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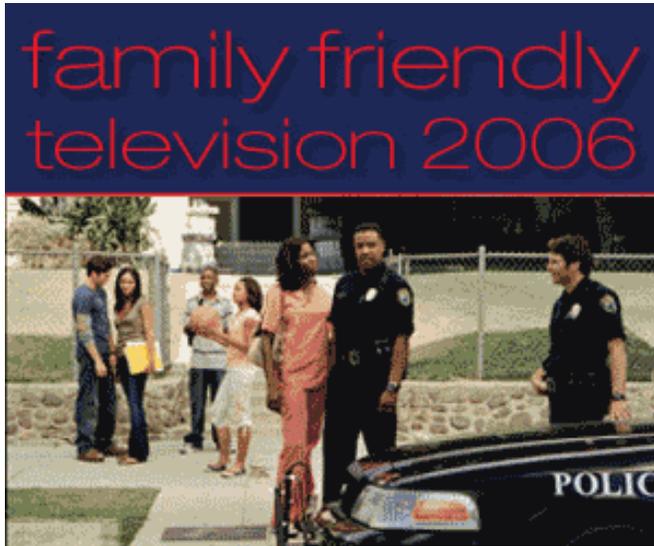
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Get Creative Teamed Up With Media

Shared Vision Unifies Delivery of Brand Message to Consumer

By Mark Dominiak

Story continues below...



Special to TelevisionWeek

One of the most potent ways to raise the bar on media plans is to expose the planning team to others who can stimulate new thinking and direction. Of all potential outside influences, perhaps the most powerful is the creative team.

In today's age of consolidated media operations, it is rare for media and creative teams to connect. That's a shame, because there is huge value to be mined from interaction between the two groups. Maybe that's why there have been recent press reports about a number of organizations that are consciously making the effort to reconnect their media and creative teams.

The Opportunity

There's an old metaphor that describes the advertising message as a meticulously crafted, insightful gift that is presented to consumers. On many levels, that metaphor is completely true. Agencies and clients both invest deep resources against understanding target consumers, determining the needs that their product fulfills and uncovering exactly which insight buttons to push in order to prompt consumers to purchase brands.

Care and clever crafting must be used to build advertising communications. Without a significant level of insight, messages will not reflect the people they are intended to influence and will fail to move those consumers on any level. Have you ever had someone you felt knew you well give you an awful gift? Beyond the disappointment, the receipt of an awful gift causes one to question what they felt they understood about the gift's giver.

The opportunity to be mined from connecting creative and media people flows directly from this metaphor. What if the gift chosen is spot-on for the recipient, but the wrapping paper destroys the entire presentation? Have you ever received a gift wrapped in newspaper or presented in the retail bag from its purchase? At that point, the relevance of the gift is immaterial. If the giver didn't care enough to wrap it appropriately or just picked it up at the last minute, the value of the gift is undermined.

Media context for the advertising message is just like wrapping paper. If the context is all wrong, the message loses its luster. Among many other things, connecting creative and media teams ensures that this situation doesn't result and that the message and the context are in sync. Proper presentation of a carefully crafted message has a much better chance of prompting desired marketplace response.

The Benefits

Connecting the media and creative teams opens up four significant areas of benefit for brand communication efforts: It beefs up the creative team's knowledge; it inspires broader creative vision; it inspires broader media vision; and it creates holistic brand impact.

Augmenting the creative team's knowledge of the core consumer: When the creative team is briefed, it is usually the account management team and account planning providing the briefing information. As such, the overriding focus of the discussion tends to be about what will make for a relevant message to the target consumer. Without media people present, what is missed is a frame of reference for the context of the message.

Media people can provide useful background for environments the target audience is disposed to consume, along with a feel for how that media environment fits into the target's life. Is it a focal point? Is it background entertainment? Is it a sought-after media experience? This is context only media people can provide.

Media people can also give particular insight as to why media are consumed, providing understanding not only concerning context but in the life of the consumer as well. If, say, outdoor ranks highly among a consumer's use of media, planners can go beyond simply pointing out that outdoor skews to the target. They can provide the creative team with the rationale for why.

Perhaps the target is very active and constantly in automobiles, hence outdoor exposure opportunities. Creative people can then make the leap to deeper levels of consumer insight that flow from being able to identify with the circumstance of being constantly forced to drive from here to there in traffic and the attendant frustrations. This kind of understanding can augment what the account planning team brings to the table.

Inspiring broader vision for the creative: The more streamlined agency staff becomes, the harder it is to attack the creation of communication deliverables as more than a checklist of items to be completed and executed. Under that kind of circumstance, it becomes hard to deliver not only big ideas but holistic brand impact.

One way media planners can help the creative team avoid this potential situation is to convey the media plan not in terms of numerical insights or a checklist of media units required, but as a breathing illustration of media presence in the marketplace.

In the case of a business-to-business brand I worked on, it quickly became evident in our relationship with the client that the

products and services they brought to the marketplace were truly innovative and in some cases jaw-dropping. Media's assessment of appropriate context to reach the target did not yield much out of the ordinary for what would be expected as appropriate vehicles for brands in that client's category.

What did become evident in the overall media process was the nature of their past execution. They consistently told their story of innovation and cutting-edge offerings with simple :30s and print pages. It didn't ring true for the essence of what the client and their brands really were. Why execute a message of innovation in an ordinary way in the media that carry the message?

We conceived of the notion of putting a greater onus on the media portion of the effort: namely, to have the executed media become part of the message. When we aired television units, we wanted to air nonstandard units. When we aired radio units, we wanted to air unconventional units. If we did print ads, we wanted to attempt to implement odd gatefold units or inserts on a completely new type of paper stock. We didn't want to buy just outdoor boards, we wanted to construct completely new types of units that were innovations from those in the world around them—just like the client's products were in the real world.

And that's the discussion we had with the creative team. It was not "We need three :30 television spots, a radio :60 and a print spread." It was "We're intending to be in these media types and we want the units that run in them to themselves be part of the message." We tossed out a few notions to get the ball rolling and the creative team quickly grasped the potential for their message. They began to have a vision for what the cumulative communication could be beyond simply creating a campaign idea.

Inspiring broader vision for media plan: Interaction between the creative and media teams does not have benefits for only the creative team. There are a couple of outstanding benefits that can be reaped by the media team as well.

Exposure early on to elements like the tag line, brand mood or campaign idea can go a long way in stimulating media ideas. One common example is the demonstration type of campaign that might have a before and after dichotomy in it. Having interacted with the creative team during plan development, a media team might alter an approach in television from, say, a :30 unit to a split :15. Or perhaps what started out as a page print unit becomes two half-pages facing each other across a spread. Or maybe even two outdoor boards in sequence on an expressway instead of simply just one.

Further, access to the creative work in progress may become valuable as meeting theatre for the media presentation. If campaign directions can be mocked up on visuals of outdoor boards or inserted into the magazines they would run in or as rich media as it would play out on a microsite, they can go a long way in demonstrating to the client the nature of how the media will appear to the consumer in the marketplace.

It's not easy to paint a compelling picture when the common tools available are a PowerPoint presentation and an Excel flowchart. Being able to hold up physical examples of how the executions will work can make all the difference when it comes time to selling the plan.

Creating holistic brand impact: In the end, all of these individual benefits facilitate the most important benefit: Delivering a more holistic message for the brand in the marketplace. Teams sharing information are much more likely to operate under a shared vision, and that shared vision will lead to a more unified delivery of the brand's message when it ultimately reaches consumers in the marketplace. A unified, more holistic communication effort is a more powerful effort. That powerful effort is what clients pay advertising practitioners for and it's what moves consumers to action when they make decisions about brands.

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