

## THINK RIGHT (AND LEFT)

Whole-brain thinking  
for better branding

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# THINK RIGHT

# (AND LEFT)

Whole-brain thinking  
for better branding

BY CHRIS WARREN

When Alessandra Bellini assembles a team to tackle a marketing initiative, she makes sure she has the right balance of analyzers and artists, or rather, the critically minded and the creatively minded. When it comes to brand building at Unilever, “The whole idea is that you need the logic and the magic,” says Bellini, vice president for brand development at Unilever North America. “It’s another way of talking ‘left brain,’ ‘right brain.’”

Our brains are divided into two regions: the left and right hemispheres. While the two sides work in concert, and we enlist both sides for everything we do, each side processes information differently from the other: the left hemisphere in a linear manner or logical order and from part to whole; the right hemisphere randomly and from whole to part (the big picture first). For every one of us, or so some experts would indicate, one side dominates our thinking.

According to Margaret King, a PhD who directs the Philadelphia-based Center for Cultural Studies & Analysis, a think tank that works with advertising agencies, the understanding of different cognitive styles comes out of applied neuroscience. A sprawling, often-complicated field, the study of the brain has revealed that a host of factors determine our approach to thinking and problem solving. Over the years, different inventories, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI) scale, and Ned Herrmann’s Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) model have all been used to pinpoint how people actually think.

King reiterates what we already understand as the left brain–right brain divide: “The basic left-brain and right-brain template refers to the critical capacity versus the creative one, or the analytical versus the holistic,” she says. She adds, “Most people gravitate to occupation and skill bases that express their natural brain function strengths. What we are





good at without trying, we tend to practice and follow as career pathways.”

Which brings us to the left-brain managers and right-brain marketers, left-brain analysts and right-brain creatives that, as Unilever’s Bellini will attest, no winning campaign can do without. Unfortunately, collaboration does not come easily between those who rely on data and numbers to drive their decisions, and those who rely on inspiration and hunches.

As far as King is concerned, this divide is not something to ignore. “Companies spend a lot of their time dealing with this conflict. Their productivity is hampered if they can’t get this problem figured out,” she says.

### EASING THE BATTLE OF THE BRAINS

Some of that collaborative tension — whether it’s between corporate and the ad agency or within the marketing department itself — is magnified by differences in work styles of left-brain and right-brain camps. Mark Hirsch worked at Adobe and ran an interactive agency before recently launching CreativeWorx, which is devoted to helping left-brainers and right-brainers collaborate better. He spent lots of time speaking to folks on both sides of the divide before starting his new business. “It’s really clear

**Collaboration does not come easily between those who rely on data and numbers to drive their decisions, and those who rely on inspiration and their hunches.**



that there is practically contempt for creatives, because people don’t understand their challenges and their need to mix up the process,” Hirsch says. “When creatives are trying to force inspiration, they’ll do something like look at Pinterest, throw a ball around, or step out of the office to think differently and be inspired. When non-creatives see that, they think it is goofing off.”

So what is a marketing manager to do to take advantage of the best of both right- and left-brain thinking? As a start, make sure there’s broad recognition that creativity and rigorous data-driven analysis are given equal importance in developing a winning campaign, argues Michael Zuna, executive vice president and chief marketing and sales officer at Georgia-based Aflac, a supplier of supplemental insurance products. “The great campaigns come out of that recognition,” says Zuna, who is responsible for the latest executions of the company’s highly successful campaign featuring the daredevil of barnyard animals, the Aflac duck. For a campaign to be innovative, Zuna says, “it has to be beautiful and amazing and creative, and at the same time it has to have sound fundamental and analytical thinking

underneath.” In other words: analytically informed, artistically delivered.

Leigh Steere, cofounder of the Boulder, Colo.-based consultancy Managing People Better, points out that a number of years ago neurolinguist Robert Dilts studied Walt Disney’s creative process and broke it down into three steps influenced by three archetypes: the dreamer, the realist, and the critic. The dreamer was tasked with producing an endless stream of ideas; the realist was responsible for figuring out what would be required in terms of cost, resources, and time to bring an idea to reality; and the critic presented all the things that could go wrong with an idea. “Managers need to help all employees understand these three phases of the creative process and help the staff recognize that different employees will excel at different phases,” Steere says. “A good manager needs to communicate that all phases of the creative process are important. One is not better than the other.”

Cultivating a work environment where both critical and creative thought count not only in silos but in collaboration is also a function of leadership and good management. John Coleman is founder and CEO of the Via Agency, which was named the Ad Age Small Agency of the Year in 2011 and works with companies like Unilever and Walmart. Raised by a civil engineer father and a creative mother, he came to appreciate both left- and right-brain thinking, and honoring both approaches equally is what he shoots for at Via. “To [view] quantitative thinking as separate from creative is going to lead to weakened and compromised work,” he says.

### ENSURING A SUCCESSFUL MEETING OF THE MINDS

In order to bridge the two thinking styles, Coleman has made it a standard practice at Via Agency for everyone to weigh in on the brief. “We always try to make sure that the brief we are crafting is written and approved by not only the client but the creative teams and the strategy teams at the agency,” he says. “The brief is fully endorsed by everyone.” The result? 



## Q&A WITH BRAND STRATEGIST **LAURA RIES**

Many marketers might not consider differences in thinking styles an impediment to

creating and executing effective campaigns. Don't count Laura Ries among them. She and her father, Al, coauthored *War in the Boardroom: Why Left-Brain Management and Right-Brain Marketing Don't See Eye-to-Eye — and What to Do About It* (2009), which paints a grim picture of potentially game-changing campaigns devised by right-brain marketers being torpedoed by left-brain executives who “just don't get it.” Ries, who runs the Georgia-based marketing strategy firm Ries & Ries with her father, shares her thoughts, here, on the left brain–right brain challenge and why right-brainers should just be left to do their work.

### **Q. What got you interested enough in this topic to write a book about it?**

A. A few years ago, my dad asked me, “Why is it so difficult to sell our ideas to top management?” I blurted out, “Because they're left-brainers.” It was a eureka moment for both of us. And *War in the Boardroom* was the result. Ries & Ries is a marketing strategy firm, but our clients are not marketing people. It's usually the CEO who hires us. Our strategy sessions [with executives] usually involve intense discussions on the logic of our recommendations, which are illogical and correct! For example, we came up with the Law of Contraction, which is “a brand becomes stronger when you narrow its focus.” Yet, invariably, a chief executive wants to expand the brand, not

narrow its focus. That's a logical desire, but in our opinion, it just doesn't work.

### **Q. Since you wrote *War in the Boardroom*, would you say the awareness of right brain–left brain thinking as it relates to marketing has grown?**

A. Very definitely. Many marketing people refer to ideas they dislike as left-brain thinking. For decades, marketers have been at odds with top executives over creativity. The left brain–right brain concept has helped marketers understand why. Unfortunately, nobody is doing much about it. And how can they? Unless you have another job lined up, it's difficult to tell a CEO that he or she is a left-brainer who doesn't understand marketing issues.

### **Q. What can be done to address the tension of left- and right-brain differences?**

A. We had hoped business management publications like *Businessweek* and *Forbes* would discuss the problem and help management people understand the void in their thinking. Few management people ever get exposed to marketing ideas contained in marketing publications. There are some good omens, though. The success of Apple under a right-brain leader like Steve Jobs could be a wake-up call for management everywhere. Revolutions take time. So we believe the “war in the boardroom” will eventually end.

### **Q. Is balancing creative inspiration with rigorous analysis the right way to go about the problem?**

A. No. That's what happens now. Creative

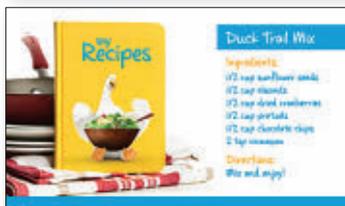
ideas produced by right-brainers are then evaluated by left-brain managers who make the final decisions. How do you sell an illogical idea to a logical person? Furthermore, consumers don't rigorously analyze marketing messages. They react instantly and emotionally. That's the way proposed marketing ideas should be evaluated. Instantly and emotionally, exactly the way right-brainers usually think.

### **Q. Can changing the culture of a company or a marketing department really help?**

A. Maybe a company needs multiple cultures, not just one. One of the disturbing trends in marketing is the emphasis on data collection and analysis. Should this be one of the most important functions of a marketing department? Doesn't this attract exactly the wrong type of person? We welcome diversity in workers. Why not also welcome diversity in thinkers?

### **Q. When it comes to creating a marketing campaign, is one type of thinking simply better than another?**

A. This is the crux of the issue, and the answer is a right-brainer is better at devising a marketing campaign. Left-brainers are verbal, logical, and analytical. Right-brainers are visual, intuitive, and holistic. A left-brainer tends to produce an idea that is not only totally verbal, but also one that has many facets, much like a slide with multiple bullet points. A right-brainer tends to produce a singular visual idea, like the duck for Aflac or the cowboy for Marlboro. Now, what's the best way to put an idea into consumers' minds? — C.W.



Aflac's "Behind the Recovery" campaign allows viewers to track the feathery mascot's recovery online.



A mesh of hard data and measurable objectives as well as inspirational language and ideas. During the brief's development, all employees are expected to move outside their comfort zones — that is, creatives are expected to pitch in with data gathering (something as simple as going along on a mystery shopping tour or interviewing a consumer), while account people must offer up their own best creative insights. "Empathy is developed because both [sets of employees] are accountable for the brief document," he says. "Everyone knows the work will be better if it's collaborative. It's not left brain or right brain — it's whole brain."

This is exactly the kind of dynamic Bellini aims to create at Unilever when she assembles teams of left-brainers and right-brainers to work on various phases of a marketing campaign. Moreover, Bellini, who considers herself a mix of creative and analytic, inserts herself in the process — to help bring clarity and elevate understanding when things start to get tense. Sometimes, she says, that simply means translating the concerns of her staff about an idea generated by the agency into language that provides some guidance toward a new solution. "I'll try and communicate to agencies in a way they can understand," she says. "Rather than worrying about providing them with the solution, I'll articulate our concern and ask them, 'Can you see how you will solve it?'"

In acting as mediator — or rather, connector — Bellini has embraced a role key to the success of many innovative companies. Indeed, Margaret King points to the working relationship between Disney's Michael Eisner and Frank Wells, in which Wells would translate the big ideas of visionary Eisner in a way that someone who might not immediately see the bottom line benefits could comprehend. "You need a person who can understand both the creative type and the business type," King says. "He or she is the essential connector

who can negotiate between parties. Things break down when there's misunderstanding, miscommunication, and a lack of people who can talk both sides through an issue." And King is quick to point out that conflict is not all bad. "If everyone at a company is always on the same page, like technology folks who think the same way, [results] come easily. But they're mediocre."

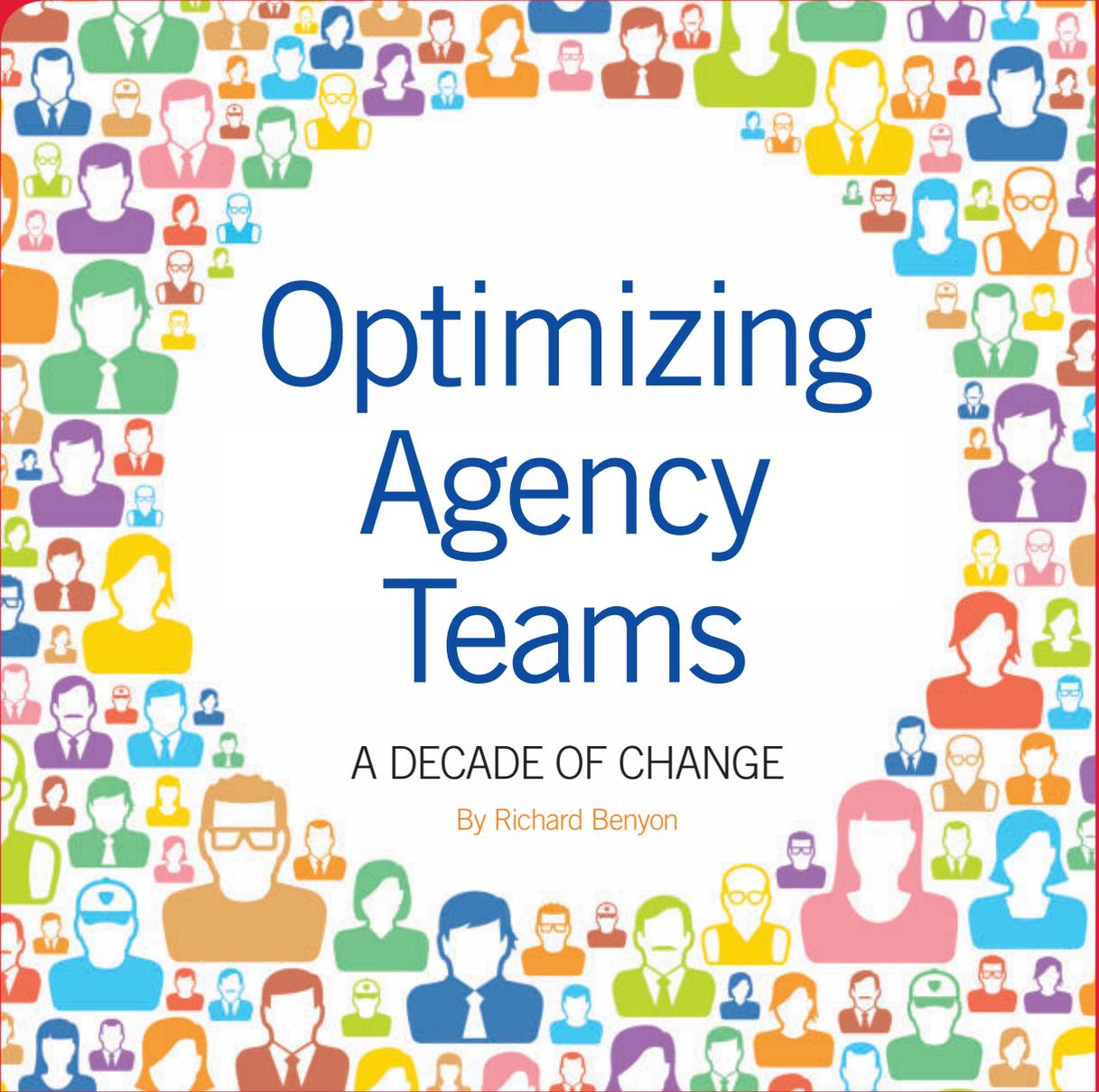
Aflac's Zuna is convinced that by recognizing, celebrating, and marrying both cognitive approaches, a company produces the strongest work. "We all come to work with

a variety of skills and perspectives and experiences," he says. "We have a great mix of talented personalities that we encourage to come together to deliver results." Aflac's embrace of whole-brain thinking can be seen in the company's most recent campaign that involves a TV spot where the Aflac duck suffers his own setback when he is injured and then starts physical therapy that includes weight lifting. "It's a highly visual and emotive

**"You need a person who can understand both the creative type and the business type. He or she is the essential connector who can negotiate between parties."**

storytelling piece about the Aflac duck and his injury and recovery — it's a powerful right-brain approach to messaging," Zuna says. But that's only part of the campaign. A call to action in the campaign takes consumers to a website where they can engage a cost calculator tool that uses hardcore statistics and data to explain the benefits of purchasing Aflac's products. "Offering viewers a way to access our products and services online is the left-brain approach," he says.

Aflac's fully integrated campaign, Zuna believes, reflects a left- and right-brain balance internally, while also appealing to both (thinking) types of consumers. "Since America has an emotional connection with our spokesperson, if you will, the right-brain approach helps people sympathize with what the duck is going through. As we develop marketing and sales material, I think it's important for us to make sure we appeal to distinct audiences that think differently," he says. "We are constantly trying to pull you in and touch you emotionally and then engage you and educate you." ■



# Optimizing Agency Teams

A DECADE OF CHANGE

By Richard Benyon

With the increase in the number and complexity of media channels over the past 10 years, many marketers now find that they are working with a larger group of agencies. It is not uncommon to be operating with five or more agencies on a specific brand, covering diverse areas such as creative, media, web, mobile, social, search, point-of-sale, experiential, events, outdoor, and public relations.

Until recently, the most common model would have been for the “creative” agency to undertake the majority of the strategic and creative development.

Today, however, where clients require one voice across all consumer touchpoints, it is vital that all agency types collaborate in order to get the best strategic thinking and build creative outputs that can be leveraged effectively across all channels.



**“It’s vital for our marketing stakeholders that with this new model Pfizer enjoys the same quality outcomes maintaining a high level of service from our holding company partners, while at the same time, delivering significant productivity and efficiency gains.”**

— George Giassopoulos, procurement director of global marketing agencies and media at Pfizer

## New Models and the Center of Coordination

To handle these new models with large teams of agencies, clients are turning to more sophisticated approaches to managing agency performance. Key to these models is the concept of a “center of coordination,” defining who exactly is responsible for building the overall strategy and managing the team of agencies, ensuring alignment, and reducing inefficiencies.

Over the past decade, many clients have found themselves becoming by default the center of coordination, facilitating the administration and communication between the multiple agencies, which in turn has placed an increasingly high administrative load on the marketer. Even worse is the situation that occurs all too often, where there

is no center of coordination, and it’s left to the agency team to try its best to self-organize, with no direction or processes to assist.

To solve some of these issues, there are two new models that appear to be gaining traction.

➤ **Lead agency model.** An agency is designated as the center of coordination and works with a team of individual agencies.

➤ **Holding company model.** The holding company manages the center of coordination and works with agencies and resources generally from within that holding company.

In these new models, however, it is vital that the client does not abdicate its responsibility to provide effective leadership. To this end, effective agency management processes for clear guidance and driving better marketing need to be ensured.

## Scope of Work and Agency Evaluation

There are two key processes that can assist pragmatically in the implementation of these new agency models: scope of work and agency evaluation.

Building an effective scope of work is fundamental to client/agency relationships and is particularly important when working with teams of agencies, where the individual agencies may not have a direct scope of work with the client. To achieve greater visibility, it is important that the deliverables being produced by the agency team are tagged to each individual channel. It is also beneficial to have the agency resources assigned to the team, identified by their role and department or functional area.

Of similar importance is the use of incentive compensation in aligning outcomes at both the client and the agency group. Many clients using agency evaluation as a component of their incentive compensation will undertake the evaluation programs at the team level, generating a score for the group of agencies. This score can then be used directly in calculating the incentive compensation bonus for the group, aligning client requirements with the outcomes of the full team, reducing the level of “internal competition,” and motivating all members of the group to allocate resources and discipline spend to gain the best brand outcome.

It is, however, important to understand how different agencies or functional areas within the group are performing. So within the evaluation program, individuals still need the ability to direct comments toward particular disciplines or agencies. Some clients will also undertake direct evaluations with the larger agencies within the group.

## The Lead Agency Model

### Case Study: Bank of America

Bank of America drives its agency management processes using a lead agency model, maintaining a core philosophy of working with “best-in-class” agencies. Strategy and coordination for its consumer business are undertaken by “Team BAC,” a lead agency compiled by WPP drawing on resources from different agencies.

## Approaches to Working with Agencies

The role of the lead agency is to ensure that the work of the individual agencies is on brand and on strategy. It is worth noting that the team of agencies working on the Bank of America business is not restricted to a single holding company but comprises agencies from different networks and independents. It is vital that the individual agencies are evaluated separately, each being reviewed on the specific work it generates.

### The Holding Company Model

In this model the client aligns with one or more holding companies, in some cases allowing specific brands or business areas to select the specific holding company that will steward their business. The holding company creates a specific team to work on the strategy and coordinate the various agencies and resources needed to work on the client's business. Generally resources are drawn from agencies within the holding company portfolio, allowing multi-disciplinary teams to work under the same umbrella. The client has the advantage of working with a single point for coordination of the team, rather than having to coordinate the individual agencies. High-profile clients such as Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Colgate, and recently both Pfizer and PepsiCo use this model.

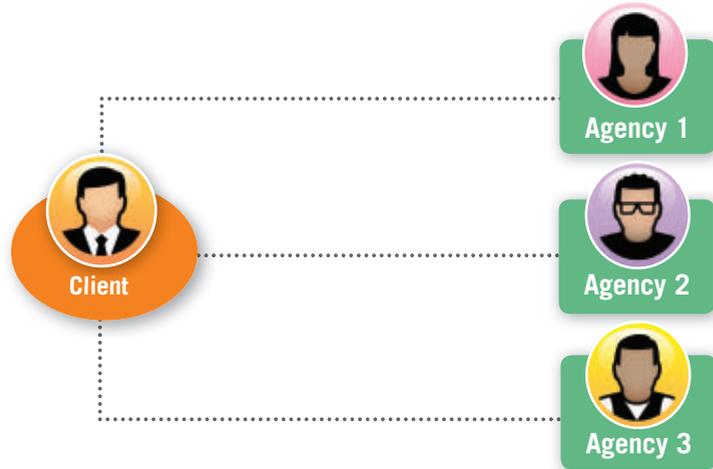
### Case Study: Pfizer

In its recent well-publicized move to a holding company model, Pfizer's stated goal is to find productivity efficiencies and remove duplication of resources and deliverables, while maintaining the same high level of service and quality of marketing outputs. In this model the holding company coordinates a team of individual agencies drawn from its portfolio.

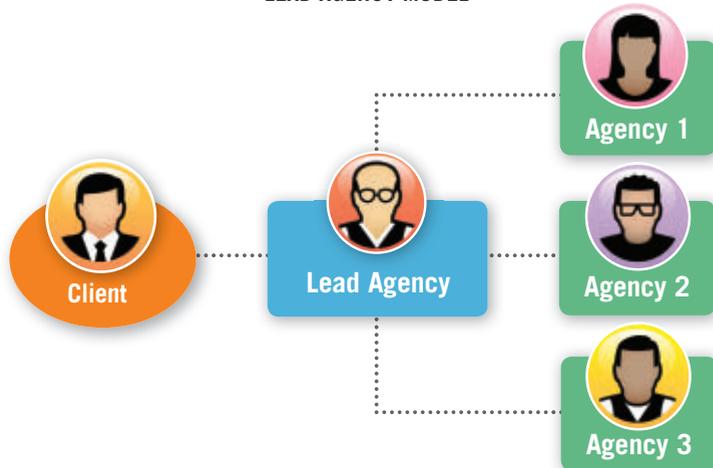
Pfizer also has the added complexity of dealing with work that can be undertaken at a global, regional, and national level. Using its well-refined scope of work process, Pfizer captures spend and activities for each brand with its agencies at all levels, and has the ability to aggregate this data to gain a complete picture globally. ■

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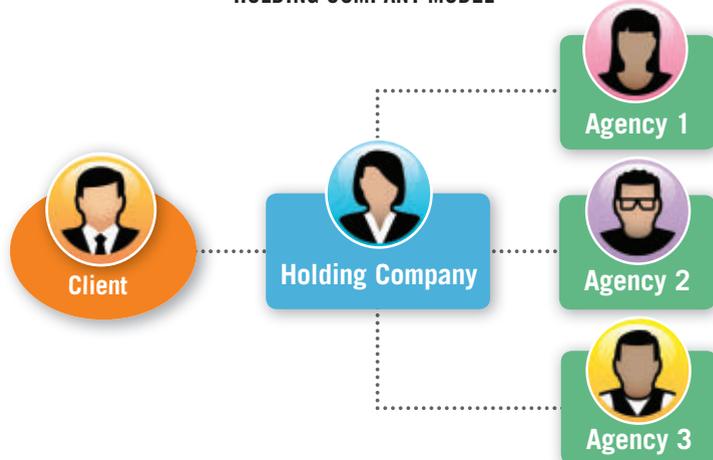
### TRADITIONAL CREATIVE MODEL



### LEAD AGENCY MODEL



### HOLDING COMPANY MODEL



# How to build an Effective Briefing Program

By Richard Benyon

The better the briefs, the better the ad campaign

Agencies need good briefs to produce good work. But many agencies say that they don't receive the quality briefs they need to allow them to maximize advertising objectives. So how can you develop a briefing program in order to help your marketers write better briefs?

## Agency Briefs — the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

In a 2013 survey conducted by Joanne Davis Consulting, partnering with Scan International, assignment briefing was found to be a major pain point in the client/agency relationship. Only 20 percent of the 293 agency C-level executives who responded found their briefs complete and focused most of the time (the good), 53 percent of respondents found briefs complete but lacking in focus (the bad), while 27 percent found them incomplete and inconsistent (the ugly). Not one respondent found them complete and focused all the time! Clearly, there's a problem with the way agencies are briefed.

## The Upside to Investing in a Briefing Program

Is it worth fixing the problem? Most definitely.

There are many tangible benefits to improving the briefing process across the marketing team, including:

- Better quality advertising through clear, focused communication
- Better coordination across channels through improved visibility
- Lower costs through less rework and improved "speed to market" through efficient approval cycles

These benefits add up to substantial cost savings and advertising results.

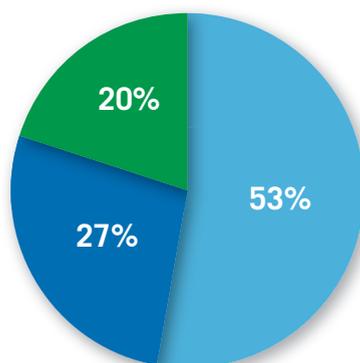
Major advertisers have been addressing other issues they face within agency lifecycle management. Scope of work and agency evaluation programs specifically designed to

improve agency performance and efficiency have been introduced. These programs typically combine better processes, deployment of technologies, expert services, and skill building of people who perform these key functions. This same commitment should be applied to the briefing process to secure the benefits listed above.

## Addressing People, Processes, and Technology

A successful briefing program needs to address three key elements: people, processes, and technology.

**People.** Effective training and modern collaboration techniques, such as peer



## Agency View of Briefing

Percentage of agencies who evaluated creative briefs as:

- **The Good** (completed and focused most of the time)
- **The Bad** (completed but lacking in focus)
- **The Ugly** (incomplete and inconsistent)



**“Well-defined and understandable processes need to be developed and enforced at a corporate level. It is important that these processes enhance quality, communication, and velocity, not detract from them.”**

review, need to be put in place to assist marketers in understanding how to write a succinct and effective best-practice brief.

**Processes.** Well-defined and understandable processes need to be developed and enforced at a corporate level. It is important that these processes enhance quality, communication, and velocity, not detract from them.

**Technology.** Finally, appropriate technology needs to be deployed to better manage the interactions between the client and the agency, and provide an analytical foundation to assist with decision making. This technology needs to cater to the highly complex marketing environment, having the ability to work across all agency disciplines, brands, business units, regions, countries, etc. Further, it has to be easy for the marketers and agencies to use in order to gain widespread adoption.

## What Should Your Program Do?

### › Enhance communication

Modern marketing departments are looking for “agile” processes to increase collaboration. A key tenet of this search is that people and interactions are as important as processes and tools. So the technology must

enhance communication, not try to replace it. The Internet provides the ideal medium for this collaboration. For stakeholders who need to participate in the brief, it provides access to a shared workspace, assisting them to collaborate and contribute as they build the brief together. View early, adjust rapidly, and communicate often!

### › Improve focus

Skilled training can assist marketers in writing clear and concise briefs. Systems can also be deployed to help structure and guide the writing process. Creating a library of templates appropriate for different types of briefs and agency disciplines is highly beneficial. Best-practice advice should be directly embedded in the interface marketers use to write the brief, guiding them to build (to quote the language of the survey) both “complete and focused” content. Peer review is another technique that can be employed, and again the systems utilized should support the ability of marketers to easily collaborate with their peers in reviewing briefs during the authoring process.

### › Speed up approvals

One of the most common gripes around

briefing is delays in approvals with questions like *Why has the campaign been delayed?*, *Who has the latest version?*, *What’s the next step?*, and *How long has it been sitting with John?* echoing through the corridors. A shorter approval process, with less-aggravating delays, can be put in place using clearly defined approval workflows. Often these use email-based messaging to notify stakeholders of actions that they need to take and status reports that give the picture of exactly what is happening at all stages of the workflow.

So how can you get started on building a briefing program? Form a working group and invite key stakeholders from marketing and procurement/agency management, along with representatives from your key agencies. Build processes underpinned by appropriate technology that address improving the quality of brief content, speeding up workflow, and enhancing communication. Consider providing additional training and possibly adopting techniques like peer review. The benefits are immense. Better briefs will lead to even better work! ■

*Richard Benyon is the CEO of Decideware, Inc.*

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