

CONTRASTING STYLES

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Account Planning Group
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(1) Introduction

- * I was trained in the Account Planning out at BMP by Stanley Pollitt as one of the first ever Account Planning Trainees in the days when BMP was still a small creative hotshop.
- * I therefore came from the Inner Sanctum of Account Planning.
- * But since then I have set up and run the Account Planning Department at SJIP for 5 years, worked on the opposite side of the fence as an Account Director, and finally ended up being responsible for the day to day running of the Planning Department at one of the larger Agencies, Y&R.
- * In that time my views of Account Planning have been modified, mellowed and gradually crystallised in a way that I would not have thought possible when I first started at BMP.
- * And I would now like to share with you some of that accumulated wisdom in the hope that, however little it may be worth, it will at least stimulate you to consider the Planner's art more deeply.

Objectives

- * In this paper I have attempted, on the basis of my experience in 3 very different Agencies to:-
 - Analyse the different styles of Account Planning
 - Isolate the common factors
 - Answer the burning question

(2) ACCOUNT PLANNING - PHILOSOPHY OR FUNCTION?

Agenda

* My paper is divided into 3 distinct parts:-

- Review of the contrasting styles of Agency
- Review of the contrasting styles of Account Planning within these
- Enunciation of a Philosophy of Planning.

Contrasting Agency Styles

- * A popular and frequently used method of classifying Advertising Agencies is to divide them into 2 groups.

Big	}	and	}	Small
Safe		Creative		
Boring		Exciting		

- * Account Planning is traditionally associated with the latter group.
- * Account Planning is often credited as a major influence in making small Agencies so creative.
- * Which is why so many large Agencies are interested in Account Planning as a means of improving their own creativity.

* But this classification and outlook

- Ignores vast majority of small Agencies too boring to mention
- Undervalues the true creativity of many large Agencies
- Oversimplifies the true role of Account Planning

* To understand better the implications of Big Agency vs. Little Agency for Account Planning and the way it operates let us look at some of the more fundamental differences between them.

* Big Agencies tend to be longer established. They therefore tend:-

- To have older senior Management
- To be more set in their ways
- To be more concerned with maintaining their position than improving it.
- To be less dynamic and go-getting.

* But these things do not necessarily have to be part of a bit agency's make up. They can:-

- Have young management
- Be aggressive and thrusting

if they really want to.

* However Big Agencies do offer the reassurance and stability of size as a major benefit to their clients.

- They have greater resources

- They are seen as a 'safe' option

- They attract the bigger more institutionalised, less dynamic kind of client

- Many of these clients don't want to be over-excited by their Agencies.

* Therefore a too overtly dynamic, thrusting and challenging style may not be such a good thing for a Big Agency even if it could achieve it.

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* Although dynamism is equally possible for Big and Small Agencies, Big Agencies are bigger

- They employ more staff
- This brings its own problems
- Its more difficult to maintain a uniformly high calibre of personnel
- It is more difficult to maintain esprit de corps
- They can become unwieldy, less flexible and slower to respond.

* But even these problems can be overcome if you:-

- Avoid the pitfalls of remote, fat cat management (which can destroy small agencies too)
- Have young, caring, active, open and involved management.
- Delegate and motivate

* However, there is one major difference between Big and Small Agencies which dramatically affects their methods of operation.

- Big Agencies are more structured places
- Therefore they're more formal and disciplined places
- Structures liked by American parents
- Also necessary for effective management control

* Structure and discipline brings advantages as well as disadvantages.

- Can lead to inflexibility
- Can stifle initiative
- But eliminates risk of serious mistakes
- Improves efficiency of operation.

* To summarise

- Big Agencies are more structured and formal organisation than Small Agencies
- But they're not necessarily any less creative.

* To underline this last point, you only have to look at the work of some of our larger Agencies such as Y&R, CDP and JWT.

* Their work is no less 'creative' than that of so-called 'smaller' creative agencies such as BMP and WCRS.

* And will these latter two cease to be 'creative' when they reach the Top 10?

Contrasting Account Planning Styles

- * So what are the differences in the way Account Planning operates in Big and Small Agencies? And what is the affect of the greater structuring of Big Agencies?
- * My observations are based on personal experience of 3 agencies, two of which have changed substantially since I left. Therefore not necessarily indicative of current practices therein.
- * Let's first look at some of the more obvious differences.

* First and most frequently quoted difference is that in Big Agencies Account Planners don't do their own Group Discussions.

* (Nor do Account Planners at Many smaller Agencies)

* Planners doing groups:-

- Brings them closer to the consumer
- Cuts out middleman
- Deepens understanding

* But it can also:-

- lead to lack of objectivity
- Be very time consuming
- Be impracticable if you only have very few Planners

* Furthermore it is:-

- Only really beneficial in creative development
- Possible to get equally good results using a good, sensitive researcher you trust (especially if you sit in on groups)
- Therefore unnecessary.

* The second frequently mentioned difference is that Big Agencies put a much greater weight on quantified research

- Market analysis
- U & A's
- Pre-testing
- Tracking studies

* There are many reasons for this

- Partly a function of their clients
- Partly a reflection of need for much tighter creative briefing.
- Also a reflection of belief in tighter communication objectives.

* Since leaving BMP I have been educated into the value of quantitative research and am now a great believer in it:-

- It provides a solid framework for creativity
- It is less dependent on individual interpretation or prejudice.
- It is sometimes more revealing than qualitative research.

* Nevertheless, even in a large Agency like Y&R.

- Quantitative supplements qualitative research not replace it
- Quantitative pretesting is still evaluative and not predictive.

- * What is less widely known however is the differences in the methods of developing advertising.
- * When I was at BMP creative development was largely a matter of trial and error.
 - Planner initially gave only vaguest of briefs
 - Creative department then had 'first stab'
 - Emphasis then on creative evolution through consumer feedback from group discussions
 - Account Planner then post rationalised strategy to help sell ads.
- * Prime example of this was Cadbury's Smash which took 24 scripts, 16 animatics and 18 months to produce Martian campaign.
- * Can't fault BMP's results very often, but very inefficient approach. Wouldn't be tolerated in Y&R.
- * At Y&R we do things rather differently
 - Much more up front emphasis on understanding all aspects of the problem
 - Creative strategy finalised and agreed before creative department starts work.
 - Much tighter creative briefing
 - Less need/emphasis for intermediate creative development
 - Evaluation of work against strategy
 - Modification of executions or strategy as necessary.

- * The old approach to advertising was set against a background in which clients were sales led.

- * In this approach the model of how advertising works was that of advertising as communication
 - Clients made products with certain supposed benefits

 - They then tried to sell them

 - Advertising's role was to communicate the benefits

 - Research measured how well those benefits had been communicated.

- * Research was therefore primarily to do with measurement.

- * The new approach to advertising is predicated on the Marketing Approach to selling
 - Clients identify consumer needs
 - They then make the products to satisfy those needs
 - Advertising persuades consumers that the product is relevant to their needs.

- * In this model of advertising the main role of advertising is one of motivation, not communication.

- * And the role of research is that of understanding consumers and of ensuring that the advertising is relevant to their needs and motivates them to purchase.

- * This new role of research in bringing the consumer into the process of advertising development is what I believe is at the core of Account Planning.

* Which brings me to the Y&R definition of Account Planning:-

"Account Planning is the application of knowledge of the consumer to the creation of effective advertising".

* And at Y&R we structure ourself to ensure this belief is put into practice.

- Account Management and Account Planner are both involved in strategy setting.
- Account Manager is responsible for understanding of market and product information.
- Account Planner is responsible for consumer information and understanding.
- Account Planner is ultimately responsible for the creative strategy and Brief.
- This underlines our belief in the ultimate importance of the consumer.

Summary

- * Big Agencies are not necessarily any less creative than small ones, but they are more structured environments.
- * In the more structured environment of Big Agencies the open-ended, people centred, geruesque approach to Account Planning used in Small Agencies is no longer tenable, it needs a more formal, well defined role if it is to be effective.
- * The role of Account Planning should be defined in terms of a Philosophy not a function, or series of functions.
- * This Philosophy of Account Planning is to do with consumers and a belief that they have a valid and indeed vital role to play in the creation of effective advertising.

Conclusion

- * Thus Account Planning is not to do with Account Planners, and could indeed exist without them.
- * Rather it is a belief that truly effective and relevant advertising can only be produced in the light of a full and proper understanding of the consumer.
- * However, because consumers are human beings just like you and I, the kind of advertising they like and respond to is the same kind that we respond to, that is to say, exciting, interesting, amusing, human, 'creative' advertising.
- * And so advertising produced by an Account Planning process will not only be the most effective, it will also tend to be the most 'creative'.

- * But all these differences are simply a reflection of the one key fact
 - Smaller agencies are less structured places
 - Therefore the Planning function is less structured too.

- * In Small Agencies, the Planning Function tends to be centred around people, the Account Planners, people who have particular research and marketing skills.

- * Thus BMP described Account Planning in terms of the Account Manager/Account Planner team being very much like a creative team.

- * And SJIP described it in very similar terms comparing the Account Manager/Planner partnership to that of the creative/media dialogue.

- * Because of this centring around people, Account Planning in Small Agencies tends to -
 - Be open ended
 - Rely on individual talent not systems
 - Be extremely pragmatic
 - Depend on total involvement of Account Planners
 - Be 'Guruesque' in nature.

- * Guruesque Planning does not however translate easily to larger Agencies.
 - More structured therefore open-ended approach doesn't fit
 - Tight existing Account Structures therefore 'New' function easily excluded
 - Less planners per account and therefore necessarily less totally involved.

- * Account Planning needs a well defined role in a large Agency for it to work well.

- * However some Large Agencies have tried to adopt guruesque Planning on Small Agency lines with very mixed results.
 - Reasonably O.K. if all good, senior people
 - Intelligent senior people can always make a contribution (the same applies to Account Managers)
 - But tendency to concentrate on Marketing not advertising problems as not properly integrated.
 - Also tendency to become/be seen as just more clever/sensitive researchers.

* Also problem with recruitment if totally dependent on senior people

- Need to poach ready-made planners
- Shortage of training opportunities
- Liable to collapse in times of high Planning demand.

* In summary therefore:-

- In small agencies Account Planning tends to be open ended and centred around the talents of the individual Planners themselves.

- In large Agencies with their more structured approach to advertising, Account Planning requires a well defined role for it to function properly.

* So what should this role be?

A Philosophy of Planning

- * Looking at Account Planning in all 3 agencies in which I've worked certain commonalities emerge which can help to define Account Planning.

- * Account Planning is:-
 - To do with Advertising not Marketing
 - (Planners can and do make valuable inputs on Marketing strategy but that is not their main function)
 - To do with research/information/understanding
 - Generalist not specialist
 - Task oriented
 - Concerned with relationships
 - Requires sensitivity to be successful

- * Account Planning also:-
 - Does nothing new
 - Is pragmatic
 - Is different every time
 - Cannot therefore be defined as a function.

- * I therefore believe that Account Planning is a philosophy, a philosophy which relates to certain beliefs about the way advertising should be created.

- * The key belief in this philosophy is in the consumer and the part he or she should play in the generation of advertising.

- * I have for many years, in an attempt to define my role as a Planner, referred to myself as the 'consumer voice' in the Agency.

- * To find out why this 'consumer voice' is so important we need to look at the changing environment in which Account Planning came to the fore.

- * This changing environment encompassed changing beliefs about
 - How advertising works
 - How it is developed
 - The contribution of research.