

ISOLATING A COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN'S EFFECTIVENESS

To win an APEX, you will have to isolate the particular contribution made by your campaign and make a convincing case for its value as an investment. This is often a difficult task: the nature of the difficulty varies somewhat between the three categories.

Category 1 - LAUNCH

Products or services which are new, or have no significant history of advertising

It has been traditionally recognized that the effects of communications campaigns can be at their most powerful and dramatic when launching a new product (or when advertising a product for the first time). It is in these cases that communications campaigns can make people aware of a new product or brand, and give them 'new news' which makes them want to try it and speed up the process by which it becomes part of their lives. However, it is also (paradoxically) a situation in which it can be very difficult to prove the effectiveness of communications campaigns. The reason was given succinctly many years ago by Stephen King: "Sales of a new product have nowhere to go but up."

The fact of a successful new product launch does not necessarily prove that the campaign was effective. A good enough new product, pack or concept with good enough distribution will achieve certain levels of success without any communications campaign.

The difficult question to answer is: what level of success would have been achieved without the campaign?

Successful entries in this category will make a particular effort to isolate the campaign's effect, for example:

- Unadvertised areas can provide a useful control, but do not often exist.
- There may be evidence in examining the precise timing of the campaign and its effect on rate of sale.

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- The judges will also be interested in cases where the campaign can be seen to have directed the products towards a very particular target market or created a type of appeal to the consumer which was not already obvious in the product itself.
- Comparisons with other new product launches in the same product field can also provide a useful benchmark.

It is sometimes the case that new products are initially successful by gaining trial, but fail to establish a pattern of repeat purchase. It would be interesting to see cases where the execution of communications campaigns not only gained initial interest and trial, but laid the foundations for longer term brand success by creating a distinctive positioning or an emotional bond with the consumer.

Category 2 - CHANGE

New communications campaigns from previously advertised brands, which resulted in significant short term effects on sales or behaviour

A change of campaign can also lead to significant short term changes in the fortunes of a brand as with the case of new products. The onus is on the author to show that the increase in sales (or whatever) was caused, at least in part, by the communications campaign and that it was not simply a result of the new formula, the hot weather or the main competitor on strike.

To isolate the campaign's effect, all such other possible factors need to be reviewed as shown to be insufficient to have, in themselves, caused the observed results.

Econometrics analysis is a useful tool for exploring the relationship of different variables, particularly in complicated situations. Econometrics is best used to confirm hypotheses which come from visual inspection of the data. Do not use it as a black box which conclusions have to be taken on trust. If you do use econometrics, include enough statistical detail for a technical evaluation of the model to be made.

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The other main possibility for isolating the communications campaign's effect is to look at some kind of test versus control structure, either planned or fortuitous. Tests are of course, never perfect and you should show an awareness of any contaminating factors.

What is not acceptable is to show as evidence of effectiveness differences in behaviour or attitude between those who are aware and those who are unaware of the campaign. A correlation nearly always exists because buyers of a brand are generally more aware of its advertising. It does not prove that the campaign did anything to cause them to buy it.

In addition, submitted cases will be greatly strengthened by corroborative evidence of 'how' the campaign worked, using intermediate measures such as advertising recall, brand image studies and not least, qualitative research. All of this is important to build up a coherent and plausible argument. However, remember that APEX is about the business contribution of communications campaigns. Image improvements, however spectacular, will not be enough on their own unless you can explain convincingly why they benefited the client's business.

Category 3 - SUSTAIN

Communications campaigns which benefited a business by maintaining or strengthening a brand over a longer period

There is still much to learn about communications campaign's long-term effects. Although everyone is usually delighted when a campaign shows dramatic short-term results, the more common justification for communications campaigns is the long term projection and consolidation of a brand's profitability. That is why effectiveness judges, the world over, constantly encourage more category 3 entries.

Traditionally, this has been the hardest kind of situation in which to demonstrate, let alone put a precise value to the effects of communications campaigns.

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The author needs to show the ‘longer and broader effects’ of the campaign. You may for instance, decide to take a shift in perspective away from purely longitudinal analysis (‘we did this – this happened’) to a focus on the competitive strength of the brand as the result to be explained. A successful brand will exhibit: customer loyalty; a price premium or lower price elasticity; ability to launch new products; standing with the retailer; more productive promotions; resistance to competitive pressure; in general greater ‘saleability’. Cases should first establish these strengths, then ask: ‘How were they caused? Could the brand have achieved this added value without the campaign?’

The campaign described must have been written and placed in the media within three years of the date of submission, although it may have commenced earlier. It will often be more difficult to put a precise value on the contribution of communications campaigns in this category but the ultimate benefit to the marketer (client) will normally be in terms of the long-term profitability of the brand.

SPECIAL AWARDS

These awards are selected by the Judges from submissions entered into the Launch, Change or Sustain categories. These awards cannot be entered for.

1. THE ENTRY THAT DEMONSTRATES THE MOST INGENIOUS RESPONSE TO LIMITED BUDGET

Neither successful communications campaigns nor the ability to argue its effectiveness, necessarily require huge budgets. It is often when a budget is very limited that you have to think harder to make it work for you. Judges wish to encourage entries from campaigns which have had to make ingenious use of limited funds and will be aware of the difficulties which this can cause.

2. THE BEST ENTRY FOR A NON-PROFIT OR CHARITY ORGANISATION OR CAUSE

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