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# The new role for advertising planning

## Review of the Account Planning Group's 'How to plan advertising'

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'How to plan advertising' is a book about insights. With eleven authors contributing on different aspects of planning, it provides a great number of them, so that the book as a whole fulfils the editor's objective of providing 'a practical how-to-do-it guide to planning and evaluating advertising'. I would recommend it to anyone interested in brands and communication, whatever their discipline.

However, I couldn't help feeling, underneath the skin of the book, a cumulative sense of uncertainty: not uncertainty about creative development, research, or creative briefs and briefings, which are covered systematically and confidently, but a more general uncertainty about the purpose and means of advertising. For example, Paul Edwards suggests 'It has become a cliché to state that marketing is a discipline under pressure'. He then continues: 'this provides an opportunity for the planner to contribute to the broader "planning" process and to become indispensable to the clients' business development.'

Uncertainty is conducive to new thinking. The chapters I enjoyed the most wrestled with the role of advertising and therefore the contribution to be made by planning.

M T Rainey took a Renaissance perspective, picking up on the best of planning over the last 30 years before building a new view, risking 'total vilification' by suggesting that 'planning can be the new creativity, or at the very least, planning can lead the new creativity.' This is not antagonistic to any other discipline within Advertising, when her aim on behalf of clients is to provide 'transformational ideas that transcend advertising'. I subscribe to that view, and more than any other chapter, perhaps, this rehearsed the future of planning.

Two other chapters struck a personal chord - Michael Harvey representing 'other communication industries' and Dan O'Donoghue looking at 'account planning and media planning'. In both you could perceive the growing remit of planners beyond M T Rainey's 'ad tweaker', 'storyteller' or 'brand positioner' historic caricatures. With Paul Edwards including loyalty cards as part of his piece, I felt planning really was spreading its wings from the previous edition.

In direct marketing agencies I have heard of planners called 'data planners'. In media companies there is clearly a distinction between buyers and planners. Michael Harvey used to be a planner in an advertising agency, then in a design agency, before he became head of consumer planning at Guinness. Planning seems to be all the rage while simultaneously fragmenting. This comes back to the sense of uncertainty. What should a planner be nowadays? Indeed what should advertising be?

A client I work with was reflecting recently on the debate about the role of management consultants versus the role of communication or advertising agencies - a debate not openly acknowledged in the book, but implicit in it nonetheless. My client saw it this way. 'Economics' he said, 'is basically made up of supply and demand. Management consultants are never happier than when they have got a

good bit of supply to get stuck into. Efficiencies of supply are their bread and butter, but efficiencies of demand? Demand is not where they are happiest, especially when dealing with a business where new demand is a pre-requisite of business success.'

In my client's mind the division of opportunity for management consultants versus agencies was therefore simple: they do 'supply', and you do 'demand'.

As I read the book, this thought kept popping into my head, as each of the authors added to the scope of planning. Every aspect of communication from pack design to point of sale, from TV advertising to the Internet is addressing 'demand'.

Identifying the new demand as well as finding the most effective ways of optimising it, therefore becomes the role of marketing, and in this context no person is better qualified to help fulfill that role than the planner.

In conclusion, I would like to add to some of the healthy uncertainty that exists as a strand throughout this book. Yes, the role of the planner has expanded since the first edition, just as the role of advertising now stretches into all forms of marketing communication and beyond. This means getting to the heart of human demand and the motivation for it, which can help drive clients' business, rather than just their communication. Management consultants, marketing departments and advertising agencies all have the means to achieve this. On the evidence of this book, the good thing for advertising agencies, and for planners, is that this is being recognised, as advertising and planners search for new ways of developing their discipline. I take the variety of approaches to this issue, and the absence of an absolute answer, as a good thing.