Evaluating advertising campaigns

Introduction

A very important part of an advertising campaign is its effectiveness:

- The concept testing phase is focused on ensuring that the creative concept effectively engages with the target audience.
- The evaluation phase investigates whether a campaign is gaining enough awareness and delivering the intended messages to its target audience.

This phase is an essential tool in gathering feedback. The information gathered should be used to adjust and modify a campaign. For example, if the target audience isn’t aware of the campaign, it may be that the media strategy isn’t as effective as it should be or that the campaign hasn’t had time to build enough awareness. This may lead to increased media exposure for the second phase of the campaign while the creative is kept consistent to build on existing awareness.

Independent evaluation

Like concept testing, the evaluation stage of a campaign is ideally conducted by an independent external party, separate from the advertising agency. If you’ve employed an external party to conduct the concept testing, it’s likely that they’ll be able to conduct the evaluation for you.

The evaluation should be developed at the same time the campaign is being developed – irrespective of whether an external party is conducting the evaluation or not. This will ensure that the measurable campaign objectives are clearly outlined for the evaluation phase.

If you engage a company to conduct the evaluation, they should include the measures outlined in the following section. A company may suggest adding other questions. However, it should be clear what additional value these responses will add to the campaign. If you need help, contact the NZTA’s advertising team (advertising@nzta.govt.nz) to discuss these matters.

What should I be measuring?

Awareness

This indicator of campaign health is measured in two ways:

- free recall – where the respondent freely and without being prompted identifies the campaign
- prompted recall – where the interviewer provides the person with more information about the campaign, ie the tagline or the name of the campaign.

Free and prompted recall indicates the level of awareness of the campaign. If the campaign has a low level of awareness, there’s a limited possibility that the key messages will connect with the target audience.

A campaign’s awareness levels take time to build. For this reason, we recommend that campaigns should remain consistent for two to three years, ie retain the same key messages and taglines.
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What should I be measuring? continued

Main message out-take
This measures the key messages that the target audience believe the advertising conveys. It’s likely that there’ll be many similar messages reported. If the key messages that the target audience report aren’t related to your intended key messages, then something isn’t quite right with your creative. That’s why it’s important to thoroughly test advertising concepts before work is produced.

Below are the key message out-takes reported by the target audience (males 16-29 years) for the Quarter four tracking 2011 of the Bloody Legend advertising campaign.

1. Don’t drink and drive (89%).
2. If your friends are drunk don’t let them drive/stop a mate from drink-driving (40%).
3. Don’t hesitate/have courage to speak up (23%).
4. It’s acceptable/cool/ok to stop a person from drink-driving (12%).
5. You won’t look stupid if you speak up (10%).
6. Be a good mate (8%).
7. Stay put if you’ve been drinking (8%).
8. Aimed at young drivers (3%).

Our intended key messages are the number two and three messages. There can be fluctuations each quarter in reported key messages. The number one message tends to become the default message that the target audience refers to for most road safety alcohol campaigns. Purely, because this is ultimately what we are after and this message has been around for a long time.

Conducting an evaluation on a budget
If you don’t have the budget to engage an external agency, there’s no reason why you can’t conduct a good evaluation yourself.

To make sure that your evaluation is robust, consider the following:

How many people will I need to interview?
This depends on the size of the campaign. Just as you did in your testing phase, you’ll need to correctly identify members of your target audience who ‘self-identify’ as a person relevant to the focus of your campaign, eg they drive after drinking; they drive above the speed limit.

Telephone interviews
Telephone interviews are conducted by randomly ringing numbers in the telephone directory. When someone answers, you need to identify who you are and where you’re calling from, then ask whether someone in the household fits your target audience. A disadvantage of this approach is that it can take a while to find your target audience, especially because many young people have mobile phones that aren’t listed in the directory.
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Conducting an evaluation on a budget continued

Street and mall interviews
In street and mall interviews, you must correctly identify your target audience through a range of short questions, e.g. checking their age. You must also ensure that your sample is random. The same biases outlined in the testing phase for time and location also apply (see page 13).

Keep your interview short. Try not to keep the person for longer than 3-4 minutes so that you can hold their attention. Don’t pack in too many questions.

Where possible, it’s important that the person asking the questions in face-to-face interviews is also part of the target audience. This makes them better equipped to engage the target audience in conversation.

Interviews that will create biases
Some interviews will create biases and interfere with the evaluation results. Examples of these include:

- Interviews with friends and family members, colleagues or stakeholders such as SADD students. These people are more likely to be aware of the work that you do. Including their responses will bias your results.
- Evaluations conducted with people who call your office to query or gain information, or access your website. These people may not be your target audience and may already have some knowledge of the work that you do. They could be more socially minded than your target audience as well.
- Gathering opinions from groups of people who know each other, e.g. a group of friends sitting on a bench together. It’s important that the people you ask are randomly selected, i.e. you ask every seventh person who you believe fits your target audience. This ensures that the people you interview aren’t connected.

As during the testing process, conducting an evaluation from one location or at a specific time of day will create a bias due to the possibility that only certain people will be out on the street at certain times.

Interpreting the results

Awareness
The question that is perhaps the most important when evaluating a campaign in its initial stages is the one that gives you the free recall and prompted recall figures. These figures indicate the percentage of people in the target audience who are aware of your campaign.

If a person isn’t aware of the campaign even after being prompted, then it’s not necessary to ask them the remaining questions.

Key messages
This is the stage where you ask the participant what they think the key messages of the campaign are. You should record every key message that they reply with. Once you’ve interviewed everyone for this question, group the responses into themes and then tally up how many responses fit within each theme.

This will give you a good indication about what key messages the campaign’s delivering. If 50% of the sample gets the right message but 50% don’t, the key messages that are wrong will give you some indication of what might need to change in your creative.
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Example of an evaluation outline

Questions to ask:

- Have you heard of _____ campaign?
  (Record all yes/no answers.)
- If no, prompt with campaign material.
- If the answer is still no, thank them for their time.
  (They’re no longer needed)
- Where did you hear or see this advertising?
  (Record all answers, even if they’re wrong. It’ll tell you what mediums are working the best.)
- Can you describe what you heard or saw?
- What do you think the advertising was saying?
- Have you changed your driving since seeing this campaign?