value is added through reducing the cost of communicating with particular audiences or creating high involvement with a niche audience. Here the planner will make a contribution, not

just by understanding these audiences and what they want from the web, but by understanding how they interact with the internet as a medium. Websites that don't change behaviour don't pay. New media planners have to be behaviourists through and through.

And now to integration ...

The nightmare for the planner who works with a multi-disciplinary team can now be seen in its full horror. How can the planner with limited time ever be expected to add value to the aggregated account team? The one refuge (often tried) is to fall back on the certainties of advertising planning. This, for reasons already given, guarantees that the planner won't deliver, and will only frustrate the rest of the team, who will have to attempt to adapt the planning product themselves (if they have the patience).

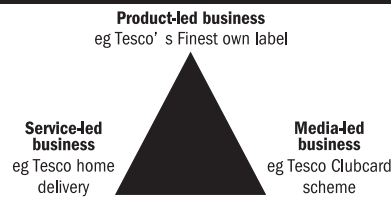
Integrated communication itself needs to be understood in terms of the business model and how value is added. In summary, agencies field integrated campaigns so that the most profitable elements subsidise the most visible. Every agency wants the advertising, but many have started to offer other disciplines to subsidise it.

The account planner needs to add value to every discipline, the whole has to work together and each part needs to perform effectively within its own framework – advertising needs a strong creative idea, DM needs effective targeting, and so on.

Advertising planning assumptions that don't work for other disciplines

- Planning adds value by improving the quality of creative work.
- Strategic development is about the construction of the message.
- The overarching task of the communication is to strengthen the values of the brand.
- Brand personality needs to be consistent.
- The communications objective is to increase salience or to change attitudes.
- The mass audience can be divided into those who get it (purchasers and considerers), and those who don't (non-considerers) which is largely how they are researched.
- Measurement is something of a black box and is quite difficult.

EXHIBIT 3

The integrated planning model**A model playing field for the IMC planner**

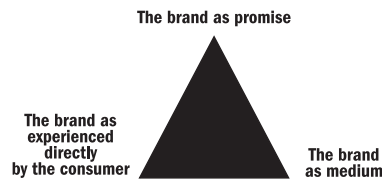
Enter yet another planning triangle (Exhibit 3). This considers three fundamental manifestations of a brand that all communication disciplines address, one way or another. It works as a playing field for the planner. When you know what discipline you are working with, it tells you what position to play to make a contribution. It saves time and heartache because it ensures the planner is always in a position to provide the right support.

Brands have three manifestations: as promise, where the communications tell you what it will be like to buy and use the product; as an experience, when the product actually performs what it is supposed to do and the consumer interacts with the retailer or client organisation; and as a medium, because every brand has a medium – that is to say an audience that uses it, or does not use it but more than half believe in it.

Around 30 years ago there were three types of company: product-based companies that used advertising to make promises about themselves; service-based companies that no one could see the point of advertising for; and media where ads appeared. Now, virtually every company makes products (and promises about them), is a service business that engages with its customers and is trying to increase the size of its audience/medium (Exhibit 4). Ad agencies add value to the brand as promise; DM and CRM programmes add value by generating income efficiently out of the audience medium and increasing its size/value; sales promotion and internet agencies add value by changing behaviour.

The planner who works with the brand as promise will get into the mindset of the consumer. The planner who works with the brand as medium will think like a management accountant – adept at quantifying audiences, and

EXHIBIT 4

How brands are beginning to function

calculating the value of communicating with them and the financial returns. The planner who works with the brand as experience will be a private investigator, expert in watching consumer behaviour and knowing how to create patterns and addictions that will make a mechanic more effective.

Planning and the integrated development process

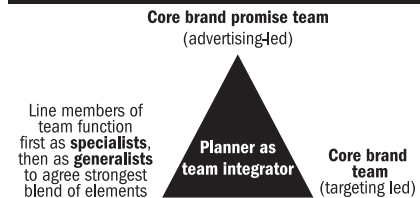
The planner within a multi-disciplinary team needs to harness the considerable skill-set within the team. Planners can't do it by themselves, which is why, when developing the brand as promise (using a brand template, essence, onion or whatever), there needs to be a core brand-promise team, probably dominated by advertising people, who ensure that the promise is articulated in a way the entire team can use.

Likewise, there needs to be a targeting team, drawn from media and data planning, who ensure that the audience is understood, quantified and that the same definitions are used across all disciplines. They also ensure the campaign is evaluated in terms of the value generated out of that audience. The two teams are there to ensure that both brand elements and audience remain consistent (Exhibit 5).

The output of the team needs to be checked to ensure that it fulfils the brand promise and effectively addresses the audience. One failing of multi-disciplinary campaigns is that they concentrate the budget on a subset of the audience – often the heaviest purchasers. Part of the responsibility of the targeting team is to ensure an appropriate level of spend to each proportion of the audience, based on likely return.

In all this, the planner plays an integrative role. Once the brand promise is defined, there is no reason in principle why the team has to wait for an advertising creative team to come up with an

EXHIBIT 5

A new way of organising the team

idea that everyone else has to adapt. The brand promise should be capable of being delivered through all channels. And the most brilliant campaign concept is useless if there is insufficient budget, or the idea only works on TV.

Specialist-generalists

Within a multi-disciplinary team everyone is simultaneously a specialist and a generalist, a specialist in their own particular discipline and a generalist in their understanding of the other disciplines and how audiences consume them. A persistent weakness in the development of multimedia campaigns is that so much of the strategy is developed by advertising specialists and what they produce can't easily be translated.

At the other end of the spectrum, a favourite complaint against integrated campaigns is that they are less effective because generalists produce them. Getting effective work out of an integrated team entails harnessing the specialists, ensuring that no specialism is allowed to dominate and that each member of the team is encouraged to think beyond the boundaries of their own discipline.

I believe the planner is ideally placed to ensure that all the specialists get a consistent and thorough brief, and then to draw out the generalist skills of the team to produce work that fits together. ■

1. Cooper: *How to Plan Advertising*. Continuum Int Publishing Group, 2001.



John Griffiths is a freelance account planner with 18 years' experience covering advertising, DM, sales promotion, new media and integrated campaigns. He is a former planning director of Grey Integrated.

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