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Media Planner  
October 25, 2004

## You've Made a Plan-Now Execute It

**Smart Teams Don't Take Chances With Final Results-They Put a Strategy in Place to Make Sure Plan Happens**

By Mark Dominiak

Special to TelevisionWeek

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As usually happens when I try to get my writer's juices flowing, I'm struggling to come up with a good metaphor to frame the theme of this piece. It doesn't help that I have the Yankees/Red Sox game on in the background-or does it? It occurs to me as the Yankees have yet another Rivera blown save against the Red Sox that my elusive metaphor is staring me straight in the face: Eight stellar innings by a team are worthless if it can't take care of business in the ninth.

I discussed this notion with a teammate while celebrating after a particularly fulfilling plan development and presentation. We experienced a very tough time making headway with a client on a regional, seasonal brand and finally broke through with innovative consumer work and many tactics new to them. One of the things that finally sold them was the way we intended to implement spot radio, particularly how we were going to use merchandising and dozens of remotes to generate local buzz.

We arrived back at the office with folks happily patting each other on the back. "What do you think?" a teammate asked. My mind immediately jumped to the intricacies of pulling off many radio buys and the hours of negotiations with spot reps soon to be faced. "We might have some pleased clients now," I said, "but that won't mean squat if we don't execute the plan well."

Just as eight innings of dominance will not guarantee a victory, a great plan will quickly become a dog if the planning team doesn't use due diligence in implementation. It's an extremely important dictum for a couple of reasons. First, the positive equity a planning team builds by delivering a killer media plan evaporates when execution fails. Key among that equity is trust and intellectual respect, two things a media planner does not want to lose once they have been earned.

Secondly, execution is the media planner's opportunity to give the plan its best chance of success, both in the client's eyes and in the marketplace. When executed properly, it's easier to determine whether or not the plan's strategic intent was achieved. When executed poorly, marketplace problems cast suspicion on all facets of the plan. Was it an ill-conceived strategy or poor execution? The last thing a media planner wants a client to think is, "If the planning team can't execute appropriately, maybe their strategic approach is questionable?" When the plan runs the way it was intended, results speak for themselves.

Getting from a successful plan presentation to final execution is no picnic, but there are a number of steps media planners can take to make sure carefully crafted plans run in the way they are intended.

### Leave Nothing to Chance

Design a plan to execute the plan. The Next Steps section of the media plan is a great place to get a head start. It also gives the client a good idea of what the key pieces of the execution process will be. Planners should take the Next Steps and flesh them out in detail as the first step in the implementation process. What are all of the small steps that need to be taken to get the message into the marketplace? When must they happen? Who is responsible for that facet of implementation?

### Everybody on Same Page

Make sure everything and everybody are on the same page. When the execution plan is ready, the entire team should sit down and discuss it. In today's world of consolidation, that is harder to do with teams geographically separated. Even so, set up time as a team and teleconference if necessary. Try to reflect execution details in a checklist the team can use to navigate through the process. Make sure everyone on the team knows his or her responsibility and hits the ground running.

### Keep Vendors in the Loop

Communicate with vendors as deeply as possible. The reason for this is simple: Vendor partners who have deeper understanding deliver more effectively in the execution process. They submit more focused packages, more useful merchandising and generally can deliver more quickly than when they are well informed.

### Interim Communications

Issue an interim contact report or status document. While this step may seem to take time away from real execution, there are two good reasons to consider it. First, it prompts the media team to double-check its work against the execution checklist. Better to catch missed items or errors before the end of the process. Secondly, it keeps clients informed and motivated. Execution can take a long time. Planners do not want positive energy gained with the client early process to flag. An interim report is a great way to keep the client's energy level high up to airdate.

### Issue Final Reports

Taking this step in the process helps ensure that the planning team has indeed dotted the i's and crossed the t's. Anything that may have slipped through the cracks should be caught at this step of the process. Multiple reports may need to be issued for different segments of the plan.

Broadcast execution details differ significantly from magazine or Internet, and each may be better captured in its own document. Also, it never hurts to have a platform that can be used to manage client expectations when so many details are involved.

Finally, don't pass up another opportunity to demonstrate how the plan's execution will impact consumers in the marketplace. In the situation referred to earlier, we were able to issue a comprehensive document detailing the remotes, events and merchandising that would physically connect the brand to consumers in each local marketplace.

In addition to generating client excitement, it was a springboard for the brand to mobilize the local sales force to a higher level of activity than first envisioned. The subsequent market results for the brand were outstanding.

Bottom line is this: A stellar performance by any team can fail unless it can bring in a dominant closer to seal the deal. For media planners, that closer is flawless execution.

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