

Good Brief

Building online direct response ad units over the last 10 years has taught me and my team more than a few lessons. The first lesson is that all good creative development projects begin with the creative brief.

A creative brief has one simple goal: To elicit the necessary client input needed to guide the production process.

These days many advertisers seem to rush through, or skip, this process. This likely is a direct result of the rushed timelines for media campaigns and lack of proper resources. However, the cost, in terms of lost opportunities, of neglecting this process can be high when the final product does not perform to full potential. In this column, we'll explore several key elements of the creative brief process using questions from actual creative briefs and examples of appropriate answers.

Company X is a financial services company looking for mortgage leads.

Objective

Q: What do we want the advertising to accomplish?

This question seeks to find the main metric that will be used to judge whether or not the ad units were successful. The answer should be as specific as possible and tied to a performance metric.

A: Deliver qualified traffic to our order form that will result in at least a 10 percent conversion from click to completed mortgage lead generation form.

Key Fact

Q: What's happening in the marketplace to make our communication of interest to the consumers?

Here, we try to learn about any relevant industry trends that could influence this ad campaign. This information helps provide some context to the advertiser's overall marketing efforts.

A: Interest rates are at an all-time low and consumers are looking to buy homes or refinance their current mortgage. With the rise of the Internet as a trusted informational resource, many consumers are searching for the best mortgage rate online. The Web is being flooded by advertisers looking for mortgage leads so ad space is at a premium. We can offer consumers the best rates at well-respected banks.

Target Audience

Q: Describe the customers we're targeting and what they come online to do (their mission). Please include relevant demographics.

A target customer profile allows the creative team to customize the message and feel of the ad unit. Separating targets into buckets will allow for a more customized pitch, and should result in higher click and conversion rates.

A: Primary target: People who own a home or who are planning to make a major home purchase in the next six to nine months.

- men and women;
- single or married;
- ages 30–55;
- household income \$90K+

(Other targets can be listed as appropriate.)

Customer Insight/Resistance

Q: What does the customer currently believe about our product/service? Include information about the target or the target's reaction to our product that can make our message more relevant.

This question seeks to gain insight into any preconceived notions the customer may have about the product/company being advertised. Ad unit selling points can be written to address these hurdles or hint at solutions and invite the user to click and learn more.

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by peter figueredo

A strong creative brief is key to successful online direct response creative

A: Many consumers believe mortgage lead companies don't protect their information, and that filling out a form could open them up to spam or identity theft. Consumers also may perceive one mortgage company as good as the next, and they may not be willing to fill out a lead form if they've done so recently for another company.

Brand Positioning

Q: Please state what the brand stands for in as few words as possible.

This element of the brief plays a dif-

ferent role for direct response ad campaigns than it would for branding ad campaigns. Direct response ad units should be driven by performance elements while being certain not to negatively impact the brand. Sometimes this means ad units are not as aesthetically pleasing or as "sexy" as branding-focused ad units. The effectiveness of the ad is the No. 1 priority—not how it looks.

A: Company X is a leading financial services institution. We've been successfully providing mortgage ser-

vices to consumers for more than 10 years. We're simply the most convenient, secure and competitive solution for mortgage rates.

Key Consumer Message

Q: What is the single most important benefit our consumer should understand after seeing our advertising?

What is Company X's unique selling proposition for this product/service? If a consumer could only take away one message from the ad unit, what would you want it to be?

A: Trust is the key message. Trust that we'll deliver the best rates, trust that we'll deliver the best banks, and trust that we'll treat your data as we'd want our own personal data treated.

Support for Consumer Message

Q: Please provide a simple bulleted list of points that provide a reason to believe the key benefit.

Providing back-up points to the key consumer benefit allows the creative team to explore various ways to support the message.

A: 1) We have exclusive deals with the top banks. 2) All banks have gone through rigorous evaluation criteria, and we only approve a small percentage. 3) Our privacy policy states that we will not distribute your information to anyone but those banks you approve ... etc.

Combine these elements with past historical performance of Company X's ad campaigns and the media plan that will use these ad units. Using all of this information, a good creative team should be able to develop strong creative ad units. After the initial development process, this brief can be updated with testing and analytical data to refresh the campaign and optimize. ♦

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