

THINK SIMPLE. I bought a watch the other day. An analogue watch, with a face, an hour and second hand, and a day and date window. The accompanying manual for the watch was 96 pages long. 96. I wonder what it said.

I bought a new MacBook Air on the same day. It had no manual at all. I just pushed the power on button and it was instinctive what to do. It just worked. It was simple, not complicated.

And I know why that is. Apple has two unofficial mantras. One is “Think Different.” The other is that everything they design should be “Simple and human.”

I like simple and human. It avoids imposing unnecessary information on me that I don’t need. It is what Apple does better than anyone. Look at their advertising—the best product presentation in the world. It tells you nothing, but at the same time tells you everything. Simplicity personified. It provokes desire.

This is a good rule for writing a brief for solving a communications challenge.

SIMPLE GIFTS



KEEP IT SIMPLE. The design brief for the iconic Coca-Cola bottle was one line: “Design a bottle so distinct that you would recognize it by feel in the dark or lying broken on the ground.” The subsequent “contour bottle” designed by the Root Glass company of Indiana in 1915 was not only recognizable in the dark, but also if it had been shattered. Simple brief. Added benefit.

For the similarly iconic Citroën De Chevaux motor car, it was to “Design a car that can be driven across a ploughed field without breaking eggs.” It was to help farmers who were still using horse-and-cart transportation. “De Chevaux” translates as “of horses.” The simple brief not only produced a car, but a name for it as well. And I am willing to bet that it didn’t have a 96-page manual.

COMPLEX BAD, SIMPLICITY GOOD. As communications professionals, this strikes me as a good thing to think about. The balance between the complex issue, and the simple solution. The need to distill detailed rational information on a subject, with a concise articulation and presentation of the message you wish to convey.

Like good design,
the goal of
communications
is intuitive
understanding
and engagement,
says
Brunswick’s **MATT
SHEPHERD-SMITH.**

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Of course the long and the short messages are both important. Detailed knowledge is king in critical decision making. Data and facts are persuasive. But so is the headline if you get it right. The pithy communication that draws the audience in, giving them enough of a taste to want to chew off a bit more.

We might think about this as paddling, swimming or diving. In communications, you must cater to all of them, with company websites as an essential place for all of these things to work in tandem.

Many businesses don’t bother with the paddling. They only cater for the swimmers and divers.

AND THIS IS A MISTAKE. Most stakeholders in business are too busy to swim or dive unless they have a good impression of the business. They expect it to stand for something positive and clear. They want a simple and inviting promise.

But the simple “toe in the water” message is the hardest to get right, because you have to leave so much out. What parts do you jettison and what do you retain?

Simplicity sells, reductionism is difficult. But it is essential to effective communications. ♦