

Chapter 3
The Alternative Brand Contact

“Resist the usual”
Raymond Rubicam

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two addressed the shift from company or product based inside-out thinking to consumer oriented, outside-in thinking in the process of brand communications planning.

To build an integrated brand identity the single-minded brand positioning strategy must not only emerge in the Advertising, Direct Marketing, Sales Promotional, Personal Selling and Public Relations efforts of the brand but must be communicated and reinforced at every point of contact with the brand. Hence the process of integrated brand contact planning.

The role of the Integrated Communications Agency is to assist the Brand Contact Task Team, as a strategic partner, in the assessment and integration of all points of brand contact. The agency’s key responsibility is to plan and manage planned points of brand contact, to contribute to the building of an integrated brand identity. It is within the domain of planned brand contacts, that Chapter Three will set out to challenge conventional brand contact planning.

The brand communications arena is characterised by increasing levels of competition and commercial messages. As Ries and Ries (2000:115) argued, consumers experience a cornucopia of choice and are inundated by a proliferation of communication messages.

Taking ownership of a relevant and differentiated positioning on a defined and single-minded level, at each point of brand contact, will present a focussed

and integrated brand identity. However, if points of brand contact are not noticed, the impact of an integrated brand contact strategy is diluted. The focussed brand positioning has little chance of being communicated, if the point of brand contact fails to rise above commercial clutter and impact on consumers. As Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2001:435) comment, brand communications that go unnoticed can not inform or persuade. The alternative brand contact concept will be introduced as part of the outside-in and zero-based contact planning philosophy.

Target audiences are growing accustomed to the traditional modes of planned brand contact. Belch and Belch (1998:113) confirm that consumers more aggressively apply selective exposure and selective attention measures. These commercial defence mechanisms are erected in expected contact areas, to avoid the brand communications onslaught.

The Integrated Communications Agency will need to accept the challenge of developing planned points of brand contact that will succeed in cutting through clutter in order to impact on consumers. The development of an integrated brand identity depends on the ability of planned points of contact to be noticed.

The alternative point of brand contact addresses this challenge. An alternative brand contact is defined from the outside-in, that is from the consumer's point of view, and entails an unexpected and unconventional brand contact experience. Alternative brand contacts are furthermore media-neutral in that they can be employed through the manipulation of traditional media or through the introduction of new forms of planned brand contact.

Chapter Three will employ secondary research to investigate the nature, role and growth of the alternative brand contact. The process of alternative brand contact planning will be investigated to highlight the importance of creative strategic thinking in developing unconventional brand communication approaches. The value of the cross-functional account team structure, in the Integrated Communications Agency, will also be debated in this regard.

Limited sources were encountered on the topic of unexpected and unconventional points of brand contact. The need for alternative brand contact planning is however expressed, hence the focus on the nature, role and growth of alternative points of brand contact. To prevent a biased assessment of alternative brand contact planning, secondary research sources were furthermore investigated and relevant opinions integrated, to present possible barriers and requisites to the planning and implementation of alternative brand contacts. Chapter Three will conclude with an investigation of the identified barriers and requisites to alternative brand contact planning.

The dynamics of alternative brand contact planning is investigated through secondary research, with a view to researching perceptions of the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof, in the South African marketing and communications industry. Chapter Three thus delivers the theoretical framework upon which the perceptions of South African marketing and communications professionals of the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, will be investigated.

3.2 Defining the Alternative Brand Contact

The denotative meaning of the word 'alternative' defines the choice between two or more things. The use of one of two, or more possibilities. The word has evolved however to refer to institutions, systems or thinking that is nontraditional, for example alternative media and alternative journalism (Thesaurus.com). Holhut (2001:5) illustrates that alternative journalism for example, aims to challenge and liberate mainstream media. Alternative journalism moves beyond the traditional styles of journalism to deliver unconventional attitudes and opinions.

The interpretation of the word alternative in marketing communications is, however, indicative of traditional inside-out thinking. The concept is applied in the context of media classifications, to refer to the difference and choice between, for example, above-the-line mass media and 'alternative' below-the-

line promotional tools, such as sales promotions and direct marketing. Rossiter and Percy (1997:8) for example, state that in Integrated Marketing Communications the media choices extend beyond conventional advertising media to include “ sales promotion media, such as sampling, coupons, or loyalty programs; corporate PR media, such as press releases, special events, or sponsorships; and direct response media, such as direct response ads in mass media, or by mail, by telephone, in home, or at the point of purchase”. Pereira (2001:60) similarly explains that alternative media, sometimes referred to as below-the-line marketing, come in the guises of for example, direct mail, one-to-one marketing, SMS technology, customer relationship marketing, promotions and competitions.

As previously discussed in Chapter Two (2.3), and as reinforced by Schultz and Barnes (1995:3-8) and Ries and Ries (2000:108), it is strategically fatal to define, categorise and plan advertising and other forms of marketing communications from the practitioner’s point of view. Differentiating between traditional above-the-line, mass media and below-the-line, alternative communication mediums is indicative of classical inside-out thinking. The brand and its points of contact must be viewed from the outside-in, in other words, through the eyes of the customer, prospective consumer and other stakeholders.

In context of the outside-in and zero-based contact planning philosophy, advocated by Drucker in Webster (1994:7), Schultz and Barnes (1995:3-8), Duncan (1995:5), Ries and Ries (2000:108), Hofmeyr and Rice (2000:29) and Belch and Belch (2001:10-11) alternative brand contacts are thus defined as those contacts that are experienced as unconventional and unexpected by the consumer.

This study submits that it is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. The alternative brand contact is not bound by media type and is therefore, in keeping with the zero-based planning approach, media neutral. The strategic challenge and qualifying factor is the unconventional and

unexpected experience of the point of contact, whether in a traditional or nontraditional media environment. In support, Aaker and Joachimstahler (2000:295) observe that it is by implementing “familiar programs in an innovative way or by creating new programs” that alternative brand building is effectively introduced. Hilton and Maclean in Dru (2002:148) likewise argue that it is by aiming to connect with consumers at an unexpected point in time and environment that a powerful unconventional idea is born.

This study will explore the perceived nature and role of alternative brand contacts, within the context of the outside-in, integrated brand contact approach, in the South African marketing and communications industry.

3.3 The Growth of Alternative Brand Contacts

Secondary research indicates that there are a number of core reasons for the growth in alternative points of brand contact. An integrated assessment reveals two primary motivators. The first of which, is clients’ demand for not only greater accountability but also a higher level of innovation in brand contact planning.

Clients are seeking innovative planned brand contact solutions within and beyond the traditional scope of contact planning. A second powerful motivator is encountered in the brand communications environment. To achieve impact, points of brand contact need to succeed in cutting through increasing levels of commercial clutter. The alternative brand contact addresses this challenge. The two primary motivators for the implementation of alternative points of brand contact will next be investigated in greater depth.

3.3.1 Client Demand for Innovative Contact Planning

Clients increasingly demand more accountability from their communication partners. As Oosthuizen (1996:35) and Duncan and Moriarty (1997:231) indicate, the advertising agency is expected to exhibit holistic and profound strategic insight and skill, in the integration and development of brand contact communications. Patterson (2001:81) confirms that the objective is to sell product and build brands, which requires strategic relevance in brand contact planning.

Oosthuizen (1996:35), Skankar and Horton (1999:3), Curtis (2001:138), Phillipson (2001:6), Mendoza and Greaves (2001:13), Dawson in Dru (2002:81), Steinhobel (2003:8) and Rogers (2003:17) furthermore assert that clients are also increasingly seeking brand communications solutions beyond the tried and trusted, mostly traditional, brand communication methods.

According to Kelly and Littman (2002:3) the single biggest trend in the corporate world today is the acknowledgement of innovation as the critical construct in the development of strategies and initiatives. This is particularly true for the field of brand communications. Clients are in need of innovative thinking or as Rogers (2003:17) reasons, “blue sky thinking”, from their brand communication partners. It is becoming more and more difficult to rise above the flood of expected traditional commercial messages. Clients thus expect of their communication partners to present brand communication solutions that will ensure that their brand messages get noticed.

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:5) voice the concern of today’s marketers and state that “placing more emphasis on traditional marketing practices is no longer the efficient way to build brands”. Herber (2000:7; 2001:78), in agreement, warns that brand communications that merely deliver more of the same, in repackaged form, are bound to fail. Ries and Ries (2002:85) more blatantly argue that advertisers are in search of alternative contact solutions because “traditional advertising isn’t working that well”. Brand communication or contact plans today, must contribute new strategic ideas and contact

innovation. Duncan (2002:369) concludes that clients are no longer “satisfied just to have their messages sent or shown to target audiences”.

Planned points of brand contact must add value to brand messages by increasing their impact, their potential to create awareness and a meaningful brand impression. Clients today require both integrated and innovative strategic thinking.

A ‘Catch 22’ is encountered in addressing this challenge. The traditional advertising agency in South Africa primarily earns its income through the approximate 16.5% commission received from media owners, on total media expenditure.

Commission-based remuneration however, debilitates the advertising agency in its role as brand communications partner. It drives the agency as Yeo (1999:49) and Heyns (2001:50) assert, to spend as much of the communications budget as possible in big media. The result is that the agency finds itself serving the sources of commission rather than the brand and its best interests.

Bosman (2000:63) submits that the application of a commission-based remuneration system, erodes agency accountability – “we take briefs from the client but are paid by the media”. The outcome, according to Oosthuizen (2000(b):63), is that clients encounter agencies that are wholly preoccupied with the size of budgets and the amount of commission to be earned.

Evidently the commission-based system does not always work to the brand’s best interests. To present holistic, integrated and innovative brand contact solutions and not just recommend media from which commission can be earned, as Oosthuizen (1996:35) observes, the advertising agency must shift from commission-based to fee-based remuneration systems. Yeo (1999:49) in agreement, urges that the advertising agency must embrace its role in delivering business advice and not in making money out of producing advertising.

Walker (2000:3) and Billet in Rogers (2003:17) however indicate that there is a definite global shift from commission-based payment to fee-based remuneration approaches. An AdFocus (2000:62-63) survey, conducted by the Financial Mail, reveals that well over a third of advertising agency income in South Africa have shifted away from commission to fee or performance-based remuneration.

According to AdFocus, South African agencies are, as a result, waking up to encounter convulsive change in the way that they operate. As previously confirmed by Fitzgerald (1995:46), Schultz and Barnes (1995:46) and Duncan and Moriarty (1997: 257), the traditional advertising agency must evolve into an accountable Integrated Communications Agency, with the insight and skill to add value on all levels of integrated brand contact management.

AdFocus (2000:62) responds that the South African advertising industry is “moving closer to the client perception that the word ‘advertising’, is not a narrowly defined discipline, differentiated from ‘below-the-line’ activities in nature and scope”. Integrated communications agencies are coming to realise that they are part of a seamless marketing and advertising function, all aspects of which need to work together toward a single brand-building goal.

The increasing demand for accountable, integrated brand communications solutions, coupled with the shift toward fee-based remuneration, enforces and stimulates, according to Walker (2000:3), the need for innovative strategic thinking. Walker reasons that within a fee-based remuneration environment, advertising agencies are no longer locked into traditional communications planning and experience client pressure to search for holistic, integrated and alternative brand contact solutions. The growth of alternative brand communications is, according to Walker, a key variable in the assessment of current global media trends. Walker asserts that the shift to fee-based remuneration sets the idea-generators free. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:299) agree that a media-neutral compensation and reward system enhances the creative output of the Integrated Communications Agency.

The South African advertising industry is seemingly elevating itself to the level of brand communications partner, to deliver integrated brand communications solutions. To fully address the needs of clients and their brands, the Integrated Communications Agency will however also have to demonstrate the strategic ability to innovate planned points of brand contact.

3.3.2 Breaking through Commercial Clutter Barriers

The second key motivator to alternative brand contact planning is encountered in the consumer's experience of the brand communications environment. Hollis (2001:50) and Baulk (2003) observe that consumers are inundated by commercial messages, more so than ever before. Advertising surrounds consumers wherever they go. To cope with the communication clutter, consumers construct defence mechanisms. They 'tune-out' during commercial breaks on television or regress into channel switching mode. Consumers today expect standard print advertisements in publications and billboard executions when driving on highways and by-ways.

The communication noise has resulted in unique media and message behaviour. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:91) reason that consumers have come to condition themselves to psychologically ignore traditional advertising messages. Belch and Belch (1998:113) and Duncan (2002:144) confirm that consumers more aggressively apply selective exposure and selective attention measures.

Blackwell et al. (2001:436-440) explain that exposure entails entering and/or gaining access to a consumer's sphere of existence. Consumers however, often deliberately avoid exposure, hence the concept 'selective exposure'. Attention defines the direction and intention (degree) of consumers' focus. Selective attention then encompasses consumers' willingness to direct their own attention and quite literally, to pay attention.

Communication clutter adversely affects the erection of selective exposure and attention barriers. The likelihood that a point of brand contact will achieve exposure and receive attention diminishes as the level of communication noise increases. Duncan (2002:144) furthermore observes that as soon as consumers “recognize something as a commercial message, (they) try to block it out, they turn the page, throw it in the waste basket, or change to another station”. As fields of brand communication contact become more recognisable and cluttered, consumers increasingly erect more intensive selective exposure and attention measures. Baulk (2003) concludes that more and more advertising is therefore ignored in a world that is characterised by too much noise and clutter.

The result often is that only the truly impactful creative executions succeed to capture attention. Consequently, advertisers make, as Belch and Belch (1998:113) submit, considerable effort to get their message noticed and employ the creative aspects of their advertisements to gain consumers’ attention. Young (1975:1) for example, refers to the ‘creative leap’. The aim is to move from the ‘dry language’ of strategy to creative message ideas that will attain exposure and engage attention. Prue (1998:3) in agreement, argues that to be noticed, a brand communications message must be creatively intriguing. The planners and creators of brand contact messages evidently rely on the creativity of the advertising message to break through commercial clutter barriers.

Creative strategic contact thinking can, however, also effectively penetrate clutter zones. Bearden et al. (2001:374) urge that planners of brand communications demonstrate innovative strategic thinking, to develop new ways to reach audiences that have become jaded by too much advertising, promotional messages, and other traditional brand communication tactics. The challenge is to move beyond, or to manipulate traditional communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner when and where they least expect to encounter a commercial message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind.

Sampson (2000:66) agrees that an opportunity to attract attention and use it to good effect must never be wasted or, as Oosthuizen (2000(a):52) puts it, every conceivable opportunity to explode the presence of the brand into the identified target markets must be exploited. Harris, quoted in Chronis (2000:67) argues that alternative contacts achieve exactly this: “They are head turners, popping up when they are least expected”. The alternative brand contact, in keeping with Blackwell, Miniard and Engel’s (2001:446) assessment of incongruent stimuli, is noticed and achieves impact because it deviates from expected brand contact points. The alternative point of brand contact draws attention because it is incongruent with expected brand communications activity.

The recent growth of new media owners is indicative of the need to apply creative strategic thinking and to introduce alternative brand contact opportunities. In direct response to client demand for innovative brand contact solutions, companies are identifying points of alternative brand contact and are formalising them into new contact offerings. Cockcroft, quoted in Chronis (2000:66) observes that a strategic advantage is consequently gained, as new alternative contacts interface with consumers in environments where fewer traditional commercial messages are clamouring for immediate attention.

The growth of new alternative contact or ambient media offerings, as they are commonly referred to in the marketing and communication industry, will next be discussed.

a) New Alternative Contact or Ambient Media Offerings

It is within the context of the new media environment that the concept of ambient media is introduced. The word ambient defines that which surrounds, encircles or envelopes (www.dictionary.com). Ambient media aim to penetrate the environments with which consumers routinely interact to create unconventional and unexpected points of brand contact.

Horton (2001:2), Phillipson (2001:6-8) and Ries and Ries (2002:84) explain that ambient media are introduced to impact on consumers in the spaces where they live their lives. Shankar and Horton (1999:1-4) elaborate that ambient media are encountered as alternative points of contact in out-of-home environments and locations. The authors refer for example, to Tobasco's (the fiery American chilli sauce) innovative campaign in South African restaurants with the launch of a mild version of the product. Branded toilet paper carried the copy line: "Don't you wish you'd had mild Tabasco instead? "

In a similar vein, Virgin Atlantic placed egg trays with a wrap-around message 'Handled by Virgin Atlantic' on airport luggage conveyer belts in South Africa, to break through traditional clutter barriers and achieve impact in an unconventional and unexpected manner. Ries and Ries (2002:83) point at yet another fast growing ambient phenomenon in Europe namely, in-tunnel advertising. Brands such as Adidas and Coca-Cola are creating unconventional contact experiences with series of illuminated signs in tunnels that, when seen from a speeding train, appear to be animated.

A large-scale alternative ambient campaign is also encountered in Cell C's 'For the City' campaign aimed at building subscriber numbers for the South African cellphone operator. The campaign uplifted central Johannesburg into an outdoor art gallery using 40 original works of art from local artists as wraps and murals on buildings.

The Future of Media (Future 2000:42, 49, 52) highlights the growth of alternative contact opportunities and specifically new ambient media owners in South Africa. The company Graffiti has, for example, evolved the outdoor media offering to introduce branded student cars, taxi tops, golf carts and more recently table-tops in canteens and coffee shops. The Forecourt Television Network (FTN) as Lindsay in Emdon (2003:27) explains, has launched large screens on petrol forecourts where satellite-based technology transmits programmes and advertisements. The company Inline Indoor Media likewise penetrates foyer and lobby areas in cinemas and airports on a

national basis. The new ambient media owners specifically aim to penetrate consumer environments that are, as Shankar and Horton (1999:4) and Nicholls in Emdonn (2003:23) argue, low on clutter, high on traffic and closely situated to points of purchase with ample time for message comprehension. For example, the average dwell-time of passengers in domestic arrivals at Johannesburg Airport is, as Nicholls point out, estimated at approximately 10 minutes.

Media fragmentation is, according to the ambient media owners, a key trend in the development of alternative points of brand contact. Gordon-Brown (2000:30) for example, illustrates that since 1995, 135 new consumer magazines, mostly niche titles, and 144 new business-to-business magazines have been launched in South Africa. This trend is also encountered globally. Hammersley (2003) elaborates that in, for example, the United States, the number of television networks increased from six in 1975 to 123 in 2002 and the number of consumer magazine titles from 339 to 17 000. Media fragmentation introduces niche-marketing opportunities but also increases customer choice and inevitable raise communication clutter levels. It is increasingly more important to apply innovative and versatile approaches to brand contact planning in order to break through commercial clutter barriers. The growth of new ambient media owners is indicative of the search for alternative points of brand contact.

This trend is however also noticeable in the traditional media environment. Walker's (2000:3) analysis of global media trends and specifically the growth of alternative brand contacts, stresses the increasing development of unconventional techniques in traditional media. Alternative points of brand contact, as previously argued, can be introduced in the form of new points of contact beyond the traditional media, or as unconventional and unexpected points of contact within the traditional media.

b) Alternative Brand Contacts in Traditional Media Environments

According to Walker (2000:3) global media owners and brand communication planners are becoming more receptive to novel brand contact ideas, as alternative contact approaches are multiplying. Audi, for example, won a Lion award at the Cannes Advertising Festival in 2000 for their use of bubble wrap covers on magazines, to advertise the benefit of Audi airbags. Walker observes that global receptiveness to “stunts, innovation and unusual treatments of traditional media types” is growing. Another example is encountered in Standard Bank’s co-operative use of existing print advertisements for premium brands such as Guess. A look-alike original and signed credit card proof of payment slip is simply stuck onto the Guess print advertisement to create an unconventional contact experience for the Standard Bank Achiever account. Cadbury’s likewise demonstrates alternative contact planning in print with the Cadbury’s Flake wrapper campaign. The original Flake chocolate wrapper is inserted into targeted magazines with an attached post-it note and hand written message – “Sorry just couldn’t resist”.

The increase in alternative brand contact approaches on television and in cinema further illustrates the trend towards alternative brand contact planning in traditional media environments. Product placement is, for example, viewed by Duncan (2002:406) as an unconventional and unique way to reach mass communication audiences. The sponsored integration of brands into television programming and cinema movie content, delivers an alternative contact to the conventional television or cinema advertisement.

According to Duncan, product placement is encountered on two levels. One is the incidental inclusion of a brand where exposure is subtle. Reebok and Pepsi for example, featured in the reality-show Survivor: The Australian Outback. Liqui Fruit and Nando’s applied the same principle locally, in integrating their product ranges into the programming content of Big Brother South Africa 2000. The brand is integrated into editorial content as an unexpected, yet natural and subtle, element to the programme.

The second form of product placement entails prominent exposure of the brand. The BMW model Z28 was for example, launched in the James Bond film, *The World Is Not Enough*. Close-up scenes of Bond driving the car left no doubt as to the brand. The Mercedes-Benz M-Class all-activity vehicle was likewise launched in the film *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*. Prominent brand exposure in television programming or cinema releases ensures that the brand enjoys a starring role in context of actual content.

A prominent and unconventional product placement campaign is also encountered in the South African campaign for Osram light bulbs for which the client and its agency Saatchi & Saatchi, won the 2003 Advertising Media Association of South Africa (AMASA) and Roger Garlick award for media innovation and creative media strategy. Rather than producing a costly conventional television commercial, a prominent and unexpected product placement was introduced onto the popular DStv CSN and Supersport 1, 2 and 3 channels. Studio lights were doused (unbeknownst to the programme presenters and thus adding to the element of surprise), long enough for Osram to deliver the brand message – “Next time use long lasting light bulbs from Osram”

A like-minded, and perhaps more unconventional approach to product placement, is followed globally by Nike. As opposed to integrating products into editorial content the brand message is transformed into editorial content. Ries and Ries (2002:38) explain that Nike penetrates Mtv programming content with brand messages that resemble music videos. The videos called hoop-hop spots, feature NBA players dribbling a basketball and dancing to pulsating music. The music video is an unexpected and unconventional means of communicating the Nike brand message. Elliott (2001:1) reasons that the alternative approaches followed by Nike and other brands are indicative of the client and communication agency search for unconventional opportunities to embed brand messages in the traditional media environment, while avoiding the clutter created by identifiable advertising messages.

Client demand for higher levels of accountability and brand contact innovation in an increasingly competitive, cluttered and fragmented brand communications environment, are powerful motivating factors for the use of creative strategic thinking to deliver alternative brand contact solutions. The Integrated Communications Agency experiences pressure from both (although interrelated) ends of the scale - clients in search of accountable and innovative strategic thinking, and consumers who are becoming increasingly more jaded and difficult to reach. The planners of brand communication strategies are however, as Walker (2000:3) claims, becoming more receptive to unconventional and unexpected brand contact opportunities.

The alternative point of brand contact is not bound by media specifications. The challenge is to create an unexpected and unconventional contact experience. This can occur through the unconventional manipulation of traditional media or through the introduction of new and unexpected points of planned brand contact as is seen with the growth in ambient media. The aim is to break with conventional strategic planning in identifying alternative brand contact opportunities. Alternative brand contact planning requires innovative thinking and the introduction of creative strategic planning. The need for and application of creative strategic thinking in the planning of alternative planned brand contacts will next be explored to this end.

3.4 The Planning of Alternative Brand Contacts

Dru (1996:54) is of the opinion that the brand communications landscape worldwide, is greatly characterised by conventional strategic activity. "A large number of advertising campaigns are predictable. They conform to a norm".

Dru (1996:35; 2002:19) addresses the need for developing alternative strategic communication approaches and grounds his approach in the concept and process of *disruption (strategie de rupture)*. Dru (1996:54) explains that "*disruption* is about finding the strategic idea that breaks and overturns a convention in the marketplace". Disruption occurs "when both the

strategy and the executions are ruptures with what has gone before, when the planner rejects using a familiar approach". The strategic challenge is to break with the status quo. The result is a novel concept based on strategic creativity.

Dru's approach to brand communications planning reinforces the orientation of this study. The planners of points of brand contact can not solely rely on the creativity of the communication message to break through commercial clutter. Creative strategic thinking must be applied to introduce unconventional and unexpected points of brand contact. Schultz and Barnes (1995:172) furthermore believe that when strategic activity takes place in an interesting, exciting and memorable way, it is more likely that larger numbers of prospects will respond to the communications message.

Dru (1996:56) presents a three-step process to *disruption*:

- Insight into the Conventional

Firstly, the conventional communications activity surrounding the brand must be investigated. Hamel (1996:80) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297), in agreement, propose that strategic activity across industries be consistently monitored. The aim is to identify the strategic ideas and activity that maintain the status quo and that are, as a result, hardly noticed because of their familiarity. Kelley and Littman (2002:6) assert that it is therefore necessary to gain insight into consumers in their real life experience of the environment to understand "what confuses them, what they like, what they hate". Insight into conventional brand communications patterns and how they are experienced by consumers presents a platform upon which teams, as Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297) conclude, can engage in creative thinking exercises to identify innovative communication concepts.

- Disruption

In the second step, disruption is applied. Dru (2002:23) explains that past and current strategic methods are questioned to develop new hypotheses, unexpected scenarios and unconventional strategic ideas. Unexpected and

unconventional brand communication ideas on both a strategic contact and creative message level, are purposefully pursued. Disruption requires that creative strategic thinking be applied to purposefully break with conventional strategic methods. The challenge, according to Hamel (1996:80), is to search for discontinuities that will present a revolutionary idea, an unconventional strategic option.

- Brand Integration

The third step, in keeping with the integrated brand contact methodology, stresses the importance of identifying alternative concepts that will most effectively communicate the brand positioning strategy. Dru (1996:58) in agreement with Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) confirms that “ we have to remain true to the brand and to the way we would like people to think about it”. The alternative concept must contribute to the overall brand contact strategy in the building of a single-minded, integrated brand identity.

Dru’s theory of disruption is pertinent to this study and presents relevant guidelines to the development of alternative points of brand contact. The disruption theory acknowledges that alternative brand contact ideas must ultimately add value to the integrated brand contact strategy. The aim is to break through commercial clutter barriers with an unconventional approach, in order to impact on consumers and create a meaningful brand impression. The alternative brand contact must communicate and reinforce the single-minded brand positioning to ensure an integrated brand identity is created.

Dru’s theory on disruption also reinforces that in order to introduce an unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact, the account team must move outside-in to gain insight into the communication norms surrounding the brand. The team must investigate the consumers’ frame of reference to identify the points of brand contact that are experienced as conventional and expected.

To create an unconventional point of brand contact, conventional contacts need to be defined before they can be defied. Moving outside-in to investigate consumer perceptions of brand communications, as Dru (1996:87, 2001) submits, presents the source of disruption.

An account team and brand contact task team conscious of the potential value of alternative points of brand contact, can apply the brand communications audit as discussed in Chapter Two (2.5.5), to address this challenge. Points of brand contact can be identified and assessed to determine the extent to which they are experienced as conventional and expected by consumers and stakeholder groups. The disruption theory indirectly reinforces the need to cultivate an outside-in, zero-based and media neutral planning framework. In order to create a fertile platform for alternative brand contact planning, brand communication planners within the agency must discard conventional brand contact biases. It is also evident that alternative brand contact planning demands creative strategic thinking. The account team must not only embrace an outside-in, zero-based and media neutral planning orientation, but must also cultivate creative strategic thinking skills.

Although insight into the consumer's experience of the brand communications environment is vital to the process of alternative brand contact planning, Dru (1996:48) and Kelly and Littman (2002:27) warn against total reliance on consumer research in the development of creative strategic ideas. A barrier to creative strategic thinking lies in what Dru (1996:48) defines as "the excessive cult of the consumer". Dru reasons that total reliance on consumer research, in creative strategic thinking, will mostly deliver conventional if not conservative strategic solutions. "If you ask a consumer what you should do, expect to get a conventional answer". This is as Dru (2002:63) argues, because consumers base their decisions or ideas on logic, familiarity and past experience. Diller quoted in Dru (1996:47) elaborates that total reliance on consumer research results in strategic activity "corroded with safe action". Nickerson (1999:409), in agreement, states that knowledge of a domain is a necessary condition for creativity but does not necessarily lead to creative

ideas. To produce surprising or original ideas a brand, as Dru (2002:63) concludes, must therefore be customer-informed but idea-led.

An alternative point of contact will only emerge as insights and opportunities are further explored and creative strategic thinking is applied. It is therefore necessary to briefly investigate the role of creativity in the planning of alternative points of brand contact.

3.4.1 Creative Strategic Thinking in Alternative Brand Contact Planning

According to Sternberg and Lubart (1999:3) creativity is the ability to produce that which is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive). Williams and Yang, quoted in Sternberg (1999:385) furthermore observe that the ability to create or innovate is greatly determined by the ability to formulate problems and create new perspectives.

Insight into the consumer's experience of the brand communications environment must therefore be applied to formulate brand communication problems or challenges. Creative strategic thinking is introduced to deliver alternative perspectives and solutions to the defined brand communication challenges. The end goal is to create alternative points of brand contact that are novel and appropriate to the overall brand contact strategy. Amabile and Tighe (1993:9) reinforce that creativity does not therefore merely deliver ideas that are "different for the sake of difference". Creative strategic thinking delivers ideas that are appropriate and expressive of meaning. Rossiter and Percy (1997:181) assert that the challenge is to present an idea that is attention getting and catalytically relevant to the brand position. Ries and Ries (2002:xv) argue that the creative strategic objective is to achieve the consumer response, "Yes, that's what the brand stands for".

Schultz and Barnes (1995:174) introduce the concept of *controlled creativity* in this regard. The objective is to deliver creative ideas that do not only draw attention, but also communicate effectively with target audiences. Alternative

points of brand contact must ultimately impact on target audiences to communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. Duncan (2002:342) deduces that in business the creative process is employed to get ideas and solve problems. Creative strategic thinking is problem-solving in nature. The account team must assess the conventional brand communications environment to identify current brand communication challenges. Creativity is employed to address these challenges and to present alternative brand communication solutions that are both novel and appropriate.

Nickerson (1999:400) proposes that structured approaches be introduced to undertake creative problem-solving. *Brainstorming*, first introduced by Osborn (1953) is, for example, a creative problem-solving tool specifically designed for groups. It is a formal process in which 6 to 10 people gather with the intent to generate a multitude of new ideas. The group is encouraged to give free reign to the imagination in order to evoke ideas. According to Nickerson (1999:402) *brainstorming* is essentially a search process with the specific aim to deliver innovative and useful ideas.

Young (1975:53-54) presents a more layered approach to creative problem-solving, similar to that of Dru (1996:56). Young introduces five evolving steps to creative idea development:

- The first step confirms the need to gather raw data and gain consumer insight.
- The second step requires that raw data and insights be turned over in the mind, to search for meaning rather than absolute facts.
- Incubation follows as step three, with no direct or concerted effort to solve the creative challenge. Young reasons that it is during incubation that new combinations and new meanings generally emerge.
- The fourth step comes to fruition with the birth of the creative idea. Young argues that the idea is sure to emerge if the previous three steps were closely followed.

- The fifth and final stage involves the crafting of the creative idea to ensure its strategic fit.

The Cognitive Research Trust founded and directed by de Bono, focuses particularly on *lateral thinking* in creative problem-solving. De Bono (1971:4) describes lateral, as opposed to traditional, logical vertical thinking, as discontinuous in nature. Change for the sake of change thinking is practiced.

Lateral thinking seeks to explore new relationships among elements, situations, events and activities, to develop new and unique ideas. De Bono (1971:50-51) identifies several methods to stimulate lateral thinking. A team can for example, generate alternatives to present situations, challenge present assumptions, apply incubation, develop analogies for situations and undertake brainstorming.

Gordon, quoted in Moriarty (1986:4-5) specifically introduces the application of synectics exercises to creative problem solving. Metaphors and analogies are, in other words, forcefully applied to create new and novel associations. A simple logic formula drives the process : “A is to B as C is to what?” Free association is encouraged to stimulate the birth of unconventional and unexpected combinations and ultimately creative ideas.

An integrated assessment of structured approaches to creative problem-solving reveals that the many methods to creative idea development seemingly all rely on a sound foundation. As argued by Dru (1996:56), Young (1975:53-54) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297) insight into the domain, is necessary to engage in creative thinking and to present innovative, unconventional ideas.

Phases of creative problem-solving, often guided by structured creative techniques, follow. As Dru (1996:54) confirms the strategic stage demands imagination, which can be stimulated through incubation, brainstorming or any other creative problem-solving technique, that a team deems suitable to

address the creative challenge. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the intricacies and potential of various structured creative methods. The role of creativity in strategic thinking must however be recognised as a vital force in alternative brand contact planning.

Nickerson (1999:408,419) delivers a further pertinent observation with regard the process of creative problem-solving. Nickerson reasons that individuals and teams are creative in “different ways, to different degrees, and for different reasons”. Various resources are invested in creative enterprises, and creative ideas can result from different confluence’s, of these resources. Dru (2002:25), in agreement, reasons that creative tools or resources are flexible and are often modified, enriched, alternated or merged to enhance idea development. The creative idea can emerge from any number of, or combination of creative methods. Of greater importance is the mindset and sense of purpose of the team involved in creative idea development.

Nickerson (1999:408,419) is of the opinion that the affective or conative (attitudinal, motivational) intent and desire to be creative, is ultimately more important than domain-specific knowledge or the implementation of creativity enhancing techniques. Dawson in Dru (2002:85) confirms that no formula for original creative thinking exists. It is the intention to be more innovative and more creative, more of the time that is, according to Dawson, the critical factor.

Purpose, is the essential ingredient to creative development. The intention to be creative, to change perspectives in order to develop novel and appropriate ideas, is core to creative activity. The mindset of the account team and the motivation and commitment to develop alternative ideas to conventional contact planning is therefore more important than the development and implementation of structured creative techniques to induce creative thinking.

The process of alternative brand contact planning is reliant on a foundation of strategic insight. To then develop alternative points of brand contact, the account team must apply creative strategic thinking, to deliver ideas that are

novel, but also appropriate to the overall contact strategy. Paramount to successful alternative brand contact planning is the mindset of the account team and the purposeful intent to break away from conventional strategic thinking.

As mindset is pivotal to the process of creative strategic thinking and, in context of this study, the process of alternative brand contact planning, it is important to revisit the reality and dynamics of the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency. The mindset of a team is shaped by the makeup of the team and the environment in which it functions. It is therefore vital that the influence of the Integrated Communications Agency and the account team on the process of creative strategic thinking and most importantly, the process of alternative brand contact planning be considered.

3.5 Alternative Brand Contact Planning and the Agency Structure

The role of the Integrated Communications Agency, in the process of integrated brand contact planning, was discussed in Chapter Two (2.6). Duncan and Moriarty (1997:232) and Schultz and Barnes (1995:25) asserted that the modern advertising agency must exhibit the strategic and creative insight and skill, to add value on all levels of brand contact.

The Integrated Communications Agency fulfils this role and functions as a strategic partner in the development of an integrated brand contact plan. The goal of the Integrated Communications Agency is to compliment and advise on the holistic integration of all points of brand contact and to excel in the development of effective, integrated and innovative planned brand contact solutions.

In this regard, Duncan and Moriarty (1997:252) and Schultz and Barnes (1995:44) proposed that the Integrated Communications Agency be structured into account groups or teams.

Duncan (2002:107) confirms that progressive agencies realise the importance of creating integrated contact strategies and therefore develop integrated account teams to have all members of a client team located and working together. Duncan observes that greater physical proximity “makes things run smoother and allows the work to be more integrated”. A cross-functional management philosophy thus permeates into the agency. The joint expertise of strategic, media and creative team members, optimises the opportunity to develop integrated planned brand contact solutions.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:46) and Wessels (2001) furthermore observed that strategic or account planning plays increasingly more important a role, as the function is pivotal to the process of integrated brand contact planning. The strategic planner represents the immediate strategic link with the client’s brand contact task team. Involvement of the strategic planner in the assessment and planning of the brand contact strategy furthermore positions the planner as a strategic partner.

The core function of the strategic planner is then to assist in the assessment of all points of brand contact, to specifically direct the development and integration of planned points of brand contact.

To plan, conceptualise and execute the planned brand contact strategy, the strategic planner relies on the skills and expertise of a media planning and creative team. The strategic planner fulfils a vital guidance role in this regard. Schultz and Barnes (1995:46) and Duncan (2002:98) explain that the strategic planner is to represent the consumer and his or her view to the account planning team, during the planning process. The strategic planner must ensure that the media strategy and creative concept is relevant to the brand positioning and brand contact strategy and responsive to consumer wants and needs. To develop a planned brand contact campaign that will contribute to the building of an integrated brand identity the strategic planner must ultimately ensure that the outside-in, zero-based and media neutral planning approach is maintained and pursued, throughout the planning process, by all members of the account team.

The core role of the media planning team is then to deliver the best mix of media for a particular brand situation. According to Duncan (2002:458) the key challenge is to balance message impact and cost. As media is often the largest single cost item in a campaign budget, it is imperative that media planners consider the efficiency of media contacts with care. Duncan elaborates that if the media budget is not wisely invested, and if the selected media do not enable brand messages to have maximum impact, money will be wasted and brand value will ultimately be lost.

The primary function of the creative team is to deliver a creative concept or big idea that synthesises the purpose of the planned brand contact strategy. Duncan (2002:340) defines this goal as the joining of the brand positioning with consumer desire in a fresh and involving way. The challenge is to bring the concept to life; and to make the reader or the audience stop, look, and listen. The ultimate aim as Duncan and Moriarty (1997:80) conclude, is to develop a creative idea “that cuts through the commercial message clutter and manifests the brand positioning”.

It is evident that the various skills and expertise of the strategic, media and creative account team members are pivotal to the development of an integrated brand contact strategy, specifically with regard the development and execution of planned points of brand contact.

The integrated account team today, is however faced by a further challenge. Points of contact that will succeed in breaking through conventional and expected brand contact clutter, to be noticed and to communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand, must be developed. The alternative brand contact serves this purpose. Duncan (2002:373), in agreement, concludes that the goal is to deliver a selection and use of contact choices that are as creative, as the development of copy and visual executions.

The alternative point of brand contact is not solely the result of research, analysis and consumer insights, as Dru (1996:48) pointed out. To develop an

unconventional and unexpected point of contact, creative strategic thinking must be encouraged and applied. The aim is to deliver a point of contact that is both novel, and appropriate to the brand contact strategy.

The potential value of the cross-functional integration of skills and expertise into account teams will next be considered in context of alternative brand contact planning. The question to be addressed is whether the process of alternative brand contact planning, is enhanced within the integrated account team environment?

3.5.1 The Value of the Integrated Account Team in Alternative Brand Contact Planning

Robbins (1994:399) delivers valuable insights into the structures of organisations and their ability to deliver innovative solutions to business problems. Robbins firstly, differentiates between creativity and innovation in an organisational and team context.

Organisations that stimulate creativity develop novel approaches or unique solutions to problems. Innovation, according to Robbins, then entails the process of taking a creative idea and evolving it into a useful product, service, or method of operation. The innovative organisation has the ability to channel creative ideas into useful outcomes.

Robbins's approach is of particular significance to the planning of alternative points of contact. The alternative contact must be novel and therefore creative in order to break through conventional contact barriers and to deliver an unexpected and unconventional contact experience. Given Robbins's approach, the alternative brand contact is also an innovation, as it is of use on an operational level. The alternative brand contact aims to break through clutter barriers to be noticed and to ultimately communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand, to add value to the integrated brand contact strategy as a whole.

It is with regard fostering innovation within an organisation, that Robbins's approach delivers insight into the structure of the Integrated Communications Agency. According to Robbins (1994:339-400) three sets of variables have been found to stimulate innovation. These variables are defined as the organisation's structure, its culture and human resource practices and will next be touched upon.

a) Organisational Structure

An organic organisational structure positively influences innovation. The reason being that an organic structure is low in vertical differentiation, formalisation and centralisation. Within an organic organisational environment, task forces and other such mechanisms exist to make interaction and innovation across departmental lines possible. The organic structure is recognised by its flexibility, cross-fertilisation and its adaptive nature, all of which assist in the adoption of innovation throughout the organisation. Monge, Cozzens and Contractor (1992:250-274) confirm that an organic structure is conducive to innovation. Frequent inter-unit communication does not only support innovation but also assists in breaking down possible barriers to innovation.

Creative strategic thinking and brand contact innovation is evidently, potentially better harnessed within a cross-functional account team. The Integrated Communications Agency existing of cross-functional account teams, in comparison to the departmentalised advertising agency (i.e. strategy, media and creative departments) emerges as an organic structure.

Within the cross-functional account team, team members fulfil specific roles, but rely on one another's skills and expertise to develop, innovate and integrate planned points of brand contact. Vertical differentiation is lowered, as different skills and expertise are harnessed within the account team environment. Frequent inter-unit communication is stimulated as integrated strategic and creative brainstorming sessions evolve. Team members have

the opportunity to work together and to bounce ideas off one another, on a regular basis.

Within a cross-functional account team, the strategic planner can readily draw on the skills and expertise of the creative team and media planners to develop alternative contacts that are both novel and appropriate. The strategic purpose of alternative brand contact planning is in synergy with the creative team's motivation to deliver a fresh and intrusive creative concept and also requires the vital input of the media planner to ensure an appropriate relationship between the impact and cost of contact is achieved. Phillipson (2001:22), Taylor and Rigby (2001:10), Clancy in Dru (2002:137) and Dawson in Dru (2002:81), in agreement, confirm that a cross-functional account team involving strategy, media and creative will ensure that all options are explored to produce alternative brand contact ideas that are efficient and original. It is this mix of skills that, according to Dawson, enables creative strategic idea development. The alternative point of contact thus has the potential to emerge as not only a creative idea, but as an innovation.

Nickerson (1999:419) enforced that various resources are invested in creative enterprises, and that creative ideas can result from different confluence's of resources. Alternative brand contact planning is potentially enhanced within an integrated account team existing of strategic, media and creative perspectives, skills and expertise. As Robbins (1994:453) supports, diversity in skill potentially results in more innovative ideas.

b) Organisational Culture and Human Resource Practices

In terms of organisational culture, Robbins (1994:400) observes that innovative organisations tend to have similar cultures. An innovative culture acknowledges for example, that too much specificity constrains creativity. Employees are encouraged to experiment, to present diverse opinions and alternative solutions to the conventional. With regard human resource practices and management, innovative organisations actively enhance the

knowledge levels of employees to ensure their thinking remains current. Robbins (1994:401) observes that employees are encouraged and empowered “to become champions of change”.

The account team must likewise be equipped and encouraged by client and agency alike, to embrace an outside-in, media-neutral and zero-based contact-planning framework, to apply insight and creative strategic thinking to deliver innovative brand contacts that are unconventional and unexpected.

In keeping with Robbins’s approach, total adherence to specificity will stifle creativity in alternative brand contact planning. Alternative brand contact planning as previously argued, is based on research, analysis and consumer insights but also requires that creative strategic thinking is applied to deliver unconventional and unexpected brand contact ideas. As Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297) asserted, mindset is pivotal to the development of alternative points of brand contact. Nickerson (1999:408) specifically argued that the intention to be creative, to break from conventional thinking, to change perspectives in order to develop novel and appropriate ideas, is core to creative activity.

The integrated account team must be encouraged to gain insight into alternative brand contact planning approaches and to experiment in alternative brand contact planning, in order to create change. Alternative brand contact planning culminates in the intent to break with conventional contact planning and to deliver unconventional contact ideas that are novel and appropriate. The culture of alternative brand contact planning must not only be encouraged but must be embraced by all involved – the client, the Integrated Communications Agency and the account team.

Given the need for creative strategic thinking in alternative brand contact planning and the assessment of the organisational structure, culture and human resource orientation conducive to the process, a number of potential barriers to alternative brand contact planning do however emerge.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the nature, role and planning of alternative points of brand contact and to specifically explore the perceptions of the South African marketing and communications industries on the topic. Chapter Three has thus far introduced and discussed the nature and role of alternative brand contacts in a highly competitive and cluttered market place. It is however vital that the secondary research study presents an objective assessment of the alternative point of brand contact in context of integrated brand contact planning.

To this end, possible barriers to implementing alternative brand contact thinking and planning were identified. The following barriers emerged based on an integrated analysis of current secondary data and will next be elaborated on.

3.6 Barriers to Alternative Brand Contact Planning

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:252) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:299) asserted that the integration of multiple communication capabilities into account teams is core to the development of an integrated brand contact strategy. Within cross-functional account teams the expertise of team members is maximised and the opportunity to develop integrated brand contact solutions is optimised.

The investment and confluence of strategic, media and creative resources in the integrated account team, furthermore enhances the development of alternative points of brand contact. Robbins (1994:453) supports that diversity in skill contributes to the development of more innovative ideas. The first critical barrier to alternative brand contact planning is therefore encountered in the structure of the traditional advertising agency.

3.6.1 The Departmentalised Agency Structure

A traditional departmentalised agency structure, as Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:299) argue, results in ineffective agency teams with limited focus. In the context of Robbins's (1994:400) assessment, a departmentalised structure enforces vertical differentiation, formalisation and centralisation. The result is a lack of inter-unit communication and subsequently, as Monge et al. (1992:250-274) assert, a lack of innovation.

The strategic purpose of alternative brand contact planning relies on the strategic planner's insight into the brand communications environment, the consumer's experience and impressions of brand communication contacts and the single-minded positioning strategy to be pursued by the brand.

Alternative brand contact planning furthermore relies on the creative team's skill to deliver fresh and intrusive creative concepts and requires the vital input of the media planner to ensure an appropriate relationship between the impact and cost of contact.

A cross-functional account team enables the integration of strategic, media and creative skills and expertise and is paramount to the development of alternative brand contacts that are both novel and appropriate. The joint skills and expertise of the members of the integrated account team is conducive to the process of creative strategic thinking and developing points of brand contact that are unexpected, unconventional and strategically relevant.

3.6.2 Inside-out Thinking in Brand Contact Planning

A further potential barrier to alternative brand contact planning is encountered in the mindset of the account team. Conventional inside-out thinking is counterproductive, and presents a major barrier to alternative brand contact planning. An account team bound by inside-out thinking and lacking in

consumer insight, may well be entirely oblivious of the need for alternative brand contact planning.

Dru (1996:56) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297) stress the importance of gaining consumer based, domain-specific knowledge in planning alternative points of brand contact. Moving outside-in, to assess the consumer's experience of the brand communications environment, enforces the need for, and presents insights to alternative brand contact planning. Seeing the world through the eyes of the consumer will confirm, as Belch and Belch (1998:113) and Hollis (2001:50) observe, the unique media and message behaviour employed by consumers to cope with increasing levels of communication clutter.

An outside-in assessment will reveal what the consumer experiences as conventional and expected brand communications clutter. Alternative points of brand contact are in response, purposefully employed to cut through commercial clutter, to communicate with consumers when they least expect to encounter a brand communications message. Alternative brand contact planning is thus also dependent on the ability of an organisation and its brand communications partner to break away from traditional inside-out thinking to consumer based outside-in thinking.

3.6.3 Media Biased and Commission-based Brand Contact Planning

Inside-out strategic planning however erects a further barrier to alternative brand contact planning. To develop alternative points of brand contact the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency and the client's brand contact task team must cultivate an outside-in, zero-based and media-neutral planning mindset.

A prefixed notion as to which brand communication media must be employed, and how they should be employed, will inhibit the process of alternative brand contact planning. Nickerson (1999:410) warns that a commitment to the

standard way of approaching problems is unlikely to deliver the possibility of developing alternative approaches. It is therefore pivotal that the account team shed media biases, in order to undertake alternative brand contact planning. To deliver unconventional and unexpected contact ideas, the account team must, as Hunt and Jamieson in Dru (2002:101) and McLean in Dru (2002:265) stress, function from a media-neutral platform, with no prejudices, preconceptions and no preconditions. Media neutral planning is as Baulk (2003) concludes a prerequisite to developing creative strategic approaches in and across channels of communication.

However, to rise to this challenge, the account team can not be bound by an agency practicing commission-based media planning. Commission-based remuneration presents an immediate barrier to alternative brand contact planning as the strategic motivation is, as Yeo (1998:49) and Heyns (2001:50) asserted, to spend as much money as is possible in mass media.

Within a fee or performance-based remuneration environment on the other hand, as Walker (2000:3) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:299) indicated, the communications agency has the freedom to search for holistic, integrated and alternative brand contact solutions.

3.6.4 Total Reliance on Message Creativity

A further barrier to alternative brand contact planning, closely linked to conventional inside-out strategic thinking, lies in the reliance of brand communication planners on the creativity of brand messages, to break through clutter barriers and achieve impact.

Bearden et al. (2001:374) in response, urge that creative strategic thinking be employed to develop new ways to reach audiences that have become jaded by too much advertising. The account team must introduce unconventional and unexpected strategic ideas, to ensure that brand communications impact

on target audiences. Relying on the creative message alone, is indicative of traditional inside-out thinking, and will not ensure brand impact.

Dru (1996:54) confirms the importance of innovative strategic thinking: “We need to become creative before the creative work starts”. Creative strategic thinking, Dru (1996:76) reasons, initiates change, and is paramount to developing alternative points of brand contact that will break through the conventional brand communications clutter and impact on consumers.

Nickerson (1999:419) previously confirmed that the affective intent and desire to be creative, is paramount to creative activity. Dru (1996:55), in synergy, asserts that the immediate challenge to be addressed by the account team, is to consciously break with conventional thinking at the strategic level. The account team must not only embrace an outside-in, zero-based and media neutral planning mindset, to recognise the need for alternative points of brand contact, but must also acknowledge the need for creative strategic thinking to produce alternative brand contacts.

An inside-out organisational mindset therefore not only hampers the processes of consumer oriented, zero-based and media neutral planning in an integrated account team environment but also inhibits the potential for creative strategic thinking in developing alternative points of brand contact. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297) conclude that alternative brand contact planning is ultimately an indicator of organisational mindset. Organisational inhibitions must be reduced to accept and develop unconventional brand contact approaches.

3.6.5 Reliance on Media Planning Systems and Measurement Data

It is a challenge to shed inhibitions, especially when available research data and set planning systems create a comfortable, although conventional, planning framework. The comfort zone of conventional strategic planning is particularly reinforced by researched based, computerised media planning

systems that are active in the advertising industry. Because alternative brand contacts often lack available research data, the organisation is not only challenged to shed inhibitions, but to take risk. As Schultz and Barnes (1995:292) illustrate, alternative contact planning requires a step away from the various computerized media planning programmes.

The lack of measurement data on the effectiveness of alternative points of brand contact consequently introduces a further barrier to alternative brand contact planning. Engel, Warshaw and Kinnear (1994:303) reinforce this point and state that the value of alternative brand communication methods depends “on the audience they deliver, and the availability of reliable audience measurement data”. As evidence of the effectiveness of alternative points of brand contact is sorely lacking, their value, according to Engel and his co-authors, remains to be judged. Schultz and Barnes (1995:300) and Shankar and Horton (1999:4) conclude that many of the new alternative brand contact concepts are therefore handicapped by a lack of accountable audience research data.

The reliance on computerised media planning systems and audience measurement data however reinforces Dru’s (1996:48) concern with “the excessive cult of the consumer” in the development of creative strategic ideas. An environment that is totally reliant on planning systems and research data in strategic thinking is unlikely to produce unconventional strategic solutions. Horton (2001:11), in agreement, reasons that the industry will have to accept that the further away it moves from conventional advertising, the harder it is to track impact and the less likely it is that formal research data will be available. Karo in Dru (2002:200) likewise reasons that conventional media plans can be supported by conventional research whereas the impact of an unconventional and unexpected contact approach can hardly be estimated. Horton (2001:11) thus concludes that the planners of brand communication strategies will have to realise that the more original their contact strategies are, the more “in the dark” they are going to be with regards available measurement data. The strategic aim, to break with tried and trusted approaches, must rather be the primary concern because as Horton states,

the more original the point of contact, the greater the possible impact of the contact experience.

To alleviate the many concerns and resulting barriers to alternative brand contact planning, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297) propose that experimental and pilot programmes be implemented to gain alternative contact planning knowledge and skills. The challenge is to “learn firsthand what works and what does not”.

The account team must be encouraged by the client and the agency alike to investigate and break conventional modes of brand contact planning. According to du Plessis (2003:24), South African Breweries (SAB) has implemented such a forward thinking manoeuvre with the implementation of a dedicated task team whose task it is to investigate and apply alternative contact ideas to “see what will work for the brand and what won’t”. Taylor and Rigby (2001:8) furthermore suggest that qualitative consumer depth interviews or focus groups be applied to gain valuable strategic insight into consumers’ daily lifestyle patterns and moods, to identify alternative brand contact opportunities and justify their potential effectiveness.

The identification and discussion of potential barriers to alternative brand contact planning reveals that the greatest collective barrier remains to be mindset. An inside-out, departmentalised, media-biased and research bound strategic planning mindset, lacking in creative strategic purpose and thinking, will make alternative brand contact planning near impossible. Mindset and orientation toward brand contact planning, is the prevailing factor in the development and implementation of alternative points of brand contact.

To alleviate and address the identified barriers to alternative brand contact planning secondary research was next analysed to present clear requisites to the development of unexpected and unconventional points of brand contact. The identified barriers and requisites will play an important role in guiding the primary research phase of this study. The aim of which is to explore South

African marketing and communication professionals' perceptions of the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact.

3.7 Requisites to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

The identification and assessment of the potential barriers to alternative brand contact planning reveals that a core factor in the planning of alternative points of brand contact remains to be mindset. Before specific requisites with direct bearing on the alternative point of contact and its ability to break through commercial clutter to create impact and communicate a single-minded brand positioning, are introduced and discussed, the mindset and environment required for alternative brand contact planning must be reinforced. The mindset of the account team in particular, presents the first, vital requisite to the planning of points of contact that are unexpected, unconventional and strategically relevant.

3.7.1 The Alternative Brand Contact Planning Mindset

A key requisite to alternative brand contact planning resides in the mindset of the account team, the Integrated Communications Agency and the brand contact task team. To develop accountable and innovative alternative points of brand contact, the account team must be supported by the Integrated Communications Agency and the client's brand contact task team, in the practice of outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic thinking.

Support of this process must be demonstrated in a shift from inside-out to outside-in thinking, from departmentalised agency structures to integrated cross-functional account teams, from media-biased to media-neutral thinking, from commission-based to performance-based remuneration and from entirely research and systems-bound strategic planning to creative strategic thinking and planning.

Mindset is pivotal to the process of integrated brand contact planning and equally so, to alternative brand contact planning. It will be futile to present and discuss requisites to the planning of potentially effective alternative points of brand contact if the context and environment in which they are produced is not heeded and acknowledged. The requisites that are next introduced and discussed are therefore based on the assumption that the mindset and environment in which alternative points of brand contact are developed, is in place.

3.7.2 Impact and the Novelty of the Alternative Brand Contact

Oosthuizen (1996:35) and Bearden et al. (2001:374) urge that the planners of brand communication apply innovative strategic thinking to develop brand communication solutions beyond the tried and trusted. Harris, quoted in Chronis (2000:67) reasons that alternative brand contacts have the potential to rise above the expected and conventional commercial clutter, because they are least expected. However, the alternative brand contact can only succeed in its strategic purpose if it has impact. The aim is to cut through clutter to ensure that the single-minded positioning of the brand is communicated and reinforced.

The concept of impact was previously discussed in Chapter 2 (2.5.5), in context of the assessment and prioritisation of points of brand contact. Impact is described per Muller (1996:85) and Lancaster (2003:16) as the degree of measured ad noting or awareness that is achieved by an individual exposure, of a particular creative execution, in any given medium and as the true measure of an effective brand communications campaign.

Duncan (2002:171) elaborates that brand communication messages must get the attention of customers and prospective consumers to create brand awareness. Messages must therefore create “a conscious narrowing of mental and emotional focus”, to get “past the senses – the point of initial exposure – and into the consciousness”. Awareness creates or reinforces

brand knowledge, which implies an acquired understanding of the brand and its benefits is ultimately established. Duncan (2002:172) concludes that the greater the brand awareness and brand knowledge, the greater the potential impact of a brand on customers' decision-making processes.

Impact is employed as a strategic measure to cut through commercial clutter, to build brand awareness and brand knowledge, with the aim to ultimately influence behaviour. The unexpected and unconventional nature of the alternative brand contact addresses this challenge. The primary aim in employing an alternative brand contact is to cut through communication clutter, to create a powerful impression of the brand identity and achieve impact.

Godin (2000:57-65) delivers a pertinent argument in this regard. In keeping with Schultz and Barnes (1997:91) who argue that consumers have come to psychologically ignore expected traditional brand communication efforts, Godin asserts that consumers actively resist traditional marketing and communications. "We have made our brains bulletproof and ideaproof. There is so much clutter, so much noise, so many ideas to choose from that the majority of them fail to make a dent".

Godin elaborates that marketing and communication ideas must become more compelling, to pierce consumers natural defenses and to achieve impact. According to Godin, the ability of brand communications to create impact, to combat clutter and competitive activity, depends on the delivery of unconventional brand contact concepts. To compel an audience and create awareness, the alternative brand contact must firstly be novel. To break through commercial clutter barriers and draw attention the alternative brand contact must be original, unexpected and unconventional. As Sternberg and Lubart (1999:3) reinforce, it is the novelty of an idea that creates its originality and unexpected appeal. Phillipson (2001:22), in agreement, states that it is the originality of the alternative point of brand contact that ensures its ability to surprise.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:182) continue that the challenge in strategic planning is to take advantage of the inherent strength of a point of brand contact, in order to maximise impact. The strength of the alternative brand contact lies firstly, in its novelty. Because the alternative brand contact is experienced as unexpected and unconventional, it succeeds in its first strategic challenge and that is to break the clutter barrier and to be noticed.

To compel an audience and create a meaningful brand impression, an alternative contact will however have to do more than cut through the clutter and be noticed. The alternative brand contact can not rely solely on its novelty, to justify its purpose in the process of integrated brand contact management. As Duncan (2002:171) asserts, the strategic objective is to gain consumer attention and to create brand awareness and brand knowledge, to influence behaviour. The alternative brand contact must ultimately contribute to the building of a single-minded and integrated brand identity. As Schulz and Barnes (1995:187) and Belch and Belch (1998:292) argue, it is vital that every point of contact with the brand is on strategy. Sternberg and Lubart (1999:3) stated that the challenge is to produce ideas that are not only novel, but also appropriate. In other words, the alternative brand contact must, as Amabile and Tighe (1993:9) stress, be expressive of meaning.

The strength of the alternative point of brand contact resides in its novelty, its unexpectedness and unconventional status. Hence the ability of the alternative contact to cut through clutter. However, to achieve true impact, brand awareness and knowledge must be created. The point of contact must be expressive of meaning. Herein lies a further challenge and requisite to the alternative point of brand contact. To be expressive of meaning and ultimately contribute to the building of a single-minded and integrated brand identity, the alternative brand contact must succeed in communicating the brand communications message effectively. Awareness and an acquired understanding of the brand and its identity can not be achieved unless the brand message is effectively communicated.

3.7.3 Impact and the Communication Effectiveness of the Alternative Brand Contact

Tubbs and Moss (2000:21) point out that for communications to be considered effective, the intended outcome of communications must be achieved. This principle is core to brand communications accountability. A brand communications strategy can only be considered effective, if the defined strategic objectives are achieved. However, a prerequisite to achieving outcomes and therefore to effective communications, according to Tubbs and Moss as well as Darroll (2002), is embedded in the understanding of the communications message. The primary failure in communication is failure to achieve accurate reception and understanding of communications, which inevitably affects the ability to achieve any intended outcome.

The aim of the alternative brand contact is to cut through clutter to communicate and reinforce the single-minded identity of the brand. Based on Adler and Rodman's (1997:17) and Tubbs and Moss's (2000:20) approach to effective communication, the alternative brand contact must, having been noticed, succeed in communicating the brand message so that it will be understood as intended by the target audience. To be appropriate and expressive of meaning, the alternative brand contact must succeed in creating a shared meaning of the brand message. Schultz and Barnes (1995:188-189) and Belch and Belch (1998:292) reinforce that it is imperative that brand contact messages communicate in a clear, concise and complete manner to be convincing. The ability of the alternative point of brand contact to communicate effectively will determine its ability to achieve strategic relevance; in other words, to add value to the integrated brand contact strategy as a whole.

Belch and Belch (1998:293) however assert that a common criticism against advertising and its ability to communicate effectively with target audiences, is that so much emphasis is often placed on the creative execution that the brand's message is overshadowed. An advertisement is consequently remembered for its creative idea, with limited recollection of the brand and its

message appeal. The advertisement succeeds in its ability to be noticed but fails in its strategic intent to impact on target audiences, to communicate effectively and to create brand awareness and brand knowledge.

Because the alternative brand contact is a product of creative strategic thinking and relies on originality, to create an unconventional and unexpected contact experience, Belch and Belch's warning must be heeded. The account team must therefore ensure that the alternative brand contact impacts on the target audience to effectively communicate the brand positioning strategy and brand message. An alternative contact that is remembered purely for its novelty, to fail in its communication intent, is inherently inappropriate to the integrated brand contact strategy.

The next requisite to be considered, having stated the need for effective communications, is the strategic intent of the alternative point of brand contact in context of the integrated brand contact strategy. The alternative point of contact is purposefully employed to cut through commercial clutter barriers, to communicate effectively with target audience and contribute to the building of an integrated brand identity.

3.7.4 Impact and Communicating a Single-minded Brand Identity

Joachimsthaler and Aaker (1997:5) assert that whether alternative brand-building approaches, a multiple of media, or both, are assessed and pursued, a company must have a clear brand identity. Darroll (2002) elaborates that brand communication messages can then only be effective if they break through clutter to communicate the brand identity effectively – if they achieve “branded impact and communicate in the name of the brand”.

The alternative brand contact must communicate effectively with target audiences to ultimately instill and build the single-minded identity of the brand. The contact must deliver a relevant, differentiated and single-minded brand message, in a clear, concise, complete and convincing manner, to create a

meaningful brand impression and achieve impact. As Horton (2001:13) concludes, an alternative point of brand contact must communicate the core brand promise to be effective. The impact value of alternative brand contacts will fundamentally be diminished in the eyes of the consumer if the brand message communicated is not in synergy with the overall brand contact strategy. It is therefore vital that alternative brand contacts are integrated into the brand contact strategy to communicate and reinforce the focussed brand positioning strategy and contribute to the development of a consistent brand identity.

A brand, as Kapferer (1997:25), Schultz and Barnes (1995:3-8) and Duncan and Moriarty (1997:9) explained, is the result of a synthesis of brand impressions. Everything communicates, as Schultz and Barnes (1995:8) reason. In building an integrated brand identity, the account team must therefore not only consider the contents of brand contact messages, but also the meaning created by the point of contact itself. Phillipson (2001:19) and Duncan (2002:373) explain that how a brand chooses to communicate and connect with prospects will inevitably influence the image of the brand. Over and above message content, the alternative brand contact must in and of itself, support the identity of the brand to achieve strategic integration. Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) illustrates this point: "If, for example, you advertise a product on dustbins, how do people see the brand? Will they think of your brand as trashy? Or does it raise the brand's profile?"

Schultz and Barnes (1995:182) conclude that a point of brand contact must be identified and employed with the purpose to maximise the impact of the brand message. The choice of an alternative point of contact will inherently influence the identity of the brand in consumers' minds. It is therefore imperative that the strategic relevance or appropriateness of the alternative contact is considered in context of the brand positioning strategy. The aim is to leverage the identity of the brand through both the form and the message content, of the alternative brand contact.

The ability of the alternative brand contact to break through clutter, to create attention, to stimulate brand awareness and brand knowledge, has thus far been investigated in context of novelty and noteworthiness, effective communication and brand identity integration. However, in context of the outside-in and zero-based contact planning philosophy alternative brand contacts are defined as those contacts that are experienced as unconventional and unexpected by the consumer. The account team must therefore not only consider the relevance of the alternative brand contact to the identity of the brand but also investigate its relevance to the target audience/s involved.

3.7.5 Impact and Target Audience Relevance

What is a relevant alternative contact to a socially active teenage audience, for example, may not be a relevant contact to an adult working professional. What a teenager will experience as unexpected and unconventional may differ from that of a professional's. The differences in the demographics, geographics, socio-psychographics and consumption behaviour of target audiences culminate and manifest in differences in lifestyle profiles. Blackwell et al. (2001:212, 219) confirm that consumer differences are frequently more visible in lifestyle patterns and subsequent responses to everyday environments. Lifestyle as a construct system reflects consumers' behaviour in creating consistency between their own values and personality and the environment in which they are active.

Kotze (1999:81), Taylor and Rigby (2001:3), Hatfield (2001:31) and McLean in Dru (2002:267) consequently propose that alternative brand contacts must be applied effectively to specifically address the lifestyle profile of the target audience. The value of alternative brand contacts are that they have the potential to penetrate, reach and impact on consumers during the course of their daily routine. Relevant points of alternative contact must therefore be identified to effectively penetrate and impact on the daily activity and interest field of target consumers. Taylor and Rigby (2001:8) explain that "it's about

understanding how consumers go about their business and their day”. The challenge is to target consumers in their lifestyle environment whether it’s in the public bathrooms of nightclubs or when they are out shopping. To achieve impact the point of alternative contact must effectively penetrate and achieve relevance in the course of daily routine. The point of alternative brand contact must be appropriate to the target audience’s lifestyle patterns, preferences and interests.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:301) furthermore argue that contact relevance is also dependent on the consumer’s state of mind. Consumer aperture must be considered in brand contact planning. When, where and under what circumstances, in other words, will the customer’s or consumer’s mind be most receptive to the brand message? Insight into lifestyle patterns must, according to Schultz and Barnes (1995:304), be considered in synergy with *consumer aperture*, to successfully identify points of alternative brand contact.

The alternative brand contact planning challenge, as previously argued, entails targeting consumers in an unconventional manner; when and where they least expect to encounter a commercial message but also, when they are in a susceptible state of mind. Horton (2001:2-3) describes the challenge as follows – “You’re trying to find a moment when the values of your brand actually coincide with their needs, their moods and modes. Succeed, and your brand is a welcome and useful addition to their lives. Fail, and you become part of the background noise”. To identify an unexpected and unconventional point of brand contact the lifestyle patterns of the target audience must be investigated. However, to ensure impact is achieved, the point of contact must also resonate with the consumer’s state of mind. Consumer aperture is equally important, in achieving strategic relevance of the alternative brand contact.

An analysis of the requisites to alternative points of brand contact reveals that the alternative brand contact must firstly be novel to break through competitive clutter and be noticed. However to achieve true impact, in other words, to build brand awareness and brand knowledge, the alternative brand

contact must be expressive of meaning. The point of contact must create shared meaning of the brand communications message, achieve brand and consumer relevance and communicate and/or reinforce a single minded brand identity, to contribute to the integrated brand contact strategy and achieve strategic relevance.

Secondary research however also reveals that maintenance of the alternative brand contact presents a particular challenge. Novelty invariably wears off and an alternative contact stripped of its unconventional alternative appeal stands to fail in its goal to be noticed and to achieve impact. Maintenance of the unconventional and unexpected appeal of the alternative point of brand contact will next be discussed in closure to the analysis of alternative brand contact requisites.

3.7.6 Continued Impact of the Alternative Brand Contact

The impact of the alternative brand contact relies on its continued ability to cut through the conventional and expected clutter barrier and be noticed.

Maintenance of the impact of the alternative brand contact presents a strategic challenge and must be addressed. As the impact of the alternative brand contact is primarily the result of an unconventional and unexpected experience, it will diminish when the form of contact grows stale.

Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) reinforces this concern: "Someone comes up with a new idea and it becomes fashionable, but how long does it last? In all honesty, as long as the idea is sustainable". Dru (2002:67) in agreement demonstrates that the original 1984 spot for Apple instantly launched the brand into the public consciousness with the first time use of the Super Bowl. It was an unexpected and unconventional point of contact at the time, but not so now, as was demonstrated by the ill-conceived millions spent by dot-coms' fifteen years later, in an attempt to replicate the success of the Apple launch strategy.

Alternative brand contacts that succeed in impact value are soon noted and copied by competitors. The result is that competitive clutter is introduced and that the alternative contact rapidly loses its unconventional status. As Yeo (1998:18) concludes, it is a “universal axiom in strategy that as soon as a strategic stance is well understood, so too has it lost its power”. To maintain impact value, alternative brand contacts will continually have to find new ways of reaching consumer segments. Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) rightfully states that one can not apply an alternative contact “to death”.

Klein (2000:16) directly addresses the need to consistently pursue new and unconventional communication methods to build and strengthen the brand’s identity in consumers’ minds. Klein argues that the focus is on penetrating and monopolising the ever-expanding stretches of cultural space with which consumers interact. To be intrusive the brand must closely investigate and track the lifestyle or cultural space patterns of the consumer, to introduce and evolve alternative points of brand contact. The objective, Klein (2000:5) concludes, is to continuously find “fresh new spaces to disseminate the brand’s idea of itself”.

Alternative brand contacts evidently lose their status when they are no longer experienced as unexpected and unconventional by the consumer. As the consumer grows accustomed to the alternative contact, it loses its ability to intrude and becomes an expected encounter in the communications environment. It simply merges into the conventional and expected brand communications arena.

Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) proposes that either fresh alternative contacts be identified continuously, or that an alternative contact with sustainability must be developed, in which case the contact can constantly be improved upon in unconventional ways. A brand can, for example, apply alternative brand contacts in public bathrooms to continuously explore and evolve the possible points of contact within these spaces.

To develop an alternative contact 'with legs', in other words a campaignable alternative brand contact, is a particular challenge. Whether alternative contacts are pursued and applied within traditional media environments or outside of the existing media scope, they will have to continuously deliver an unexpected and unconventional experience, to retain impact and instill a meaningful brand impression. The need for continued creative strategic thinking is thus reinforced. The pursuit of alternative points of brand contact requires of the account team to consistently apply creative strategic thinking to deliver unconventional and unexpected contact ideas.

To date no guidelines or tools to evaluating the potential effectiveness of alternative points of brand contact have been documented. Alternative points of brand contact are also, as previously discussed, and demonstrated by Engel et al. (1994:303) and Schultz and Barnes (1995:300), handicapped by a lack of audience and performance data.

Duncan (2002:344) however states that go or no-go decisions in brand communications planning, are often based on the judgement of the brand communications planning team. In the light of everyday practicalities the account team must apply guidelines to decide on the potential of an idea. Such an evaluation process is arguably subjective. However, as Belch and Belch (1998:292) propose, qualitative guidelines can be applied to assess the potential effectiveness of brand communication concepts and executions. The identified requisites for alternative brand contact impact can therefore be applied as guidelines, by the brand contact task team and the account team, in the planning and assessment of alternative points of brand contact in the integrated brand contact plan.

3. 8 Conclusion

It is the nature of consumer contact with the brand that defines the alternative contact appeal. The alternative brand contact, in keeping with the outside-in and zero-based contact planning philosophy, is media-neutral. The strategic purpose is to establish an unexpected and unconventional planned brand contact experience, whether in the traditional or nontraditional media environment.

The key motivating factors to alternative brand contact planning is firstly, clients' demand for innovative strategic thinking. Clients are seeking brand contact solutions beyond the tried and trusted, traditional brand communication methods. To answer to this challenge, the Integrated Communications Agency must shift from commission-based to fee-based remuneration systems. The commission-based remuneration system erodes agency accountability, in that it motivates the agency to spend as much money as possible in conventional ways in traditional mass media. Walker (2000:3) asserted that within a fee-based system, the agency's idea generators are set free. The agency is able to explore alternative brand contact approaches and invest, as Yeo (1998:49) suggests, in the business of strategic advice.

The second and related key motivator to alternative brand contact planning resides in the consumer's response to a highly competitive and increasingly cluttered marketplace. Consumers are, as Duncan and Moriarty (1997:91) claim, psychologically conditioning themselves to ignore the brand communications thrust at them. Consequently, advertisers are making considerable effort to create impact by focussing on the creative aspects of brand communication messages. Creative strategic contact thinking can, however, also effectively penetrate commercial clutter barriers. The aim, as Bearden et al. (2001:374) state, is to develop new ways to reach target audiences who have become jaded by traditional brand communications clutter. The thrust of alternative brand contact planning is thus to move beyond, or to manipulate traditional brand communication vehicles to target

consumers in an unexpected and unconventional manner when and where they least expect to encounter a commercial message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind.

The planning of the alternative point of brand contact is linked to Dru's (1996:35) theory of *disruption*. The theory proposes that the brand communications environment must be investigated to identify traditional brand communication norms and accordingly, to define brand communication challenges. Disruption follows as creative strategic thinking is engaged to deliver innovative alternative brand contact solutions.

The strategic objective is to develop alternative points of brand contact that are novel and appropriate to the overall brand contact strategy. Alternative brand contact planning is reliant on creative strategic thinking. The approaches and opinions of Sternberg and Lubart (1999:3), Amabile and Tighe (1993:9) and Duncan (2002:342) amongst others, reinforce that the alternative brand contact must be novel, to cut through communications clutter and be noticed, and appropriate, to fulfil its strategic role within the integrated brand contact strategy.

Various creative problem-solving techniques, as illustrated by Nickerson (1999:400), Osborn (1953), Young (1975:53-54), De Bono (1971:4) and Gordon, quoted in Moriarty (1986:4-5) can be employed to stimulate and develop creative ideas. Nickerson (1999:419) concludes that creative ideas can emerge through any number of creative processes, as teams are creative in different ways for different reasons. Of greater importance however, is the mindset of those developing creative ideas. It is the intention to be creative and to break with conventional thinking at the strategic level, that is paramount and instrumental to alternative brand contact planning.

Creative strategic thinking is integral to the process of alternative brand contact planning. The chapter continues to establish that the challenge to alternative brand contact planning, to create unexpected and unconventional points of contact that are both novel and appropriate, is best addressed in an

account team environment. The account team presents, based on Robbins's (1994:399) assessment of creativity and innovation in organisations, an organic structure that is integrated, cross-functional and conducive to innovation. The alternative brand contact is reliant on a confluence of the strategic planner's assessment of the contact environment to identify points of alternative contact high on impact, the creative team's expertise to produce fresh and novel ideas and the media planner's aim to achieve contact efficiency. The cross-functional integration of strategic, media and creative skills and expertise into account teams, is conducive to the planning of alternative points of brand contact that are both novel and appropriate to the integrated brand contact strategy.

The alternative brand contact is ultimately the product of an outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset and process. Alternative brand contact planning culminates in the intent to break with conventional contact planning to deliver unconventional contact ideas that are novel and appropriate. The culture and mindset of alternative brand contact planning must be embraced by all involved – the client, the Integrated Communications Agency and the account team.

To present an objective assessment of the planning of alternative points of brand contact, the potential barriers to the process of alternative brand contact planning were investigated and discussed. The identified barriers are:

- A departmentalised agency structure, as the cross-functional integration of strategic, media and creative skills and expertise into account teams, is more conducive to alternative brand contact planning;
- A lack of outside-in thinking, as seeing the world through the eyes of the consumer will highlight the importance of developing unexpected contact approaches within the cluttered and conventional world of brand communications;

- Media and commission bound biases, as alternative brand contact planning commences from a zero-based, media-neutral planning platform to deliver unexpected and unconventional contact ideas;
- A total reliance on brand message creativity to achieve impact, as alternative brand contacts require that creative strategic thinking is applied to enhance the impact of brand communications;
- Total reliance on computerised media planning systems and measurement data. Alternative brand contacts remain to be judged and require of the client and agency to engage in investigative, explorative and experimental strategic activity.

An analysis of the various barriers to alternative brand contact planning reveals that the greatest collective barrier is encountered in mindset. An inside-out, departmentalised, media-biased and measurement bound planning mindset, void of creative strategic purpose and thinking, will entirely inhibit the process of alternative brand contact planning.

Given the identified barriers to alternative brand contact planning, requisites for alternative brand contact impact were next explored and developed. The requisites present qualitative guidelines, according to which the brand contact task team and account team can plan and assess the potential impact of alternative points of brand contact in the integrated brand contact strategy. The following requisites were identified and discussed:

- The Alternative Brand Contact Planning Mindset

Alternative brand contact planning demands that the planners of brand contact communications break with conventional, inside-out thinking at the strategic level. The unexpected and unconventional point of brand contact is irrespective of its context, whether in the form of traditional or nontraditional media, the result of an outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative

strategic planning process. The mindset of the cross-functional account team, the Integrated Communications Agency and the client is either the greatest barrier or the most powerful contributor to the process of alternative brand contact planning.

- Impact and the Novelty of the Alternative Brand Contact

Impact entails the degree of awareness achieved by an individual exposure of a brand communications execution, in any given medium. Duncan (2002:171) asserts that attention must be gained to create brand awareness and stimulate brand knowledge. The greater the awareness and brand knowledge, the greater the potential impact of the brand on consumer decision-making.

The primary objective of the alternative brand contact is to cut through commercial clutter barriers, to be noticed and to build brand awareness and brand knowledge. To achieve this goal an alternative brand contact must firstly be novel. It will only be noticed if it is perceived as original, as unexpected and unconventional.

- Impact and the Communication Effectiveness of the Alternative Brand Contact

The strength of the alternative brand contact lies firstly in its novelty. However to attain true impact, to create brand awareness and build brand knowledge, the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning. The point of contact must succeed in creating a clear, concise and complete understanding of the brand communications message to be convincing. Novelty alone will not attain meaningful impact and strategic relevance.

- Impact and Communicating a Single-minded Brand Identity

To fulfil its strategic role, the alternative brand contact must add value to the integrated brand strategy as a whole. The alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning and effectively communicate the single-minded positioning of the brand. This implies that not only the brand message delivered by the alternative contact be considered, but also the meaning communicated through the point of contact itself. As Duncan (2002:373) reasons, how a brand chooses to make contact will invariably influence how it is perceived. The choice and form of alternative brand contact must in and of itself, be relevant to the identity of the brand.

- Impact and Target Audience Relevance and Involvement of the Alternative Brand Contact

Because alternative brand contact planning is defined from the consumer's point of view, in other words from the outside-in, it is also vital that the contact achieves target audience relevance. What is unexpected and unconventional to one consumer audience may not be unconventional and unexpected to another. Kotze (1999:81) reasons that alternative contacts must penetrate and achieve relevance in context of consumers' lifestyle patterns and interests. Schultz and Barnes (1995:301) elaborate that consumer aperture must also be investigated. To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must resonate with the consumer's state of mind, in context of lifestyle.

- Continued Impact of the Alternative Point of Contact

The final requisite to be considered, is the alternative brand contact's ability to maintain its unconventional and unexpected appeal. Because the alternative brand contacts is reliant on its novelty, to rise above clutter and be noticed, its impact value will diminish, as it grows stale. Hollis, in Chronis (2000:65) consequently proposes that fresh contacts are developed

continuously, or that sustainable alternative brand contacts that can be improved upon, be employed.

Chapter Two focussed on the concept of brand contacts and the process and importance of integrated brand contact planning. Chapter Two thus presents the context of this study. The alternative point of brand contact can not be investigated in strategic isolation. The building of a relevant, differentiated and single-minded brand identity is the primary goal of brand contact activity today.

The aim is to achieve brand contact integration and the alternative brand contact must contribute to this process. Alternative brand contact planning is also reliant on the strategic mindset cultivated in integrated brand contact planning. An inside-out, media-biased planning framework will present a major barrier to the process of planning unconventional and unexpected points of brand contact.

Chapter Three delivers an assessment of the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact. The unconventional and unexpected brand contact has received little attention to this date and limited secondary data is encountered on the topic. For this reason data was investigated to deliver as objective and academically sound an assessment as possible. The chapter therefore also entails an identification and discussion of potential barriers and possible requisites or guidelines to alternative brand contact planning.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the opinions of South African marketing and communication professionals on the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact. The insights gained through the secondary research study will consequently be applied in constructing and implementing a valid research framework. The findings of the primary research study will ultimately be consolidated with the secondary research study to present valuable insights and guidelines to the planning of alternative

points of brand contact in the form of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning

Chapter Four will next discuss the research methodology to the study.