

ACCOUNT PLANNING

THE BLUEPRINT FOR
A GREAT CAMPAIGN



ACCOUNT PLANNING

THE INSIDE STORY

It may not be totally untrue to say that the number of account planners in India is only a trifle more than the number of theories of what account planning is. In the many years of its existence, account planning has developed into a job function that exists not only in the advertising agencies but in client marketing departments, direct marketing agencies, design consultancies, PR firms, media independents, etc. It has long since existed outside its London birthplace, extending to the US and Canada, Hong Kong, Australia, Scandinavia, China, Brazil, Europe and India.

A Brief History of Account Planning

Where it Started and Why

Stephen King of JWT and Stanley Pollitt of BMP are the undisputed forefathers of Account Planning. In separate agencies, but at pretty much the same time, they started a revolution in the advertising world which has spread from the UK to other countries and from ad agencies to management consultancies, direct marketing, PR, design and client research departments.

In 1964, Stephen King, dissatisfied with the workings of both the media and marketing departments within his agency, developed a new system of working (the T-Plan or Target Plan) which concentrated on combining consumer research and insights to create more effective, creative advertising.

Stanley Pollitt in 1968, was concerned at the enormity of discretion given to account management in the writing of the creative brief, and felt that they were using data either incompetently or expediently. He wanted a research person at the elbow of the account man.

For Stanley, the voice of the consumer was of paramount importance, and using consumer research to clarify the issues and enrich the advertising development process was an essential component. When BMP was formed, each of its three accounts was managed by an account director and a (line function) account planner.

Both Stanley and Stephen shared a desire to reorganise the media planning, market research and marketing departments. Stephen initially by a process, and Stanley via a person. Both were led towards the creation of a new department and a new discipline.

The Origins of the Job Title

The name Account Planning was coined by Tony Stead at a JWT workshop in 1968, attended by media planners and account people from the marketing department.

He simply merged the two titles together as Stephen's new department was to comprise a hybrid selected folk from both disciplines. And so we have been saddled with one of the most obfuscatory job titles ever since.

Information Centre

Knowing where to go to find stuff out is key. Planners should always make time to feed their heads.

Soothsayer/Futurologist

This aspect of the planner's craft is to have a genuine interest in and capacity to generate knowledge about trends and anticipate social movements that their colleagues can actually use to grow their brands.

Data Analyst

The planner is charged with ensuring that all data relevant to the brand's communication decisions be properly analysed. It should be complemented with new research where appropriate, and then brought to bear on judgements of the creative strategy and evaluation of the communication.

Social Anthropologist

Monitoring cultural and social trends is a specialist task. The findings need to be fed in early to brand and creative development. Differentiating between mere fashion and genuine cultural trends is not something for the inexperienced. Many people can tell you what's in and what's out, but planners should be able to tell you why.

Writer of the Creative Brief

The brief is widely considered to be the planner's main product. There's considerably more to it than baby talk; clarity, brevity and fertility being the hygiene factors of a good creative brief. One that can spark ideas.

Insight Miner

"At the heart of an effective creative philosophy is the belief that nothing is so powerful as an insight into human nature, what compulsions drive a man, what instincts dominate his action, even though his language so often can camouflage what really motivates him". -Bill Bernbach
These insights about the client's business come from many areas:

- the consumer
- the client company's culture
- the marketplace/category
- the competition
- the brand (past, present, future) values
- the product qualities
- the advertising and communication conventions of the category

Strategic Thinker/ Strategy Developer

The planner identifies the key issue and determines the role for communication against a specific target.

Bad Cop/Good Cop

Planners tend to work in pairs. Very often, it makes sense to adopt the bad cop/good cop routine with some clients and some creatives in order to deliver somebad/ challenging/ alternative/ unexpected news without ruining the relationship.

Brainstorming Facilitator

More challenging, more exhausting and rewarding than the average group discussion because you'll (hopefully) be dealing with the Chairman, the Brand Manager and the Creative Director in the same session.

Media/Communications Planner

It is increasingly more important for the planner to understand the strategic role and effectiveness of different media, by target and by category, and know when and how it is relevant to use them to achieve the brand's objectives.

Market Researcher

Planners need to be able to ignore, challenge or exploit the data from a perspective built on understanding.

Qualitative Focus Group Moderator

Qualitative Research (and the ubiquitous Focus Group) has taken on an increasingly significant role in everyone's lives. It gives the planner a confidence and an authority he/she wouldn't otherwise be entitled to. It means you are both a psychologist and an interpreter.

Thinking about the portfolio nature of the planner's working day, we've made a list of the various job functions and skill sets a planner often needs to fulfil.

Almost every communications agency (and their clients) benefits from a disciplined system for devising communications/advertising/commercial strategy and enhancing its ability to produce outstanding creative solutions that will be effective in the marketplace. It is the planner's job to guide or facilitate this process via the astute application of knowledge or consumer/market understanding. Planners are in a unique position in their jobs because they have an understanding of the audience through research expertise AND an understanding of how it will be applied within their own business, thus they provide a crucial bridge. At the core of this task, is the need to understand the consumer/customer and the brand to unearth a key insight for the communication/ solution (Relevance).

As media channels have mushroomed and communication channels have multiplied, it has become increasingly important for communication to cut through the cynicism and connect with its audience (Distinctiveness). And as planners move into client companies, brand identity companies, design companies and the internet world, the planner can provide the edge needed to ensure the solution reaches out through the clutter to its intended audience. Moreover, to continue the learning cycle, planners must also recognise the need to demonstrate how and why the communication has performed (Effectiveness). Finally, planners must bring upstream thinking to the brand's development. Brands must move forward, or they die!

WHO IS AN

ACCOUNT PLANNER

Key Characteristics

Curiosity about what makes people act and think the way they do; capable of real insights into motivation; someone who understands that what people say is not necessarily what they believe or do; someone who is detailed enough to examine a problem from different perspectives without losing sight of the big picture; logical and analytical, yet capable of lateral thought; views research as a means to an end; not technique-oriented; pragmatic approach to problem solving.

Ability to conceptualise and think strategically; ability to clearly identify problems (getting to the nub of it); capable of taking a commercial and making a reasonable judgement/guess on its intended effects (role of advertising, target consumer, desired responses); intuitive about people, brands and advertising; able to portray a target consumer without immediately stating demographics; an understanding of advertising as only one tool in the marketing mix, its potential uses and its limitations; an ability to see alternate strategic routes for a given problem/brand.

Numerate. Able to visualise the meaning of numbers and generate hypotheses, or draw conclusions; an eclectic user of information, with a desire to draw on all sources rather than just the most recent; someone who accepts nothing at face value, and challenges assumptions until the whole picture (sales, quantitative, qualitative, competitive info, etc.) makes sense.

Advertising orientation; passionate about the subject. Also someone who enjoys talking about advertising. Presentation skills; able to argue a point of view coherently and concisely; not afraid of big or senior audiences; able to win an argument without making the protagonist (client) feel like a loser; quick-thinker; able to speak authoritatively, without seeming dogmatic or inflexible.

People skills; a team player; someone who can appreciate and use inputs from others; someone who knows when to push and when to relax. Great personality! Must be able to see the funny side of it all; to be a participant, not an observer; involvement must be genuine, not forced; must be able to deal with pressure, unpredictable circumstances, an informal, loosely structured work environment, and criticism; not territorial nor defensive nor paranoid.

WHAT ROLE DOES PLANNING FULFIL