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**Big Idea Patterns of the
Advertising Creative Process**

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**Big Idea Patterns of the
Advertising Creative Process**

by

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Report

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Dedication

To my peers. You are admired and appreciated. Your partnership and friendship has been a treasure. Special thanks to Joan Sheski and Lori Darley, my mentors.

Preface

In the television show, *Mad Men*, Donald Draper is a hero of creativity. Being a creative director and partner in an advertising agency, Draper's counterparts look up to him, trusting him with the wellbeing of their clients' babies – their brands. He is an artistic visionary of the corporate world. Despite his seemingly divine ability to create something new from nothing, his humanness is revealed in his chain smoking, hard drinking, and womanizing. Draper is the stereotypical power-oriented American upper-middle class white male of the 1960s. If the essence of Donald Draper was captured in a single tagline, it might read: "Ad Guy as God." This *Mad Men* protagonist is the source of the show's critical acclaim. *Mad Men* is the first basic cable series to win the Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series, winning it in 2008, 2009, and 2010.

Donald Draper represents an embodiment our society's movement toward a right-brain world where problems are solved through creativity, when logic does not suffice. In this time of job scarcity, the workforce is invited to reach out and create work for itself, with an entrepreneurial spirit and an artistic drive; Draper is largely the success story American laborers are bearing in mind. Even though his character is fictional, his presence is felt. In fact, Donald Draper was named the most influential man in the world by *Ask Men*, an online magazine, ahead of such names as Michael Phelps, Olympic swimming champion, and President Barack Obama.

November 17, 2010

Abstract

Big Idea Patterns of the Advertising Creative Process

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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The analysis of creative processes reveals that there are behaviors, techniques, and resources that have proven to be indispensable when embraced by advertising creatives in order to achieve big ideas. There are specific behaviors that clearly define successful creatives, and there are techniques and resources that creatives commonly use to arrive at big ideas. Some of these behaviors, techniques, and resources are well-known and time-tested, while others are proposed here for the first time, backed by research. This report aims to improve the productivity of creativity.

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Introduction

On this subject of creative processes that are involved in the production of advertisements, only a small number of relevant academic studies are available for public viewing. Approximately two dozen electronic articles exist in the libraries of the University of Texas at Austin. An *Amazon.com* search turned up around 10 books related directly to the subject, e.g. David Ogilvy's *Ogilvy on Advertising*, with another 20 books indirectly related, e.g. Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*. This report is a collection of insights from the various perspectives of academic researchers and creative professionals. The objective is to reach emerging ad specialists with some positive reinforcement and some methods, procedures, strategies, tactics, and resources for creating ads that rock.

This report begins with an evaluation of existing research in the area of creativity as it relates to advertising. Next is an overview of creative processes, first analyzing behavior patterns of advanced creatives compared to beginners, and then highlighting the tools – techniques and resources – available to creatives. After that is a discussion of the two requirements of market-centered creativity: originality and appropriateness. The client-agency relationship is examined, with details about each stage of production. Later, you will see the fine points of a survey designed to gain new insights from professional creatives. Then, case studies reveal first-hand scenarios with creative processes, including exchanges between client and agent. Last, is a discussion of big ideas, and the prospects for making them bigger.

A study of creative processes logically begins with a definition of creativity. To an ad agency, creativity is viewed as a way to smartly address complicated problems for the benefit of a client (Goldenberg & Mazursky, 2002). As stated by psychologists Mumford, Hunter, and Byrne (2009), creativity results in “the production of original, high quality, and elegant solutions to novel, complex, ill-defined problems” (Mumford, Hunter, & Byrne, 2009). Posing theories about creative processes is a complicated task, partly because creativity itself is an abstract concept. In the context of advertising, the two vital elements of creativity are: (1) originality; and (2) appropriateness. In the larger realm of creativity, these elements translate into: (1) new; and (2) valuable. By *Wikipedia* (2010) definition:

Creativity refers to the phenomenon whereby a person creates something new (a product, a solution, a work of art, etc.) which has some kind of value. What counts as “new” may be in reference to the individual creator, or to the society or domain within which the novelty occurs. What counts as “valuable” is similarly defined in a variety of ways.

At the heart of the development of marketing communications is the “big idea,” described as: a contribution to a brand image in an original and appropriate way (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009). David Ogilvy, called “The Father of Advertising,” emphasized the weight of the big idea in his classic 1983 book, *Ogilvy on Advertising*, in which he writes that no idea is big unless it will work for 30 years. He adds, “Big ideas come from the unconscious. This is true in art, in science, and in advertising. But your unconscious has to be well informed, or your idea will be irrelevant” (Ogilvy, 1983).

In advertising, the big idea is everything – a winning idea can engage consumers even through poor execution of art direction and copywriting, but even the most attractive words and imagery can't help a losing idea to shine (Ashley & Oliver, 2010). “One can't polish a dirt clod and make it into a diamond,” as the saying goes. In marketing communications, big ideas are the highest goals – they are of paramount importance. One recent book calls them, “Big Honkin' Ideas” (Sullivan, 2008). And yet, you will not find, “big idea,” listed in the end-of-book glossaries of the latest publications related to the field of advertising. In the glossary of this report, you will find “big idea” defined – it is arguably the most important principle for advertising.

In this paper, there are terms that may be unfamiliar to you. The term, “creatives,” is used in replacement of, “creative people.” Individual creatives include creative directors, art directors, and copywriters, along with others. The title, “copywriter,” is used in business to name the individuals who write content for ad campaigns. A copywriter's responsibility is to fine-tune taglines, for example. A tagline is: a statement that declares what a brand is equal to (Barry, 2008). Out-of-date dictionaries may not list, “tagline,” as a single-word term, but recent books use the one-word term frequently, e.g. Barry, 2008. Also, the word, “ideation,” appears here as a replacement for, “idea creation,” or, “idea generation.”

Cliffnotes is to Shakespeare as *Big Idea Patterns of the Advertising Creative Process* is to the two-year Master's-level graduate program in advertising at the University of Texas, from the perspective of one student in the Texas Creative portfolio sequence for AdGrads. The author's intention, with this report, is to offer strategic

recipes, or methods, or patterns that creatives use in pursuit of big ideas for brands. This report is designed to increase the public's understanding of creative processes, especially those processes involved in the field of advertising.

Information available here includes a review of relevant research, some techniques that cultivate creative thought, and some fresh perspectives on the client-agency relationship. This study is valuable because the generation of new ideas tends to be a highly unexplainable – it is often random and sporadic (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). For the same reason, research on the topic of creative processes is uncommon. It is this author's belief that no two creative minds are identical, just as each Almond Joy candy bar has a slightly different blend of coconut filling, just as every Steinway piano is hand-made, and just as every creative mind works differently. So naturally, there is no go-to strategy that works every time for all people. However, in this author's belief, there are indeed techniques and resources that can be collected and shared as a book of big idea patterns.

Fundamentally, in order for an agency's idea to be considered valuable to a client, it must be both original and appropriate (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009). The ultimate goal of research in this area is to define and evaluate tools that can boost an individual's creative productivity (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). A creative person's techniques may include mind mapping and brainstorming, for example, and skill sets like these can be enhanced over time, through practice (Griffin, 2008). For research purposes, ideation techniques can be observed and evaluated in terms of their originality or novelty, in

addition to their problem-solving and performance criteria associated with the particular case at hand. All of these areas will be explored in this report.

It has been said that creative people create, but they do not analyze, while analysts are analytical and not creative (Russell & Lane, 1996). However, the position of advertising creatives is a notable exception – here, the job requires both left-brain logic and right-brain creativity alike. The act of creativity is spirited and spontaneous, while the act of analytics is focused. “Creative director” is the job title of the person who is responsible for ensuring the value of an agency’s creative output. Originality is a right-brain function while appropriateness is a left-brain function, making it essential for advertising creatives to be well-equipped in both sides of the brain.

Hypothesis: If creative processes can be explained via analysis, then the findings of these analyses can be used to streamline creative processes.

Here the independent variable is “analysis,” which is controlled by this author via exploratory research and experimentation. The dependent variable is “creative processes,” which are observable and measurable. By exploring behaviors, techniques, and resources embraced by professionals in creative processes, one can arrive at a collection of best-practice methods that can be embraced as a route toward big ideas. In other words, advertising creatives who practice time-tested methods for achieving big ideas will have a higher likelihood of achieving big ideas themselves.

The research questions propelling this report are as follows:

- RQ1: What is the process of developing creative advertisements around big ideas?
- RQ2: What techniques and resources are available to assist in creative processes?
- RQ3: What are the notable behaviors in advanced creatives compared to beginners?

This essay begins with an assessment of the value of streamlining the creative process. Next is a review of literature that has been written on the subject of creative processes, with an overview of creative techniques. Then, the client-agency relationship is examined, with a discussion of the equal importance of originality and appropriateness for advertising that results in on-target big ideas. Finally, a series of case studies are provided, with research-based analysis to help explain complexities and provide clarity in complex situations. These case studies illustrate creative processes from a first-hand viewpoint.

Chapter 1: Evaluating Creative Processes

Since creativity is of utmost importance in an ad agency, the successful management of creative processes is a surefire route to prosperity. Creative thought is so valuable in ad agencies that entire business structures are sometimes designed around the talents of one bright mind: the creative director. Ad agencies are the only organizations in which creativity is the primary service offering, and “Creative” is the name of a

department headed by a “Creative Director” (Tellis & Ambler, 2007). A strong handling of creative processes is essential to an ad agency’s success in developing business-building ideas for their clients (McNamara, 1990) (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009).

The advertising industry is an environment of tenacious competition, with a rising emphasis on accountability – perhaps due to concerns over return-on-investment (Reynolds, 2008). In this deadline-obsessed field, creative services must be delivered faster, more efficiently, with more impact, on budget and on time. Today is a time of recession and cutbacks, with high turnover among chief marketing officers, leading to an atmosphere where marketers manage metrics quarter by quarter, and avoid risks to protect their jobs (Ashley & Oliver, 2010). It is time for advertising processes to become streamlined fast.

Creativity is not easily tapped, because it is unpredictable, may not appear on command, and “escapes most attempts at manipulation and control” (Ziegler & Johnson, 1981). On one occasion, ideas flow freely and easily, while on another occasion, writer’s block occurs. The idiosyncrasy of creativity in advertising is well-stated in a study by Tellis and Ambler (2007) on the subject of advertising management:

Creativity in advertising may consist of overcoming the banal (sheer regularity) on one hand and the bizarre (sheer surprise) on the other; thus achieving a middle way between normativity and crazitivity, and enhancing effectiveness.

Creative teams often seek ways to become more productive as they progress from one creative task to another (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). An agency’s adherence to recognized patterns may help in streamlining the creative process by

promoting routes that have proven to lead to productive ideas and avoiding those that do not (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). Performance-related issues are a top concern of advertising agencies, as return-on-investment is increasingly important to clients (Riveong, 2007). A noteworthy trend in the client-agency relationships is the increasing termination of agencies that under-perform. The average client-agency relationship lasted over 7.2 years in 1984, and that number had declined to 5.3 years by 1997 (American Association of Advertising Agencies, 2007). If this trend continues, the average client-agency tenure will last only 4 years in 2010.

Today, communications firms are maintaining their competitive edge by adjusting their traditional workflows, automating their systems, and working to streamline creative processes. Some creative service firms are transitioning to all digital workflows and realizing cost benefits, flexibility and efficiencies. For example, Deutsch, a full-service marketing communications agency, renovated its production studio in 2005 with up-to-date production methods. This agency dramatically reduced the cost and cycle time of delivering business solutions to its clients, optimizing its workflow by building an in-house media center (Goodwin, 2005).

Digital processes offer the advantage of simplification. Large-scale, worldwide ad agencies like BBDO and Goodby, Silverstein & Partners, have recently implemented more efficient systems for digital media management, simplifying the exchange of content (Van Camp, 2003) (Reynolds, 2008). Quality is more easily assured in a digital workflow, where there is no need to convert files and no loss in clarity due to exchanges via fax machine or scanner. Digital workflows are more “green,” with no paper covers, or

bulky packaging to throw away. Advantages of a digital workflow are perhaps best evidenced in the client-agency relationship, where real-time editing and feedback is possible (Going with the Flow, 2009).

The increasing presence of digital workflows has resulted in do-it-yourself templates for generating creative advertising ideas, as well as computer programs that evaluate advertising creativity (Ashley & Oliver, 2010). For example, a company named Online Ad Design offers an application called Ad Wizard, providing design templates for newspaper print ads. This application bypasses the agency entirely, and allows clients to create industry-standard ads themselves by independently selecting graphics from online image banks, then adding customized text, similar to personalized greeting cards. Ad Wizard's management functions include the ability to purchase media placement, with pricing and scheduling options for finished ads (Online Ad Design, 2004). Although the production value of ads like these is low, being mass-produced and mediocre, the fact remains: creative processes can be streamlined and made more productive.

Chapter 2: Overview of Research

To identify the literature in advertising creative processes, a key word search of available publications yielded a relatively small number of books and journal-based articles. This is a subject area that has eluded researchers, with only a small number of exceptions. Literary publications pertaining to the advertising creative process include works by ad heroes, such as David Ogilvy (1983), as well as experienced educators, such

as Professor John Philip Jones (1999). Systematic investigations related to the advertising creative process have been led by: Goldenberg, Mazursky, and Solomon (1999); Koslow, Sasser, and Riordan (2006); and Sasser & Koslow (2008). These are the chief references that apply to the topic at hand – research on the topic of creative processes.

Research in advertising creativity can be divided into three major perspectives, relating to: (1) the people who create advertising; (2) the places or environments in which they work, and (3) the processes they follow in developing creative ideas (Sasser & Koslow, 2008). Previous research pertaining to *people* study models of individual creativity, attempting to gain insights into what makes individuals creative, i.e. how they are different from others. Previous research pertaining to the *place* focuses on the physical workspace and agency culture (Sasser & Koslow, 2008). This report is focused primarily on the *process*. Research studies pertaining to the process focus on factors involved with the production of creative advertising campaigns. The process seems to be the most mysterious aspect of creativity, according to some researchers (Sasser & Koslow, 2008). Analyses of creative processes aim to reveal the “artistic science” of creativity. For example, Goldenberg, Mazursky, and Solomon (1999) focus on advantages in a particular creative-thinking technique that uses established patterns.

The Goldenberg, Mazursky, and Solomon report is one of the standout investigations on creative processes. This study reveals consistent patterns that underlie the creation of award-winning ads. In studying the behavior of creatives, Goldenberg et al. identifies common methods of obtaining a big idea, and then researchers objectively verify and generalize these patterns. Findings indicate that these “creativity templates,”

herein referred to as “big idea patterns,” lead to effective outcomes by facilitating focused creativity (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999).

Chapter 3: Overview of Creative Processes

In this report, a “creative process” is a series of steps that lead to a big idea. Here, creative processes are divided into three subgroups: (1) creative behaviors, (2) creative techniques; and (3) creative resources. Before an individual can make full use of techniques and resources, one must become inherently creative – this can be achieved through practice. As a paradigm, this report provides a comparative look at the behavior patterns of experienced creatives versus beginners, which highlights best-practice behaviors for pursuing big ideas. Also, one’s path to a big idea may involve brainstorming, or some other creative technique, and for that reason, practical techniques are specified herein. Another’s route to a big idea may include looking for a brand’s problem and solution; this is a process that be achieved with a creative resource, e.g. Goldenberg’s big idea patterns. Fittingly, a creative thinker’s noteworthy resources, techniques, and behaviors are described here.

According to classic academic texts, a specific step-by-step process is involved in every instance of a big idea search. Although there is some variance in every individual’s creative process, it is commonly agreed that there 6 stages: (1) Preparation – collecting information; (2) Frustration – working to define or solve problems, often with uneasy transitions between left and right sides of the brain; (3) Incubation – associating new and

old information and arriving at new combinations; (4) Illumination – connecting two previously unrelated elements as an idea; (5) Evaluation – filtering and decision-making pertaining to the value of the idea; and (6) Elaboration – working out the execution of copy, imagery, and layout (Bendinger, 1993) (Ziegler & Johnson, 1981).

Developing an Advertising Strategy is usually a team effort involving clients, account management, creatives, and even consumers. There are numerous formats for writing an Advertising Strategy, one of which was used by the agency, Leo Burnett Company, with its client Procter & Gamble. The following formula is based on the Leo Burnett model given in *The Copy Workshop Workbook*, with revisions made for simplicity and to account for more modern approaches, i.e. Luke Sullivan et al.:

Advertising will (verb) (target audience) that (brand) equals (advantage). Support will be (rationale). Tone will be (adjectives).

There are three parts to an Advertising Strategy: (1) objective statement; (2) support statement; and (3) statement of tone or brand character (Bendinger, 1993). The objective statement combines the mission statement with description of target audience, e.g. Advertising will convince elementary school teachers that apples are the rewards for all their efforts in educating children. The support statement substantiates or explains the reason why the product is beneficial, e.g. Support will be the fact that apples are frequently given as gifts from young students to their teachers. The statement of tone or

brand character describes the selling attitude or long-term values of the brand, e.g. Tone of the message will be sweet and satisfying.

Creative Processes: *Creative Behaviors*

To be successful as an advertising creative, one cannot simply use creative techniques or resources and expect to achieve big ideas. One must also be innately creative; this in itself is a practice (White, 2002) (Foster, 2007). Creative breakthroughs cannot be scheduled, but creative people can practice being creative and practice being organized, prepared, and open for creative insight when it comes. On this subject, White (2002) writes:

We don't simply need compartmentalized creative processes such as brainstorming sessions. We need to live creative lives. We need to be creative people. We need to eat, sleep, and breathe creatively. We need to become what we want to produce – fountains of innovation.

Pablo Picasso is a good example of a creative person whose originality developed over time. Picasso endured a long-term, devoted practice of preparation and mastery of his medium. His early works reflected the discipline and training he received under his mentors and art academies. Through preparation, uniqueness naturally finds its expression (Loori, 2004). Picasso said, “There are painters who transform the sun into a yellow spot, but there are others who, thanks to their art and intelligence, transform a yellow spot into the sun.”

Numerous writings on the subject of creative exercise advise us to behave as children, with a sense of wonder and awe (Foster, 2007) (Pink, 2006) (White, 2002) (Ogilvy, 1983). Children live in the present moment and address problems by seeing situations freshly each time. They play, without getting hung up on the risks of playing. They stand up in the boat and rock it. They shout out loud in church. They pound the piano with their fists. Importantly, children employ spontaneity. “They constantly see the new relationships among seemingly unrelated things. They paint trees orange and grass purple, and they hang fire trucks from clouds” (Foster, 2007).

In addition to behaving like children, there are two additional behavioral patterns that can help creatives to be more idea prone: (1) optimizing self-image; and (2) believing in success. Each of these is a mental behavior pattern that has been widely attributed to achievement in right-brain thinking. This is not merely a New Age self-help concept, like *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) or *The Secret* (2006), although this author finds no fault in the messages therein. The concept that the mind can alter the body is a scientifically-proven fact, e.g. seeing a scary movie makes the heart race. Human beings can alter their lives by shaping their attitudes, and because of this, it is important for creatives to optimize self-image and to believe in success.

Through practice, confidence can be learned. On the subject of becoming idea prone, long-time creative director, Jack Foster, writes: “Your self-image determines what you are and how you perform.” To Foster, the best way to significantly improve one’s performance is to improve one’s confidence (Foster, 2007). The first step in achieving self-confidence is to focus on the present moment, like a child, where a person can be

free from troubles of the past or concerns about the future (Loori, 2004). Self-confidence is heightened through life experiences, e.g. letting oneself be seen and heard, while truly expressing feelings. Every experience offers the potential for inspiration and growth as a thinker: snapping photographs, hearing recited poetry, sharing conversations – right-brain exercises that develop confidence (Barry, 2008) (Foster, 2007) (Minsky, 2007).

Regarding general creative behaviors, professional creatives advise a positive attitude. Foster writes: “If you think of yourself as successful you will probably become successful.” He declares that an individual’s ability to generate big ideas is wholly dependent on whether or not the individual believes he or she can generate big ideas (Foster, 2007). The ability to come up with big ideas begins with the belief in the existence of big ideas, which can be learned through perusing award-winning ads published in annuals, for example. Believing is achieving, as the saying goes, and so the next step in being idea prone is a belief in the self as being capable of generating big ideas. The final step is to see beyond the self as a success story of a big idea, e.g. recognition at an awards ceremony (Foster, 2007) (Loori, 2004).

Ironing out one’s creative behaviors makes one more likely to find success in utilizing creative techniques and resources. In addition to toning creative behaviors by optimizing self-image, believing in success, and free-thinking without filtering, there are opportunities elsewhere as well. There are advantages in experiencing life even if it means breaking rules, and even if it leads to failure. In fact, great advances in the sciences and arts are the direct result of rule breaking. “Pablo Picasso broke the rules on what a woman’s face should look like. e.e. cummings broke the rules on what poems

should look like. David Ogilvy broke the rules on how copy writing should sound,” Foster writes. He concludes: “The only way to know that you’ve gone far enough is to go too far – going too far is called failing. But if you don’t go far enough in searching for an idea, then you can’t be sure you’ve got the best idea” (Foster, 2007).

Being childlike is a sign of maturity in creative processes, noticeable in one’s willingness to be spontaneous, suspend disbelief, and dwell in the present moment. In fact, researchers have discovered that successful, advanced creatives are more likely than beginners to express thoughts openly, free-write freely, and brainstorm uninhibited. During ideation processes, inexperienced creatives limited themselves by filtering, and ruling out ideas, whereas advanced creatives are less likely to self-edit (Griffin, 2008).

Behaviors of Advanced Creatives versus Beginners

The Griffin study (2008) investigated the ideation process of creative teams, aiming to “demystify the process and make it more accessible to all.” This study compared techniques employed by advanced creatives versus beginners. The key technique of interest here is called “mindscribing.” For advanced participants in the Griffin study, mindscribing involved a technique of writing assorted notes, spontaneously and eclectically archiving and organizing their thoughts. They emphasized the value of writing everything down, as this practice served to clear and open their minds – the act of recording a thought essentially removed it from their subconscious clutter in order to make room for new ideas. Advanced students were less likely to self-edit while doing this

type of writing whereas inexperienced students limited themselves by filtering, and ruling out ideas (Griffin, 2008).

The Griffin report found strong evidence suggesting a route that enables creatives to develop their creative expertise: acquire ideation strategies and then experiment with them to determine which strategies are most comfortable and are most fruitful (Griffin, 2008). Over time, participants in the Griffin study were exposed to a wide variety of techniques, and they developed diverse, individualized toolkits of effective ideation techniques. Findings suggest that creative processes need to be customized to the person and situation at hand; the techniques are not one-size-fits-all. This tendency is revealed to be true in other studies as well, including articles by Kilgour and Koslow (2009) along with Sasser and Koslow (2008), and the book by Law (1999).

As indicated by Diagram X, techniques differ greatly between advanced participants and beginners. Chiefly, advanced participants are oriented toward the big idea whereas beginners are oriented toward the advertisement. By comparison, the technique of advanced creatives is richer in resources, because of more extensive mindscribing (non-filtered) and larger collection of reliable heuristics (more tools in the toolkit), offering more possibilities. With these ample possibilities, generating a large quantity of ideas increases the likelihood of reaching quality ideas. Another notable difference is the presence of an “adaptation” phase in the advanced participants’ workflows, allowing them to further develop their more viable ideas. The adaptation phase involves the generation of headlines and/or taglines related to the idea. After adaptation, the idea is considered ready to execute (Griffin, 2008).

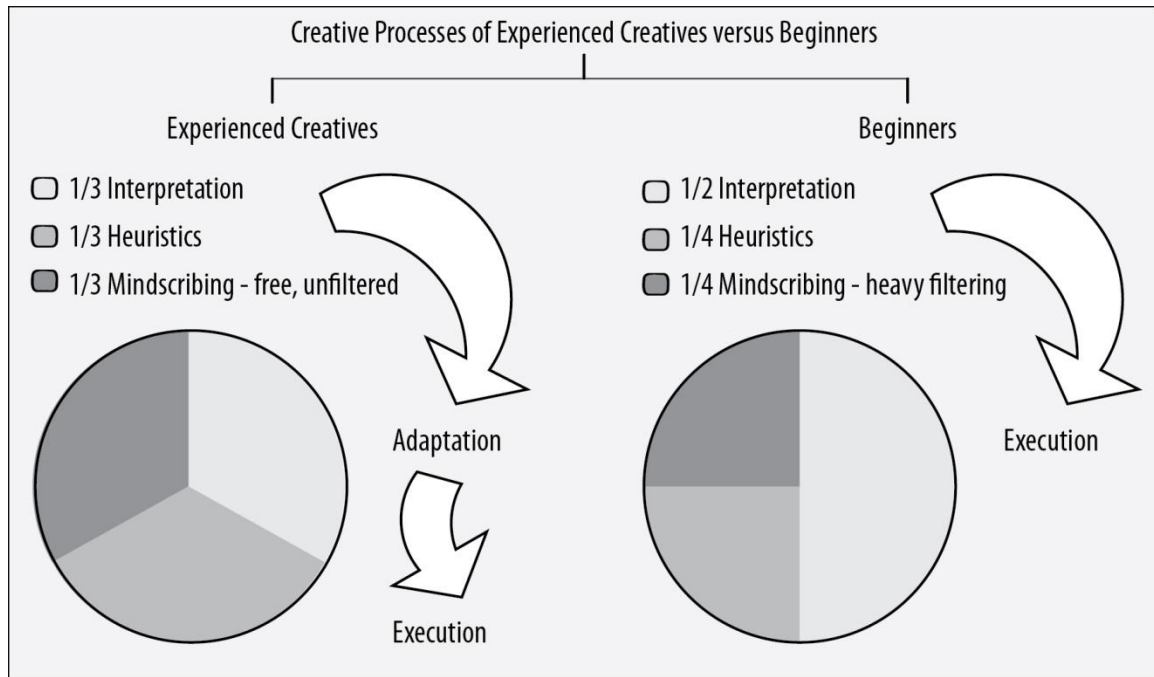


Figure 1: Side-by-side models comparing the creative processes of experienced creatives versus beginners.

Reportedly, the ideation process of highly skilled creatives is a two-step cycle: (1) develop an original idea; and (2) integrate the idea into a problem-solving process and generate other elaborations. According to a report by Sasser and Koslow (2008), this two-step cycle often takes less than three seconds, and will often flow quickly for seven minutes of highly focused attention, followed by several minutes of “rest,” or reduced idea flow. The process repeats itself, and the cycle can last for hours. For beginner creatives, more time is spent on elaboration. The beginner’s ability is limited, as they tend to become distracted with the tactical details of the execution (Sasser & Koslow, 2008). This behavior is also noted in the Griffin report (Griffin, 2008). The lesson here is

this: cautious, apprehensive filtering is the counter-productive path of the beginner, while free-flowing, rule-breaking open-mindedness is the clear path of the advanced creative.

Creative Processes: *Creative Techniques*

Why are creative techniques important? Creative thinking techniques are employed to help streamline the workflows for art directors, copywriters, and other members of creative teams within an agency in order to develop superior ideas for their clients (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009) (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). Studies suggest that ideation techniques can simplify and improve the decision-making processes involved in designing advertising strategy and execution. Creative techniques can be learned and trained as effective, efficient tools for real-life applications (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999) (Griffin, 2008).

Researchers interested in the study of creative thinking have identified various techniques that prime unusual concepts. In *The SAGE Handbook of Advertising* (2007), authors Tellis and Ambler discuss creative methods that are prevalent in the field of advertising. In the book, two ideal types of creative processes are identified: (1) “unbounded randomness,” emphasizing the element of surprise, proceeding from divergence to convergence; and (2) “bounded regularity,” proceeding from convergence to divergence” (Tellis & Ambler, 2007).

The creative department of an agency is responsible for ideation, illustration, copywriting, and conceiving the layout, all of which are tasks that benefit from

unbounded randomness. The unbounded randomness type of creative process breaks away from existing mind-frames with the goal of generating a large quantity of ideas to find surprising, innovative solutions (Tellis & Ambler, 2007).

Creative processes in advertising frequently involve methods that encourage the generation of a large number of concepts on the assumption that “the best way to get a good idea is to get a lot of ideas” (Tellis & Ambler, 2007) (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). As the number of ideas increases, there is a higher likelihood of achieving a set of quality ideas that can later be sorted, filtered, and extended (Tellis & Ambler, 2007) (Sullivan, 2008). Veteran copywriter Luke Sullivan advocates writing out in simple words what is intended, to get the words flowing. Later, in Sullivan’s process, he advises a fine-tuning of the message to make it memorable. His procedure is this: “First, say it straight. Then say it great” (Sullivan, 2008).

In art and in advertising, ideas spring up most freely when the creator is able to work without hindrance or judgment. Keeping this in mind, criticism in art is valuable at times, but not during the ideation process (Loori, 2004). It has been said that the key to creative writing is this: write the first draft from the heart and the second draft from the mind. Ideally, the original expression is purely creative and free-flowing, with the goal of assembling a high quantity of ideas. The *quality* of these ideas is later determined, through a process of filtering and editing, which is both creative and critical (Sullivan, 2008). Loori (2004) writes:

In the creative process, as long as the energy is strong, the process continues. It may take minutes or hours. As long as you feel chi peaking and flowing, let it run its course. It’s important to allow this flow and

expression, without attempting to edit what is happening – without trying to name, judge, analyze, or understand it. The time for editing is later. The time for uninhibited flow of expression is now.

Big Idea Practice 1: Idea Prompts

Academics and experts have discussed some common strategies that serve as sources of inspiration. A few of their examples include: (1) before and after – show life with or without the brand; (2) demonstration – show the brand in action to dramatize its benefit; and (3) testimonial – show people’s approval of the brand. Both the before and after and demonstration strategies are often comparative in nature to show one brand alongside a competitor (Barry, 2008) (Bendinger, 1993). Variations on the testimonial strategy include showing a spokesperson who shares positive experiences with the brand, or showing the owner or staff behind the brand – these techniques put viewers at ease by creating a sense of credibility, which leads to comfort and familiarity (Barry, 2008).

Along with the strategies at play in the search for big ideas, there are a variety of different idea types that serve as sources of inspiration. Examples of idea types include: (1) Brand as God – show the brand’s unquestionable superiority; (2) Brand as Personification – show the brand’s influence, i.e. you are what you eat; and (3) Brand as Social Commentary – show the brand’s presence in the rhetoric of popular culture (Barry, 2008). Brand as God is the type of idea that involves messages of supreme excellence, either stated or implied. After all, a brand’s benefits can be exaggerated beyond truth, as long as there are no false promises. The brand as personification idea type may display someone using a brand and then becoming that brand in some way, or conversely, the

brand is compared to a person or human behavior. Brand as social commentary is often related to general cultural trends, movements, or current events such as global warming, all relating back to the brand and its benefits.

Big Idea Practice 2: Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a way of playing through the fog of a campaign by improvising, collaborating, and refining ideas. It is the most widely recognized and utilized method for creativity-enhancement (White, 2002). The formalized brainstorming technique is attributed to Alex Osborn, founder of the multi-national agency, BBDO. Variations exist, depending on the level of formality, number of participants, etc. Basically, in brainstorming, a small group of people focus on a problem and create a sprawling list of words and phrases that could lead to a potential solution. The basic rule is that all ideas are worthy of inclusion. Even hollow and impractical phrases are included, as in fact, outlandish ideas often trigger constructive ones. Filtering and criticism are prohibited in brainstorm sessions because judgment stifles the flow of free thinking (Tellis & Ambler, 2007).

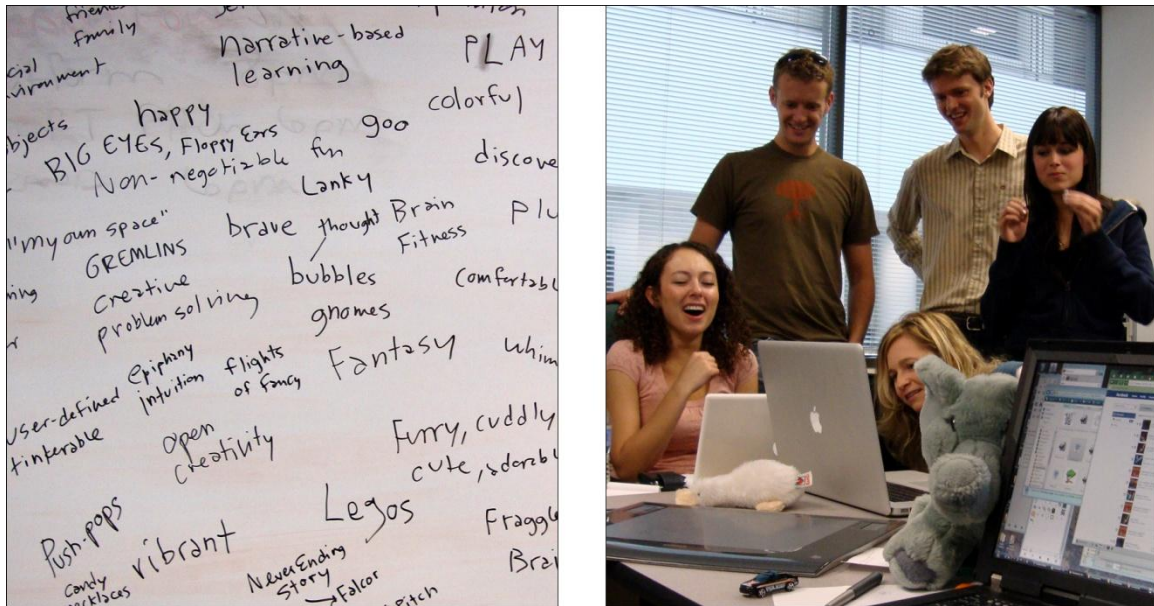


Figure 2: Brainstorming technique involving a team of participants working on a branding campaign for Hippo Bubble, an educational software company. Above is the Ideation stage and Wildest Idea stage; below are screenshots from the animated demo that resulted from this session.



In the formal method of brainstorming, there are six stages: (1) Problem – articulation and discussion of the issue at hand, e.g. apple business is suffering from increasing concerns about waxed skins; (2) How-To – problem is restated and revisited as a set of purposeful objectives, e.g. how to establish a tradition of peeling the apple before consumption; (3) How Many Ways – group explores each of the objectives and lists possibilities for solving the problem, e.g. apple pie eating contest w/ potato peeler giveaway; (4) Warm-Up – short session to step away from the big problem and swap ideas to get the brain muscles stretched and ready for action, e.g. naming alternative uses

for an apple; (5) Ideation – continual flow of ideas with everything written down; (6) Wildest Idea – group considers the strangest, most illogical idea and tries to run it into something useful, e.g. Apple Bobbing Day as national holiday. The brainstorm session usually ends with an evaluative, left-brain search for quality in the quantity (Bendinger, 1993).

Two additional creative methods that utilize the unbounded randomness process include “mindscribing” and “mind mapping.” Similar to brainstorming, except executed independently, mindscribing is a technique of writing assorted notes, impulsively and haphazardly, like a real-time transcription of one’s thoughts. The mindscribing technique enables creatives to build a database of raw materials – words, sketches, phrases, associations, all of which help to fuel ideation (Griffin, 2008). Mind mapping is more like a spider web of linked thoughts stemming from a central idea, in the shape of a diagram that serves to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas and their linkages (Tellis & Ambler, 2007).

Big Idea Practice 3: Synectics

“Synectics” is a derivative of Brainstorming that calls for a precisely executed technique as a route to practical problem-solving. Specific exercises are used to stimulate fresh, rich beginning connections. These exercises include: Discontinuous Stories, Symbolic Analogies, and more. Synectics is a copyrighted technique developed by W.J.J. Gordon and George Prince, practiced by Synectics, Inc., and licensed users around the world. At its essence, synectics is a problem-solving method that stimulates thought

processes of which the thinker may be unaware. This practice incorporates brainstorming and deepens it with metaphor, building a springboard for active ideas. In synectics, two or more different elements are juxtaposed to form a purposeful group. Synectics encourages the combination of distantly associated ideas from different perspectives (Tellis & Ambler, 2007) (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009).

A related technique is “storyboarding,” which relies on a visual display. Not to be confused with the TV storyboard, the ideation technique by the same name is simply a visual outline of thoughts (Bendinger, 1993). For example, one could begin with a topic, e.g. applesauce is high in sugar content. Next, the various subjects pertaining to this topic are listed underneath the topic, e.g. sugar in oranges, sugar in honey, sugar in candy, sugar in soda, etc. Then, details pertaining to each subject are listed underneath the respective subject.

The synectics and storyboarding problem-solving techniques are “divergent” (right-brain) thought process as opposed to “convergent” (left-brain) thought process. The terms divergent and convergent were coined by U.S. psychologist Joy Paul Guilford. In his studies of human intelligence, Guilford defined the convergent thought process as the ability to give the correct, logical answer to standard questions that do not require creativity, e.g. standardized multiple-choice tests. The opposite is divergent problem-solving: the method used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions (Salovey, Brackett, & Mayer, 2004). The divergent thought process is the type of problem-solving technique emphasized in this report.

Some divergent thinkers benefit from traditional creative-thinking tools, like mindscribing, where as other tools may be useful for convergent thinkers (Sasser & Koslow, 2008). In divergent thinking, an individual or group uses word association, for example, making links between associated ideas to arrive at a coherent insight (Mumford, Hunter, & Byrne, 2009). Divergent thinking techniques bring people to more original solutions by priming distant concepts. Focus groups are an example of this – ideas emerge via associative thinking in an environment free of limitation, without judgment (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999).

From an advertising professional’s perspective, Leo Burnett is quoted in Bendinger (1993) as follows: “The secret of all effective originality in advertising is not the creation of new and tricky words and pictures, but putting familiar words and pictures into new relationships.” He proceeds, “Creativity is the art of establishing new and meaningful relationships between previously unrelated things...which somehow present the product in a fresh, new light.” Leo Burnett is one of the most influential creative thinkers of the 20th century, as declared by *Time* magazine in 2010. His self-named advertising firm is perhaps most famous for creating memorable brand icons such as: the Jolly Green Giant, the Marlboro Man, and the Pillsbury Doughboy, to name a few.

From the perspective of a business professional outside of advertising, Daniel Pink is a bestselling author who advocates the idea that the modern workplace must evolve from “left-brained,” or logical for knowledge workers, to “right-brained,” or open and flexible for creative services workers. In Pink’s perspective, art directors and other members of creative teams can cultivate six artistic “senses,” to increase their likelihoods

for success in today's workplace: design, story, symphony, empathy, play, and meaning. According to his book, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, 2006, today's workplace has shifted from an "Information Age" to a "Conceptual Age" (Pink, 2006). In Pink's proposed future, there is more public desire for right-brained prowess, as opposed to left-brained prowess.

In contrast to creative methods that advocate unbounded randomness, there are some creative methods that advocate bounded regularity – advancing from logical, convergent thinking to creative, divergent thinking. Here, participants manage cognitive processes in focused, analytical sessions, as opposed to blind, illogical sessions. An example is the Heuristic Ideation Technique (HIT), in which a system is broken down into essential sub-concepts, each representing one dimension in a multi-dimensional matrix. Here, ideas are formed by penetrating the matrix and searching for new, previously non-existent combinations of attributes (Tellis & Ambler, 2007).

Big Idea Practice 4: Brand Concept Cross-Tabulation

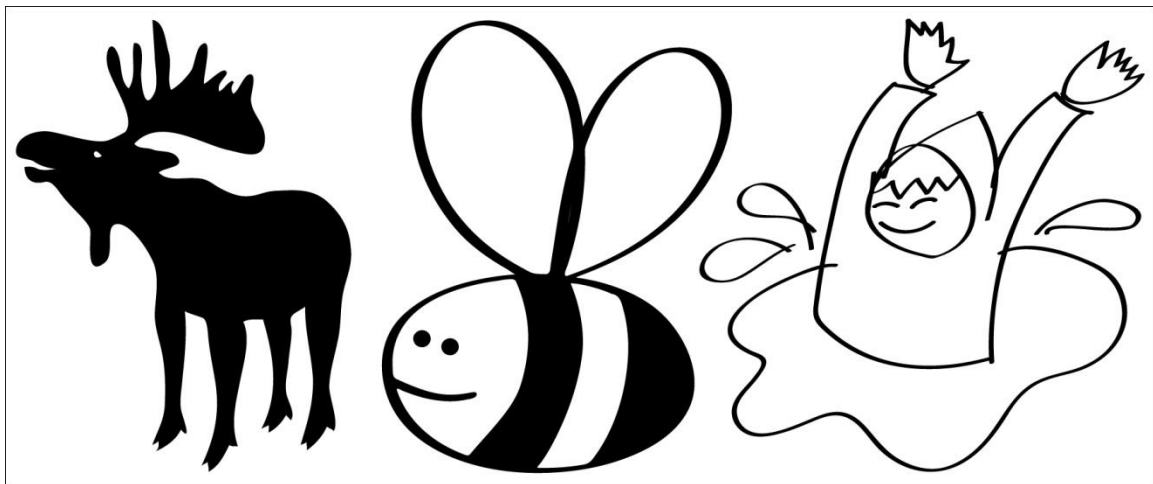
An example of a campaign that calls for bounded regularity is a brand development exercise called, "Brand Concept Cross-Tabulation (BCCT)," by this author. If a campaign strategy requires the exploration of a brand, e.g. Fisher-Price, then a logical way of exploring this brand is by conceptualizing its basic target audience, or its primary benefit, or its one-word adjective that neatly describes it. In the Fisher-Price example, a BCCT, might begin with two concepts: (1) kids, i.e. a target audience; and (2) fun, i.e. a

benefit. These separate concepts can be listed on x- and y-axes, charted as a cross-tabulation grid.

After selecting the two initial concepts, the next step in BCCT is to list a number of sub-concepts, and then crisscross the sub-concepts. In reference to Fisher-Price, the “kids” concept yields the following sub-concepts: friendship, learning, powerlessness, smallness, and growth. The “fun” concept yields: action, playing, laughing, sharing, and exploring. By crisscrossing concepts, the practitioner arrives at creative, divergent associations: laughing with smallness equals grinning; exploring with smallness is like being a bumblebee; and exploring with growth is like being a moose. The BCCT creative method is inspired by the teachings of Professor Sean Thompson, in his Art Director’s Seminar course of 2010, at the University of Texas.



Figure 3: Brand Concept Cross-Tabulation technique for a Fisher-Price re-branding campaign. Above is the BCCT grid, beginning with two keywords, “kids” and “fun,” resulting in a moose, a bee, and a puddle splash, each illustrated below.



Big Idea Practice 5: FCP Planning Grid Explosion

The FCB Planning Grid is a technique for visualizing the brand in the mind of the target consumer. This technique is named after Foote, Cone & Belding, the ad agency that designed it. Here, there are four quadrants appearing on a grid, with the X-axis revealing the consumer's mind, i.e. left-brain rational ideas versus right-brain feelings. The Y-axis reveals the height of the consumer's interest in the decision-making process surrounding a given brand. Beginning at the top-right of the grid and moving counter-clockwise, the four quadrants of the grid are as follows: (1) High Involvement Feeling, e.g. perfume, fashion, motorcycles, cosmetics; (2) High Involvement Thinking, e.g. 35mm camera, expensive copy machine; (3) Low Involvement Thinking, e.g. clothes pins, floor cleaner, motor oil; and (4) Low Involvement Feeling, e.g. Popsicle, candy bar, soft drink, cigarette (Bendinger, 1993).

From an advertising creative's perspective, the idea in plotting the brand on the FCP Planning Grid is to determine an ideal advertising approach. This is achieved by first deciding how the consumer is likely to view the brand, and second, customizing a message for this consumer in order to achieve a desired impact. Using the grid may involve a series of three or more steps, depending on the desired outcome: (1) plot the overall product category in its proper coordinates on the grid; (2) plot the particular brand in relation to the overall product category; and (3) plot the distinguishing brand attribute (Bendinger, 1993).

Once the brand is plotted as a dot on the grid, a second technique comes into play: "Exploding the Dot." Here, beginning with the visualization of the brand in the

consumer's mind, ideation continues in shifting the consumer's mind and level of involvement 45 degrees further in any of the four directions. This process allows creatives to explore new possibilities for a brand, with new insights revealed (Bendinger, 1993).

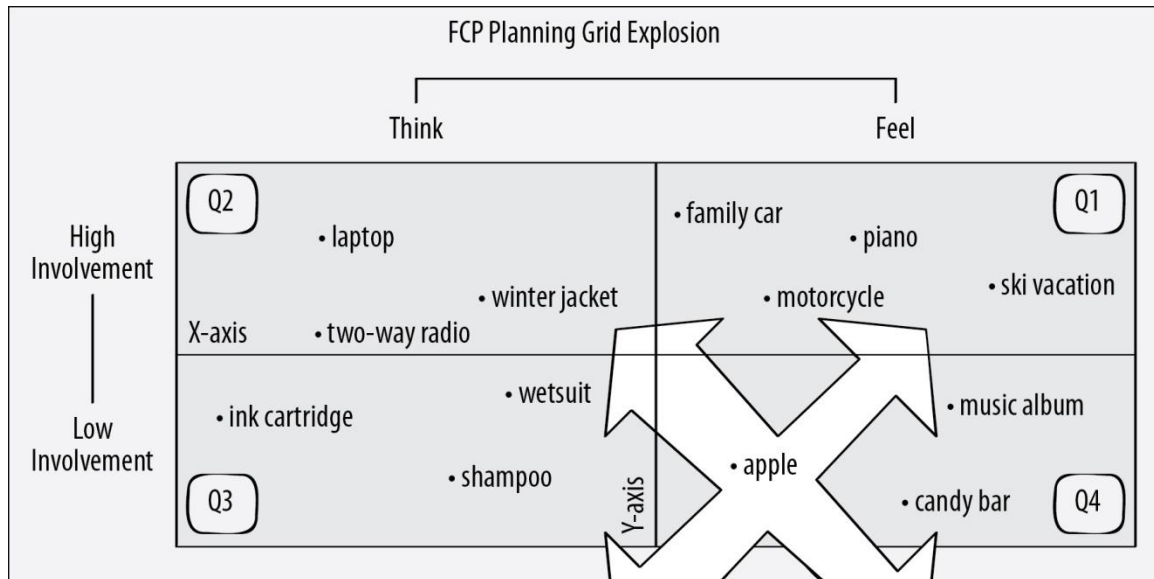


Figure 4: FCP Planning Grid Explosion technique, with the apple plotted in quadrant 4 and then shifted 45 degrees in any direction as an exploration of various strategies for reaching the consumer's mind.

To illustrate the use of the FCP Planning Grid Explosion, let us consider the apple. An apple is a product in the Low Involvement Feeling category, quadrant 4, because it is essentially an easy, inexpensive product that is a satisfyingly delicious snack, for example. On the X-axis, it lies nearer the midpoint than a candy bar, since the apple is logically beneficial to one's health, making it more of a thinker's snack than a feeler's. By exploding the dot toward quadrant 1, one could emphasize the satisfaction that could be associated with being gifted an apple, e.g. teacher with apple on her desk.

Exploding the dot toward quadrant 2, one could emphasize the apple's distinct health benefits, or else risks that could be associated with not eating an apple. Exploring quadrant 3, one could emphasize the apple's economical value or the fact that it is quickly and easily consumed, i.e. logical benefits. Moving deeper into quadrant 4, one could emphasize the simple joy of eating an apple, i.e. emotional benefits.

Creative Processes: *Creative Resources*

Some creatives in advertising use manuals and other helpful tools as launching pads for ideas, similar to the way chemists would use a familiar formula to solve their problems. There are numerous tools available to a creative person, including "The Kickstart Catalogue," found in Mario Pricken's book: *Creative Advertising: Ideas and Techniques from the World's Best Campaigns*. The Kickstart Catalogue contains a list of approaches commonly used by advertising creatives in order to attack problems, seeking big ideas. For example, "Comparative Juxtaposition," invites a before-and-after comparison to underline a product benefit (Pricken, 2008). Manuals like this one belong in a creative person's toolkit, much like a chemist benefits from having a Periodic Table of Elements nearby.

"Creativity template" is the term used by Goldenberg et al. (2009) to identify a strategic platform for uncovering big ideas, like The Kickstart Catalogue mentioned previously. Basically, a creativity template is a pattern for acquiring big ideas, similar to a fabric pattern that will result in a hand-sewn garment, or a recipe that will lead to a self-

prepared meal. Used by advertising creatives, patterns help guide the ideation process, as a sort of catapult for big ideas. The six big idea patterns identified by Goldenberg et al. are as follows: (1) Pictorial Analogy; (2) Extreme Situation; (3) Consequences; (4) Competition; (5) Interactive Experiment; and (6) Dimensionality Alteration (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999).

The Goldenberg study defined specific patterns in the big ideas behind award-winning ads. In the Goldenberg report, some of these patterns are illustrated as diagrams, expressing the root formula. However, the diagrams are presented in a way that merely describes the commonly existing big idea patterns, as opposed to also facilitating explorations of new big ideas. With this in mind, Goldenberg's big idea patterns can be enhanced by re-engineering the logic and expressing them as fill-in-the-blank equations. To use these diagrams as creative resources, one can apply the same logic of the six classic big idea patterns into new campaigns. One can start with the underlying model, and then essentially paint by numbers to create a new ad for a new campaign.

The proposed process of using Goldenberg's big idea patterns as creative resources would involve a recycling of old patterns to arrive at new big ideas. Thus, big idea patterns can be viewed as resources that can help spur big ideas, which is in fact supported by Goldenberg et al. In theory, any brand could be methodically examined, searching for big ideas with any of the six patterns. For example, let us consider an item and its respective benefit: an apple provides nourishment. Here, the product, an apple, equals the adjective, *healthy*. This message, *apple equals healthy* can be plugged into one or more appropriate pattern(s), like using a scientific formula, resulting in a big idea.

Although the Goldenberg study suggests the possibility of using patterns as a resource for prompting ideas, there is no elaboration, and no method proposed; the method is proposed here for the first time. The basic step-by-step process is as follows: (1) list the general conditions of the brand; (2) list the general conditions of the benefit(s); and (3) link brand conditions with benefit conditions, arriving at new associations. In the first two steps, the word “conditions,” refers to situations with respect to circumstances, i.e. states of being. While the first step applies to all of the big idea patterns, the second step is specific to its particular pattern, because each of the big idea patterns explores a particular feature of the brand benefit(s), i.e. metaphor, result, etc.

Big Idea Pattern 1: Metaphor


The most widely used example of a pattern identified in Goldenberg’s study is the *Pictorial Analogy*, here called *Metaphor*, in which a figurative symbol is introduced as a substitute for the key subject matter in an advertisement (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). The Metaphor equation can be formulated as such: Brand (B) = Metaphor of Benefit (M), where variable Brand Conditions (B_n) are linked with variable Metaphors (M_n). Here the lowercase “n” stands for the number, so a set of three variable product conditions would be abbreviated as B1, B2, and B3. In the apple example, variable product conditions include: (B1) tree in an orchard; (B2) grocery store produce aisle; and (B3) home kitchen fruit basket. Symbols for healthy include: (M1) vibrant house plant; (M2) running shoe; and (M3) smiling heart. Linking B1 with M3, one finds an interesting association: a tree in an orchard with smiling hearts as apples. This is a

beginning concept for a big idea. Viewed as an equation, BIP 1 looks like this: $B_n \pm M_n$
= Big Idea.

There are two variations within the metaphor big idea pattern: *Replacement* and *Extreme*. The Replacement version is illustrated in the example of an apple orchard with smiling hearts as apples – the symbol of an apple replaces the actual apple in a space where the apple would normally be present. The Extreme version adheres to the same formula, except the concept features a symbol taken to the extreme (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). An example of the Extreme Metaphor pattern might portray a heart doing bench presses in a gym – eating an apple is like exercising the heart, in that these actions are similarly healthy.

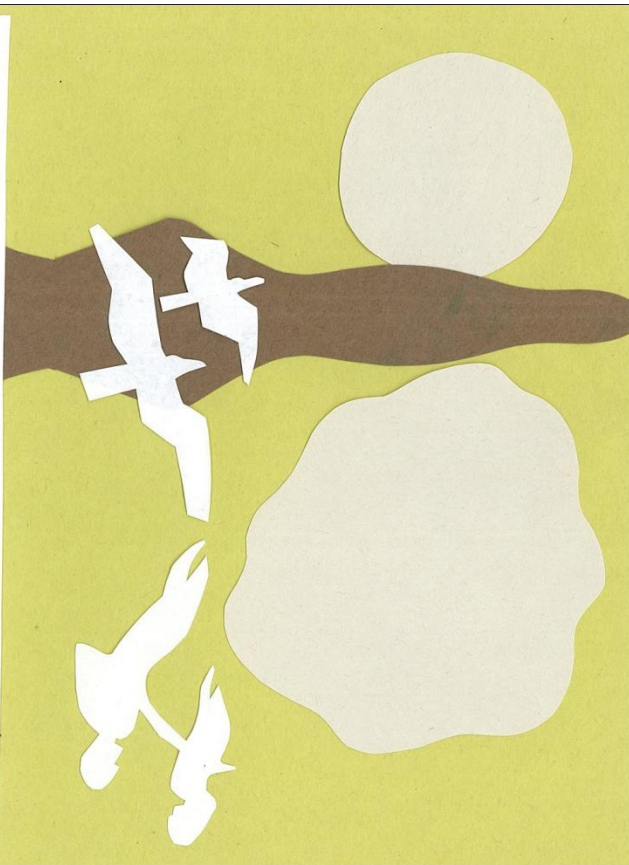
To further examine BIP 1, let us consider a campaign for Almond Joy candy bar. First, we compose a list of variable brand conditions (B_n): two morsels per package, blue packaging, coconut filling, milk chocolate coating, etc. Next, we list variable metaphors of the benefit (M_n): satisfies the need for freedom like flying, satisfies the need of nurturing like a parental figure, satisfies cravings like a lover, and satisfies the need for companionship like a long-time friend. In BIP 1, the Replacement variation might involve substituting a metaphor (M_n), e.g. lovers, and linking it with a brand condition (B_n), e.g. packaging, resulting in: two chocolate morsels in Kama Sutra postures, for example. In the Extreme variation of BIP 1, the metaphor and brand linkage ($B_n + M_n$) might result in a series of images with birds flying over water with their reflections in the shapes of various satisfying glimpses at life: a boy with his dad or a girl with her pet, for example, and the tagline: “Two, for Folks of a Feather.”

we were seagulls
 nesting in coconut shells
 flying over almond beaches
 among chocolate coated mountains
 swimming in the same, same wind
 as best, best friends
 enjoying being
 together
 enjoying being
 as best best friends
 swimming in the same, same wind
 among chocolate coated mountains
 flying over almond beaches
 nesting in coconut shells
 we were seagulls




two tasty morsels in every

two, for folks of a feather




in the almond trees
 where we used to meet
 in another life
 as eagles
 you were closer to me
 than the coconut sun
 to the chocolate horizon




two tasty morsels in every

two, for folks of a feather



reflections ripped coconut while waves
 as we waded
 almond eyes facing each other
 we were stuck together
 in a muddy milk chocolate night



two tasty morsels in every

two, for folks of a feather




Figure 5: Almond Joy campaign, with the tagline: “Two, for Folks of a Feather.”

Big Idea Pattern 2: Extreme Situation

The second big idea pattern is the *Extreme Situation*. Here, the word, “extreme,” refers to uncommon, absurd, surprising, and otherwise exaggerated situations. With this pattern, unrealistic situations enhance the prominence of key attributes in a product or service (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). Using the example of the apple again, some of the attributes at hand include: healthy, juicy, and vitamin rich; all qualities that can be exaggerated. The apple attribute, *healthy*, is comparable to the benefit presented by variable options, such as oranges and other fruits, obviously, and more absurdly, a vitamin sandwich – a heap of various pills placed on a hamburger bun. The extreme situation equation can be formulated as such: Brand (B) = Extremity of Benefit (E), where variable Brand Conditions (Bn) are linked with variable Extreme Conditions (En). As an equation, BIP 2 looks like this: $B_n \pm E_n = \text{Big Idea}$.

There are three variations in the extreme situation pattern: *Alternative*, *Value*, and *Attribute*. In all of these examples, the qualities of a brand are exaggerated to unrealistic proportions (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). Sauce made from an alternative healthy fruit or vegetable, such as potato sauce or onion sauce, demonstrates the Alternative form of the Extreme Situation pattern, where En is a variable alternative of an apple, i.e. onion, and Bn is a variable condition of the apple, i.e. sauce. Extreme Value and Extreme Attribute patterns each exaggerate the qualities of the brand at hand in order to enunciate its benefits. An example of an exaggerated value is this: Sir Isaac Newton sitting under an apple tree, with the tagline, “The Drop that Makes Ideas Pop Up.” An

example of an exaggerated attribute is this: an apple farmer takes a bite out of an apple and spits out a vitamin, instead of a seed, with the tagline, “Vitamins Inside ‘Em.”

To illustrate the use of BIP 2 further, let us consider a campaign for Motorola Talkabout two-way radios, a.k.a. walkie-talkies. Variable brand conditions (Bn) include any occasion for communication in a rural environment, especially outdoor adventures in rural areas: hunting, fishing, or boating. Variable extreme conditions (En) related to alternatives include: smoke signals, flare gun, and other primitive devices that work where cell phones are not an option. A linkage (Bn + En) highlighting the alternative options for the two-way radio might be this: the bat signal light bulb is dead and so the mayor of Gotham City cannot reach Batman. An example of a concept that might result from variable extreme conditions (En) related to value include: Jane of the jungle with leopard print underwear in hand contacting Tarzan via walkie-talkie as he swings away absent-mindedly on a vine. An example of a concept that might result from linking a variable extreme condition (En) related to an attribute is this: Mrs. Claus can use it to reach Santa on his sled because two-way radio communicates up to a 1-mile radius even in the sky. The former concept highlights the brand’s value, while the latter highlights the brand’s attribute.



Figure 6: Motorola Talkabout campaign. Tagline reads: “In Touch in the Outskirts.”

Big Idea Pattern 3: Results

The next big idea pattern, *Results*, emphasizes the effects of either executing or failing to execute the recommendations supported in the message. Here, the word “results” is a replacement for the Goldenberg term, “*consequences*” – this distinction changes the negative tonality of a “penalty” to the neutral tone of an “effect” for one’s action or inaction, which could be either favorable or unfavorable. Two variations are named in the Goldenberg report: *Extreme* and *Inverted*. The difference in the two variations is this: the *Extreme* variation implies extreme results for executing the ad’s recommended course of action, while the *Inverted* variation implies results for *not*

executing the ad's recommendation (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). The formula for the Extreme Situation equation is this: Brand (B) = Results of Benefit (R), where variable Brand Conditions (Bn) are linked with variable Results (Rn). Viewed as an equation, BIP 3 is: $B_n \pm R_n = \text{Big Idea}$.

Examples of both Extreme Results and Inverted Results patterns are given here. In the consumption of an apple, results include: doctors run out of business because the apples eaten each day are keeping them away; and Adam and Eve are no longer naked. Doctors out of work and people dressed in clothing are two extreme results (Rn) of apple consumption. Juxtaposing one of the Rn possibilities with a variable brand condition (Bn), like an apple farm, the following concept is a possibility: a group of doctors rioting on an apple orchard with signs vilifying the consumption of apples, e.g. "Johnny Appleseed is a Socialist." Conversely, a few results of non-consumption include: enormous weight gain; apple farmers out of business; and the disappearance of the Johnny Appleseed legacy. Inverted results could be depicted by a screenshot of a *Wikipedia* search page, with "Johnny Appleseed" typed in the search engine and the resulting: "No Results Found."

Let us consider the example of a tourism campaign for Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Here, variable brand conditions (Bn) include: horseback riding, rock climbing, hiking, biking, and other summer sports, plus skiing, snowmobiling, and other winter sports. In the Extreme Results variation, i.e. the act of visiting Jackson Hole, the conditions of variable results (Rn) include: looking up a steep cliff and seeing a mountain goat looking over the ledge, or, looking down from a snowy cliff and seeing a tiny deer below. These

results exaggerate the height of the landscape in Jackson Hole. Linking the imagery (Bn + Rn), one might arrive at a rock climber on a steep cliff with a mountain goat looking over the ledge, with the tagline, “Where Nature Calls *You* Wild.” In the inverted variation, i.e. the act of not visiting Jackson Hole and instead going to an alternative destination, the resulting big idea might be this: outdoorsman rowing a kayak into the crowded canals of Venice, with gondoliers screaming at him to get out of the way. An appropriate tagline for this visual is, “Get Away from the Getaway,” emphasizing the spaciousness and freedom to roam in Jackson Hole.

Big Idea Pattern 4: Competition

The *Competition* big idea pattern portrays situations in which the brand competes with another product or service. The selection of the other product or event is guided by its expected superiority over the advertised brand. Variations here are similar to those in the Extreme Situation pattern: *Alternative*, *Value*, and *Attribute*, except in this case the focus is on the competition between one product and another. Also similar to the Extreme Situation BIP, the particular conditions being compared here are generally “extreme,” as in exceptional and exaggerated (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). The formula here is: Brand (B) = Comparative Benefit (C), where variable Brand Conditions (Bn) are linked with variable alternatives, value, and attributes of the product (Cn). The BIP 4 equation is written as follows: $B_n \pm C_n = \text{Big Idea}$.

To illustrate the Competition variances, one could select from the competitive variables of the brand. With apples, competitive variables of alternatives include: apples

versus potatoes as bait for catching a wild boar, apples versus baseballs in a “Homefun Derby” event, and apples versus pinecones as tools for knocking a kite out of a tree. Competitive variables of value include: apple versus pencil sharpener as an ideal gift for a teacher, and apple versus watermelon as a target for bow and arrow shooting demos. Competitive variables in attributes include: caramel apple versus caramel popcorn as a movie theatre treat, and applesauce versus taco sauce as a spread on a bagel. The alternative usage of apples as make-shift baseballs (Cn) could be linked with an applesauce factory (Bn) resulting in the concept of a baseball team’s batting practice being responsible for the mashing of apples into sauce.

A tangible brand that illustrates BIP 4 is the Billabong wetsuit. Here, a list of variable brand conditions (Bn) includes: water surface sports like surfing, underwater sports like scuba diving, and offbeat sports like shark wrestling or jellyfish riding. The list of variable comparative benefits (Cn) include: thermal insulation, comfort, and abrasion resistance, all of which can be expanded in the variables: alternatives, value, or attributes. Variable competitive conditions (Cn) related to alternatives include: wetsuit versus sea kelp or versus a tow rope as a tool to get a jeep unstuck from the beach. Variable competitive conditions (Cn) related to value include: wetsuit versus knight armor, implying the value of body protection. Variable competitive conditions (Cn) related to attributes include: wetsuit versus baby blanket, implying comparable attributes of comfort and warmth. Combined with the brand conditions (Bn), an example of a linkage (Bn + Cn) is this: a baby asleep in a crib with a wetsuit for a blanket, with the tagline: “Born to Surf, Cozy Baby.”

Big Idea Pattern 5: Interactive Experience

The fifth big idea pattern is the *Interactive Experience*, in which the advertisement engages the viewer in a sensory approach, literally or figuratively involving the senses, i.e. seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and/or feeling. Interaction with the ad can stimulate the viewer, and promote the benefits of a product or service. Variations include: *Activation* and *Imaginary*. In the Activation variation, the viewer is engaged in a first-hand experience requiring physical activity and attentiveness. In the Imaginary variation, a concept engages the viewer's mind, inviting one to imagine an experience (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). The formula is: Brand (B) = Interaction of Benefit (I), where variable Brand Conditions (Bn) are linked with variable Interactions (In). As an equation, BIP 5 looks like this: $B_n \pm E_n = \text{Big Idea}$.

The Activation type of Interactive Experience big idea pattern is demonstrated in the following example: a sheet of several scratch-and-sniff stickers, with a large apple-scented sticker surrounded by smaller stickers of different scents to be scratched in combination with the apple scent, as a sort of taste test via sense of smell. For example, the viewer scratches the apple, and then scratches a cinnamon-scented sticker to experience the combination of apples and cinnamon. Additional scents could include caramel and other standards, as well as absurd scents, for humor or dramatic effect. The Imaginary type of this big idea pattern is identical, except in this case the viewer simply imagines the experience, as opposed to literally interacting with the medium in which the ad appears. The same scratch-and-sniff example could apply in the imaginary variation,

perhaps with a tagline inviting the viewer to imagine the scents: “Sweet Crispness of Life.”

To further illustrate BIP 5, let us consider a campaign for Steinway pianos. First, we compose a list of variable brand conditions (Bn): recital or concert, recording session, moving the instrument up a staircase, etc. Variable interactive conditions (In) related to experiencing a Steinway include: the sound of a piano note, the glass-like feeling of a key, and the vision of 88 black and white keys. The viewer of an interactive Steinway ad could be subject to an imagined experience such as reliving the recording of John Lennon’s song, “Imagine.” This example might be executed with a 25-key keyboard on a print ad with the melody and a tagline, “Imagine a Steinway,” inviting viewers to play the melody while listening in mind. An Activation variation of this concept is as follows: an application for iPhone or PC with a keyboard displayed on screen and keys that respond to touch with high quality sound samples from a Steinway piano, featuring songs from Steinway Artists, with the tagline, “Artists’ Sound Canvas.”

Big Idea Pattern 6: Dimensionality Alteration

The last of the six big idea patterns is *Dimensionality Alteration*, in which the brand is manipulated in relation to its environment. In all its variations, an ordinary situation is made entertaining by shifting the dimensions of the scenario, e.g. past/future, bigger/smaller, with/without, etc. There are four variations: *Multiplication*, *Division*, *Time Leap*, and *New Parameter Connection*. The first two variations involve altering the brand’s size or quantity, perhaps duplicating it or dividing it into its components. The

Time Leap variation features the brand benefit in a way that is heightened through presentation in the past or future. Finally, in the New Parameter Connection variation, the brand's parameter dimensions are altered, i.e. characteristics or elements (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). The formula is: Brand (B) = Alteration of Benefit (A), where variable Brand Conditions (Bn) are linked with variable Altered Conditions (An). Viewed as an equation, BIP 6 is: $B_n \pm A_n = \text{Big Idea}$.

Examples of altered dimensions are as follows. In the Multiplication variation, a brand could be multiplied into its enlarged state, e.g. an apple is turned into a horse carriage by the fairy godmother Granny Smith in order to transport Cinderella to the ball to meet Prince Braeburn. In the Division variation, a brand is divided, e.g. apple is split horizontally to emphasize its star-shape center and infer that the apple is a star, or Jesus feeds 5000 people by splitting a single apple into ultrathin slices in "the miracle of the five loaves, two fish, and one apple." The Time Leap variation presents an ordinary situation involving the brand, with a past or future twist, e.g. Adam and Eve playing the "hot potato" game with an apple from the Tree of Life in Eden, or a glimpse at the future with apple trees preserved in glass bubbles instead of orchard fields. In the New Parameter Connection variation, previously unrelated factors become related, e.g. the health benefit is demonstrated by replacing Atlas' celestial sphere with a giant apple in the famous sculpture, or, portraying an apple juice fountain of youth.

To further examine BIP 6, let us consider a campaign for Breathe Right nasal strips – a product that provides relief in sinus conditions, such as stuffy nose and snoring, so users breathe better and sleep better. A list of variable brand conditions (Bn) include:

yoga, marathon race, singing choir and other breath-associated activities along with high-stress events that require heavy breathing, and various sleeping situations such as a bed at home, a prison bunk, and a movie theater. Next, we list variable alterations of the benefit (An). The Multiplication variation results in the concept of jumbo nasal strips for crowd control, e.g. opening a path in otherwise dense traffic, while the Division variation leads to miniature nasal strips for inner body work, e.g. opening constricted blood vessels. The time leap variation results in the concept of future humans evolved with giant lungs due to increased air intake provided by Breathe Right. The New Parameter Connection variation yields an animal predator using the product to widen an underground hole to their prey, e.g. a big fox uses the brand to expand a tiny rabbit hole. The dimensionality alteration and brand linkage (Bn + An) might result in a bumblebee using the product to open up a closed flower, with the tagline, “Opens Passages Naturally.”

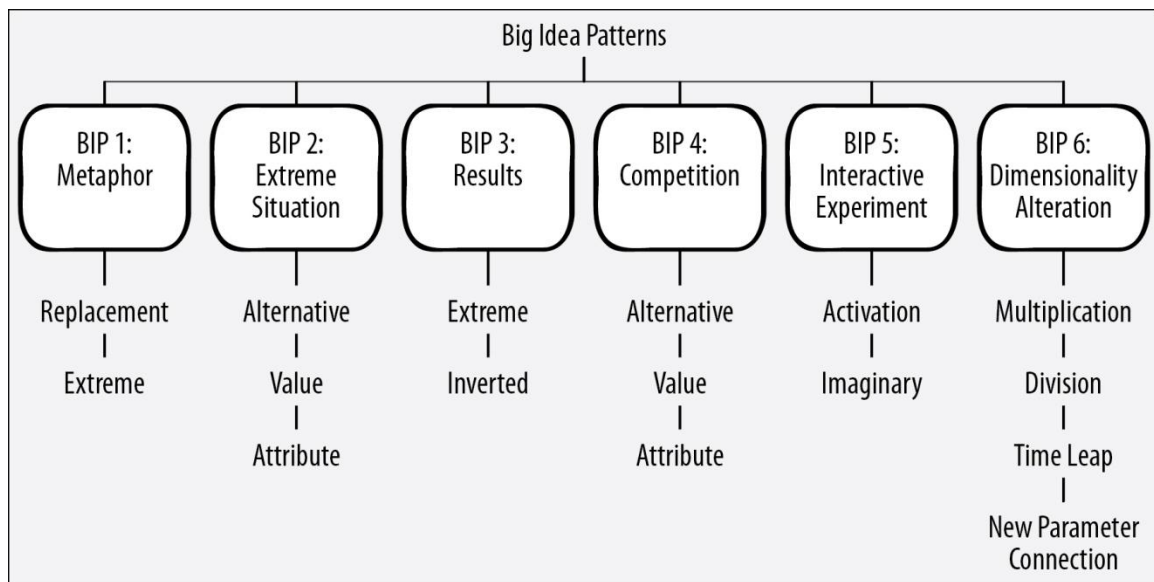


Figure 7: Big Idea Patterns derived from the six “creativity templates” identified by Goldenberg et al. (1999), which explain the conceptual bases for 89% of 200 highly evaluated ads.

Big Idea Patterns: Discussion

The testing of big idea patterns as creative resources is one that will require future experimentation for substantiation. The potential value in using these tools is validated here through multiple investigative trials, including the hypothetical campaign for apples as well as real-world examples of actual brands. These illustrations are derived here, originally, by this author in order to test the worth of Goldenberg's six identified patterns. This author's cases in point indicate the usefulness of BIPs as tools for helping creatives to arrive at big ideas for advertising campaigns.

The Goldenberg study is based on an assessment of 500 award-winning ads and contest finalists, i.e. *The One Show* awards program for branded entertainment, deemed "highly evaluated" by experienced creative professionals. Of these highly evaluated ads, 89% adhered to one of the six big idea patterns (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). To advertising creatives, this study by Goldenberg et al. shows empirically that adopting these six distinct patterns can help them to generate new ideas of high quality. These big idea patterns are based on time-tested, universally powerful methods of communication that can be widely applied toward any target audiences, across products or services (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999). The use of patterns assures superior creative efforts because it facilitates a focused cognitive effort (Tellis & Ambler, 2007).

In addition to identifying the patterns present in highly evaluated ads, the Goldenberg report also found that patterns were not present in non-winning ads. The

proportion of big idea patterns differs dramatically, ranging from 89% in the highest quality ads to a mere 2.5% in the non-winning ads. Among the award-winning ads that adhered to big idea patterns, the most abundant pattern is the Metaphor, or “Pictorial Analogy,” accounting for 38% of the pattern-matching ads, followed by the Results, or “Consequences,” pattern, accounting for 21% (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999).

Chapter 4: Originality and Appropriateness

In advertising, a creative idea is only valuable when it is both original and appropriate, as stated repeatedly throughout this report. In a marketing context, appropriateness refers to how on-strategy an idea is. An inappropriate idea may be tactless or irrelevant to the situation at hand, and thus, it does not bring value to the client’s unique case. Similarly, an unoriginal idea falls short as being uninspired and commonplace – also not valuable to a client. The value of an idea stems from a combination of its originality and appropriateness (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009).

A big idea is not necessarily bigger if it is most original or the most appropriate variation possible – there must be a balance. If the big idea is imbalanced by being overly logical, thus being too appropriate, then it will likely produce a boring, factual, “hard sell” ad. Conversely, if a big idea is overly emotional and unusual in its creativity, then it will likely produce an ad that lacks substance or selling points. Therefore, the goal for

any agency is to ensure that every ad appeals to both sides of a consumer's intellect (Barry, 2008).

A divergent (right-brain) thinking technique can reveal ideas that are original, but some knowledge of the case-at-hand must also be available to make the idea relevant (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009). This is where the client brief becomes essential. The client brief provides a base level of case-specific knowledge, so that informed creatives will explore on-target ideas. In order to ensure the ideas are valuable to the client's cause, creatives in an agency must balance between the freedom to explore ideas and the discipline to stay relevant (Ashley & Oliver, 2010) (Sasser & Koslow, 2008) (Goldenberg, Mazursky, Solomon & 1999) (Krieff, 1993).

In the absence of a formal, written client brief, there are a couple of alternatives that enable creatives to ensure appropriateness. One option is for the agency to write a brief itself, and then gain the client's approval – this is a good practice as it puts the agency in the mind of the client. Verbal briefs are common, and these present the possibility for transcription into writing later to be affirmed by the client. Unquestionably, written briefs are most advantageous, so a necessary second step in composing a client-side brief or a transcribed verbal brief is to express it in writing. Written briefs enforce a thorough examination of the subject while also justifying the actions of the creative team (Shaughnessy, 2005).

The following elements are mandatory for innovative, on-target advertising that sells: (1) a strategy document, e.g. client brief, to communicate relevant information necessary for creatives to develop big ideas; (2) a brand concept, directed by a strategic

review board, to provide input during ideation and executions; and (3) a system for reviewing the creative work itself – in many agencies this is the responsibility of the creative director (Barry, 2008) (Shaughnessy, 2005) (McNamara, 1990).

David Ogilvy emphasized the importance of doing one's homework. He advised knowing as much as possible about a client's product or service to ensure on-target marketing of it. He said, "The more you know about it, the more likely you are to come up with a big idea for selling it." Beyond the ordinary knowledge about a product or service that would be learned in a client brief, Ogilvy advocated research among test groups to find out how consumers responded to the client's product or service. In his experience, he benefitted from knowing what attributes were important to consumers and what promises would be most likely to make them buy the client's brand (Ogilvy, 1983). Modern creative directors agree. The more diverse one's knowledge is, the broader one's basis of intuition is – this leads creatives to new connections and, ultimately, big ideas (White, 2002).

Chapter 5: Client-Agency Relationship

During the advertising creative process, agency representatives become professional problem solvers while the client, in turn, assumes the primary responsibility of delivering information. The client has proprietary knowledge about product performance, market conditions, and target market characteristics that the creatives lack. Such information is seen as a necessary precondition for the creation of successful

advertising campaigns (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004). The agency's performance depends largely on the client's needs and its behavior throughout the production process (Halinen, 1997). This calls for a study of thresholds between shortage versus excess of client involvement, as it relates to an agency's productivity in executing an advertising campaign.

In the client-agency relationship, it is in the best interest of both parties to be informed, on-target, and prepared with all the knowledge necessary to communicate effectively. The client profits by obtaining creative work that is appropriately tailored to the client's unique situation. The agency profits by staying on course, making the most efficient use of its time (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004). An agency saves time and energy when its creative output fits; otherwise the agency is gambling with labor hours, with a potential for wasted energy. Being on the same wavelength helps strengthen the production process, allowing it to function as smoothly as possible.

Client-Agency Relationship: *Synergy through Partnership*

Advertising is a two player game between a creative agent and a client, in which both players must participate cooperatively in completing the game's objective – an advertising campaign with a big idea behind it. During creative production, the accessibility of top managers on the client side has proven to benefit creative teams, particularly in the information-gathering phase, and when prompted for feedback at the agency's request (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004). Agencies require information

from the client in order to make informed decisions throughout all four stages in a creative service workflow: initiation, preproduction, production, and postproduction. The following model illustrates that the client is the “key speaker,” or primary source of knowledge, in three of the four development phases. Examples are given to denote specific pieces of information exchanged at each phase of development.

Development Phases of Creative Services				
Development Phase:	Initiation	Preproduction	Production	Post-Production
Key Speaker:	Client	Client	Agency	Client
Primary Action Items:	Proposing and Negotiating	Briefing and Account Planning	Design Concepting and Media Buying	Evaluating

Figure 8: Action items involving a client and its agency during a creative service project.

During initiation, the client and agency define the scope of their work, compensation, and other terms, all held in a development agreement. During preproduction, the agency requires information about the situation at hand in order to prepare creative teams for strategy. Creative teams at this stage rely on clients to fulfill important roles such as setting direction, allocating resources, and evaluating outcomes (Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2006). During production, the agency requires feedback to ensure that the campaign execution is aligned with the client’s vision. During post-production, the agency requires evaluations in order to best serve the client in future campaigns, assuming the client-agency relationship is satisfying for both parties.

A 2006 study by Davies measured agency performance based on their level of interaction with the client. The report distinguishes two types of client-agency interactions that indicate relationship value: ad hoc versus collaborative. In ad hoc projects, relationships are informal, unrehearsed, and unplanned. Collaborative projects, on the other hand, involve a partnership, to some degree, indicating a desire to maintain a long-term, reciprocally-rewarding relationship (Davies, 2006). A separate study, by Vitrano, 2008, revealed a relevant top-ranked value driver in the client-agency relationship: working in a collaborative way by creating an environment of mutual respect (Vitrano, 2008).

Ron Smerczek, a veteran creative director, and writer for *Brandweek*, wrote, “My strongest bonds have been with clients who are highly collaborative. These bonds are most often forged in an environment where agency and client work together and build off each other’s ideas” (Smerczek, 2009). In the client-agency relationship, creative synergy is possible when clients seek a genuine partnership with a mutual willingness to explore new ideas. Meetings between them can bring forth a productive, and often astounding, fusion of business goals and creativity. Collaboration between left- and right-brained professionals facilitates productive work sessions from which excellent creative strategies and executions are born (Vitrano, 2008) (Davies, 2006) (Law, 1999).

Client-Agency Relationship: ***Production Stages for Strategy and Execution***

An advertising agency's involvement with a client begins in the initiation phase – one of four production stages. The initiation phase is marked by sales pitches and contract negotiations. A large-scale advertiser, like Procter & Gamble, may invest 6-12 months of time into agency reviews before settling on an ad agency and signing a development agreement (McNamara, 1990). When a marketer hires an ad agency to plan and implement its advertising, the client acknowledges its need for specialized professional services, investing in custom-made solutions. The client expects new ideas and objective viewpoints, along with support in specific areas of expertise (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004). Initiation transitions into the preproduction stage when the client hires an agency as its creative services provider.

Preproduction

The client's perspective is perhaps most valued in the preproduction stage. Here, the agency prepares itself to make informed decisions by educating itself sufficiently about the product and market at hand. Off-target execution is best stopped early, and on-target execution is best started early (Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2006). "An effective strategy reduces waste in the process of developing advertisements because it helps to prevent the misuse of expensive and scarce creative resources," according to Professor John Philip Jones (Jones, 1999).

An agency's immersion in a client's culture presents opportunities to discover truths that will help them successfully market their brands (Cleveland, 2008). During

preproduction, the client fulfills the important task of providing the necessary information to the agency team. This information forms the backbone of the agency's "creative brief," from which art directors and copywriters begin their brainstorming processes (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004) (Sims, 2004) (Jones, 1999). Poor briefing may result in weak creative solutions, causing unnecessary and costly redesign efforts. To deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time, an agency requires adequate knowledge about the product and the market (Jones, 1999).

The client brief is a blueprint for building an agency's awareness. A study by Sutherland, Duke, and Abernethy (2004) identified six distinct types of marketing information considered to be critical in the creation of effective advertising campaigns. This list includes: (1) target audience demographic profile; (2) customer product usage information; (3) client's product performance information; (4) competitors' product performance information; (5) marketing strategy information; and (6) a main selling point supplied by the client (Barry, 2008) (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004). If any piece of required information is missing, then a knowledge gap exists.

In addition to factual information about the brand, a client brief is likely to include figurative information, such as the brand image profile. Each brand has its own personality, which is an amalgam of various features including branding and image-related characteristics, tonality and style of its communication, and positioning. For example, copywriter Luke Sullivan describes a unique positioning strategy as follows: "Cameras aren't about pictures. They're about stopping time and holding life as the sands run out" (Sullivan, 2008). Another example is David Ogilvy's description of Dove soap

as a toilet bar for women with dry skin, as opposed to a detergent bar for men with dirty hands (Ogilvy, 1983).

A well-established brand stands for something, just one thing, and then creatives are responsible for reinforcing this thing throughout advertising endeavors. Dan Wieden, of the independently-owned ad agency, Wieden Kennedy, notes the consistency in a number of brands he has worked with. He explains that brands are verbs: “Nike exhorts, IBM solves, and Sony dreams.” Also, it could be said that brands are adjectives: Jeeps are tough, Porches are fast, and Volvos are safe (Sullivan, 2008). David Ogilvy writes, “Every advertisement should be thought of as a contribution to the brand image. Your advertising should consistently project the same image, year after year” (Ogilvy, 1983).

Production

A client’s perspective continues to be valuable long after the client brief is given. Client involvement is required during production because the agency requires acceptance of plans, materials, and creative concepts. Constructive criticism, in particular, is an important way for clients to contribute during certain steps in the production process. In some cases, the client may recognize that a creative work is off strategy, or is inconsistent with the client’s ideas of acceptable communication. While endlessly debating a tagline may be management overkill, listening to a client’s legitimate concerns is a good use of an agency’s time (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004) (Jones, 1999).

Feedback is a key element in any ad campaign – it acts as a powerful teacher – and in every ad campaign there are two audiences to reach: the client and the client’s

target market. Thus, there are two parties to obtain feedback from. Obtaining constructive criticism from both of these audiences is desirable, if not a necessity, because it reveals truths about the people who will ultimately need to understand the message. For this reason, Ogilvy advocated copy testing, examining the consumer's response to a message (Ogilvy, 1983).

Being subjected to criticism is, of course, challenging at times, and there are hindrances that stand in the way of receiving positive feedback. One pitfall in creative feedback is the possibility of concepts designed merely to please, as opposed to designing concepts that spring from one's artistic vision. "It requires a deep sense of trust between the person giving the feedback and the person receiving it, and it takes time and patience to develop this trust. Once the process is working, it acts as a doorway to insight" (Loori, 2004). Since criticism is a judgment of both the merits and faults of a work, it is often harsh in instances of disapproval, while often being sterile in instances of flattery. What makes criticism constructive is its usefulness for practical purposes.

During the production phase, regular meetings between client and agency are often beneficial in facilitating diverse discussions that equip the agency to do a better job of promoting the client's product or service. When questions arise during production, the agency has two options: (1) halt production until the client's input is obtained; or else (2) continue the creative workflow with unanswered questions. The first option risks disrupting the creative flow, while the second option risks falling off track. Both of these problems are alleviated by accessible management, with articulation in a timely manner (Morais, 2007) (Law, 1999) (Krieff, 1993).

Ultimately, it is the client's responsibility to determine if the work merits exposure to customers. Once the agency presents its initial concepts, clients are responsible for making critical comments, thereby providing direction to the agency for the next round of creative development. Clarity is crucial (Morais, 2007) (Law, 1999). When a client says, "I just don't think that tagline works," the agency is not certain what will please the client. When a client says, "I'd like to see a tagline that expresses our brand's superiority over the competition," the agency can craft copy that will be more acceptable in the next round of creative work (Morais, 2007). The client's acceptance or rejection of the agency's proposals is an inherent part of the advertising process. Rejections do not imply dissatisfaction on behalf of the client or failure on behalf of the agency.

Post-Production

Since taste preferences differ on what constitutes a good ad campaign versus a bad one, success measurements are often subjective. So, in order to truly determine a campaign's effectiveness, the client and agency must agree in advance on a specific objective that a campaign will achieve. An agency learns how to meet and exceed client expectations only after agreeing on clearly stated objectives. Once they agree on the challenge or opportunity for which the advertising is being created, they then have a basis for gauging success. In a typical scenario in the client-agency relationship, if a client dislikes a campaign presented by its agency, or finds it to be off-target, the client may ask

for another round of creative development. Redoing creative work is not uncommon (Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2006).

A 2006 article in *Advertising Age* discussed the friction between one client, Toyota, and its agency, Saatchi & Saatchi. In this case, the client forced its agency to reinvent. Specifically, Toyota questioned the functionality of the slogan in use, noting that only 23% of surveyed consumers connected the umbrella tagline, “Moving Forward,” to the automaker (Halliday, 2006). Additionally, Toyota called for a shift away from TV ads and toward nontraditional media, as largely utilized in the launch of Toyota’s sub-brand, Scion. This client-agency “friction” is healthy, according to a Toyota spokesperson, illustrating the point that constructive criticism is a natural part of a campaign’s evolution (Halliday, 2006).

The presence of client-side management is helpful at times, but potentially threatening in others because of the interference caused by disrupting the creative process. Differences of opinion are healthy in some cases, but in others, a client is best-served when one leaves the creative decisions to the professionals within an agency. For this reason, the client-agency relationship is healthiest when the client is willing to delegate some decision-making authority to the agency. Clients seek out certain qualities when they hire agencies, such as: account planning, media management, and creative execution (Halinen, 1997). Each of these examples falls into the agency’s area of expertise, and so the agency is best-suited for these decisions. Still the client is the ultimate decision maker, and problems may arise when a client’s inflexibility of influence takes priority over the agency’s specialized intuition.

Creatives are conceptual, imaginative people who invent, design, and produce ideas; creatives differ temperamentally and stylistically from their MBA-trained clients (Morais, 2007). When senior client-side managers with sophisticated advertising knowledge are involved, there may be a distinct “chilling” effect on the agency, thus reducing the creativity it produces. Clients can be their own worst enemies, especially if they approach the client-agency relationship with the attitude that advertising agencies function like other service providers, with monetary concerns as a their core motivator. This type of cost-based, commoditized relationship limits creative potential, and thus it is not conducive to the advertising creativity needed (Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2006).

An agency must respect its client’s desired level of collaboration, while the client must respect its agency’s desired level of space. Too little participation from client may be perceived as aloofness, while too much is perceived as interference (Davies, 2006). It is the agency’s responsibility to let the client know when there is an interference with the creative process. It is the client’s responsibility to be suitably involved in the process. The client’s involvement begins with providing the relevant information. The client’s involvement continues with being available to answer any questions that arise while giving the agency a generous level of flexibility.

Chapter 6: Study Methodology

Research in creative processes requires sample groups with divergent thinking abilities. Thus, ad agencies are the best organizations for this type of study. However, the

population of individuals working professionally as creatives is extremely small and this population is also geographically centered, i.e. New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago (Ashley & Oliver, 2010). The limited access to a sizeable survey set is one of the biggest constraints in researching creative processes, and this constraint may explain why research dealing with the creative process so rarely uses working advertising creatives – instead, research tends to use student subjects (Sasser & Koslow, 2008) (Ashley & Oliver, 2010).

Some research studies on the subject of creative processes do survey actual professionals. Notably, Goldenberg, Mazursky, and Solomon (1999), and Johar, Holbrook, and Stern (2001), both used professional subjects. As stated previously, the advertising industry is ideal for this type of study, because it employs a high concentration of creative specialists. To test hypotheses and answer research questions related to the creative process requires sample groups with time-tested divergent thinking abilities – an ad agency’s creative director is the epitome of this (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009).

The author of this report designed a survey in order to help explain behaviors of professional advertising creatives as they approach big idea strategies and executions. This survey was designed to obtain first-hand data related to the research questions, later to be analyzed and discussed. The specific population to be examined was the U.S. population of professional creatives, with 400+ individuals selected for convenience as a non-probability, exploratory sample. The source of this contact information was *Advertising Redbooks*, a database containing exclusive information on 15,000 U.S. and

international agencies. Within the database, a search for U.S. agency creative personnel, i.e. art director et al., returned a list of 3,086 agencies. Most of these results listed contact information for one or more creatives.

Here again are the research questions behind this report:

- RQ: What is the process of developing creative advertisements around big ideas?
- RQ: What techniques and resources are available to assist in creative processes?
- RQ: What are the notable behaviors in advanced creatives compared to beginners?

These RQs are each addressed in a brief survey. The introduction to this questionnaire reads as follows: “This study will assess creative processes involved in generating big ideas for advertisements. For the purpose of this study, a *big idea* is a contribution to a brand image in an original and appropriate way. A *creative technique* is a technical skill set that can lead to a big idea. A *creative resource* is a helpful source that can lead to a big idea.” The questionnaire is provided in the Appendices section, at the end of this report.

Chapter 7: Case Studies

Summer of 2010 was this author’s first period of semi-steady self-employment, doing business as Optimistic Realism (see www.optimisticrealism.com). In May that

year, I was wrapping up a semester, more than halfway through completing my master's degree at the University of Texas in Austin. By June, I had a handful of commissioned projects in-the-works, ranging from online branding to a digital children's story, along with a 30-hour-per-week commitment to various creative services for a software company. Although I was busy beyond belief, the work was enjoyable, and so I comfortably devoted long, attentive hours into every assignment. When I felt overwhelmed, I hired help. This was all new to me, and so I took meticulous notes – I wanted to remember how I started my career as a creative director.

There were advantages and disadvantages to operating a digital business in this way. One clear advantage was the cost savings – no office space to rent, and essentially no equipment to buy. Also, I worked from a comfortable space, at my designated rate and desired pace. Striving for efficiency, I setup an automated system for archiving emails and digital files, all backed up on an external hard-drive. In my estimation, 95% of my communication with clients occurred via email. My clients and co-workers had open access to my personal phone, but they seemed to prefer email messages. In most cases, we could have held video conferences, or face-to-face meetings, but email was sufficient.

Our reliance on email did present disadvantages, however, because of the general problem of one-way digital communication – it is impersonal and lack a tone of voice. Emails on my end had to be written with care, edited, double-checked for spelling, etc., prior to sending. In a few cases, the client or I neglected to include an attachment, or else accidentally left out a crucial bit of information. So there were waiting periods, with anxiety felt on my end and probably on theirs too. Learning to communicate with clients

was the biggest area of growth I noticed in myself over the summer. I became an excellent email listener and conversationalist.

The main client I worked with throughout the summer of '10 is Systemware, a software firm based in Dallas, Texas, specializing in enterprise content management (ECM) business solutions for Fortune 500 corporate accounts like Bank of America and Office Depot. I committed 30 hours per week to this company, with an occasional rush job requiring 10+ hours in a day. Projects included art direction and copywriting for digital ads and minisites, along with email marketing campaigns and print documents such as white papers, case studies, and fact sheets.

There were other high-tech clients as well, and my main focus in each was online branding. First, I assisted with a rebranding campaign for a software company headquartered in India, called InXero. Next, I undertook a web branding project for a pioneer in broadband wireless technology. A partner from UT helped me to develop a database-driven website with all sorts of advanced features to invite usability. I handled the strategy and design of the branding, while my partner focused on the more technical tasks. Later, I interned as an associate producer for *The Advertising Show*, a radio show sponsored by *Advertising Age* magazine. Here again, I focused on web branding, completing an entire re-branded website.

Three of my most pleasant business dealings during the summer of 2010 began with relationships formed during my involvement in an event for young entrepreneurs, called 3-Day Start-Up (3DS). Through 3DS, I began working with a team of talented students at UT to create educational software to teach computer programming to kids. We

started a business together, called Hippo Bubble Games. Our first step was to create an investor-oriented website (www.hippobubble.com), which I designed and launched. Another 3DS friend started an application for Apple's iPhone, called Hurricane Party, and I participated in some heavy marketing-related brainstorming with the executive team. Third, I consulted a grad student entrepreneur from UT's MBA program as a creative specialist for a company he started, called FlipTog. His idea was basically to sell footwear from vending machines in downtown settings with heavy pedestrian traffic.

There were other clients as well, and three of the most interesting ones are discussed below, with a research-based analysis related to the topic of this report. While some of these projects were merely extensions of a pre-existing brand personality, e.g. Systemware, others demanded high-concept big ideas. These projects required the same level of originality and appropriateness that would be required of creatives at a large-scale agency, with the same managerial skills that would be expected of a creative director. Backed by a team of partners, I was responsible for delivering both the strategy and execution of big ideas, serving as a designer, writer, and manager of creative services. Although my creative behaviors, techniques, and resources were not entirely developed at the time of these projects, I believe these personal experiences with creative processes serve as a substantial contribution to this report.

Case Studies: *Kacey's Cakes*

I first became acquainted with Kacey Hanson through a campaign called get ur 60 (see www.getur60.com) – I was commissioned in the Fall of 2009 to design the website, and Kacey was one of the organization's managers. A few months after successfully launching the get ur 60 website, Kacey approached me about designing a website for her side-business, called Kacey's Cakes. Outside of her involvement with get ur 60, Kacey was a pastry chef. By March, 2010, we reached an agreement with the goal of creating a Flash-animated website with a photo gallery to display a variety of her dessert specialties. I completed the website slowly, over the course of four months, and published the website on July 1, 2010.

Throughout the construction of this website, there were 90 total emails exchanged between us, with 59 hours of labor invested on my end. For the most part, this project was by-the-book, beginning with a written contract and ending with a top-notch brand-centered website (www.kaceyscakes.com) and a satisfied client. She called it, "the website of my dreams." Although this business relationship was mutually satisfying, there was one small hiccup: I underestimated the labor required in building the website. It was Flash-animated, demanding "bells and whistles" outside of my expertise. My original estimate quoted 32 hours of labor, but I logged a total of 59 hours – 46% more time than I first anticipated. I ended up having to disregard the extra 27 hours, since it was not accounted for in our contract.



Figure 9: Screenshots of the Kacey’s Cakes website.

In the case of Kacey’s Cakes, the pricing plan we agreed on is a labor-based fee system modeled after the fee system used by lawyers and accountants. It is a flexible pricing plan in which the client and agency agree on a reasonable hourly rate. David Ogilvy has summarized of the advantages of the labor-based fee system: “The fee enables the agency to make a fair profit on services rendered. The [client], in turn, pays for what he gets – no more, no less” (Jones, 1999). Since this was a new account for me, I agreed to an hourly rate that she could afford, even though it was less than what I typically charge for my services. According to research, it is common for an agency to agree on an unusually low rate of commission in the beginning stages of a client-agency relationship, as a stipulation for new business (Jones, 1999).

The simplest and most direct way to charge for internal time is by using hourly rates applied to the time each person spends on the job (Hameroff, 1998). Each employee’s hourly rate is customarily based on a standard year of 1,600 hours, which allows for vacations, holidays, a few days home with the flu, coffee breaks, etc. Here,

one's basic hourly rate is the salary divided by 1,600. So, a \$32,000-a-year employee has a basic rate of \$20.00.

In a labor-based fee system, an important part of a creative's job is to log labor hours. This information is valuable to a client because it explains the cost, and it is valuable to an agent because it facilitates efficient account planning, i.e. simplifies the process of making time estimates for related projects (Calantone & Drury, 1979). In my 10-year background interning and working as an advertising professional, 2000-2010, I have developed a routine of logging my tasks in 20-word descriptions to verify the labor hours I am billing for: "In Photoshop, prepared new image template for specialty cakes section, patterning the borders and shading of images elsewhere in the site," for example. After each description, I include a fraction of an hour to indicate how much time is required in each step. I include a detailed task sheet along with my invoices in every project with a labor-based fee structure.

Even though my task sheet for Kacey's Cakes included nearly every detail of the tasks I completed, I did not require additional payment for the extra time I devoted to this project. It was an exercise in customer service, with the aim of exceeding the client's expectations and thereby maximizing client retention. Like almost any creative assignment, I ran into unforeseeable obstacles, and in this case it caused me to exceed my estimated labor hours. We discussed this, and I reassured this client that I was committed to seeing the project through to its launch, promising to do my best. I shared my progress frequently, as well as my hurdles. In this way, the client-agency relationship stayed comfortable between us, with open discussions that eased the tension of a delay.

Communicating with this client was a good use of my time. A client knows when one is being ignored or taken for granted (Cleveland, 2008), but the client does not witness the full effort agencies make on one's behalf. By regularly communicating the status of my progress, I showed that I was working diligently on the client's behalf. I earned Kacey's appreciation this way, and she acknowledged this in writing: "Thanks, Cabe. You'd be a really good life coach. You say the most encouraging things." Kacey Hanson's satisfaction is consistent with researchers' findings on the subject. According to studies, the client-agency relationship functions most favorably when the client understands the agency's method of operation. The client appreciates knowing what to expect from the agency, as exhibited through the agency's consistent work process. A client enjoys reassurance via consistent updates on the account status and strategy (Davies, 2006) (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004).

Case Studies: *Sami G*

Samantha Gilbert is a friend who I had worked with in the past, bartering creative services with each other. She helped me by acting as a public relations video spokesperson for Optimistic Realism, during its initiation phase in 2007. In exchange for her help, I provided lessons in web design. Specifically, I showed her how to use Adobe Dreamweaver, the industry-standard software for web design. With a new project in mind, Sam approached me in mid-May, 2010, inquiring about my fee structure. She quickly commissioned me for some brand development and web production tasks,

including: (1) rebranding her corporate image as a nutrition expert, named Sami G; (2) rebranding her product line, called Sami's Superfoods; and (3) designing and developing a brand-centered website.

Our development agreement provided a project overview, summary of the required tasks, and other details. The overview read as follows: "This agreement outlines the general terms for a preliminary engagement of Optimistic Realism (O.R.), related to creative services, which may include marketing communications and business development for Sami G." The scope of work was this: "O.R.'s function will be to support Sami G on various activities including but not limited to brand development, web production, and copywriting." The development agreement included an explanation of the compensation structure and terms, all clearly expressed.

Sam and I exchanged 98 emails between May 17 and July 29, mostly cordial, while also staying professional. Although we communicated frequently, we did not always see eye-to-eye. For example, one of the logos was met with feedback like: "It isn't stylish enough," or "it is too modern-looking," and this required extensive revisions, with dozens of iterations. This was the cornerstone image of the brand personality, and so it had to be aligned with the client's vision for her brand. The client and I discussed this logo in great detail, and yet we still seemed to find shortcomings in every draft. Meanwhile, I was racking up heavy labor hours. The back-end of the website was already produced, but the front-end did not come to fruition – we walked away from the project to pursue our other callings. At the time of this report's publish date, this website is not launched.



Figure 10: Three logo variations of the Sami G brand development project.

Here, my creative processes were off-target, teeter-tottering with imbalances between originality and appropriateness. Even though the client and I were expressing our ideas well, the subjectivity of creative criticism made it difficult to decipher at times. In hindsight, I recognize that I did not have any form of a creative brief for this project, and so I was lacking clarity on the overall brand strategy. As expressed in the research of this study, a knowledge gap can lead to dissatisfied creatives and less effective campaigns. Obtaining basic customer, product, and market information prior to launching the advertising campaign has been found to be a major difference between campaign success and failure (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004).

In this dual-branding campaign, the first brand logo was a smashing success, which might have implied adequate briefing, if it were not for the obstacles encountered in the second logo. The second logo proved to be a disconnect, indicating the need for a

re-assessment of the brand strategy. Instead of communicating about the creative executions being presented to this client, we may have been more productive if we had communicated about the creative strategy behind these executions. Surveys of both clients and agencies reveal that “miscommunication” is commonly identified as a cause for friction (Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004) (Krieff, 1993) (Law, 1999).

Case Studies: *Chef Gonzales*

The Chef Gonzales project was a central focal point for me in mid-summer 2010, with 82 emails exchanged between us. My team and I were commissioned with the ambitious objective of establishing a high level of popularity that would lead to a Chef Gonzales TV show. This was a wild shot, since we were starting from scratch, but I believed we had a strong possibility of reaching this goal – our research revealed a tremendous opportunity for a Latin American celebrity chef, as there was not a prominent public figure in this role at the time of our business dealings. In addition to producing a first-rate brand-centered website, I recommended self-producing a series of “webisodes,” web videos broadcast via the Chef Gonzales website. With webisodes, we would be able to start developing a fan base and show cable TV execs some substantial evidence to convey the chef’s popularity.

When I first met the chef, Adam Gonzales, he emphasized his desire to star in a televised cooking show, and so I was hired to create a brand-focused website to portray him as a chef worthy of broadcast exposure on television. In addition to featuring Adam

Gonzales as a celebrity, the website would also highlight his new product line and his restaurants. His products included organic, all-natural mixes for Mexican martinis and margaritas, along with homemade salsas. He was the founder of Austin-based Tex-Mex restaurant chain called Serranos, as well as the proprietor of a handful of other restaurants.

My team and I ran into a high hurdle with this case: a lack of communication. The Gonzales team went AWOL for months at a time, simply unreachable via telephone, email, or in person. Still, the client expected us to proceed in directing the online branding for Chef Gonzales, so we marched forward, largely uninformed. In an early iteration of the brand imagery I was developing, Chef Gonzales was branded with a unique image of a great blue heron – a rare and attractive bird that I felt represented him well. The heron was repeated throughout the web interface, with alluring herons sweeping across the pale yellow screen. As it turns out, Gonzales did not particularly like birds; he was more of a fisherman. The Gonzales team requested a shift to a fish-related emphasis in the design.



Figure 11: First draft of the Chef Gonzales logo.

With the exception of a 1-hour meeting over lunch one day, the client was not available to offer feedback, so our lack of communication is a justifiable explanation for the off-target creative execution, i.e. the heron. The obvious remedy was more communication, and more closeness between the parties; this resolution is supported in research (Beverland, Farrelly, & Woodhatch, 2007). However, more communication was simply not an option in this case, because the client was focused elsewhere. The Chef Gonzales team was invested in a large-scale business building phase: building their product line and building new restaurants. During this time, while they were strictly devoted to business development, they were not available to discuss the big idea.

This client basically left the brand-related creative decisions to the professionals – my staff and I. This type of client-agency relationship is apparently extremely rare. In fact, there appears to be a scarcity of research on the topic of client-agency relationships that agree on agency-led briefing, or AWOL client wholly entrusting the agency, here indicating an opportunity for further research. Anyhow, in my experience, I found it exhilarating to be trusted with complete control of creative strategy and execution, while also terrifying, since I would not obtain the client’s approval to launch the campaign until after presenting the completed execution.

A survey by the Association of National Advertisers (2004) revealed that good communication was the most valued characteristic of the agency-client relationships; both clients and agencies agreed on this. Marketers indicated the importance of an agency’s responsiveness, as part of the outstanding service they expect. Agencies

indicated that they value communication, including criticism, above all else (Sanders, 2004).

Eventually, the Chef Gonzales team presented feedback, i.e. fish instead of heron, and this quickly kick-started the workflow leading to the website's launch. While I received encouragement for developing the *heroic* angle of "Legendary Latin Dining," I also received requests to emphasize the *entertaining* angle of Adam Gonzales' passion for fishing. Plus, I had to handle the *traditional*, old-fashioned branding of Chef Gonzales' cocktail mixes. This resulted in a multiple personality disorder of sorts, which in this case is the equivalent of a diluted branding effort.

Regarding the client-agency relationship, Luke Sullivan advises creatives to find and embrace a single personality for a brand. He writes, "Simplicity involves stripping your brand's value proposition down to the bone and then again to the marrow, carving away until you get down to the brand = adjective." His heuristic is to pair a brand with an adjective that describes its essential personality (Sullivan, 2008). With this in mind, I advocated adherence to a single brand personality. However, in the Gonzales case, the brand personality was threefold, indicating an opportunity for improved simplification.

This client supported at least three separate brand personalities, each communicating a separate message with a separate adjective: heroic, plus entertaining and traditional. The Gonzales team persisted in being all three things at once, despite my team's encouragement to select a single, simple, all-encompassing brand personality. Each of its three personalities held its own brand story, color palette, and tone of voice. These separate branding efforts were beyond my control, so I focused strictly on the one I favored: Legendary Latin Dining.

I requested a client brief in the early stages of our relationship, but the Gonzales team was not forthcoming. My team and I side-stepped this issue by creating the client brief ourselves. We built an interactive presentation full of images and words that offered a glimpse into the marketplace and target audience. For example, the presentation included web screenshots to show what other successful chefs are doing with online marketing. This presentation enabled us to start thinking conceptually about the project. I asked for feedback from the client, and received little. Still, our presentation was invaluable to us, because it revealed opportunities to shine.

Based on insights of our self-made client brief, I used the mindscribing technique to approach the problem at hand. I started with a single term, like "Mexican," and assembled a collection of associated words and images, working into the colors, environment, history, culture, and more. Next, I filtered my results and moved toward original and appropriate big ideas. Eventually, I arrived at a breakthrough tagline: "Tex-Mex Extraordinaire." This tagline was nearly right, except Chef Gonzales' cooking repertoire was more diverse than Tex-Mex; he also utilizes Cajun and Italian styles, all

with a certain Latin American flair. “Legendary Latin Dining” is the tagline we later settled on.

With this tagline, the Optimistic Realism team set forth in creating a brand personality dramatized with a silhouette image of the chef with a steaming skillet, in a landscape resembling Cabo San Lucas. By late June, the first draft of the website was completed, after which an in-person meeting occurred, with all members of Optimistic Realism and Gonzales teams present. A day later, we launched an introductory splash page with social network links, and issued a set of business cards to draw people to the splash page. My partners and I crafted some written content to add substance to the site, using nearly every photograph the client provided. On September 2, the website was up and running (see www.chefgonzales.com).



Figure 12: Screenshots of the Chef Gonzales website.

At the time of this report, the Chef Gonzales website is live, standing steadily as an online brochure with the flexibility to expand as the client sees fit. Although there is ample room for improvement, the site is editable via web browser, enabling the client to

take responsibility for its own web content. While at first, all parties aspired to build a rich-media experience featuring lively videos of the chef in action, we instead settled for a slideshow of still images, because that is all we had to work with. My team and I logged a total of 120 hours on Gonzales' behalf, nearly all of which was uninformed guesswork. We did earn the client's thumbs up, and so I believe this project was a great success.

Although we managed to complete the Chef Gonzales website without much assistance from the client, the researchers' findings about an agency's need for feedback are confirmed: a client's involvement in its advertising pursuits is indispensable. The client's first responsibility to its agency is to convey information that enables the creative team to make informed decisions throughout the creative process. An agency's awareness of the reality of a situation reduces the dependency on guesswork while presenting opportunities for insightful action. Informed decisions lead to successful campaigns that reach the right audience with the right message at the right time (Ashley & Oliver, 2010) (Sasser & Koslow, 2008) (Goldenberg, Mazursky, Solomon & 1999).

Chapter 8: Blowing Up a Big Idea

Once an agency arrives at a big idea, the spectrum of possibilities opens up. For example, a big idea for apples could translate into different media outlets ranging from traditional, i.e. print and television, to non-traditional, i.e. bus stops and subway walls, to interactive, i.e. iPhone apps and websites, to spaces untapped. The idea of finding extra contact points – places of contact with consumers – is called integrated marketing

communications (IMC). The way IMC works is by communicating the same message across different communications channels – a campaign with one big idea, all supporting a single brand with a unified message (Bendinger, 1993).

IMC facilitates the expansion of a big idea. At its pinnacle, a consumer's ordinary experience turns into an "adverperience," with a barrage of subtle and comfortable advertisements intermixed with daily life. In a grocery store, one might first see a news print message for apples and then a point-of-purchase display in the apple aisle, or a sticker label on the apple itself, all repeating the same big idea. Outside, in transit, one might find the same message on the side of a bus, and then see a billboard. At home, one might discover the same message on television, or *Hulu*, or *YouTube*, with a link to an interactive mini-site where one might play with digital apples, playing with the same big idea. One might make an online purchase of apples, and ship them directly to one's home, or as gifts to neighbors, or as peace offerings to office mates...

Ambient platforms for big ideas commonly include areas of transit, such as installments by roadsides, in bus stops, and in subway systems, e.g. a gigantic apple sculpture as a symbol of local pride in "The Big Apple," New York City, also serves as a reminder that apples are a beloved American fruit. Non-traditional possibilities are immense as there is massive unexplored territory and room for growth. A big idea for an apple could easily work its way into a variety of non-traditional platforms. Examples of non-traditional areas include: street benches, backs of parking receipts, base panels of grocery store hand carts, and graffiti or projections on the sides of buildings. Even

traditional media qualifies as non-traditional when its placement is unique, e.g. a print ad resembling graffiti on the interior stall door of a public restroom.

New media platforms for big ideas include websites, viral videos, and interactive ads. Big ideas often appear online as “microsites,” i.e. websites specific to a single campaign and therefore separate from the main website. An example of a microsite is an “advergame,” i.e. interactive advertisement inviting consumers to essentially play with the brand. An apple advergame might invite players to “Dig into Apples,” with players displayed as worms as they work their way into an apple core and back. Brand-focused websites are often emotionally-based and entertaining, as opposed to traditional corporate websites which tend to be information-based.

Some online platforms invite visitors to participate in making a big idea bigger. Viral videos, blogs, and social networks are a few examples of this – each of these platforms facilitates peer-to-peer sharing. A television commercial, forcibly consumed, is easily transitioned to an online video, voluntarily consumed, shared on YouTube, for example (Porter & Golan, 2006). Branded viral videos like these can be viewed at will at any time, and shared as links or passed forward via email, blog link, social media, and more. Similarly, branded blogs facilitate word-of-mouth advertising in a viral way. Blogs range from corporate-oriented to creative-oriented, designed to appeal to different audiences while each inviting consumers to read and respond, i.e. comment on an article or forward the article to friends.

Bringing a big idea into social media can be handled through the consistent, unified delivery of the brand personality. First, a brand’s profile page can be customized

with a personality that closely matches other executions of the big idea. For example, the big idea is reinforced when an identical tone of voice carries through all media, from print ads and radio spots to the writing of a *Twitter* message, i.e. a “tweet.” Likewise, the big idea is reinforced when a consistent image and style carries through all media, perhaps displayed as the background imagery of a brand’s *Twitter* profile.

Besides reinforcing the big idea, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and other social networking platforms give brands a powerful opportunity to build relationships with customers. While countless corporate accounts have misused social media as advertising vehicles for pushing out information, many of these have not realized the greater value of these channels: pulling information from consumers (O’Reilly & Milstein, 2009). Successful advertisers are using social networks to hold conversations, exchange ideas, and connect with consumers in other ways (Clapperton, 2009). These channels are ideal for client-audience engagement, e.g. launching an “Apple a Day” event where individuals are invited to submit homespun health-related tips and see the best ones published daily on the apple’s *Twitter* page.

In any outlet for advertising, the fact remains that the success or failure of a message is rooted in the presence or absence of a big idea. The advertising concept is more important than its execution. The substance is more important than the style (Barry, 2008). The advantages in ambient platforms include the adaptability in targeting audiences during ordinary, everyday activities, e.g. reaching commuters with messages on the hand rails of subways. Big ideas in ambient platforms bear the benefit of specialized targeting. The advantages in interactive media include the speed and ease

with which a consumer can respond to a message, e.g. reacting to a *Facebook* ad by immediately purchasing the advertised product. Big ideas in interactive platforms bear the benefit of specialized experiencing.

Conclusion

While the impact of a big idea is potentially enlarged through integrated marketing communications, the big idea itself is the key to a campaign's impact, regardless of its form, be it traditional, ambient, or interactive. IMC does present an increased likelihood of reaching audiences at the right place at the right time, thus accumulating contact points – this can make a big idea bigger. However, in the absence of a big idea, nothing is made bigger. A device is just a device, without a big idea. A gimmick is just a gimmick. But a big idea stands on its own regardless of its execution quality or its mode of delivery.

A big idea is the zenith of the advertising creative process, and achieving this requires dual-competency in right-brain thinking, i.e. originality, and left-brain thinking, i.e. appropriateness. Rightly so, since originality and appropriateness are both fundamental to an idea that is considered valuable to a client (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009). Appropriateness is ensured through combined efforts of client and agency, working together to reach the kernels of concepts that can be shaped for the public as big ideas. Originality is enhanced within a methodical framework, since complete randomness or pure chance is obviously not a reliable path toward stable and continuous advertising

creativity (Tellis & Ambler, 2007). Researchers and experts agree that big ideas are earned through practice, dedication, and organized thinking.

Big ideas can be strategized and executed more efficiently with more impact, on budget and on time, through awareness and practice of creative processes. Roy Spence, co-founder of the Austin-based agency, GSD&M, writes, “Visionary ideas are discovered, not created (Sullivan, 2008). By this, he refers to the fact that big ideas in advertising are rarely attained through spontaneous breakthroughs in clarity. Instead, big ideas are earned through a dedicated search for answers, a process. As supported in this report, creative processes can be efficiently streamlined through awareness and practice of behaviors, techniques, and resources. Creative teams often seek ways to become more productive as they progress from one creative task to another (Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999), and this report highlights some of the behaviors, techniques, and resources available to them.

Appendix A: Big Idea Patterns Questionnaire

This study assesses creative processes involved in generating big ideas for advertisements. For the purpose of this study, a *big idea* is a contribution to a brand image in an original and appropriate way. A *creative technique* is a technical skill set that can lead to a big idea. A *creative resource* is a helpful source that can lead to a big idea.

1. Are you a creative professional?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (skip to end of survey)
2. Which of the following best describes your role as a creative professional?
 - a. Art Director
 - b. Copywriter
 - c. Creative Director
 - d. Other (please specify)
3. In your profession, which of the following best describes your creative process?
 - a. Step-by-step routine
 - b. Combination of routine and spontaneity
 - c. Completely spontaneous
 - d. No process whatsoever
 - e. Other (please specify)
4. In your profession, which of the following statements do you agree with most?
 - a. Strategy is most important

- b. Execution is most important
 - c. Strategy and execution are equally important
 - d. Something else is most important (please specify)
5. In your profession, which of the following best describes your primary focus?
- a. Strategy
 - b. Execution
 - c. Both strategy and execution
 - d. Other (please specify)
 - e. No involvement with big ideas (skip next question)
6. Regarding big ideas in advertising, which of the following do you agree with most?
- a. Originality is most important
 - b. Appropriateness is most important
 - c. Originality and appropriateness are equally important
 - d. Neither originality nor appropriateness is important
7. On average, how frequently do you actively use creative techniques, e.g. brainstorming, in your profession? Select the best answer.
- a. Never (skip next question)
 - b. Rarely
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Often
 - e. Always

8. Which particular creative technique(s), e.g. brainstorming, do you utilize in your profession?
9. On average, how frequently do you actively use creative resources, e.g. books, templates, etc., in your profession? Select the best answer.
 - a. Never (skip next question)
 - b. Rarely
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Often
 - e. Always
10. Which particular creative resource(s), e.g. books, templates, etc., do you utilize in your profession?
11. On a scale of 1-7, how do you agree with the following statements?
 - a. Creative processes can be enhanced through practice
 - b. Creative processes can be taught
 - c. Creative processes can be learned
 - d. Creative techniques and skill sets like these can be improved over time, through practice
 - e. Creative resources can provide patterns that may lead to big ideas.
12. Which of the following statements applies to you? Select all that apply.
 - a. I develop big ideas no one else thinks of
 - b. I develop many alternative big ideas for each campaign, not just one
 - c. The more ideas I come up with, the higher likelihood of finding a big idea

- d. I prefer to understand a client's marketing strategy in advance of my creative work
- e. I prefer to see a client brief in advance of my creative work
- f. My big ideas are original
- g. My big ideas are appropriate
- h. I am an excellent problem solver.

Please complete the survey by completing the following fields regarding your demographic profile.

13. What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

14. What is your age?

15. Approximately how many years have you been working as a creative professional?

16. Approximately how many hours do you work per week?

17. What is your average annual salary? (optional)

Glossary

Art Director: A person who is responsible for the selection, execution, production, etc., of graphic art for a publication, advertising agency, or the like.

Big Idea: A contribution to a brand image in an original and appropriate way.

Big Idea Pattern (BIP): A creative resource designed to facilitate focused creativity, which leads to effective outcomes.

Brainstorming: A group technique of solving specific problems, amassing information, stimulating creative thinking, developing new ideas, etc., by unrestrained and spontaneous participation in discussion.

Brand Concept Cross-Tabulation (BCCT): The process of developing a brand by analyzing two categorical variables in order to reach unforeseen associations with significant meaning.

Client Brief: A short, concise informative statement shared between a client and its agency, ensuring that the agency is on-target when providing its service to the client.

Convergent Problem-Solving: The method used to generate the correct, logical answer to standard questions that do not require creativity.

Copywriter: Writer of copy for advertisements.

Creative (n.): A creative person, esp. one who devises advertising campaigns.

Creative Brief: A document used by creative professionals and agencies to develop creative deliverables incl. visual design, copy, advertising, websites, etc.

Creative Director: The person responsible for overseeing all aspects of branding and advertising.

Creativity: The phenomenon whereby a person creates something original and appropriate as a way to smartly address complicated problems for the benefit of a client.

Divergent Problem-Solving: The method used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions.

FCP Planning Grid Explosion: A technique of visualizing a brand from the consumers' perspective and using that as the basis to explore new possibilities for a brand, with new insights revealed.

Freelancing: The act of working as a writer, designer, performer, or the like, selling work or services by the hour, day job, etc., rather than working on a regular salary basis for one employer.

Ideation: The process of forming ideas or images.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC): A management concept that is designed to make all aspects of branding cohesive, working together as a unified force throughout advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and other marketing communications aspects.

Microsite: A website that is intended for a specific limited purpose and is often temporary.

Mind Mapping: A technique of diagramming used to represent words, ideas, or other items linked to and arranged around a central key word or idea. Mind maps are used to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas, and as an aid to studying and organizing information, solving problems, making decisions, and writing.

Mindscribing: A technique of transcribing one's thoughts during the creative process as a method for building a database of words, sketches, phrases, and associations that would fuel ideation.

Storyboarding: An ideation technique which serves as a visual outline of thoughts.

Synectics: A technique of identifying and solving problems that depends on creative thinking, the use of analogy, and informal conversation among a small group of individuals with diverse experience and expertise.

Tagline: A memorable phrase that sums up the tone and premise of an advertisement, used to reinforce the audience's memory of a product.

Viral Video: A video that becomes popular through the process of Internet sharing, typically through video sharing websites, social media, and email.

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Vita

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