

'However important the response to the ad is, it is only meaningful if it affects the brand in some way'

people's perceptions of the brand to change commitment. Our approach is founded on the basis that there are three elements to these underlying brand dynamics, which would lead to a change in commitment. These are 'Persuasion' – how the brand is perceived functionally; 'Involvement' – how close people feel to the brand and 'Salience' – how much the brand stands out as different and has dynamism and currency. To explain the changes in commitment the pre-test must also predict changes in these brand dynamics.

The third type of prediction needed from a pre-test is that of advertising response. The advertising will have been developed with certain assumptions in mind about how it will work. Therefore, a pre-test needs to predict whether it is likely to work in the way intended. Again, we believe these fall into the three categories outlined above.

If an ad has been designed to a 'Persuasion' framework, the assumption is that the ad needs to communicate a functional benefit of the brand and that people will find this believable and interesting; an 'Involvement' strategy assumes that people will enjoy the ad, find it appealing and watch it closely; a 'Salience' ad will need to stand out as different from others. Therefore, Pre-response predicts whether the ad is working to the assumptions to which it was designed.

I've got a prediction: how do I know if that's a good or a bad number?

Many pre-testing systems compare the numbers achieved for the test brand and ad against a 'norm'. This gives an idea of whether that number is good or bad, but good or bad versus what? As Marilyn Baxter said in a previous article in *Admap* (3), a norm is simply an average of all other ads tested by that agency, and this has two fundamental problems.

One is that it is not even an average of all advertising but an average of all advertising tested by that agency.

This means that the norm is depen-

dent upon the type of client and, therefore, the type of advertising that agency tests. The other problem is that it assumes 'good' is defined as the same as or slightly better than the norm, or average, and I assume not many ads are developed with the objective of being 'average'.

To truly be able to tell if an ad is performing well or poorly, we compare it to two elements.

● *The competition.* Most pre-tests put the test ad in a 'clutter' reel – against ads from other categories. This is to achieve some semblance of 'real life'. Therefore, to disguise the test ad they must ask respondents about the other brands from other categories.

However, what we really need to know is how the test ad compares to other ads for the competition, because that is what it will be up against in the market. Therefore, we put the ad in a 'competitive' reel and ask the brand response measures for all the competitive brands. This then tells us whether the ad's performance is likely to be better or worse than that of the key competition.

● *The 'gold standard'.* However, it may well be that the test brand operates in a category where the advertising is nothing to aspire to. In this case, we interpret the scores in the light of 'gold standard' benchmarks. These are other ads that have been measured previously which are in similar situations with similar objectives: if the ad is designed to be 'involving', how does it compare to other great 'involving' ads?

It is only in view of these two sets of measures that we can really determine if the prediction is good or bad.

What diagnoses does a pre-test need to give?

There are two areas Pre-response will understand in detail in order to give the best possible explanation of why things are working as they are and how they can be made better.

The first is executional diagnoses. We predict overall how the ad is working, for

example whether it is working 'Involvement', capturing imagination and enjoyment and therefore creating greater identification with the brand. However, in order to make it even better we also discover why that 'Involvement' happens and how we can make sure people feel highly involved.

So to understand how, say, involvement happens, we need to explore these elements in detail: for example, it only when people like the music, identify with the characters, or find a joke funny that they become involved. This can then help to identify the action needed to heighten this dynamic.

However important the response to the ad is, it is only meaningful if it affects the brand in some way, so we also need brand diagnoses.

We gather the information needed to understand exactly how the ad is working its effects on the brand. Then, while overall we may predict that the ad will feel 'closer' to the brand after the ad, we will also then understand what this is based on and so explore the brand in the complex detail that makes up the brand at a total level.

So if people identify with the brand more, why is that? Is it because they see it as someone who lives life fully, someone who has a ballsy attitude or what?

We believe that the Pre-response approach to advertising pre-testing represents a significant advance from what is currently available in the market. However, even we would argue it is not perfect: pre-testing results are dangerous when not in the hands of skilled practitioners who understand what they mean.

1. A Hedges: *Testing to Destruction*, IPA monograph, NTC Publications Ltd, 1999.
2. C McDonald: *Pre-testing Advertising*, monograph, NTC Publications Ltd, 1999.
3. M Baxter: 'How to use target norms in advertising tracking', *Admap* number 1999.

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