

# Strategic marketing brief

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The marketing communications brief is a very important element in the process for developing effective marketing communications.

Writing a strategic/creative brief essentially comes down to answering a series of stringent questions relating to the project at hand. The questions have been phrased and ordered in such a way as to present a logical flow. This makes it easier to tell the story, because the answers provided to one question forms the backdrop to the next.

The structures take you from discussing why there is a project in the first place, to specifying creation and execution related constraints imposed by the client:

- What's the background to this project?
- What's the problem we're trying to solve?
- Who are we talking to?
- What's the mindset of that audience?
- What positioning fits that mindset?
- What effects are we trying to achieve?
- What message will achieve those effects?
- What evidence substantiates that message?
- What constraints exist for expressing it?

# The questions

## 1. Background.

Describe what has happened and why. Summarize the key event(s) initiated, the major decision(s) made, or the new strategy adopted – which called for this marketing communications initiative.

*For example:*

- New product
- New market entry
- New pricing structure
- Distribution changes
- Competitive move

Formulate the market ambitions – what are we hoping to achieve (in business terms), as well as why we believe this will be possible in view of the developments described above.

*For example:*

- Increase market share
- Raise profits
- Increase sales productivity
- Block competition
- Become established in a new market segment

Summarize all market observations relevant to the project.

*For example:*

- Historic summary
- Current market trends – technology, applications, users
- Competitive developments
- Strengths and weaknesses (own and others')
- Threats and opportunities (own and others')

Articulate the overall purpose of the program. How does it relate to the events, ambitions and observations described?

## 2. What is the problem that marketing communications must solve?

Describe actual problem(s) posed. Be sure they are such that they can be addressed with marketing communications tactics. Describe how and why this will happen.

*For example:*

“Most buyers still believe that today's XYZ technology is inadequate for achieving [...]. Trade journalists are making things worse by writing articles focusing on older generations of the XYZ technology. Marketing communications must help change perceptions, by [...].”

Describe one problem at a time; make sure they are really different, not merely several ways of describing the same problem.

### 3. Who are we talking to?

Primary audiences (buyers, decision makers, direct influencers). Describe relevant company characteristics (industries, sizes, geography, business orientation, etc).

Describe relevant people characteristics (positions, responsibilities, buying behavior, etc).

Secondary audiences (indirect influencers; future buyers/influences; internal, etc).

### 4. What is the mindset of this audience?

*For example:*

- Relevant things they know, believe, think, feel — and why.
- Concerns, perceived problems, obstacles, opportunities.
- Brand perceptions — awareness, interest, acceptance, preferences.
- What types of messages are they likely to believe (and not believe)?

Be sure to state where the above information is coming from — whether from some kind of field research, or hearsay from the client.

### 5. How should the brand/product/proposition be positioned?

Discuss pros and cons of various positioning scenarios that could be considered, based on the audiences and mindsets (and market realities) described above.

Be sure the options all revolve around meaningful buyer/user benefits. Whenever possible, analyze the proposed positioning using the five criteria: relevant, available, attainable, sustainable, acceptable. And explain why they are being met (or not met).

Draw conclusions, recommend one scenario; explain why it's the best.

Positioning is a marketing communications strategy for occupying and defending a desired position in the buyer's mind. In essence, it's the act of defining to the buyer

- a) the category we play in (or want to play in), and
- b) what makes us different from others who also play in that category.

### 6. What effects do we want marketing communications to have on the audience(s)?

*Knowledge:*

Focus on the few, central topics that have a realistic chance of being understood and remembered by the audience.

Knowledge is most of the time about facts – try to avoid subjective statements; use as few adjectives as possible.

*Attitude:*

Here's where the adjectives go.

Adopt the audience's perspective by writing in first person (I or we);

use expressions like “it seems”, “I believe”, “probably”, “I have a feeling”, “maybe” (because that's what attitudes are like: rarely black & white).

Make sure the emotions described are relevant to the project – and realistic. And discuss them separately as they pertain to product, competition, brand, etc.

*Behavior:*

Only discuss targeted behavior that can be expected as a direct effect of marketing communications. Again, be realistic.

## **7.** What is the single most essential message that will achieve these effects?

Focus on one proposition or promise! Even if you need several sentences to describe it.

Say it directly to the audience, in second person (you).

Is what you're saying interesting, logical, clear? Does it capture the key buyer benefit in a compelling way?

Are you presenting "an irresistible offer"?

And is it really a singular proposition?

## **8.** What evidence is available to substantiate this message?

Hard proof, facts, directly and clearly supporting the claims made above. Quantified whenever possible. Try to structure the facts into relevant subsets or categories.

## **9.** What kind of program will do the job?

Describe the marketing communications tactics that you have considered to achieve the stated objectives.

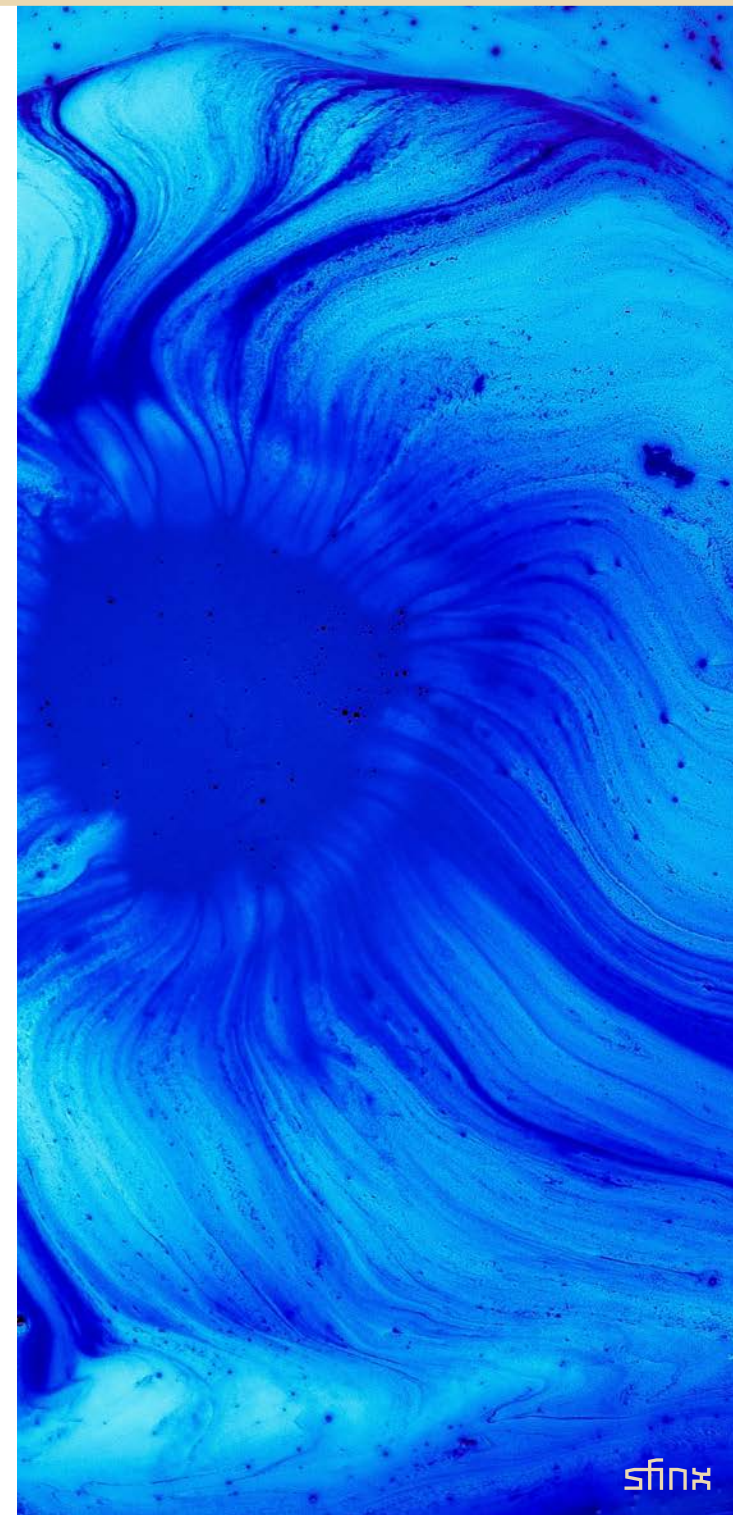
Discuss how each tactic will contribute and support others, what role each will play in the overall program, and why.

Use a structure based on chronology (phase 1, 2...) or audience types; avoid a random 'shopping list' of tactics.

## **10.** What (if any) are the creative requirements on the program?

Formats, sizes, colors, budgets, typography, logos, etc. that are defined in our corporate identity.

Existing material and units like landing pages on .com



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