

# If You Don't Have a Strategy, You Handicap Your Advertising

*Resist short-cutting the creative process.*

BY DICK MAGGIORE

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A prospective client recently came to a wise conclusion, but the first words out of her mouth were a bit foreboding.

"That's what I was afraid you'd say," our prospect said.

"This prospect may not be the right fit for our agency," I thought.

Turns out, however, she was not "afraid" in the literal sense that our ad agency was going to steer her in a problematic direction. Rather, she was acknowledging that the recommendation, while not what she wanted to hear, was the right thing for her company.

What our new friend heard was our counsel that before we invested a single minute in creative design and writing for her company, we needed to determine the strategy that would drive the work. She had called with a let's-cut-to-the-chase mindset, ready to get the work checked off her company's to-do list. But by the time the call was over, she was convinced she would be wasting time and money if she didn't take our strategy-first counsel.

Though it may be tempting to take the path of least resistance—and profit from some whose guts tell them to advertise for the sake of advertising—we highly recommend and heartily endorse advertising responsibly. It's our mantra. As a matter of fact, we have trademarked Advertise Responsibly™. It's that important.



Dick Maggiore is the president and CEO of Innis Maggiore Group Inc., based in Canton.

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I can tell you our growth since 1974 is testimony to the soundness of the strategy-first positioning approach that benefits all companies and organizations.

No matter your business or the marketplace in which you compete, getting the right strategy is job one in an advertising or public relations campaign. And regardless of the media you employ to get the message to your audience—from traditional to the latest digital—you need a solid strategy before an artist, writer or digital programmer even begins to work on your behalf.

But the temptation is to shortcut, to cut to the chase that is more fun

and tangible.

I've been in the advertising business for nearly 35 years and I know it's agonizing to wait for that hot new design copy that resonates, the jingle that breaks through the clutter and is remembered, or the video that can't be ignored.

It's as though our culture has moved to a place where waiting is no longer a virtue, where investing in intangibles (like strategies) might get you fired.

Experience proves, however, that time invested in getting the right strategy actually saves ad dollars and, most important, vastly increases ROI. Working on your strategy brings clarity to your proposition, focus on your

target and impact to the dramatization of your message. Getting the right strategy is the absolutely essential step before decisions are made on tactics and media.

All of this means that when strategy is the starting point, you are more likely to put your most compelling and relevant proposition directly in front of your best audiences in dramatic fashion. You will advertise responsibly.

We always recommend strategy first. For all of our clients, whether they sell fine hardwoods' beauty like Baird Brothers or work in advancing titanium like RTI International Metals, it always boils down to defining the strategy.

RTI and Baird Brothers may have vastly different products (they do!) and completely different audiences (indeed!), but they have in common what all advertisers do, the simple purpose of being in business: to create and keep customers.

Differentiation is the key, whether one is selling fine hardwoods or aerospace titanium.

Positioning is about getting the right idea, the differentiating idea. Then, when Baird Brothers and RTI dramatize their differentiation in their marketplaces, they give their audiences the most relevant reasons to purchase from them.

We believe advertising that lacks a solid positioning strategy, and thus no truly differentiating idea, is simply irresponsible.

Get the strategy right first. Then, and only then, can the creative process be the optimum investment for your company.