

## 5.1: Chapter Introduction



Figure 5.1 Ten Months to Launch!

The more information you have the more effective you can be.

Joe Kessler, partner, SS+K/LA

Joe Kessler understands that knowledge is power. In the ad biz, that power comes from knowing as much as you can about your audience. Who is buying what you're selling? What are their hot buttons? What are their needs, and which of those needs is your client's product or service equipped to satisfy? For msnbc.com, SS+K needs to figure out what makes consumers of online news tick. After all, you can create the prettiest ad in the world, but if it doesn't address the right customer you might as well throw your money out the window (or perhaps buy a lottery ticket). Now that we've covered a lot of the fundamentals, it's time to jump in and get our hands dirty as we learn about msnbc.com and who its customers are.

Enter the research department, or as they are called at SS+K, the Asymmetric Intelligence Unit (AIU). It's their job to gather *consumer intelligence* that enables everyone else to make intelligent decisions. So, what's the best way to do that? "Simple," you might say. "If you want to know something about somebody, just ask them." If only the world were that simple! Sometimes we can just ask—but we're never sure we're getting the correct answer. Imagine being asked to explain your own habits and preferences: Why do you drink what you do? What makes you splash on a certain fragrance? Tune in a certain TV show? Hang out in MySpace versus Facebook? Your answers might or might not be helpful to a prospective advertiser.

To go beyond simple questions, researchers have many tools in their arsenal. In the 1950s a psychoanalyst interviewed a few men, each for several hours at a time, to find out why they "really" liked to drive cars. He concluded that to a man driving is all about sexual conquest—and Esso's tagline "Put a tiger in your tank" was born.

Today, we find both extremes in consumer research—from "up close and personal" encounters with consumers in their own homes to massive surveys that yield gigabytes of data. SS+K, as we'll see, relies on both extremes. For example, The Creative Artists Agency is a part owner of SS+K. CAA's research division, the Intelligence Group, sponsors a one-day event each month it calls Trend School in both New York and Los Angeles. Each session features presentations either by in-house execs or by outsiders who are into cutting-edge popular culture. At one recent seminar, a panel of über-cool sixteen- to twenty-five-year-olds talked to attendees about how they spend their leisure time (including giving them some quick Nintendo Wii lessons), viral-marketing hits, and the best emerging bands and music trends. Beth Snyder Bulik, "Want to Build a Hipper Brand? Take a Trip to Trend School," *Advertising Age*, February 19, 2007, <http://www.adage.com> (accessed February 19, 2007).

Which technique is the one to use? Here's a clue: don't be a hammer in search of a nail, where you doggedly choose one favorite research method no matter what the situation. Let's see what our options are, and how SS+K made use of them for its client.

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