

Creative Executions

A practical guide for anyone involved in commissioning professional creative and marketing work
By Glenn Greenhill



Hanging:

The most common way to kill a campaign before it's even conceived is to leave the creative people hanging in mid-air without a proper brief, budget and schedule. Good creative work springs from the confidence that comes after thorough research and analysis of a task; from depth of thinking and intuition; from the opportunity to discuss, challenge and agree on the objectives of a project. Discussing a brief is a hundred times more productive than arguing over a creative execution of it. Testing, challenging and exploring the brief is involving, exciting and produces far better chances of exceptional creative results. No-one is left hanging around waiting for things to make sense or left dangling wondering what to do. If you cannot provide a properly researched and structured brief along with a budget and schedule then you are guilty of killing both creative and business opportunities.



Guillotine:

This is particularly applicable to cross-media, multi-channel campaigns. The risk is to chop the project into little bits to make it more manageable. The excuse is usually lack of time but inevitably results in a fragmented and disjointed solution to the original marketing proposition. Cutting a job into small pieces also cuts down the excitement and energy inherent in it. It is just like trying to create a jigsaw puzzle by painting the pieces one by one. Impossible! Where creative is concerned; big is beautiful. The best creative talent is easier to harness when the task is a complete one, not fragmented. By allowing the big picture, the vision to be formed first, the pieces then shape and colour themselves, with the additional benefit of synergy across all the different components and areas of activity.



Electrocution:

Shock! The presentation is tomorrow. Shock! The product sample has been delayed but I need the concepts straight away. Shock! The budget is less than we hoped, just trim the creative. Frizzle! Sorry the work's been rejected but now we have time to do it again properly. Frizzle! Thanks for the effort; it helped focus our minds on the weaknesses of the brief. Too much of this treatment and creative people will respond with some shocking behavior. So when time or budget is short involve them early, use creative people to assist in developing the brief, to think around problems, to find short cuts, without allowing time and money to dictate compromises in quality.



Gas:

It is a deadly practice to gas about 'your idea' before defining and explaining the objectives of a project. This kind of talk is toxic and a sure way to drain a project of life. The probability is that everything gets skewed towards supporting the pre-determined solution. So there's never a chance of anyone open-mindedly getting to grips with the creative opportunity. It is staggering how much time can be wasted trying to work around an ego with an unsuitable idea. All chances of finding an effective solution to the real problem evaporate in a cloud of noxious hot air.



Firing Squad:

Get it right or we'll take you off the job and give it to someone else. Sad to say, but sometimes this can't be avoided. But something had gone wrong long before this terminal outcome; a communication breakdown, confusion over objectives, or a lack of confidence in the brief. If the brief doesn't strike the creative people as feasible then the creative work is certain to misfire. To avoid reaching such a crisis point, try to remember it's not enough to create a thorough brief it's also important that the creative people believe in it. If they don't have faith in the brief how can they work to it. The brief was just a shot in the dark and threatening to fire people won't get the project back on target.



Poison:

Misinformation and guessing are two poisons lethal to creativity. They always lead to fatally flawed creative work. A creative brief contains hard fact not subjective opinion and blinkered speculation. If you want a real job inject the brief with real facts and figures. Then use judgement and creative people to help analyse them. Don't jump to conclusions. Even small doses of distorted information can be absolutely deadly to new ideas. Or a long running stream of minor inaccuracies can lead to a painful, slow deterioration of creative standards.



Starvation:

The food of big ideas and solid creative is information. You may not say anything wrong. You may say nothing at all. The end result is a creative result job that is undernourished and thin to the point of being nothing but bare bones. It is a much healthier approach to feed creatives a balanced diet of nourishing information before you ask them to start work. It will prevent skinny ideas that contain all the wrong ingredients from being dished up.



Suicide:

The final way, is perhaps the saddest of all. Death through self-inflicted wounds. Given a great brief, lots of time, a reasonable budget, a receptive account group and client, the creative team find a way to bury the opportunity. Brilliant creative work was never produced by trying to be brilliant. Brilliance comes from finding a solution to a problem. The old saying about genius being 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration applies to direct and digital marketing creative work too. Any other way of approaching it is creative suicide. THINK hard about the problem. Get your ideas out fast. The first concept is usually the most obvious and may do nothing more than clear your mind. Or it might nail the brief. Either way there's still a lot of work to do to test and challenge your own thinking. If it's a really difficult problem, remember that's the easiest kind on which to innovate and break new ground. And little jobs don't require a huge idea to solve them, after all there's no point killing yourself for nothing.