



The Advertising Association

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Student Briefing No.3: The Advertising Agency

There are so many different ways to advertise, so many different 'audiences' and so many different media that getting the best out of advertising is a highly skilled job. It involves experts in many different fields - writers, artists, photographers, designers, television production crews and many others. Few of even the largest advertisers could afford to keep all these experts on their staff. Almost all advertising is arranged through an advertising agency which provides the skilled people who can turn the message into an effective advertisement. The agency is the link between the advertiser and the media where the advertisement will appear.

There is another good reason for using an agency. The advertiser will probably be too close to the business to see clearly how the message will look to the public. The staff of an agency can look at the message from the public's point of view.

What the agency does

The advertising agency finds out what message the advertiser wants to give to the audience, turns it into a piece of art-work for a newspaper or magazine, or into a commercial for TV or cinema, or a poster, and gives advice on which media should be used. But it can do much more than that. The best way to show how an agency works is to take an example of a particular **campaign**.

Researching the problem

This is the story of a fictitious milky bedtime drink called **Goodnight**. **Goodnight** has been made since the 1930s, but over recent years sales have steadily dropped. Goodnight Ltd want to find out why, and how sales could be improved. The company decides how many tins of **Goodnight** it would like to sell each year (the sales target) and how much it can afford to spend on advertising (the budget). Then it asks a number of advertising agencies to put forward their ideas.

The ABC agency gets the job. The first thing the agency does is to find out as many facts as possible about **Goodnight**. For example:

- How many tins of **Goodnight** are sold each year, compared with other similar drinks?
- How much **Goodnight** is sold compared with all the other kinds of drinks people have at bedtime?
- How does the price of **Goodnight** compare with the alternatives?

The answers tell the agency among other things, what **Goodnight's** market share is of milky drinks, and of all bedtime drinks.

But the agency needs to know about the people who drink **Goodnight** and - even more important - about the people who used to drink it but now choose something else. This is done by **market research**. A carefully chosen sample of people, including old, middle-aged, young, well off, poor and so on, is asked questions like this:,

- Who buys **Goodnight**?
- Does everyone in the family drink **Goodnight**, or only the children?
- Some people used to buy **Goodnight** but have changed to something else. Why?

- Do people think **Goodnight** is good value for money, or do they think of it as an expensive drink'?
- The answers are collected and studied. They show that:
- Mothers of junior school age children still buy **Goodnight**.
 - Mothers of older children sometimes stop buying it because teenagers think of **Goodnight** as a 'kid's' drink.
 - Most mothers think that a milky drink last thing at night is good for the digestion and helps to give people a good-night's sleep.
 - **Goodnight** is drunk mainly by children. Adults in families where **Goodnight** is drunk tend to have milky coffee at night.

The Campaign Plan

Now the ABC agency puts forward some ideas for the advertising campaign. Here are a few of them:

- Goodnight needs to be 'sold' to teenagers.
- Goodnight is a good relaxing drink for all the family - including adults.
- Having a drink together last thing at night makes a happy, relaxed family occasion.
- **Goodnight's** label could be changed to make it appeal more to teenagers.
- **Goodnight** could be made the 'hero' of a cartoon-type TV commercial to appeal directly to the children who drink it.

The agency and the makers of **Goodnight** discuss all these ideas at length. The makers don't like the idea of changing the label, which has looked the same since 1932. A change might confuse the people who still buy **Goodnight**. The first and last ideas are turned down because it is the parents who must be persuaded that their families need **Goodnight**. So the second and third ideas are left, and it is decided to work on these.

Putting over the message

The agency suggests a two-part campaign:

- TV commercials showing happy, relaxed families, including teenagers, drinking **Goodnight**.
- Full-page advertisements in the magazines read by mothers of teenagers. These will be used as reminders of the TV commercials and will show domestic scenes similar to those used on TV, with a picture of the **Goodnight** label and the one word **Goodnight**.

Here are some of the story-lines suggested for the TV commercials:

- Nick, 15, is busy revising for his exams. He's been at it all evening and looks exhausted. "Leave it now, Nick", says his mother, "and let's all have a mug of **Goodnight**". Fade to the next scene: the family sitting around drinking with Nick relaxed again.
- Sue, 17, comes home looking upset, "What's wrong?", says her mother. "Had a row with Peter." Sue bites her lip but says nothing. "Come on", says her mother, "let's talk it over with a mug of **Goodnight**".
- A young married couple are decorating their flat. It's late, and they're tired out. The wife tears a piece of wallpaper as she is putting it up. "Right, that's it", says her husband. "I'm going to make us a mug of **Goodnight**".

At the end of each story, a well-known personality's voice says, "**Goodnight** - end the day together".

The ABC agency represents **Goodnight** Ltd with these ideas in the form of storyboards - series of still drawings showing roughly what the TV commercials will look like. Roughts - rough drawings - of the magazine advertisements are prepared.

The agency and the manufacturers go through the storyboards, TV scripts and roughts carefully. Then the agency gets the go ahead.

Timing is everything

Each step of a large campaign like the one for **Goodnight** has to be planned carefully. **Goodnight** Ltd want their advertisements to appear in the autumn when people begin to think about nourishing, warming drinks. Some of the women's magazines go to press months before they appear in the shops, so advertisements have to be ready well in advance, and space has to be booked well ahead. Time must be allowed for the advertiser to see proofs of the advertisements to check them, and for copies of the finished TV commercials to be made and sent out to the programme companies. This control and progress chasing in the agency is done by those people whose job is known as **traffic control**.

Into Production

Once the makers of **Goodnight** are satisfied with the agency's plans, production begins. An artist is found for the magazine advertisements, and given instructions. The artist will also produce roughts for the agency and advertiser to see before the artwork is finished. The TV script is sent to the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre to make sure that it keeps to the strict rules for TV advertising. A production company is signed up to make the TV commercials. The production company signs the director, who is in charge of making the film, the camera, lighting and sound crews, and casts actors for the stories. Studios are booked, acting sets are built and rehearsals are organised.

The advertisements themselves - both TV and press are looked after by the agencies **creative department**. Meanwhile, the **media department** has booked suitable slots of television time and suitable space in the magazines. The **research department** is planning to follow up the campaign by finding out what the public thinks of the advertisements and whether more **Goodnight** has been sold. This information is fed back to the manufacturer so that he is continually aware of consumer reaction, and the possible need for a fresh response.

Does it work?

One way of finding out if the campaign has worked is to go out into the streets again and ask people about the advertisements. Here are some of the questions the ABC agency will ask:

- Have you seen the advertisements for **Goodnight**?
- Do you know what kind of product **Goodnight** is?
- What did the advertisements tell you about **Goodnight**?
- Have you bought **Goodnight** since you saw the advertisements?
- Do you intend to buy any?

Another way of finding out whether the campaign is effective is to look at sales figures before and after it.

Often, especially with TV commercials, advertisements are tried out in one region of the country before being used nationally. Market research after a test campaign can often lead to alterations before the national campaign starts.

Of course, not all advertising works. We saw earlier that the agency put up a number of ideas to the makers of **Goodnight**, and two were chosen for the campaign. Perhaps one or more of the other ideas might have been better. Or perhaps the reason why sales of **Goodnight** have fallen is that people are not keen on its taste. In that case, no amount of advertising; however good it is, will make any difference. Advertising can't sell something that people don't want to buy.