

# “How to Make Your Communications 19 1/2 Times More Successful”

*Stefano Boscutti has created more than \$7,480,000,000 of brand value for clients with nothing more than creative ideas.*

*Here are 44 things we've learned along the way.*

**1. Universal truth.** Communications is an art, not a science. People first make decisions emotionally which they then rationalise logically. People all over the world across every demographic want what they've always wanted - love, acceptance, beauty, health, nutrition, community, social status, relief from suffering, transcendence. Ease up on the technology. Go for the humanity.



*"The Apple Store was probably the best ad we ever did." Lee Clow*

**2. Everything is communications.** Advertising, public relations, corporate affairs, marketing, branding, design, etc. It's all communications. Every way your brand interacts with people is an opportunity to communicate successfully. Or not.

**3. Brand personality.** Every piece of communications should contribute to the complex symbol which is the brand personality. Ninety-five percent of all communications is created ad hoc. Most brands lack any consistent personality from one year to another. This breeds scepticism and distrust.

**4. Most important decision.** We've earned the effect of your communications depends more on this decision than any other: *How should you position your brand?* Should you position Qantas as an airline or the spirit of Australia? Should you position Lexus as a luxury car or an idea in pursuit of perfection? The results of your campaign depend less on how we create your communications than on how your brand is positioned.

**5. Large promise.** The second most important decision is this: *What should you promise people?* A promise is not a claim or a theme or a slogan. It's a benefit, clear and simple. It pays to promise a benefit which is unique and competitive. And the brand must deliver the benefit you promise. Most communications promise nothing.

**6. Big ideas.** Unless your communications are built on a BIG IDEA, it will pass like a ship in the night. It takes a BIG IDEA to jolt people out of their indifference. To make them notice your communications, remember it and take action. BIG IDEAS are usually simple ideas. BIG SIMPLE IDEAS are not easy to come by. They require genius and midnight oil. A truly big one can change a company's fortunes - like Apple's THINK DIFFERENT campaign.

**7. How to recognise a big idea.** According to David Ogilvy, it will help if you ask yourself these five questions:  
- Did it make me gasp when I first saw it?  
- Do I wish I had thought of it myself  
- Is it unique?  
- Does it fit the strategy to perfection?  
- Could it be used for 30 years?

**8. How Aristotle recognises a big idea.** Ask yourself these three questions: *Is it lucid? Is it pleasing? Is it strange?*

**9. Words make all the difference.** There's a magnitude of difference between good and bad communications. John Caples has seen one advertisement sell 19 1/2 times as much as another. Same size, same image, same copy. Different headline. A handful of words can make all the difference between failure and success.

**10. Medium is the message.** Context is king. How your message appears says more than you think. When BHP runs a quarter-page advertisement in the Australian Financial Review for its "Think Big" campaign, it's actually thinking small. At best it negates the message. At worst it triggers cognitive dissonance and seeds distrust.

**11. Positively good.** How do you stand out in a world of product and service parity? Don't slam the competition, don't get down in the muck. Convince people that your brand is positively good.

**12. High-quality.** It pays to give most brands an image of high-quality. Stefano Boscutti has been conspicuously successful in doing this for Apple, Ford, Levi's, Nike, Porsche, Qantas, SBS and others. If your communications look ugly, people will conclude that your brand is shoddy, and they'll be less likely to buy it.

**13. Don't be a bore.** Nobody was ever bored into paying attention. Yet most communications are impersonal, detached, cold and dull. It pays to involve people. Talk to them like a human being (not an algorithm). Charm them. Make them smile. Get them to participate.

**14. Be first.** Be a leader. Start trends instead of following them. Communications which follow a fashionable fad or are imitative is seldom successful. It pays to innovate.

**15. Psychological segmentation.** Any good communications agency knows how to position brands for demographic segments of the market - for women, for young children, for farmers in Far North Queensland, etc. But we've learned it often pays to position brands for psychological segments of the market.

**16. Burr of singularity.** The average person is now exposed to thousands of communications a day. Most of them slide off their memory like water off a duck's back. Give your communications a flourish of singularity, a MNEMONIC DEVICE, or relevant symbol - like the triple drumstick logo we devised for Triple J.

**17. Don't bury news.** It's easier to interest people in a product or service when it's new than at any other point in its life. Many brands have a fatal instinct for burying news. Launch your new product or service with a loud BOOM!

**18. Go the whole hog.** Most communications campaigns are too complicated. They reflect a long list of marketing objectives from well-intentioned committees. They embrace the divergent views of too many executives. By attempting too many things, they achieve nothing. Boil down your strategy to one simple promise - and go the whole hog in delivering that promise.

## What works best in commercials

**19. Avoid irrelevant celebrities.** Testimonial commercials are almost always successful if you make them credible. Either celebrities or real people can be effective.

**20. Problem-solution.** You set up a problem that people recognise. Then you show how your product or service can solve that problem. And you prove the solution. This technique has always been above average in gaining attention.

**21. Visual demonstrations.** It pays to visualise your promise. It saves time. It drives the promise home. It's memorable.

**22. Slice of life.** These playlets are corny, but they've been known to get actors re-elected as President of the United States.

**23. Show don't tell.** Make your pictures tell the story. What you show is more important than what you say. Many commercials drown the viewer in a torrent of words.

**24. On-camera voice.** Commercials using on-camera voice do significantly better than commercials using voice-over.

**25. Musical backgrounds.** Most commercials use musical backgrounds. But musical backgrounds reduce recall of your commercial. Very few creatives accept this.

**26. Stand-ups.** The stand-up pitch can be effective if it's delivered with direct, straightforward honesty.

**27. Animation.** Cartoons or animation are less persuasive than live commercials. Cartoons do not invite belief (unless you're talking to children).

**28. Salvage commercials.** Many commercials which test poorly can be salvaged. Faults revealed by the test can be corrected. We've doubled the effectiveness of a commercial simply by re-editing it.

**29. Grabbers.** Commercials with an exciting opening hold their audience at a higher level than commercials which begin quietly.

## What works best in headlines

**30. Branded headlines.** Five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. So if you don't include the brand in your headline, you've wasted 80 percent of your money.

**31. Benefit in headlines.** Headlines that promise a benefit are more effective than those that don't.

**32. News in headlines.** It pays to inject genuine news into headlines. People are always on the lookout for new products and services, or new improvements.

**33. Simple headlines.** Your headline should telegraph what you want to say in clear, simple language. Readers don't stop to decipher the meaning of obscure headlines.

**34. How many words in a headline?** David Ogilvy found that headlines of ten words or longer sold more goods than short headlines. In terms of recall, headlines between eight and ten words are most effective.

**35. Localise headlines.** In local communications, include the name of the city in your headline.

**36. Select your prospects.** When you advertise a product which is consumed only by a special group, it pays to flag that group in your headline - ART LOVERS, GOING TO EUROPE?

## What works best in copy

**37. Yes, people read long copy.** People read what interests them as long as it's well written. While readership can fall off rapidly up to fifty words, it drops very little between fifty and five hundred words. (This page contains 1,850 words, and you're still reading it.) Stefano Boscutti has used long copy with notable success - for Nike, Orica, ANZ, Qantas and others.

**38. Story appeal in words.** Stefano Boscutti has achieved notable results with copy structured as a story. People are naturally drawn to a narrative sequence that puts them at the heart of a story that leads to transformative success.

## What works best in design

**39. Story appeal in photographs.** Create photographs that suggest a story. Enough of a hint that people want to read the copy to find out what's going on. All it takes is a little juxtaposition, an unexpected visual twist.

**40. Before & After.** Any form of visualised contrast seems to work well. Such contrast reduces drama to its most elemental.

**41. Photographs vs. artwork.** We've invariably found that original photographs work better than drawings. Original photographs attract more readers, generate more appetite appeal, are more believable and better remembered.

**42. Use captions.** Twice as many people read the captions under the photographs as read the body copy.

**43. Editorial layouts.** Simple, non-fussy editorial layouts get higher readership than conventional advertisements.

**44. Simple brand assets.** Create consistent, constantly-used, easy-to-remember brand assets which over time will create distinctive memory structures. These sensory and semantic cues will refresh and reinforce memory structures and keep your brand top of mind.

## Is this all we know?

These findings apply to most brands, most categories of products and services. But not to all.

That's why Stefano Boscutti has developed specialised information on what makes for success in communicating food products, travel destinations, financial services, media properties and other industries. It's for the education of our creatives and the benefit of clients.

## Stefano Boscutti

Want to make your communications more valuable? More successful? Stefano Boscutti has a comprehensive one-hour presentation on successful communications. If you'd like to see it, please email [stef@boscutti.com](mailto:stef@boscutti.com)