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TEMPLATE

001

Campaign Brief

Briefing an integrated marketing
communications campaign.

With expert advice from
Mark Sareff, chief strategy
officer, Ogilvy Australia.





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Read this first

This document was created for marketers to brief an agency, or agencies, for an integrated marketing communications (IMC) campaign, but is also useful for a specific creative/advertising campaign.

'Garbage in, garbage out'

Mark Sareff: "Many marketers treat the process of filling in a brief as paperwork, or something they just have to quickly put together. What they fail to realise is that a well-written brief is crucial to their agency delivering a successful campaign.

"From an efficiency standpoint, the better written a brief, the easier and quicker it will be for the agency to get down to work, instead of wasting time and manpower reviewing and revising sections for more information or clarification. It saves marketers time and money, and it also means there aren't several interpretations of a loosely written brief floating around, with each party having varied impressions of what this brief is actually asking for.

"In short: put effort into writing a brief so that it can help you get the results it deserves.

The difference in words can mean millions of dollars you miss out on."

What this brief aims to uncover

Where are we now?

Where do we want to be?

What are we doing to get there?

Who do we need to influence?

Are we getting there?

"If you go back to the old Stephen King planning cycle, those are his titles for the stages of the planning cycle, which forms a complete feedback loop. Once you get to 'are we getting there', you look at 'where we are now'. It's a living, ongoing thing; a never-ending process."

A brief has two purposes

"An integrated marketing campaign brief has two main purposes:

1. Inspiration, and
2. control.

"Inspire us, your agency, to create the best possible campaign for you by lending us your insights, your knowledge, and your ideas.

"Give us the boundaries to work within, tell us what we need to be aware of. Do this upfront, and in full honesty.

"Traditionally, briefs are written with an emphasis on control. Yes, this is an official document that binds client and agency to what an agency will deliver, but don't forget that inspiration is just as important."

Integration starts with you

"Many marketers still choose to brief their various agencies – creative, PR, media, social, etcetera – separately. To me, it just doesn't make sense.

"Marketers today want two things: they want a purpose-driven marketing solution, and they want integrated marketing communications. So, get all your agencies together and brief them at the same time, with the same material. Get them to talk to one another, and to work together."

Part 1: Commercial Context

Mark Sareff: This is the part that both marketers and agencies often fail to see the importance of. By outlining the commercial significance and relevance of this brief, both parties understand the perimeters to work within. After all, no matter how many awards a campaign receives, if it does not achieve commercial targets and expectations of the CFO and CEO, is it truly a success?

Often, this first part is not done at all – marketers question: why do you want to know about sales or how we make it and how much it cost and what our margins are?

And at the same time, account managers no longer spend the time needed to fully understand their client's business. There was a time when we expected account managers to know the client's business better than the client themselves. Agencies used to get thicker margins, we had more time and we had more staff.

The idea of cutting down the retainer and negotiating the fee down affects the outcome you get from an agency. After all, you get what you pay for. So it's not to say that agency people today are lazy or incompetent, it's just that in many agencies they are spread too thin.

1.1 What's the reason for this brief?

What's the business opportunity or problem?

Why is this task important to the business?

Mark Sareff: *Marketers, please share this information with your agency. Many times, agencies forget that the buck does not stop with you, that you have to justify your spending and your budgets to your CFO, and other senior management.*

Why are you briefing us? Do not just respond with, 'We want a TV ad'.

Tell us about the business problem you're trying to solve. What's the opportunity you've got? Who knows, TV might not be the best solution or advertising may not be the best solution!

Tell us why this is important to your company – and who it is important to.

If your chairman (or his wife) has a particular love for the opera, and there is an opportunity here for a great sponsorship campaign, tell us that too!

1.2 What is the measurable business or marketing objective?

Make it as precise as possible. Numbers, please.

Mark Sareff: *We are in the age of data now, so make your business or marketing objectives really precise and give us numbers. If you want to grow sales by 20%, tell us. If you want us to do something that enables you to charge an extra dollar on the item – tell us. And we will agree to be bound by this, and you will too, so we both know what we’re shooting for. When we get to the end of ‘are you getting there’, at least there is something for us to measure against, rather than ‘we did better than last year’.*

I’m a strong believer in the Effectiveness Awards. The only reason clients retain an agency is in order to spend their money wisely and deliver a proper return on it. I always have in mind that even if I am working with the CMO, I am actually working for the CFO. He/she is watching. We’re not in the business of fine art – we’re in a commercial industry, so let’s be commercial. Let’s nail some numbers down so we know where we’re going.

1.3 What do we already know that may be helpful?

Recent research. Past campaigns, successes or failures.

When quoting past experience, was success (or not) due to strategy, idea or execution?

Mark Sareff: *The key line here is: if you're going to quote past experience or research, whether successful or not, break it down. If it went well, what did you think made it go so well? Which of the three parts (strategy/ idea/ execution) worked?*

If it broke down, why do you think it broke down? Was the strategy and idea great but execution was weak? In that case, we just need a new execution. Why fix something when it's not broken.

Identify what went wrong so we can go from there.

This is also chance for marketers to talk about their pet theories, their hypotheses, and to have an open conversation. If you have a theory or an inkling that something might work, tell me! Good marketing people are bright, they are just as entitled to speculate and have theories as agency creatives are, so share these thoughts.

At the same time, be adventurous, and be ready for your opinion to be challenged.

The beauty of technology today is that we have the ability to trial and experiment like never before. Results can be reaped within hours, and unsuccessful executions can be pulled down or fixed immediately. We get to understand what works and what doesn't with real life proof.

So give me your suspicions and your pet theories – we can now experiment and learn from it very quickly.

Direct marketing has always done A/B testing or similar.

Years ago, when I worked with Citibank, we used to stand by the fax machines because one version of an ad would have a different telephone number to the other, and you could physically see which ad worked better.

Digital just allows you to do it that much faster.

So open your minds and realise how nimble we can be, together.

1.4 Without stifling thinking, what do we think we require?

If there are mandatory channels and/or materials, spell them out.

Be flexible and open to a newer, better or fresher way.

Mark Sareff: *The key to writing a good brief is this: strong opinion, lightly held.*

I want you to have an opinion and to speculate, but be prepared to listen at the same time.

If there are mandatory channels and materials, please be upfront about it here. However, be flexible and open to new and better ways. TV may have always worked for you in the past, but do not discount other media.

We won three Effies for KFC's 'Snack! In the Face' campaign. It was an app on your phone where you win chicken prizes by playing the game. It was to promote snacking between 2-5pm for younger people. KFC had done TV advertising the past few years to solve this issue, but felt a better result was possible. This year, we took the risk and did no TV, and instead, created a smartphone game. And as the Effie entry states, and I have never written an Effie paper as clear-cut as this, we spent one-sixth of the budget compared to the year before, and yet we achieved six times the sales result from previous year.

Therefore, our campaign was 36 times more effective than the previous year. These numbers sound too cute to be true (see: <http://www.effies.com.au/attachments/kfc-sitf-2014.pdf>).

The KFC CMO was brave enough to acknowledge that digital was right for this audience and not just go with another TV ad like every other year. Instead, she canned the TV, and gave a new direction a shot. And it paid off.

Part 2: Communication Strategy

2.1 What is this communication's goal?

Note: Don't start in this box. Begin with the insight (2.2), the springboard to the goal.

Then, what should this communication do?

Must be something communication can do.

Must be concisely/precisely expressed. Never: increase trial, increase sales, convert non-users, grow 'likes'...

Mark Sareff: *My best advice is to skip this question and return to it later. Answer the section which follows on insights first. You'll find the goal falls out neatly and easily. Or you run the risk of a goal most kinds of communication can't achieve.*

2.2 What helpful insight do we have about our audience (behaviour, beliefs or feelings)?

Note: Fill in this section before 2.1 above.

Who are they? Really? (Define the audience so you like/respect them.)

What do we know about them? (E.g. They use us in certain ways, or don't use us in certain ways. Or they think/feel something we'd rather they didn't, or don't feel/think something we'd rather they did.)

But most importantly: why is this so?

Don't stuff too much in. You'll bury the real insight.

Other questions to ask: what's holding them back? Or, why are we talking to them?

Mark Sareff: *Respect your audience and write about them in a positive way. Consider how hard it will be for your agency people down the chain to have to create likable stuff to your audience if you describe them in a negative way. It is hard to create great ideas for people you despise.*

I have quite a strong definition of what 'insight' means. What you include here needs to be more than just basic demographic and gender information. Tell me how your audience currently feel, think and behave, and the reasons behind this.

Example: "They think about our product in this way..., or they don't think of our product because, or they feel strongly about us because..." And don't forget to tell me WHY!

Here's an example of how to go about this:

Years ago, when I used to work on Kraft, our brief was to increase mothers' purchasing of Kraft cheese sticks. Someone wrote in the insight box: Moms don't buy Kraft cheese sticks. There was no reason, no background, nothing.

So we set out on our own research, and found that Moms did not realise these cheese sticks have enough milk in them to help their kids build strong bones.

Now that's a great insight, and once you have that, you will know what the campaign will try to answer.

I dare say this is the most important box in this section. If you get this bit right, and nail a great insight, everything else will fall into place.

And here's another tip for you: often, it will be the most unexpected people in the company who provide the best insights. The CEO of a company may not have a marketing background, but he's usually the one who knows everything. He doesn't partake in these 'box-filling exercises', he doesn't speak in marketing lingo and try too hard to theorise his brand. Instead, he speaks to people, he asks questions, and he comes up with his own suspicions.

2.3 What should this communication get them to think, feel or do?

Not what we put in – what we want people to take out. What do we want them to do as a result?

Mark Sareff: Behavioural science confirms that human beings are emotional beings, and most of our decision-making is done emotionally. When a decision has to be made, our primitive brain takes over, and our decision-making is done mostly by what feels right or feels wrong.

Similarly, when we do think, we are wired to think negatively.

Back in primitive times, when the sabre-tooth tiger attacked a primitive man, the man did not calculate how many paces or steps he needed to get away, his emotional brain took over and he ran like hell.

At the same time, it was important to think negatively. The safe thought-process was 'this sabre-tooth tiger is going to kill me', not 'that cat looks friendly'.

When people are confronted with the conflict between thinking and feeling, the brain operates to make feeling triumph over thinking. Think about those significant times in your life when a decision had to be made, like buying a house or car. Once you have fallen in love with it, you will find a rational reason to defend any negatives, you will try and change the order of importance to prove to yourself that you're making a good decision.

Therefore, you want your audience to feel positively towards your product, and to stop there. Once they overthink, chances are they will find something negative to associate with your product.

2.4 What is the single most important message, proposition or benefit?

What can we say which bridges the gap between what's holding people back and what will encourage the response we want? Is it true? Motivating? Distinctive?

Mark Sareff: Remember: this brief caters to a range of communication – PR, advertising, social, etc. Think about the story you want to tell – pick one story, or one important message, and work this brief around it. Keep it brief. The art lies in being precise and concise.

2.5 What evidence (sensory, emotional or rational) makes this believable?

The proposition needs content to be credible. Only evidence that supports this proposition. Use the 'Why should I believe you more than your competitors?' test. Don't be confined to rational.

Mark Sareff: *Provide us with relevant evidence to back up our story. Leave out information that does not actually help 'prove' the idea in the prior section. Please don't be afraid to include emotional 'proof'. That said, beware it's not all sizzle without good steak backing it. Traditionally, marketers have been taught to sell the sizzle. not the product or its features. Charles Revson, who created Revlon, said, "In the factories, we make cosmetics. In the department store, we sell hope." Unfortunately, it has gone too far. Today, advertisers think they can just get away with all claiming and nothing sustainable to back it up. Be harsh on yourself. Put yourself in the mind of a consumer and ask: why should I believe you more than your competition? Why should I pay more? Why are you better? However, leaving out fluff does not mean going completely rational, or forcing the audience to think.*

2.6 Brand properties and character

Properties: Visual, verbal or aural. Help our brand register and stand apart.

Character: The way the brand talks to people and the values we want to build.

Mark Sareff: *You are the brand custodian – bring your brand to life for us. Help us get into the mind-frame and the persona of your brand and what it stands for.*

2.7 How can channel thinking enhance this strategy?

What channels/media? Where? When? Why? Online? Offline? Paid for or not? What are the moments? Important: Context and content reinforce each other to create brilliant communication.

Mark Sareff: *Path to purchase; customer journey; consumer buying system – they are all same thing, focusing on the importance of understanding your audience’s journey, and where along that journey are there barriers preventing them from trialing or purchasing. Or opportunities we can enhance. Consider a suite of channels, not just what you’re used to. Understand that tv might work at certain times, but role of digital might be needed when they’re looking for more information, or some word-of-mouth reinforcement might be needed from their friends. This was done well in the old days when creative and media worked together, but once that separated, creative and media stopped talking to each other. I was around before the separation and I had great media thinkers with me right from the minute we started work on a campaign. Realise that the content (the big idea) and context (where this message is delivered) have a yin-yang relationship. They should be sitting together and helping each other get to a better place. When I worked on Tontine Pillows at Happy Soldiers, the client asked us to do a Spring promotion. They asked for a modest growth. They wanted us to shake up the category. We knew that a seasonal promotion wasn’t going to ‘shake up the category’, and we also knew the real reason why we change our pillows – they become foul. A ‘best before date’ would make it clear when you need to change your pillow – alert you to the fact your pillow was certainly full of creepy crawlies and fungi. And that was our big idea. We wanted to take the entire budget, and create the most urgent and shocking news in the country. We treated this campaign like a sales event – and spent the budget in just four days. Thankfully, the client believed and trusted us and we created a campaign that left a huge impact. So that is what I’m asking marketers for – dare to be gutsy. Why must a campaign dribble out for three months when there is an alternative to huge impact that gets people talking?*

2.8 Any thought starters?

Think of props like music, film clips, pictures, objects that help bring the brief to life.

Mark Sareff: *I once heard about a briefing in London for Dulux Paints years ago – the brief was to sell a new paint with Teflon, which meant stuff did not stick to it. The account guy walked into the office and kicked his shoe on the door, and some of his boot polish came off and smeared on the paint. He then said ‘See that? It won’t happen with our paint’. Help inspire imaginative thinking.*

Part 3: Implementation and Process

3.1 What can't be left out?

Logo, website, music, terms and conditions etc.

Be upfront.

The question to ask is: is it really mandatory?

Mark Sareff: *This is important. If we have to leave time at the end of the TV commercial, or space at the bottom of an ad, spell it out. If there are laws and rules we need to abide by, tell us now.*

However, take a moment to question how necessary these are, and if they are really mandatory.

Do not be blinded by perceived/received wisdom? Is it something that has been passed down for generations with no real backing?

Similar to the (alleged) Five Monkeys experiment, a rule can somehow form in a company and by the time its been handed down a few generations, no one questions it anymore. Corporate rules can feel like they're set in concrete when in fact there could be no basis at all. Always ask: is this still relevant?

3.2 What response mechanisms are involved?

For relevant channels of communication/ types of work.

3.3 What's the budget?

Really important. Do we have a production:media split in mind? Is it a guide or concrete?

Mark Sareff: Please tell us your budget upfront.

It is disappointing for all parties if we write you a million-dollar campaign that you fall in love with, but only have a few thousand dollars to spend.

If your company has a pre-determined spending split – let us know but be open to have that challenged.

Back when I was working at The Campaign Palace years ago on Gatorade, a two-minute long ad was made for TV, and it only appeared in 12 spots.

Yes, it was an expensive production and media costs were high, but it created such an impact. And impact far outweighed frequency.

I also worked on the Meat and Livestock Australia account at The Campaign Palace, and we created the 'Red Meat' campaign with the famous dancing butchers. We made a 90-seconds ad that was only meant to run for two weeks to coincide with The Rolling Stones' tour in Australia. The client was gutsy enough to run with the idea, and he understood that the impact would be so huge that it would account for the lack of frequency, or the length of time the ad in the market for.

3.4 How will we know if this has worked?

Link back to the communication and business goals. What measures do we have in place?

Mark Sareff: *I want measures.*

It is an absolute fallacy that agencies do not want to be accountable. I want to know how I will be measured and has our solution worked. Agencies want long-term partnerships, and accountability helps bind both parties to a mutually-agreed contract.

If the campaign works, I want us to celebrate the success together, and if we don't get there, I want us to understand what needs to be improved for the next year.

3.5 Timings and approvals

Insert a table here or append a spreadsheet to this document.

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