

Managing global brand advertising

Hamsini Shivkumar, JWT, examines how global ads can be developed, suggesting how advertisers and agencies can be clearer about their objectives

THE KEY CHALLENGE for global brand positioning and communication is to motivate consumers around the world, evoking the same mental picture or image of the brand. The question that global brand teams grapple with is, of course, whether 'same' means identical, quite similar or a bit similar. In other words, what should the degrees of freedom be in defining and communicating the global brand?

A second, critical question is how to go about defining this motivating mental image of the global brand and then, how to communicate it to consumers in the most effective way – to grow the business and strengthen the brand. These are challenges that global and regional planning teams have been struggling with for years, with no accepted best practice so far.

The short answer to these questions, in my view, is that global brand positioning/brand identity is, ideally, built from a tightly defined and motivating brand concept. The communication of it, however, often requires significant degrees of freedom to grow the brand's business and added values in diverse markets and cultures. Therefore, global brands need a global brand idea but not a global advertising idea. However, this thinking is not yet accepted as best practice among global brand teams.

Global companies and degrees of freedom

We may think of three types of company in terms of their philosophy towards global branding – the degrees of freedom they pursue: Purists, Pragmatists and Entrepreneurs.

Purists hold their brand definition as sacred, in terms both of defining and communicating the brand positioning. Hence their global branding approach is standardisation. This calls for an extremely top-down approach, with central decision-making and local implementation. L'Oréal is a good example of a Purist approach, as are most global luxury and designer brands.

Entrepreneurs hold business results as sacred. Hence, their global branding approach is localisation. They are prepared to extend high degrees of freedom in both defining and communicating the global brand positioning. Their management approach is based on decentralisation. The centre essentially sets targets and measures their delivery, while markets are free to use the strategies that they think are appropriate locally, to deliver the promised results. Pepsi and DeBeers are good examples of this approach.

Pragmatists are in search of the middle path – delivering business results, while maintaining coherence to a global brand definition. Hence, their global branding approach is adapt/interpret. They look for tightness in defining brand positioning, but allow more flexibility in communicating it across markets and cultures. Their management approach is based on negotiation and consensus between the centre and markets. Unilever, P&G, Nokia and BBC are good examples of the Pragmatist approach.

All three approaches face some common and some different challenges in defining and communicating a global positioning for their brand. The challenges of development are similar, while the challenges of implementation are different, as their branding philosophies are different.

Approaches to developing global positioning – and the pitfalls

The first step that a global or regional brand team undertakes is to define the brand positioning/identity at a global/regional level. Many tools exist for this – the Brand Vision Statement, Brand Lighthouse, Brand Vision Key, Brand Value House, and so on. Every global agency network, brand consultant and large global marketer has its own tool. And teams take different approaches to its development – using large scale workshops to small group meetings to briefing agency planners. Teams often carry out

some kind of multi-country, consumer research before or immediately after, to help generate the insights on which the positioning is based and/or to validate the positioning in terms of its relevance and credibility.

All these tools are built on the accepted wisdom that today a brand is not just a 'product+', but needs to be conceived as a multi-faceted entity. Hence all these tools have multiple boxes to fill. What often happens, in the process of filling in the format – either individually or as a group – is that the team ends up with a brand vision description. This outcome can easily occur even in single-country

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situations. But the chances of it happening are much greater in a multi-country situation, due to the need to find commonalities that hold across all markets and cultures. This brand description is something that all markets are happy with, because it incorporates their consumer and competitive reality. However, since it is a description, it is likely to be lacking in imagination or power.

Often there is a catchy sum-up of the positioning in a phrase, variously called 'brand essence' or 'vision focus' (or whatever), but this is not usually used as the platform to springboard communication development.

Having defined the global positioning vision, it is almost axiomatic for the client team to brief the agency team to develop a global advertising idea to dramatise and bring alive the vision. The hope and desire of the brand team are that the agency creative will bring some magic

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into what is often a somewhat bland brand-benefit expression and create a global advertising idea (which could become a global communication idea if it is 'big' enough). This is a carry-forward of the standard operating procedure at a single-market level. However, for a global brand, this is where the process usually breaks down and the hoped-for magic never materialises. And teams are caught in a never-ending cycle of creative development.

What's wrong with a global advertising idea?

As we all know, the best advertising ideas are relevant, distinctive and surprising.

The single biggest hurdle that global advertising ideas stumble against is relevance. And this is for a very simple reason. The most universal, yet sharp and distinct, insight is reflected in the positioning. Thereafter, it is a struggle for the advertising idea to find yet another, equally universally appealing and distinctive insight in the brand's emotional space.

The second hurdle for the global advertising idea is that it has no clear task to address in the marketplace, other than to present the positioning. This is because tasks vary considerably by market, which only a country-specific brief can capture. Briefs for global advertising ideas, then, generalise the task to a level where it becomes useless from a creative development point-of-view. And worse, when the idea/scripts are checked in major markets, the consumer response reveals the lack of fit with the issues affecting the brand in that market.

Finally, the insight and task definition problems are often compounded with issues of credibility, distinctiveness, etc, given market and brand realities in various countries and regions.

Many brands which have succeeded in creating a global advertising idea have ended up creating a global advertising format, rather than a genuine idea. Sometimes, idea and format are pretty

much the same: for example, user testimonial or celebrity testimonial. This is why global brands that use these formats have been able to make pretty much the same ads all around the world. The personal care products company Dove and detergent manufacturer Tide are examples of global brands which have used user-testimonial campaign formats across countries and for several years. Soap company Lux was, for years, a global brand that used celebrity testimonials everywhere. However, testimonials are not the answer to all advertising needs of all global brands.

Brand concept as communication platform

A far more effective approach is to define a brand concept or brand idea – take the idea into the brand positioning itself – a strategic idea. Use this as the lens for the brand's view of the world and as a platform for advertising and other communication development.

When the brand team writes up the brand vision, lighthouse or whatever, the final step should be to articulate the brand idea or brand concept in one or two sentences. This should capture the brand's *raison d'être* and answer the criti-

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Some examples of global brand statements

1. L'Oréal Harnesses the power of science to give every woman the confidence of attaining perfection in her beauty

2. BBC World Authoritative coverage of world events for a seriously informed perspective

3. Bang & Olufsen Brings poetry to hi-fi for an experience that touches the spirit and soul

4. Prêt à Manger Our passion for the freshest food makes us take a stand against processed food

cal question of why consumers should be attracted to this brand. It could be an expression of the brand's promise or attitude or point-of-view or ideology. This brief concept statement then serves as the platform for communication development in each market.

As the brand's strategic positioning idea, it should have the power to capture people's interest, imagination, have them engage with it; it should act as a magnet, drawing consumers towards it.

Expressing the concept with a point of tension built-in can work even more powerfully in getting consumer engagement with the idea.

The Brand Concept Statement can be used at the beginning of the communication development process, to lead the development of the creative brief in each market. It can also be used at the end of the process, as a filter to judge creative work to any advertising or communication brief – is it true to the concept in form, spirit or both?

The first step after defining the brand concept is to map consumers in each market in terms of their attraction and responsiveness to the brand idea. In this way, we use the brand idea as the lens through which to view consumers and competition in a market, define the role ►

How the approaches differ: an example

The Brand: Ritu Kumar Designer Wear – a leading Indian designer brand which sells in markets in the US, UK and the Middle East.

Brand Positioning Vision Statement:

Vision – to be the leading Indian designer brand for the modern, upscale, urban woman, aged 30+.

Strategy – to offer a range of clothing and accessories to meet her every wardrobe and lifestyle need.

Target Audience

- ▶ upscale, urban, women, aged 30+
- ▶ women who want designer wear – for everyday and for occasions, in order to make a style statement
- ▶ women who want to be fashionable and glamorous, yet elegant and chic
- ▶ women who like the ‘ethnic Indian look’ and particularly appreciate the finer nuances of traditional Indian craftsmanship.

Brand Proposition

Benefits/Reasons to want

Ritu Kumar designer wear makes an authentic Indian style statement like no other brand can, so that you are set apart and stand out from the crowd.

Reasons to believe

- ▶ As a designer, Ritu Kumar has unparalleled knowledge and expertise in the history and heritage of Indian textiles and craftsmanship.
- ▶ She has invested in training and reviving the skills of hundreds of craftsmen across the country.
- ▶ She is the designer of choice for India’s contestants at the Miss World and Miss Universe pageants, creating personalised wardrobes for them.
- ▶ Hers was the first (the original) designer boutique in the Indian market.

Values & Personality

Values – Ritu Kumar believes in authenticity, superior quality, being world class, in Indian heritage.

Personality – She embodies timeless elegance, style and a meticulous perfectionism.

1 Conventional approach: desired solution – global advertising idea

1. Write the brand positioning vision statement (above).
2. Turn this positioning into an advertising creative brief – for a global advertising idea that dramatizes the brand proposition – the key benefit and reason why.
3. In the creative brief, mention the need for theme and product ads and a demonstration of how the idea would be executed for each.
4. Ask for some advertising properties to act as brand signals.
5. See how the idea can then be executed/ scripts adapted for individual markets.

2 Alternative (proposed) approach: desired solution – global brand concept

1. Write the brand concept in a sentence or two.
‘Ritu Kumar – authentic Indian craft heritage re-interpreted as classic, designer-style statements for urban sophisticates’
2. Use the brand concept as the communication platform and the lens with which to view the world
3. Explore consumer attitudes to the concept in each key market and identify the tasks to address, as well as locally-relevant insights
4. Write briefs for individual markets based on locally-appropriate advertising tasks and ways of propagating the brand concept to consumers in that market, using local insights
5. Check the advertising’s fidelity to the brand concept
6. Purists, pragmatists and entrepreneurs will take different implementation approaches.

for advertising, and identify insights to leverage in the advertising.

Using the brand concept in this way will help us identify the conventions prevailing in each market. Conventions are the unwritten rules that govern people’s perceptions of the brand, and decisions about it. Conventions in a market could relate to the category – the way it has been marketed so far; consumer needs – how they are manifested and fulfilled; culture – social norms and symbols that motivate and modulate people’s behaviour.

To determine the likely success of the brand concept in a market, we need to assess the solidity or flexibility of its conventions. If the conventions are solid and the brand concept stands in opposition to

the convention, this means that consumers would be unwilling to accept it and hence it is likely to fail. On the other hand, if the brand concept can ride on an existing solid convention, it will benefit from the social forces at work in the market and get greater power. If the convention is flexible – undergoing development or erosion in consumers’ minds – the brand concept may have an opportunity to reshape consumer values and gain as a result. It represents an opportunity to challenge convention, get differentiation and offer added value consumers.

It would also be possible to group markets in terms of their similarities and differences in responsiveness to the

brand idea. This could throw up counter-intuitive groupings – India, Brazil and South Africa could be similar, whereas a second cluster could consist of Argentina, China and Turkey.

Having got a strong brand concept, all three kinds of globalists – the purists, pragmatists and entrepreneurs – can implement it differently. The purists can define a uniform communication of the brand concept – in advertising and the retail experience. Pragmatists can develop similar advertising, or share advertising across groups of countries. And entrepreneurs stop at sharing a common advertising slogan for the brand. ■

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