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Cool and beautiful but full of empty promises?

Chris Ingram's article on keeping consumers happy is highly positive for the "cool and beautiful brands" as he calls them (Customer service is still crucial – unless you're cool and beautiful, *MW* August 14). However, having a good brand will only get you so far – it's the delivery of the brand promise in communications that really counts.

Even if the brand is cool enough to shake off any bad press, customers will quickly desert a brand if they don't get the personalised and responsive contact they want.

It's important to do the basics right. Remember why a customer bought your brand in the first place. And keep those same company values running across all of your communications – from your front end marketing right through to your customer complaint responses. By the time a complaint comes, it's last chance saloon. Giving customers the right response, at the right time and in the right way is crucial for customer retention.

As with brands such as Nike and Apple with their uncluttered logo and values, clear, simple and honest communications reinforce any brand's promise and can go a long way to retaining customers in these difficult economic times. But the 'cool and beautiful' will only succeed if they work across all of a company's communications.

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Gut-feeling isn't a good creative measure...

With regard to your news analysis "The lamp-post theory of pitch research" (*MW* last week), the focus group still has its place when consumer input, such as in-depth discussions of emotional attachment to a brand, are needed. But it can be a long process and difficult to arrange, let alone quantify.

There are simpler ways of testing ad creatives, driven by data. For instance, we have access to an online panel of 30,000 UK consumers who can respond to research questions in real-time. So if they were asked "would this creative execution make you open the envelope?" the brand

would be provided with a snapshot of attitudes in days not weeks.

The beauty of using this insight to tweak creative work is that agencies do not need to base executions on a gut feeling or the mercurial whim of a marketing director.

This objectivity is of vital importance at a time when businesses are keen to achieve maximum ROI. Data – for too long a four-letter word driving fear into the hearts of creatives up and down the country – is due its day in the sunshine.

Alan Thorpe
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...and research has a place in some pitches

Your interesting piece on post-pitch research (*MW* last week) misses an important point. Clients don't always choose agencies because they want a long-term relationship. Sometimes they choose them because they want a specific campaign.



Nike and Apple: Simply does it

If a client wants "out of the box" creative then researching the preferred work may well help a decision. But if they want a long-term relationship it matters a lot less.

Over the years I've seen more clients appoint despite feeling the creative work "isn't quite there" than I've seen pitches lost because the creative got marked down in research. So, frustrating though it may be on occasion, agencies should not bitch about clients researching their work. In the long run we all get the clients we deserve.

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