

## 5.6: Using Research to Guide a Successful Launch

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this section, students should be able to do the following:

1. *Explain* how advertisers use a communications brief to expand idea generation and concept design and testing.
2. Assess the importance of audience profiling to advertisers.

Research plays a role in each of several phases of a successful campaign or product launch. Michelle and John, the account planners on the msnbc.com account, used the information and learnings from the research to compose the **communications brief**, which is the basis for the entire campaign. Michelle and John worked closely with the internal team at SS+K as well as with Catherine Captain at msnbc.com to ensure that everyone agreed with their conclusions.

You'll learn more about the communications brief in Chapter 8, but it's important to note how these elements build on each other. The creative brief (informed by research) is the jumping-off point for any communications or ideas related to the campaign.

### Idea Generation

Early on, research can help feed the **idea generation** phase of the creative process. Research conducted during preconcept development can uncover relevant brand messages by observing purchase behavior, evaluating brand images and profiling customers. Research can help identify unmet needs, changing attitudes, and demographic trends.

For example, Chris Hannigan, director of new ventures at Del Monte, said, "We monitor consumer trends closely, and we're constantly vetting ideas on what will meet consumer needs. We'll work closely with the R&D team to develop concepts that we think meet the needs. Then we'll test them with consumers to determine if they're appealing."

In addition to using traditional research, some agencies will pull together one-time groups, asking people from diverse backgrounds to join in a few hours of brainstorming to generate ideas. For example, Don Carlton, CEO of Paragraph Project, was working on a campaign to make a regional fast-food company iconic in the Pacific Northwest. An **icon** in the marketing or advertising context refers to a well-known, enduring symbol of an underlying quality—for example, the Nike swoosh or McDonald's golden arches. As Carlton explained, "In addition to some traditional research, I pulled together people who I thought would have some good ideas about icons: a professor of architecture from the University of Illinois, to talk about iconic buildings; the founder of Second City in Chicago, to talk about iconic comedians; people who worked on iconic movies like 'Return of the Jedi' and 'Rocky IV,' to talk about iconic movies....The whole point was to [identify] the qualities of iconic people and things to help this client understand how to represent what the whole region was about in an iconic way."

Movie studios conduct test screenings of their films to generate ideas for marketing campaigns that run upwards of \$50 million. For example, First Look president Ruth Vitale did a test screening for *A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints* (Dito Montiel's Sundance Film Festival entry starring Robert Downey Jr.). The purpose of the screening was not to change the film but "to have a conversation about: Who's the primary audience? How do we reach them?" Vitale said. Although First Look screened *Saints* only once, most studios hold three to five screenings for each film. At a cost of \$10,000–20,000 for each screening, one source says, "It is the best money you could spend."

### Concept Design and Testing

Research is important in the **concept design** phase because it helps determine whether a concept is in line with the intended message and what the likelihood is that the concepts will influence the behaviors and attitudes of the intended consumers.

**Concept testing** provides a way to get feedback on an advertisement or a specific new product concept. Concept tests involve asking consumers to evaluate a new ad or new product idea, typically asking them if they understand the message, if the ad gets their attention, and if they would consider buying the product (and if so, how much they would be willing to pay for it). The purpose of the concept test is to gather consumer feedback before the advertiser spends large sums of money finishing the product or creating the ad campaign. Research determines whether the concepts are in line with the intended messages and whether they will influence the intended audience.

For example, Kraft wanted to gauge customer response to its planned "Heavenly Angels" TV and newspaper campaign for its Philadelphia Light Cream Cheese. During pretesting of the newspaper ad concepts, the company got valuable feedback from consumers. Consumers liked the ad's idea of suggesting Philadelphia Light cheese as an ingredient in cooking, not just as a bread

spread. The recipes in the ads were seen as “new news” by consumers. But consumers also had suggestions for improvement: they wanted to see recipes for lighter foods (which would also be “more heavenly”), and they suggested brighter and lighter blue colors for the background, which were more evocative of what they envisioned “heaven” to look like. Kraft made these improvements and enjoyed strong sales results from the campaign: the newspaper ads increased the product’s sales volume by 15 percent, and the combined newspaper and TV campaign generated a 26 percent increase in sales.

### SS+K Spotlight

While feedback to a concept can sometimes be helpful, it is the brand and the agency experts who are ultimately responsible for deciding whether the campaign works. There is a strong school of thought that opposes concept testing, as we can imagine some of the most brilliant work we’ve seen out there would have been “killed” by a focus group.

At msnbc.com they decided not to test their creative concepts because the brand was making a new statement and everyone involved knew that they had to take a stand. However, there are other situations where a larger consensus is necessary. For example, SS+K’s design team, led by Alice Ann Wilson, collaborated with the creative team Matt Ferrin and Sam Mazur to update the msnbc.com logo. After giving feedback and narrowing it down to a few options, Catherine Captain offered msnbc.com employees a chance to opine and vote on the new identity for the brand. Ultimately, marketers should learn from feedback but rely on their expertise to make the final call.

### Audience Definition and Profiling

Defining and targeting your audience is the best way to ensure a match between the company’s product or service and the consumer’s needs. Often, the more a company knows about its audience, the more effective its ads will be—and the company may uncover needs for new products that it didn’t know about. **Granular audience profiling** includes all aspects of demographics (age, gender, income, ethnicity, geography, industry, and job function) as well as psychographic information (interests, behaviors, and values) coupled with media habits across all media channels (print; online ads, searching, blogging, podcasting, social networking; radio; mobile and SMS; billboards; TV; trains, buses, subway). The goal is to carve out segments within your audience universe and develop target-specific messaging in the media that each target uses.

The more information you can provide to the creatives, the better. For example, consider the differences among the consumer profiles for hiking shoes compared to walking shoes compared to casual sneakers. The consumer of hiking shoes tends to be younger, more rugged, and more outdoorsy compared to the others and is likely to read a magazine like *Outdoors*. The consumer for walking shoes tends to be older than the other two and more affluent; he is concerned about appearance, comfort, and status. The consumer of casual sneakers is more easygoing, less affluent, and more likely to watch TV. The clearer the picture creatives have of their potential customer, the better they can target the advertising. Thus, the walking shoe customer will be more likely to respond to an ad that touts the health benefits of walking than will a casual sneaker customer.

### SS+K Spotlight

After extensive research and data, SS+K and msnbc.com identified a niche for their product, and a newly defined segment of their audience was born. We’ll learn more about that new audience in Chapter 6.

### Key Takaway

Research provides crucial inputs at several stages of message development. It helps to generate ideas based upon the experiences of real people and how their needs evolve. It provides reactions to concepts so that the agency can choose those that work as it throws a bunch of ideas against the wall to see which stick. And research that profiles potential customers is imperative; insights will help strategists to select the most attractive market and creatives can develop a position for a brand that best meets the needs of that market.

### EXERCISES

1. Describe the role research plays in the creation of a successful campaign or product launch.
2. Explain the process of idea generation and provide an example of a new idea you have seen or experienced lately.
3. Explain the process of concept design and testing. Create an example to illustrate how this process might work.
4. Criticize the process of audience definition and profiling. As you review the positives and negatives, remember to comment on what you perceive to be the future of audience profiling.

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