

What's Better For Advertising Creativity: Nuts & Bolts or Lightning Bolts?



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What really goes on behind closed doors when the creative professionals you contracted are developing your brand or messaging? Are lightning bolts or electricity involved? Are copious amounts of caffeine and sugar being consumed? Exactly what is the alchemy?

Unless you are actually present during the creative process, it may seem mysterious or a bit baffling. Really, it's neither of those. Don't get me wrong. The process is inspiring, exciting and frequently fun. It's also a lot of hard work. (Forgive me fellow creatives, I've lifted the proverbial veil).

One Creative Director I worked with equated the advertising creative process to having your house painted. You tell the painter "make my house look better." If your painter starts to pick up a brush, you are in trouble. Rather, he or she should ask questions first. What colors do you like? Does your neighborhood have an approved palette? What is your budget? Are we scraping, sanding or filling nail holes? What is your timeframe?

It's the same with creative advertising: you must address the nuts and bolts of the process first to develop a successful idea and properly execute it. So, what do these nuts and bolts elements entail? They involve conducting your research.

Types of creative research and data gathering may include:

- Customer, vendor and client surveys
- External and internal focus groups and stakeholder interviews
- Collaborative idea workshops with agency and client personnel
- Active listening programs
- Messaging and media audits and testing

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Reputation monitoring and assessment
Mining previous internal and external company research
Honing USPs (unique selling points)
Developing a detailed creative brief

— all this, and more, before any creative brainstorming is initiated.

Advertising creativity is not a matter of simply thinking ‘harder,’ or furrowing your brow until a great idea squeezes out. It’s about doing your homework and using the results to inform thinking that (yes) takes some talent, courage and a willingness to be unafraid.

Having said all this, it is true that inspired light bulb moments do occur. But they are like catching lightning in a bottle. It’s not something you can leverage as a consistent work strategy.

So, what’s better for advertising and branding creativity: lightning bolts or nuts and bolts? Let’s go with nuts and bolts. I’ve found that when you do your due diligence (i.e., fully prepare for the creative process by discovering as much research-verified data as possible), the breakout ideas fly a lot easier and more frequently. And that’s better for all involved.

So, the next time you ask your creative people to “put more pizzazz into our ads,” and they do so unquestioningly — well, you know where you stand.

That’s my say. I’m sticking to it.



About the author:

Dan Stech has more than 20 years of advertising and branding experience — serving as an award-winning Copywriter, Copy Chief and Associate Creative Director at two global recruitment-marketing agencies. Now as principal and owner of danwillwrite, Dan provides copy, concepts and content to a wide variety of clients. Dan also eats a healthy breakfast every day and regularly cleans his room.

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