How The big ideaL™ sells big

Tim Broadbent
The big idea is a discovery, not an invention. Ogilvy & Mather noticed that certain campaigns — some by Ogilvy, some by other agencies — were better than most. They more easily crossed borders, demographics, target audiences, communication disciplines and media channels. And they did more for the brand, giving it energy, direction, consistency and alignment. In short, they sold big.
Contents

Original consumer research  

Case histories  

4  

9
Original consumer research

Research methodology

Ogilvy commissioned Added Value, the research and consulting company, to carry out a global consumer survey in January 2009. Two thousand twenty-five interviews were carried out online in the US, the UK, Russia, China, India, Brazil, Spain and Germany (approximately 250 interviews per country).¹

Five brand pairs were selected by Ogilvy. Our hypothesis was that one in each pair had a stronger big idea than the other. The pairs were as follows (in each case, we believed the first brand listed had a stronger big idea):

- Coca-Cola vs. Pepsi
- Nike vs. Puma
- Apple vs. Microsoft
- Dove vs. Nivea
- MasterCard vs. Visa

Respondents were asked to rate each brand on the following brand value statements, using a five-box scale:

- “I see [brand X] as a brand that has a point of view.”
- “I see [brand X] as a brand that stands for something.”
- “I see [brand X] as a brand that represents a way of living.”

A proprietary algorithm then assigned respondents into two groups based on their answers: those who gave brand X a high big idea ranking (by rating the brand in the top two boxes on at least two of the statements), and those who gave it a low big idea ranking (by rating the brand in the bottom three boxes on all three statements).

¹ The sample in each country was split approximately fifty-fifty male:female. In terms of age group, 18 – 24 made up 34% of the sample, 25 – 34 made up 37%, and 35 – 45 made up 30%. Respondents shopped at least occasionally for any of the following categories: Clothing, Grocery, Electronics/Tech, Auto, Household Goods, Household Appliances, Personal Care Products, or Baby Products, and considered themselves to have an “involved” shopper mind-set.
Findings

Most brands were rated as we had expected (see Figure 1):

Figure 1. Consumers believe some brands have stronger big ideaLs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High big ideaL rating %</th>
<th>Low big ideaL rating %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coca-Cola 53</td>
<td>Pepsi 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nike 63</td>
<td>Puma 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple 68</td>
<td>Microsoft 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dove 53</td>
<td>Nivea 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MasterCard 46</td>
<td>Visa 46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that more people rated Coca-Cola as having a big ideaL than rated Pepsi, and so on for Nike vs. Puma, Apple vs. Microsoft, and Dove vs. Nivea. It is not the case that Pepsi, Puma, etc., have no big ideaL, just that fewer people rate their big ideaLs as highly. However, the two credit card brands were rated the same. We suspect this shows the methodology is sound in that high/low ratings are not an inevitable construct of the research, and it may also indicate that financial brands are typically weaker than brands in other sectors — a finding that has been repeated many times in brand strength research and literature.
The next question is whether brands with stronger big ideaLs typically rank higher in consumer perception than their counterparts. The answer appears to be yes. In terms of brand consideration (Brand X would be my first choice/One of my first choices), opinion (Brand X is the best brand/One of the best brands) and salience (Brand X completely stands out/Somewhat stands out), brands with high big ideaL rankings consistently outperformed their counterparts. The differences were statistically significant at 99% confidence levels (see Figure 2):

Figure 2. Brands with stronger big ideaLs rank higher in consumer perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>High big ideaL rating %</th>
<th>Low big ideaL rating %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How is the notion that a brand has a strong big ideaL created? Attributes such as being seen as Truly different/Unique, Optimistic, Idealistic, A brand that makes its customers feel good, and being a Leader are all strongly correlated (see Figure 3):

Figure 3. Key predictors of stronger big ideaL rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More important</th>
<th>Truly different/Unique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A brand that makes its customers feel good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A brand that wants to enhance the customer’s life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A brand that customers can depend on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further testing

It was observed that some of these image attributes corresponded to attributes used in Millward Brown’s BrandZ™ brand strength studies. For example, “Idealistic” is measured on both surveys, while “Truly different/Unique” seems to correspond to “Different” on the BrandZ survey, and so on. A key BrandZ metric is “Brand Voltage,” an indication of how successfully the brand converts from awareness to bonding; it appears to be a predictor of brand share growth or decline. With Millward Brown’s generous help, we were able to compare the strength of a brand’s big ideaL, measured by our survey, with brand strength measured by Voltage. This provided a further, independent, test of The big ideaL in consumer research.

We found the best-performing brands on our survey outperformed the lowest-rated brands by 2.8 times in terms of higher Voltage. In other words, brands rated highly on having a big ideaL were also in a good position to grow market share, at least from a consumer perspective (naturally, survey research cannot include external factors such as distribution, etc.) (see Figure 4):

Figure 4. Brands with stronger big ideaLs have higher Brand Voltages
Conclusions from research

Consumers seem able to identify brands with stronger or weaker big ideas. Research seems able to measure how strong brands are, whether by an ad hoc survey or via an existing brand database such as Millward Brown’s BrandZ.

Brands with a strong big idea seem more likely to be considered as the first or one of the first choices for purchase, a finding that appears to be corroborated by their Brand Voltage scores. This does not guarantee market share growth — no consumer survey can do that — but it does suggest that brands with strong big ideas are well placed to grow in terms of consumer perception.
Case histories

Four pillars explain how The big ideaL sells:

1. Enhances brand differentiation
2. Appeals to nonusers, driving penetration
3. Engages audiences emotionally
4. Makes the brand famous

Based on these pillars and insights drawn from our big ideaL research, we go on to suggest how big ideaL campaigns should be pretested.

1. Enhances differentiation

Differentiation is the source of profitability. Highly differentiated brands can command higher profit margins, while less differentiated brands compete on low price at the expense of margins. The mechanism behind this is well known. Michael Porter’s classic *Competitive Strategy* (1980) is one of many studies on how buyers in all markets try to negotiate a brand’s price down relative to its competitors. The more your brand is the same as other brands, the more price is a factor when buyers choose between them. But the more your brand is different, distinctive and unique, the less price influences choice.

The big ideaL process leads to a definition of the brand’s *best self*. “Best” is understood here in a competitive context. Basing a brand’s communications and actions on a big ideaL increases differentiation. We have seen how a brand’s ratings on “Truly different/Unique” correlate with a strong big ideaL.
Mini case history: Differentiating hotels

Hotels sell sleep. That leads to a sameness in communications. In Asia, the standard communications template presents the customer as king. We always see vast marbled halls, enormous golden chandeliers, and obsequious porters and greeters.

But Shangri-La Hotels needed to be distinctive to grow the brand globally beyond its Asian, specifically Chinese, heritage. That meant getting beyond the luxurious hardware. The big idea helped the organization articulate what really made the guest experience different and better.

The key insight was this: it isn’t the chandeliers that bring guests back, it’s the people. Shangri-La has a culture of treating guests like family—as kin, not king.

The campaign was built from the inside out. It was embraced by 66,000 staff before being exposed to customers. And it resonated powerfully with the premium business travelers in our target. Despite its glamorous image, business travel isn’t fun. Travelers arrive alone and leave alone. In alien cultures, they miss their families and friends. The human warmth of a Shangri-La welcome means a lot. As one guest said, “It’s nice to be in a place where they really care about you for a change.”

The campaign results were extraordinary. Members of the staff said, “We feel proud to be part of the Shangri-La family.” Some cried when the campaign materials were screened.

Guests reacted in the same way. One said, “Their commercial was the best I have ever seen. I had tears in my eyes...That made me their customer.” Another said, “Doing business away from home is just like being at war. You need a hotel that gives you this kind of care and support.”

Sales followed suit. Occupancy has increased by 19% against the category average of 5%. Revenue has grown by 24% against the category average of 6%.
TO EMBRACE A STRANGER
AS ONE'S OWN
IT'S IN OUR NATURE

Our new TV ad captures what we believe is in our nature: hospitality from the heart.

Here, you can view our TV ad as well as download desktop wallpapers.

- TV
- PRINT
- THE MAKING OF
- WALLPAPERS

© 2015 Shangri-La International Hotel Management Ltd. All Rights Reserved.
2. Drives penetration

After differentiation, the second brand pillar is relevance. The relevance of your brand determines how many buyers it has and thus its sales volume: highly relevant brands enjoy bigger sales than niche brands.

The big ideaL process identifies a relevant cultural trend or tension. Cultural trends involve a broader swath of the population than a brand’s current franchise. By increasing a brand’s relevance to cultural trends, the appeal of the brand is therefore extended to nonbuyers. We have seen that brands perceived as “Leaders” tend to have strong big ideaLs. Campaigns that grow penetration are 75% more likely to create very large business results than those that grow loyalty (see Figure 5):

Figure 5. Penetration campaigns drive business success more than loyalty campaigns

Mini case history: The power of dreams

Honda cars in the UK had a drab reputation. They were known to be well put together and reliable, but so were all Japanese cars. Their styling was considered unadventurous and “samey.” It was a low-fat vanilla brand: a brand for mothers or for people who don’t want to use their free bus passes.

Communications made Honda cool and culturally relevant. The campaign was based on Honda’s inspirational founder, Soichiro Honda, who has been described as imaginative, socially responsible and just a little bit bonkers — in a nice way. He believed in the power of dreams. His legacy still walks Honda’s corridors but was unknown outside them. Wieden + Kennedy embraced this and created “The Book of Dreams,” a big idea. While fashioned around Honda’s product reality, it defined a contemporary attitude for the brand.

The campaign, which included creative standouts like Cog and Grrr, was voted the coolest of the year, beating Nike and John Smith’s. It became an event: half a million people requested DVDs, more than two million people downloaded Cog from Honda’s website, searching “new Honda ad” on Google produced almost two million matches, and it was discussed in newsgroups ranging from alt.pro-wrestling.wwf to sci.physics. More people came to believe the brand was imaginative, inquisitive, optimistic, passionate and human.

The number of showroom visits increased and more visitors bought. Higher penetration grew Honda’s volume market share from 2.7% to 3.3%. Wieden + Kennedy’s econometric analysis for the IPA Effectiveness Awards in 2004 demonstrated the campaign had increased sales revenue by £388 million and incremental profit by £84 million.
3. Engages emotions

It used to be thought that if you really want advertising to sell something, you should use the techniques developed in direct response. Split-run tests showed that rational, product-based, informative campaigns increased response. Our own David Ogilvy believed this was true of all advertisements. He wrote:

Give the facts. Very few advertisements contain enough factual information to sell the product. There is a ludicrous tradition among copywriters that consumers aren’t interested in facts. Nothing could be further from the truth. Study the copy in the Sears, Roebuck catalogue; it sells a billion dollars’ worth of merchandise every year by giving facts.²

It is now known he was half right. True, informative and persuasive campaigns outperform emotive campaigns in stimulating direct response (see Figure 6):

Figure 6. Persuasive and informative campaigns better at direct response


However, direct response is only one criterion of effectiveness. Sales, market share and, above all, profit are more relevant. Against these criteria, emotive campaigns are more effective on every business metric (see Figure 7):

Figure 7. Emotive campaigns create more sales, market share and profit

% of campaigns reporting very large business results

The big idea engages with audiences at an emotional level. It follows new learning from neuroscience. Anthony Damasio’s seminal book *Descartes’ Error* (1994) showed how decision making is heavily dependent on the emotional centers of the brain. Brands that engage with us emotionally are likely to influence our purchasing decisions more powerfully than brands that merely inform or reason with us. As we have seen, brands that make emotional connections, such as “Making their customers feel good,” tend to have strong big idea. Brands with emotive campaigns are almost twice as likely to report very large profit gains as brands with rational campaigns (see Figure 8):

Figure 8. Emotive campaigns more likely to report very large profits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of campaigns reporting very large profit gains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mini case history: Humanizing technology

Cisco was the most valuable company in the world at the height of the dot-com boom in 2000, and is still the bellwether of the technology sector. It makes the boxes that make the Internet work. It needed to expand beyond B2B into consumer sales, but what could be less emotive than routers or switchers?

Cisco and Ogilvy & Mather devised a big idea summed up in the line “Welcome to the Human Network.” John Chambers, Cisco’s chairman and chief executive, explained in an interview at the 2007 Las Vegas Consumer Electronics Show (CES) how Web 2.0 would change the way people live their lives. It is fundamentally about social networking: “It’s a human network, you’re welcome to it, and Cisco is trying to play a role in that.”

John Chambers played some commercials during his presentation at CES that, in the words of Yahoo! Tech’s blogger, “made me cry”: “I get teary-eyed over those feel-good-about-the-network commercials, and I know I’m not alone.” Naturally, TV was only one element in the campaign’s communications mix, whose home was a website packed with emotive stories. For instance, one mother posted her experience of using a human network of online communities to help diagnose her son’s illness.

Ogilvy’s successful entry to the American Marketing Association Effies in 2008 demonstrated the power of emotions to increase both Cisco sales (+20% after the campaign, compared to +11% the previous year) and its corporate brand value (an increase of $16 billion).

---

On the human network, people everywhere are experiencing a new kind of day. Encyclopedias update themselves every minute. Movies appear wherever there’s a screen handy. And a phone can double as a train ticket or a lift ticket. Welcome to a place where wikis, collaborative applications and social networks are making us smarter, better and faster. Welcome to a network where anything is possible. Because when we’re together, we’re more powerful than we could ever be apart. The story continues at cisco.com/humannetwork.

On the human network, the team you follow now follows you. Welcome to a place where players appear in the palm of your hand. Where a goal is as close as the nearest screen. To a network where passion, points and play-offs merge with voice, video and data. Anywhere. The story continues at cisco.com/humannetwork.
4. Drives brand fame

Campaigns can have many different objectives. Some aim to create awareness, others to change imagery. Still others try to reinforce commitment. Only about a third aim to make the brand famous.

Brand fame is more than mere brand awareness. A famous brand gets talked about. Analysis shows that campaigns get brands talked about because of the point of view they project for the brand. Having a point of view also encourages usage, because it creates the belief that the brand is authoritative and important. The big ideaL gives brands a point of view.

A famous brand is the one seen as making waves in the category. Fame campaigns generate strong emotional responses (not necessarily based on liking the brand) that cause the brand to stand out distinctly from other brands in the category. Consumers feel reassured when the brand is widely esteemed: fame campaigns have the precious ability to raise the quality of perception at an emotional level while also creating widespread depth of appreciation of brands.

Fame campaigns therefore have the highest success rate of any campaign objective (see Figure 9):
Figure 9. Fame campaigns outperform all other strategies

% of campaigns reporting very large business results


Mini case history: Make soap, sell self-esteem

Unilever and Ogilvy & Mather devised a big idea for Dove in 2003: “The world would be a better place if more women were allowed to feel good about themselves.” Feeling good about oneself may appear quite a modest objective, but the fashion and cosmetics industries sell with images of unattainable perfection. Women are torn. Research shows that 72% of women feel worse about themselves after reading fashion magazines, but they still come back for more. Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty” made the brand famous by taking on the cultural tension between women’s self-esteem and social stereotypes.
Dove’s stance infiltrated popular culture. Its Self-Esteem Fund has run body image workshops in schools for 1.8 million young girls. At the other end of the age spectrum, its Pro-Age initiative led Oprah to dedicate an entire show to it. Wal-Mart and Asda have created their own “real women” TV ads featuring their staff. *Evolution*, a viral film made by the Self-Esteem Fund for just $50,000, has been downloaded by more than 500 million viewers.

Simon Clift, Unilever’s marketing director, stated in the *Wall Street Journal* that “[f]undamental to success is having built-in ‘talkability’ from the outset, that is, linking the brand with an idea that is sufficiently interesting to inspire word-of-mouth communication.” Ogilvy’s successful entry to the IPA Effectiveness Awards in 2008 estimated that making Dove famous had generated an incremental profit of $394 million.

---

Researching big ideaL creative work

The two pretesting methods used most often are based on flawed and outdated theories of advertising effectiveness:

- The persuasion testing method most often used dates back to the 1920s. It is designed for direct response campaigns, namely campaigns that inform or persuade based on rational facts about the product. This technique may or may not be good at identifying direct response winners, but the method is now known to be irrelevant. Informative and persuasive campaigns, the kind that score well on persuasion tests, tend to produce lower sales, lower market share and less profit than emotive campaigns. Yet emotive campaigns score badly on this test. It is not just that this test fails to identify commercial winners. It actively discriminates against them.

- The awareness testing method most often used dates back to the 1970s. It is designed for message-push campaigns, in which audiences are passive recipients. But today the role of TV ads is more often than not to spearhead a campaign that takes on a life of its own via social networks enabled by the Web. This technique may or may not be good at testing whether the brand name is linked with the creative idea after a couple of exposures, but the issue is now irrelevant. The conception of exposure has fundamentally changed.

The research department can be among the most reactionary, hidebound and conservative of all client functions. Methods of financing, producing and distributing products have evolved beyond recognition in a generation, but many research departments still use the techniques described in Daniel Starch’s *Principles of Advertising*, published in 1923.
It is probably pointless to expect communications based on a big ideaL to score well on tests designed for very different communication models. New, customized research methods must be devised. It is not so much a question of how consumers rate the communication, as much as how they rate the brand once they’ve been exposed to the communication. As we discussed above, a brand with a strong big ideaL will be seen as different/unique, optimistic, idealistic, a leader, and as a brand that makes its customers feel good.

Mini case history: Researching a drumming gorilla

Todd Stitzer, the chief executive of Cadbury Schweppes, presented the company’s preliminary business results to London City analysts and investors on 19 February 2008. He said, “In China, 2007 was the year of the pig, but at Cadbury Schweppes it was the year of the drumming gorilla.” That same month, Trevor Bond, the managing director, said the famous television commercial with a gorilla had “put a buzz into our organization and made us proud of being part of it again.”

The drumming gorilla was not a piece of whimsy. It was a business strategy brought to life. The need for a more profitable business model led to a new communication model, one that challenged the traditional advertising theory manifested in conventional research techniques. Cadbury’s old communication model was focused on TV. Commercials followed the same format: they would describe what the chocolate was like, show some chocolate, show someone enjoying it, and do this all in a warm and engaging way. It was based on the persuasion model. It did not prevent Cadbury Dairy Milk from losing sales and market share.

The new communication model aimed to make the brand famous. Cadbury’s Dairy Milk has been part of British life for over a century, but it needed to earn its place today in a new context and with a new audience. The campaign’s big ideaL was based on love. Chocolate has had bad press in these diet-conscious times, but it also gives us simple, visceral pleasure. The cultural tension was the question, which is best — being thin or happy?
But how to pretest *Gorilla*, their new ad? Traditional methods would not do. Instead, the research company tailored an approach designed around *Gorilla’s* specific objectives. A key criterion of success was generating a smile, so the research company recorded people’s facial expressions when watching the ad rather than recording their verbatim comments. As the ad was not based on the persuasion model, the research company downplayed the inevitable “Where’s the chocolate?” comments, and up-weighted measures of impact, involvement and purchase intent.

*Gorilla* became the most-viewed ad ever on YouTube, with ten million downloads. Seventy Facebook groups dedicated to loving the ad emerged. Hundreds of people released their own remixed and spin-off videos. The ad was discussed in pubs, schools and buses. Cadbury’s buzz rating went up 600%.

Fallon’s entry to the IPA Effectiveness Awards in 2008 showed that years of sales decline had been reversed. Sales and market share are now growing again although less volume is on deal. The growth was caused by increased primary demand, and margins grew by 5%.
Conclusions

We have shown that The big ideaL enhances differentiation, drives penetration, engages emotionally and makes the brand famous. Each of these alone is likely to increase sales and profit. Together, they can sell big by increasing consideration — so don’t allow outdated research methods to slow you down.

However, the normal health warning applies. Sales of your brand depend on all four Ps (product, price, place and promotion). The big ideaL is not a magic wand that will sell inferior or delisted products. No communications can. But when a brand or organization is already competitive, The big ideaL is likely to increase both the effectiveness and efficiency of its communications spend.

Tim Broadbent, April 2011
Ajilwy