

Chapter 5

Research Implementation, Results and Interpretation.

5.1 Introduction

The dual purpose of this chapter is firstly, to briefly and objectively present and discuss the real world dynamics encountered in the process of conducting the research for this study and secondly, to present the research analysis, results and interpretation of the qualitative exploratory study. The chapter is thus constructed into two sections namely, Research Implementation and Results and Interpretation.

The qualitative exploratory research methodology to this study, discussed in Chapter 4, was purposefully crafted to gain depth of insight and to expose current attitudes, opinions and motivations in the South African marketing and communications industry and specifically and for well motivated reasons, the Integrated Communications Agency and their clients.

Accordingly, a layered research process was constructed, with the aim to address the primary and supporting research objectives in depth. The exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications agencies present the first layer or phase of research and will therefore be the first point of discussion in relaying research implementation dynamics and in presenting research results. The focus groups were followed by semi-structured depth interviews with clients (Marketing or Brand Managers) of the senior account teams and thereupon by in depth interviews with key players within the senior account teams (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors). The implementation dynamics encountered in and the results gained from the latter two research phases will thus also be discussed in this order.

5.2 Research Implementation Dynamics

As stated, the implementation dynamics encountered in the research process is the point of departure in Chapter Five. In accordance with the research methodology and design of the research process, the implementation of the exploratory focus group research with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies will firstly be discussed.

5.2.1 The Exploratory Focus Groups with Senior Account Teams

The immediate challenge was to contact the Managing Directors of the identified Integrated Communications Agencies (Lindsay Smithers FCB, The Jupiter Drawing Room, Network BBDO, TBWA Hunt Lascaris, Ogilvy & Mather Rightford Searle-Tripp & Makin and King James). The first five mentioned agencies are situated in Gauteng, the hub of the advertising industry in South Africa. King James's main agency is situated in Cape Town.

The Managing Directors of the agencies were verbally briefed on the nature and orientation of the study and were requested to make available a senior account team in the agency, with range and depth of experience, for focus group sessions. The directors and/or their assistants were also requested to e-mail the names and designations of the members of the selected account teams to the researcher. The Directors were all intrigued by the study and the availability of senior account teams was generally secured with ease. The focus group with the senior account team at King James, situated in Cape Town, completed this first phase of the qualitative exploratory research study.

The focus groups were conducted in agency boardrooms. An hour and 30 minutes was requested and scheduled up front. Respondents were thus at ease with the allocated discussion period and comfortable and confident in their own territory. The smallest focus group involved an account team of four members. The largest involved an account team of seven members.

The research discussions were audio taped and a research assistant was present to manage equipment and additional note taking. The researcher was thus able to pay full attention to respondents and their responses. The focus groups were introduced, as previously motivated with a brief description of the alternative brand contact and examples of alternative points of brand contact, either described and/or visually mounted on presentation boards. This measure succeeded to create a sense of clarity and direction in the focus group discussions and also established a natural comfort zone. The reason being that the respondents are familiar with presentation board formats, as these are tools that are made use of in their own internal meetings and in presentations and pitches to clients.

The research methodology discussed in chapter four (4.9.1) of this study explains and motivates that the research guide to the focus groups consists of a single open-ended question. The purpose of the question is to stimulate free discussion. In reality the informal description of the alternative point of brand contact and the supporting examples were, in the case of four of the focus groups, sufficient to stimulate relevant free and interactive discussion. Conversation thus naturally evolved to address the focus of the formulated open-ended question and the researcher therefore only had to focus on probing appropriate and new/fresh responses.

The various respondents in the focus group sessions were generally very vocal and opinionated and thus interaction and debate rapidly ensued. The possible reason for this is that the interviewed senior account teams function as integrated teams and are accustomed to frequent cross-functional internal meetings and planning and brainstorming sessions. As Deacon et al. (1999:56) explain, focus groups can involve either pre-constituted (already existing) or researcher constituted (self-created) groups. The researcher believes that it is the pre-constituted nature of the focus group teams that made for ready, active and dynamic discussion.

The focus group sessions were concluded with a summary of the key points of discussion. All audio-taped data was captured, processed and prepared by

the researcher immediately after the focus group sessions, for analysis purposes. Individual focus group reports were developed in the process and also presented to the research assistant to ensure accuracy and objectivity in reporting.

In general the advantages of focus group research, as described by Tull and Hawkins (1993:450), Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1) and Kinnear and Taylor (1996:319) were encountered. The combined group effect of the senior account teams produced spontaneous discussion and a greater range of thought, ideas and experiences. The involvement levels in the focus group discussions naturally increased and individual comments did trigger responses from other respondents.

It is the researcher's opinion that the first exploratory phase of the research study, as presented through exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in the research sample of Integrated Communications Agencies, was indeed successful. A depth of understanding was gained and a number of unexpected and fresh opinions, as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134 – 137) also reason, were delivered on the core research issues. The qualitative data produced by the focus group sessions did in fact enable the researcher to affirm and explore literature findings and importantly, to enrich the defined research propositions and related objectives. The proposed interview guide applied in the semi-structured depth interviews with clients (Marketing or Brand Managers) could consequently also be meaningfully enriched.

5.2.2 The Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Clients

The sample of Marketing or Brand Managers, as discussed and motivated in the research methodology in Chapter 4 (4.10.2), was generated by the individual senior account teams representing Lindsay Smithers FCB, The Jupiter Drawing Room, Net#work BBDO, TBWA Hunt Lascaris, and to include clients from a small agency, King James. Each team was requested, in closure of the focus group session, to identify two key clients for depth

interview purposes. It was made clear to the account teams that the purpose of the research study is not to bounce the team's opinions and attitudes off their clients. The teams were consequently comfortable in identifying two key clients.

The sample of Marketing or Brand Managers that was generated is as follows. Coincidentally, a healthy balance or spread of clients in terms of industries was obtained.

1. **Toyota SA Motors:** Claude Jarrard – General Manager Advertising and Database Marketing, situated in Gauteng.
2. **Edcon Group United Retail Division:** Richard Ashton – Executive Marketing Manager for Jet, Sales House, Cuthberts and Smileys, situated in Gauteng.
3. **Permark International:** Nicky de Kok – Marketing Manager for Lip-ice, Milton, Gallia and Durex, situated in Gauteng.
4. **SABC Radio:** Randall Abrahams – General Manager Public Commercial Broadcasting Services, situated in Gauteng.
5. **Standard Bank:** Nikki Twomey – Brand and Communications Director, situated in Gauteng.
6. **South African Tourism:** Themba Khumalo – Chief Marketing Officer, situated in Gauteng.
7. **Independent Newspapers Cape:** Mike Vale – Marketing Manager, situated in Cape Town.
8. **Sea Harvest Corporation Limited:** Michelle Harvey – Marketing Director, situated in Cape Town.
9. **Guinness:** Rynard van der Westhuizen – Marketing Manager, situated in Cape Town.
10. **Vodacom:** Andre Beyers – Executive Head of Marketing, situated in Gauteng.

Telephonic contact was made with clients and interviews were scheduled with ease, as clients were informed of the nature of the research study and the participation of their account teams.

The semi-structured depth interviews were scheduled for an hour and were conducted in clients' offices. A number of interviews however lasted an hour and a half to two hours, as clients engaged with the research topic and open-ended questions. As motivated in the research methodology, the client interviews commenced with the exact same description and alternative brand contact examples, as the account teams were exposed to. The marketing or brand managers readily bonded with the proposed description, elaborated on examples and naturally engaged in free and open discussion. In many instances open-ended questions were naturally addressed with the result that the researcher often only had to apply probing where necessary. All of the semi-structured interviews were audio taped, whereafter reports were immediately developed for analysis purposes.

The depth interview as Kahan (1990:8-9), McDaniel and Gates (1996:198) and Sudman and Blair (1998:196) confirm, is employed to uncover respondents' attitudes and to ensure that personal opinions on the defined research propositions are expressed. The semi-structured depth interview, as a one-on-one data collection method, is employed in this study, as motivated in Chapter 4 (4.8.2) and argued by Dillon et al. (1993:141), to explore and describe the perceptions of the Marketing or Brand Managers.

The aim is to ensure that they divulge and share their thoughts, beliefs and potentially charged opinions, on their own terms. This objective was achieved as Marketing or Brand Managers not only confirmed but elaborated on many of the research propositions and delivered new and fresh and certainly also charged opinions on the nature and role of the alternative brand contact and the process of alternative brand contact planning.

The interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers furthermore assisted greatly in the assessment of the proposed interview guide to the final phase of research namely, the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams. As a result of the insights gained from Marketing and Brand Managers and the high degree of correlation demonstrated with the attitudes and motivations of the senior account teams, a far more focussed

research approach could be developed and implemented in the final phase of research.

5.2.3 The Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Key Players in Interviewed Account Teams

The sample of key players in senior account teams naturally emerged from the first phase of research, namely the exploratory focus groups with the senior account teams. As discussed in the research methodology the three key players to be interviewed per account team, are the Strategic Planner, the Media Planner and the Creative Director. A sample size of fifteen interviews with key players was therefore planned (5 x Strategic Planners, 5 x Media Planners and 5 x Creative Directors). However, during the phase of exploratory focus group research it was identified that in the instance of one team, the strategic planning and the media planning functions are essentially managed by one individual. Consequently, the final sample size existed of 14 as opposed to 15 key players.

The sample profile with reference to functions is as follows:

1. James Barty – Strategic Planner: King James
2. Lucinda Dare – Media Planner: King James
3. Alistair King – Creative Director: King James
4. Gerrit Visser – Strategic Planner: FCB
5. Gwen Bezuidenhout – Media Planner: FCB
6. Qiantes Venter – Creative Director: FCB
7. Abdulla Miya – Strategic Planner: Net#work BBDO
8. Hannes Jooste – Media Planner: Nota Bene
9. Julian Watt – Creative Director: Net#work BBDO
10. Yvonne Dow – Strategic Planner: TBWA Hunt Lascaris
11. Donna Rooyen – Media Planner: TBWA Hunt Lascaris
12. Catherine Thomson – Creative Director: TBWA Hunt Lascaris
13. Alistair Duff – Strategic and Media Planner: The Jupiter Drawing Room

14. Derek Logan – Creative Director: The Jupiter Drawing Room

All interviews were secured with ease as the researcher had met the key players and discussed the final phase of research with them, in conclusion to the focus group sessions. As mentioned, the high degree of correlation in opinions encountered in the first two phases of research, lead to a far more focussed research approach in the final phase of research. The researcher finally posed four specific open-ended questions to the key players in senior account teams. The interviews commenced with ease as all key players recalled the focus of the research study and the gist of the focus group discussions. True to the purpose and nature of the semi-structured depth interview, attitudes and motivations were delivered and uncovered and personally charged opinions presented in own terms, as the key players engaged with the research questions.

The semi-structured depth interviews with the key players in the senior account teams lasted approximately three-quarters of an hour, to an hour. All interviews were audio-taped and reports were drafted for analysis purposes after each individual interview.

The final phase of semi-structured depth interviews with the key players in the interviewed senior account teams, as will be discussed and motivated later in this chapter, were focussed on key areas that required further exploration and greater depth in opinions and motivations. The final phase of research was indeed successful on this level and consequently delivered a valuable contribution to the enrichment of final research findings.

Chapter Five will next proceed to present the results and interpretation of the primary research study.

5.3 The Research Results and Interpretation

5.3.1 Introduction

The research analysis and results will be presented in accordance with the three phase-design of the research process, in support of the qualitative exploratory methodology of this study. The increasing exposure and depth of insight that was gained through the research process, on the current attitudes, opinions and motivations of Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients, will thus be clearly demonstrated.

In order to ensure clarity in the presentation and reader absorption of the research analysis and results, the propositions and objectives to the research study will next be briefly reinforced. The tool employed in the analyses of research data will be discussed thereafter whereupon the results of the three-phase qualitative exploratory research study will be presented.

5.3.2 The Research Propositions and Related Objectives

a) Central Research Proposition:

The unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The ability of the alternative point of brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand is however found, based on the literature study, to depend on a set of requisites. These requisites, as previously introduced and motivated, consequently present the integral propositions to the research study.

b) Integral Research Propositions:

- **The unexpected and unconventional point of brand contact is irrespective of its context, whether in the form of traditional or non-traditional media, the result of an outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning process.**
- **To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed.**
- **To attain impact, the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning.**
- **To create meaningful impact, the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand.**
- **To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer, in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind (aperture).**
- **To maintain impact, novel alternative brand contacts must be developed continuously or a sustainable alternative brand contact that can be improved upon must be employed.**

Based on the opinions of Burns and Bush (1998:63) and Aaker et al. (1998:48 – 49) clear-cut research objectives were next developed by setting specific research questions to address the formulated research propositions and importantly, the scope or boundaries of the research study.

It is within this context that the study of literature revealed that the alternative brand contact is greatly dependent on a planning mindset and environment conducive to the development of unexpected and unconventional brand

contact solutions. An inside-out, media-biased and measurement bound planning mindset, void of creative strategic purpose and thinking is the greatest inhibitor of the process of alternative brand contact planning.

The Integrated Communications Agency, unlike the highly departmentalised and traditional agency, embraces the organic nature of the integrated account team which, as based on the reasoning of Robbins (1994:400) and Monge et al. (1992:250-274), is a catalyst for integrated strategic and creative brainstorming, conducive to alternative brand contact planning. It is thus also assumed that clients of Integrated Communications Agencies demonstrate the desire to develop a relationship with a communications partner that meets expectations and adds greater value to the process of brand building.

Consequently, the qualitative exploratory research study explores the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients.

Given the central proposition and parameters of the research study the **primary objective** of the research study is therefore to determine:

If the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact is perceived by South African Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients to be to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand?

The integral research propositions likewise, present the **supporting objectives** to the primary research study and aim to determine:

Whether South African Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients are of the opinion that:

- **The unexpected and unconventional point of brand contact is irrespective of its context, whether in the form of traditional or non-traditional media, the result of an outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning process?**
- **To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must firstly be novel to be noticed?**
- **To attain impact, the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning?**
- **To create meaningful impact, the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand?**
- **To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer, in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind (aperture)?**
- **To maintain impact, novel alternative brand contacts must be developed continuously or that a sustainable alternative brand contact that can be improved upon must be employed?**

Each of the above questions or objectives is relevant and specific to the purpose of this research study and have carefully been considered and applied in the design of the Interview Guides. If these objectives and Interview Guides are effectively carried out, as Burns and Bush (1998:63) argue, the data produced will solve the research problem. The nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals, in the form of Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients, will then be effectively explored to ultimately produce findings that can be applied in the development of plausible hypotheses for future empirical testing.

The tool employed in the analyses of research data will next be introduced and motivated, whereupon the research results of the three-phase qualitative exploratory research study will be presented.

5.3.3 The Application of Thematic Content Analysis

Communication, as Dane (1990:169-170) explains, holds meaning, and content analysis is a research method used to study meaning. The communication messages directed by someone to someone else for a specific purpose, are the observations that are investigated in content analysis. The measure of content analysis employed in this study will briefly be introduced and described. It must be noted that due to the qualitative exploratory nature of this study, content analysis was merely used to assist in the analysis of research data.

Berelson (1952:147) presented the first officially accepted definition of content analysis in the early 1950's – "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication". Cooper and Schindler (1998:417) and Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2000:236) point out that content analysis today, is applied as a flexible and wide-ranging tool in quantitative and qualitative research, to essentially measure the *what* aspect of a communications message.

Krippendorff (1980:22) argues that several levels of content analysis can be conducted and that "all of these may be simultaneously valid". A message can therefore convey a multitude of contents, even to a single receiver. Cooper and Schindler (1998:417) continue to explain that content analysis therefore follows a systematic process based on the selection of an unitisation scheme. The unit selected may be:

- Syntactical - units illustrated by words.

- Referential - objects, events, persons and so forth, to which an expression refers.
- Propositional - the use of several frameworks to for example demonstrate the relationship between various different units.
- Thematic - higher-level abstractions inferred from their connection to a unique pattern or structure in content.

Given the qualitative exploratory nature and purpose of this study, thematic content analysis was applied to assist in the analysis of data. The researcher applied thematic content analysis to identify and respond to themes that emerged from the patterns in the individual phases of research. Thus results were obtained and importantly, the next phase of research could be planned.

It must be reinforced that this is not a formal research study that aims to produce or assess hypotheses on empirical levels. The objective rather, and as previously motivated, is to produce results that can be applied in the development of hypotheses for future formal research.

The aim of this study is to explore and understand the phenomenon of alternative brand contact planning and therefore, as Holsti (1969:5-8) and Berelson (1952:114-128) explain, less precise and so-called “quasi-quantitative” methods (quantification in a rough format), will be applied and encountered in the analyses of data.

The process of thematic content analysis employed in this study, to assist in the analysis of data, will therefore not involve an empirical quantification of research results. Measures such as inter-coder reliability will also not be applied. The analysis is not aimed at coding, counting and measuring content. Also, this study is based on a small sample. There is thus, as Berelson (1952:14-128) reason, no justification for precise counting or for advanced statistical analyses. Measurement will therefore be used in terms of the assignment of major themes to content and the presence or absence of themes, rather than more specific frequencies. The focus is on the whole, the

nature, role and planning of alternative brand contacts (the Gestalt), rather than on specific parts of the whole.

The results of this study are presented in context of the themes that appeared from the patterns and structures in the content of conversations that evolved from and within the exploratory focus groups and the proceeding semi-structured depth interviews. The researcher aimed to present results objectively and systematically. Verbatim statements are employed to demonstrate opinion and the progressive nature of the exploratory study is reflected in the process of data analysis.

As motivated the analysis and results of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies will firstly be presented. Thereupon, the analysis and results of the semi-structured depth interviews with clients (Marketing and/or Brand Managers) and key players within the interviewed senior account teams (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors), will be presented.

5.4 Exploratory Focus Group Analysis and Results

The purpose of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies was, as presented by Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308), Proctor (1997:155), Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) and Aaker et al. (1998:191), to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact through the free flow of group discussion and to produce fresh opinions, attitudes and motivations.

To this end, a more loosely structured and interactive approach was employed. Firstly, with a description and examples (presented in Chapter 4 – 4.9.1) of the alternative brand contact and secondly, by the planned implementation of a single open-ended question that addresses the central research proposition and the primary objective of the research study in broad

terms. As previously stated, most of the senior account teams immediately and instinctively engaged with the description and examples of alternative points of brand contact and naturally pursued and addressed the open-ended question. Only two of the focus group sessions required an active introduction of the open-ended question namely,

How would you define the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact?

The full potential of the exploratory focus group method was thus leveraged, as Tull and Hawkins (1993:450), Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) and Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2001:1) suggest, to discover the unexpected and to produce greater range of thought, ideas and experiences.

The results of the exploratory focus groups will next be presented in context of a thematic content analysis. The analysis is presented in context of three core themes namely,

- The nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact.
- Requisites to the alternative point of brand contact and the planning thereof.
- Barriers to the alternative point of brand contact and the planning thereof.

The three core themes were not created on the grounds of, nor to suit the format of the literature study, but are based on the free-flow of discussions that naturally veered into the three identified areas.

The various themes emanating from the individual focus groups were furthermore captured and a cross-correlation of themes ultimately highlighted the dominant themes or results of the focus group research. High degrees of cross-correlation were encountered with information clearly repeating itself by the fourth focus group, as predicted by Eric du Plessis, Heather Kennedy and Lee Kotze in interviews.

The themes will next be identified and discussed with verbatim comments, in priority of occurrence under the three core thematic headings. The frequency with which themes were addressed, by the six focus groups are indicated in brackets next to each theme.

This approach is pursued in response to the opinions of Sudman and Blair (1998:195) who argue that the aim is to draw important themes or ideas and to write a narrative that reports these ideas as well as their implications. The emphasis is thus not on a quantitative report of how many respondents said something but rather on what was said. Verbatim comments are therefore presented to illustrate themes and ideas and the purpose is to develop a report that reads “like a story rather than a series of tables”, as Sudman and Blair argue.

5.4.1 The Nature, Role and Planning of the Alternative Point of Brand Contact

The following main themes emerged from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. A summary of the results will be presented in Table 3 on page 254 in this chapter.

a) Theme 1: The alternative brand contact breaks through clutter to achieve impact (6)

The key role of the alternative brand contact was defined by all of the senior account teams to be to break through clutter to achieve impact. A team for example, argued that marketers and advertisers today are active in an attention economy, “*consumers are time starved*” and that a lot of advertising today presents nothing more than “*wallpaper harassment*”. In agreement another two teams argued that “*consumers are a lot more sussed today*”, “*people know advertising for what its is*” and that “*going in below the*

consumer radar has to be the primary objective". As yet another team reasoned *"it is imperative that we break through expected contact clutter to ensure impact"*.

Alternative brand contacts according to the interviewed account teams, *"jump-out because of their different approach"* to *"make people sit up and take notice"*. Alternative brand contacts *"draw awareness and achieve impact, which is becoming increasingly more difficult given the clutter levels today"* and as *"people become immune to classical advertising"*.

The role of the alternative brand contact is clearly seen by all of the interviewed senior account to be to break through expected clutter levels to achieve impact. In this regard the concerns of Duncan and Moriarty (1997:91), Belch and Belch (1998:113), Hollis (2001:50) and Duncan (2002:144) on the increasing levels of consumer clutter and the resultant selective attention and exposure barriers erected by consumers, are reinforced by this research result. More importantly, Bearden et al. (2001:374) and Oosthuizen's (2000(a):52) opinions on the need to introduce new approaches to explode the presence of the brand into identified target markets, as Oosthuizen puts it, is also agreed with. And ultimately, Harris's, quoted in Chronis (2000:67) description of alternative brand contacts as "head turners, popping up when they are least expected" is also reinforced.

The study of literature however also clearly reveals that the alternative brand contact only succeeds in its strategic purpose if it has impact, if it cuts through clutter to ensure that the single-minded positioning of the brand is communicated and reinforced. Based on the opinions of Muller (1996:85), Lancaster (2003:16) and Duncan (2002:171) the alternative brand contact must therefore get the attention of customers and prospective consumers to create brand awareness and to communicate and reinforce brand knowledge, which implies an acquired understanding of the brand and its positioning.

Although the senior account teams did not immediately elaborate on the concept of impact, it is evident that the alternative brand contact is perceived

as an impact creator with statements such “*achieve attention*” and “*sit up to take notice*”. Of further importance is that the ability of the alternative brand contact to create awareness and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning or identity of the brand, presented itself, as will later be discussed, as a key alternative brand contact requisite.

b) Theme 2: The alternative point of brand contact differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional (6)

This result presented a new and fresh dimension to the nature and role of the alternative brand contact, as this quality was not revealed through the study of literature. The literature study does establish the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact in breaking through clutter to achieve awareness and communicate a focussed brand identity, but the pure value of the alternative brand contact as an immediate brand differentiation tool did not emerge.

All of the senior account teams’ reasoning was based on the consumer’s unconventional and unexpected experience of the alternative brand contact and the immediate rub-off association that positions the brand as different from its competitors. This result is substantiated with statements such as “*the alternative brand contact differentiates the brand purely because the use of an alternative point of contact is different from the norm*” and “*because it’s unconventional it positions the brand as different*”.

The significance of this research result is that aside from the means to break through clutter to achieve branded impact, the use of an unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact per se, is perceived as a brand differentiation tool. This result therefore presents a valuable level of enrichment to the defined research propositions and related objectives and ultimately the proposed interview guide to client interviews.

c) Theme 3: Alternative brand contacts generate word-of-mouth and publicity (5)

A further new thought or opinion derived from the exploratory focus groups is that the alternative point of brand contact often “*stimulates consumer word-of-mouth and also generates publicity*”. Alternative brand contacts “*get people talking*”. The teams reasoned that because of its unconventional and unexpected nature, the alternative point of brand contact draws the attention of the consumer to get talked about, and gets the attention of the media to be reported about.

One of the interviewed senior account teams elaborated and claimed that they outperformed budgeted media spend with publicity value gained, through the use of a particular alternative brand contact campaign. Alternative brand contact strategies, according to the senior account teams, have the ability to generate both word-of-mouth and media publicity.

d) Theme 4: Alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy (4) and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter (3)

Four of the senior account teams devoted a fair amount of time to debating the nature of alternative brand contact planning. According to these teams alternative brand contact planning is, as one team stated, “*often wrongly relegated to the implementation of unconventional tactical executions*”. According to these four teams, who then also demonstrated complete outside-in, zero-based and media-neutral thinking, alternative brand contact planning should be positioned and practised as a brand communications planning philosophy. The four teams reasoned that:

“Alternative brand contact planning should not be put into a little box. You can do this in traditional media”

“It’s a methodology and a process that we live with clients. We are passionate about it. It’s our culture and our philosophy”

“It (alternative brand contact planning) must be core to all communications planning – as a philosophy and approach. Alternative brand contacts must not be seen as spectacular, once-off tactical applications”

“It’s (alternative brand contact planning) ingrained in how we work – it’s all about planning attitude”

One of the mentioned three teams imbed their alternative brand contact planning philosophy in the concept of disruption. Disruption as discussed in Chapter 3 (3.), is employed to break with conventional brand communication norms to introduce an unconventional and unexpected brand contact experience. The team believes that *“disruption is married to connections (contact) planning”* and for that reason *“TV can be an alternative brand contact”*. The nature and value of disruption as a planning approach was echoed and reinforced by two of the other account teams who also enforced that alternative brand contact planning can thus be applied in any given media context – *“It’s really all about disruption to bust through clutter and create impact. It’s breaking the norms and disruption can be applied to any medium”* and *“you must disrupt the norms to break through – and this spans all media”*.

It is evident that the four senior account teams believe that alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy. Alternative brand contact planning, according to these teams, should not be confined to or labeled as tactical activity. Three of the four senior account teams furthermore referred to alternative brand contact planning as the disruption of brand communications norms to break through clutter.

e) Theme 5: The alternative brand contact in ambient media form, is more focussed and cost-efficient (3)

This particular result is directly linked to three of the interviewed senior account teams’ discussions around the new media environment and ambient

media as a form of alternative brand contact. Ambient media, as defined in Chapter 3 (3.3.2) by Shankar and Horton (1999:1-4), Horton (2001:2), Phillipson (2001:6-8) and Ries and Ries (2002:84), aim to impact on consumers in the spaces where they live their lives and are specifically encountered in out-of-home environments and locations.

According to three of the senior account teams, the value of the ambient alternative point of brand contact is that it achieves strategic focus and therefore reaches and impacts on audiences cost efficiently. This result is supported with account team opinions such as:

“You can focus on your target audience where they really are and spend your budget well – get a better return on your investment” and
“You can get to your target market, where they live their lives, more cost efficiently”.

One of the three account teams furthermore reasoned that *“many brands today are resource poor”* and that *“traditional media has become very expensive”*. The team’s reasoning is that, given these market realities, innovative ambient contacts ensure that the brand breaks through clutter to achieve impact cost efficiently – *“We have to spend money more wisely – that’s where these types of unconventional contacts come in”*. The team is of the opinion that ambient contacts are a cost efficient application of increasingly tighter budgets in an increasingly media expensive communications environment.

Although this result is only related to alternative points of brand contact in new media environments, as specifically encountered in the form of ambient media, it does contribute a new thought to the field of unconventional contacts in the so-called out-of-home environments.

f) Theme 6: The planning and implementation of the alternative brand contact is time and energy consuming (3)

Three of the senior account teams defined the nature of alternative contact planning as highly time and energy consuming and as an *“investment in our part”*. The reasoning is that alternative brand contact planning is challenged by the process of having to *“generate the contact ideas and then having to convince clients and media owners”*. The teams consequently concluded that: *“going the traditional route is probably just so much easier”* and *“It’s a hell of a lot easier to just do a normal ad – this is hard work”*

This result can in general be positioned as a barrier to alternative brand contact planning and for the vast majority of agencies probably is. The teams were however adamant that alternative brand contact planning is *“our philosophy and a passion”*, *“it’s ingrained in how we work”* and that *“it will take time but we will persevere”*. It is consequently evident that the planning mindset of these account teams is firmly embedded in and committed to the value of alternative brand contact planning.

The remaining theme that is related to the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact, was generated by three senior account teams and surfaced as a further new or fresh contribution.

g) Theme 7: The alternative brand contact is more memorable (3)

Memorability as a strategic construct, is not addressed in the study of literature and therefore did not present itself as a quality of the alternative point of brand contact. The opinion of three of the senior account teams is that because of its unconventional and unexpected appeal the alternative brand contact *“tends to be more memorable”*, than traditional or expected points of brand contact.

Although the memorability of the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact is not supported with literature findings and is only speculatively stated by three of the interviewed senior account teams, it is a bold claim to make and for that reason worthy of further exploratory research.

In conclusion to the exploration of the senior account teams' perceptions of the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact, it is evident that two findings of the literature study have been reinforced, namely:

- **The alternative brand contact breaks through clutter to achieve impact (6)**

And,

- **Alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy (4) and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter (3)**

Most importantly, the fact that the alternative brand contact is perceived by all of the senior account teams as a means to break through clutter to achieve impact partially supports the central research proposition and primary objective to this study. That is, the nature and role of the alternative brand contact is perceived to be to break through clutter to impact on consumers. It does however remain to be seen if the senior account teams also perceive the nature and role of the alternative brand contact, in full answer of the central research proposition and primary research objective, to be to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

Of value and in justification of the implementation of exploratory focus groups, a number of new thoughts or fresh ideas with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, have also been uncovered:

- **The alternative point of brand contact differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional (6)**
- **Alternative brand contacts generate word-of-mouth and publicity (5)**
- **The alternative brand contact in ambient media form, is more focussed and cost-efficient (3)**
- **The planning and implementation of the alternative brand contact is time and energy consuming (3)**
- **The alternative brand contact is more memorable (3)**

These results will, as previously argued, be employed to enrich the research propositions and related objectives and ultimately the interview guide designed for the semi-structured depth interviews with key clients (Marketing or Brand Managers) of, and key players within the senior account teams.

The focus group results that will next be presented and discussed relate to the central research proposition and primary research objective, in that they directly address the defined integral research propositions and supporting objectives. The literature study clearly reveals that the ability of the alternative point of brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers, to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand is found to depend on a set of requisites. As previously discussed, the focus group discussions naturally evolved to address requisites to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof.

5.4.2 Requisites to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

The following main themes emerged from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams with regard requisites to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof. A summary will be provided in Table 3 on page 254 of this chapter.

a) Theme 1: Target audience relevance (6)

The study of literature reveals that the point of alternative brand contact must be appropriate to the target audience's lifestyle patterns, preferences and interests, as argued by Kotze (1999:81), Taylor and Rigby (2001:3), Hatfield (2001:31) and McLean in Dru (2002:267). Schultz and Barnes (1995:301) furthermore reason that consumer aperture must also be considered. In other words, when, where and under what circumstances is the customer's or consumer's mind most receptive to a particular brand message? To ensure impact is achieved, the alternative point of brand contact must be relevant to the consumer's lifestyle patterns', preferences and interests, to also resonate with state of mind.

The senior account teams all considered the target audience relevance of the alternative brand contact to be of paramount importance. The relevance of the alternative brand contact to the lifestyle patterns, interests and state of mind of the target audience were addressed in indirect terms.

The teams all expressed the need for the alternative point of brand contact "*to be appreciated by*" or "*to reward*" consumers - "*It's really important that you know whom you are talking to. Are they going to appreciate the approach?*" The teams expressed the concern that if the alternative brand contact does succeed to break through clutter, but "*fails to appeal to consumer interests and preferences, it may do the brand damage*". A team for example reasoned that "*It must be relevant to who they are and what they are about, or else it*

will disappoint the consumer and damage the brand'. Another team in agreement argued that: *"People's attention is as important, as precious to them as their physical, absolute money. If the alternative brand contact is not rewarding it's going to irritate them"*.

It thus stands to reason that target audience relevance is indeed, based on the perceptions of the senior account teams a critical alternative brand contact requisite. Should the alternative point of brand contact fail to resonate with consumers it will be experienced, as the teams argued, as a disappointment or a source of irritation, and consequently do the brand damage.

b) Theme 2: Communicate and reinforce a focussed brand positioning in message and form (6)

This result is critical to the exploratory research study in that it directly addresses the central research proposition and primary research objective. The preceding discussion of the senior account teams perceptions of the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact (5.4.1), reveals that the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact is perceived as a means to break through clutter to achieve impact. The above result, as an alternative brand contact requisite, now establishes that the senior account teams are of the opinion that the alternative brand contact must break through clutter to achieve impact and communicate or reinforce a focussed brand positioning.

The study of literature, with reference to Joachimsthaler and Aaker (1997:5) and Darroll (2002) reveals that brand communication messages are effective if they break through clutter to communicate the brand identity or as Darroll argues, to achieve branded impact. To create a meaningful brand impression the alternative brand contact must likewise, as Horton (2001:13) confirms, clearly communicate a relevant, differentiated and single-minded brand message. Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) furthermore argues that the alternative brand contact must achieve brand relevance in terms of message content and

form. The meaning created by the point of contact itself must also be supportive of the brand positioning. The alternative brand contact is thus integrated into the brand contact strategy to communicate and reinforce a focussed brand positioning and contribute to the development of a consistent brand identity.

All of the senior account teams focus group discussions highlighted and stressed the vital importance of communicating the brand identity or positioning, as an alternative brand contact requisite. The teams noticeably devoted discussion time to the brand relevance of the alternative brand contact, in message and form, and also consistently returned to this requisite in discussion, to reiterate its importance. The senior account teams thus reinforced the literature study findings, as can be seen from the following team opinions and attitudes:

“The alternative brand contact point and its message must fit the image of the brand – what the brand stands for”

“The alternative contact itself and the message it communicates, must be in synergy with and reinforce the brand contact strategy”

“It must be relevant to the brand – in terms of its message execution and its actual choice in point of contact”

“Brand relevance is absolutely paramount. It must be totally in line with the tone of the brand and what it wants to take ownership of”

“It must, in its entirety, communicate and reinforce the core brand idea or concept - the brand blue print”

“It must on every level reflect exactly what the brand stands for – it’s a focussed discipline”

It is evident that the senior account teams view brand relevance as a critical alternative brand contact requisite. The alternative brand contact must break through clutter to achieve impact and communicate or reinforce a single-minded or focussed brand positioning (*core brand idea/ what the brand stands for, what it wants to take ownership of*). From the above statements it is also clear that the teams believe that the alternative brand contact must create

brand relevance in message and form of contact and that the alternative brand contact must integrate into the brand contact strategy to contribute to the process of brand building.

Of interest is that the teams were particularly concerned about the ramifications of introducing alternative brand contacts that lack brand relevance. Failure to achieve brand relevance, according to the senior account teams, will result in *“increasing clutter and brand damage”*. *“If its not relevant to the brand, people will perceive it as an invasion and get irritated”*. *“It will spoil and pollute the brand”*. The end result is *“just another gimmick, not doing much of a branding job”*. The alternative brand contact that does not demonstrate brand relevance and therefore does not communicate a focussed brand positioning in message and form is, according to the senior account teams, merely a gimmick that increases clutter, irritates consumers and harms the brand.

c) Theme 3: An integrated and cross-functional account team (5)

The literature study reveals that the integration of multiple communication capabilities into cross-functional account teams, is core to the development of an integrated brand contact strategy. Robbins (1994:453) and Monge et al. (1992:250-274) furthermore argue that diversity in skill contributes to the development of more innovative ideas. The confluence of strategic, media and creative resources in the integrated account team, is thus also conducive to the process of developing points of brand contact that are unexpected, unconventional and strategically relevant.

The traditional and departmentalised agency environment is consequently identified as a barrier to alternative brand contact planning, in the study of literature. Five of the interviewed senior account teams in turn unanimously perceive the integrated and cross-functional account team as an alternative brand contact requisite. The single line of reasoning pursued by the various account teams, is that an integrated and cross-functional planning

environment stimulates creative strategic planning. The following opinions and attitudes support this result:

“You must work as a team – we (creative and strategy) work together. We have broken departmentalisation down – it’s a group process”

“The result is a team that is creatively driven to look for opportunities”.

“Joint creative interpretation presents unconventional radical ways to communicate the brand identity effectively”.

“There’s a natural tendency to rally around”. “You must be able to look sideways to come up with a relevant creative solution”. “The idea can come from media or client service”

“In an integrated cross-functional team you get ideas from anywhere and anyone”

“Creative thought can come from everyone”

“You need to work together to recognise a great idea”

“You can then see the opportunity and develop unconventional ideas”

“You need a culture of creative integration. You can’t have a silo mentality. You can’t be protecting turf. You need cross-pollination across all avenues and you need the structure to support it”.

“In silos everyone’s protecting their own turf. There’s territory all over the place” “The interactivity and the dynamics in an integrated team produces creative strategic planning and its critical to alternative brand contact thinking”

According to the senior account teams, an integrated and cross-functional account team environment stimulates joint creative idea development and the identification of unconventional and unexpected opportunities or contact ideas that will succeed in communicating the brand positioning effectively. The five senior account teams believe that the integrated and cross-functional account team produces *“creative strategic thinking”* because it is *“creatively driven”* through *“joint creative interpretation or a culture of creative integration”* to *“identify opportunities”* and develop *“unconventional contact ideas”* that will *“communicate the brand identity effectively”*.

The joint skills and expertise of the members of the integrated account team is thus perceived by the senior account teams to be conducive to the development of contact solutions that are unconventional and strategically relevant, hence the notion of creative strategic planning is reinforced.

d) Theme 4: An outside-in (6), zero-based and media-neutral planning mindset (5)

The study of literature presents a set of alternative brand contact requisites on the premise that the integrated account team practices outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic thinking and is supported by the Integrated Communications Agency and client in doing so.

The account team, agency and client must therefore demonstrate, as advocated by Dru (1996:56) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297), a break away from traditional inside-out thinking, to consumer based outside-in thinking. Moving outside-in, to assess the consumer's experience of the brand communications environment will, as Belch and Belch (1998:113) and Hollis (2001:50) observe, reveal what is experienced as conventional and expected brand communications clutter. In response, consumer relevant alternative brand contact solutions can be developed and implemented to cut through commercial clutter.

The literature study furthermore purports that the account team and its clients have a zero-based and media-neutral planning mindset. 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. A prefixed notion as to which brand communication mediums must be employed, and how they should be employed, will inhibit the process of creative strategic planning and thus alternative brand contact planning.

Outside-in thinking was established as a definite requisite to alternative brand contact planning by all of the senior account teams. The senior account teams generally reasoned that to develop a point of brand contact that is experienced as unexpected, it is critical to have insight into the identity of the target audience. The teams felt that alternative brand contact planning will be near impossible if the consumer's experience of his or her environment is not well understood. In other words, and as respondents for example reasoned:

"Norms can hardly be broken if they are not identified and understood in the first place".

"You need to know what is experienced as expected to develop the unexpected. It must be unexpected from the consumer's view to get noticed" and

"You need to be unconventional to get noticed but it is the consumer base that will determine what is unconventional and unexpected".

Given the above statements and line of reasoning, it is also evident that all of the senior account teams indirectly argued that the alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed. According to the senior account teams the consumer base will determine what is novel – unexpected and unconventional.

Zero-based and media-neutral thinking were addressed in direct terms, as requisites to alternative brand contact planning by five of the senior account teams. With regard to zero-based thinking, the teams all argued that an *"open-minded"* planning approach is vital to develop unconventional and unexpected contact ideas. This suggests that preconceived notions and preconditions will inhibit alternative brand contact planning. The teams furthermore reasoned that *"a radical /paradigm shift/change from traditional media-biased planning"* or as one of the teams put it - *"a shift from typical advertising thinking to creative strategic thinking- ideas thinking"* is required.

The need for a media-neutral planning platform flowed directly from the above line of reasoning, as teams generally argued that it *"allows for creative*

strategic planning". According to the five senior account teams, media-biased thinking will constrain alternative brand contact planning. As two of the team's argued: "*there can be no biased influence*", "*you can not brainstorm with fixed media ideas in boxes*" and another stated "*we shouldn't be thinking in media moulds we should be thinking of communication spaces*".

It is evident from the above analysis that alternative brand contact planning, according to six of the senior account teams, requires an outside-in planning approach. Also, as five of the teams continued to reason, a zero-based and media-neutral planning platform is required to undertake alternative brand contact planning and to produce unconventional and unexpected brand contact solutions.

e) Theme 5: Agency and client confidence (5) and an integrated client – account team relationship (3)

An intriguing new idea contributed by five of the senior account teams as a requisite to alternative brand contact planning, is agency confidence to challenge the norms and present unconventional contact solutions to client, and thereupon client confidence to implement alternative brand contact solutions. The lack of client confidence, as will later be revealed and discussed, reverted into one of the senior account teams' perceived barriers to alternative brand contact planning.

According to the five senior account teams who identified agency confidence to undertake alternative brand contact planning as a requisite, it is imperative that the account team "*has the confidence to identify opportunities and develop unconventional ideas*". There can be, as one of the teams put it "*no fear to address opportunities and present unconventional approaches – not internally and not between agency and client*". As another concluded, "*agencies must have the confidence to present alternative brand contact ideas to client and convince them that it will establish a competitive advantage*".

One of the four account teams linked the lack of agency confidence and the fear to take risks, to what they refer to as “*old school thinking*”. The Managing Director of the agency who plays an active role on a planning level within the team, described the state of mind as follows: “*The client says ‘jump’ and the agency says ‘how high?’ – the old story. It’s disturbing that agencies still think like that. When the client says ‘jump’ – it’s ‘lets do it together’. There’s a lot of commitment to risk taking with clients here – where the client’s actually with you, not apart from you*”. Another of the account teams in agreement stated that: “*Our clients go for it. They seem to have trust (in us) and trust makes for faith in the idea*”. The two senior account teams established that an integrated client-account team relationship is needed to ensure confidence in alternative brand contact planning is created.

A third senior account team reinforced this perception or opinion in focus group discussion. Likewise, the team believes that the confidence to take risks is established as an integrated working relationship is created between client and account team. The account team claims to be involved in client brand planning meetings, the brand communications brief is co-developed by client and account team, unconventional thinking is encouraged from a zero-based and media-neutral planning platform and the client is often involved in contact planning and disruption brainstorm sessions. The team drew the following analogy “*we are the backs and they (client) are the forwards. We work as a team*” and “*there is a shared and real willingness and desire to take risks, to challenge the norms*”.

Evidently three of the four account teams who perceive agency and client confidence to be a requisite to alternative brand contact planning, perceive an integrated client and account team relationship as the key to establishing or creating the confidence to undertake alternative brand contact planning. As one of the three account teams reasoned and concluded - “*Confidence in alternative brand contact planning requires mutual trust and joint decision-making. Everyone needs to work together to make it happen*”.

In conclusion to the analysis of the senior account teams' opinions and motivations on requisites to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof, it is evident that the central research proposition and primary research objective to this study has now been addressed in full. All of the senior account teams believe that the alternative brand contact breaks through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers to communicate and reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand. As all of the senior account teams reasoned, the alternative brand contact must:

Communicate and reinforce a focussed brand positioning

The analysis of data furthermore reveals that the ability of the alternative brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand is indeed, according to senior account team responses, dependent on a set of requisites. Interestingly the requisites identified in the free flow of the exploratory focus group discussions either directly or indirectly confirmed five of the six requisites identified in the study of literature. Consequently the integral research propositions and supporting research objectives have greatly been confirmed and addressed in the focus group research.

An integrated assessment of the correlation between the integral research propositions or supporting research objectives (SRO) to this study and the focus group results appear as follows:

SRO 1: The unexpected and unconventional point of brand contact is irrespective of its context, whether in the form of traditional or non-traditional media, the result of an outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning process?

All of the senior account teams established the need for consumer oriented outside-in thinking in alternative brand contact planning. Five of the six senior account teams furthermore defined a zero-based and media neutral mindset as an alternative brand contact planning requisite.

Five of the senior account teams also perceive alternative brand contacts to result from creative strategic planning and for this reason set an integrated cross-functional account team environment, as a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. This result consequently also supports the sampling premise of the primary research study in that the need to focus on Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients to investigate the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact, is confirmed.

SRO 2: To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed?

This requisite was addressed indirectly by all of the senior account teams in arguing the need for outside-in thinking and that the unconventional and unexpected (novel) appeal of the alternative brand contact is dependent on the target audience profile. That the alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed is seemingly perceived by the account teams as a given. The qualifying factor is whether the target audience experiences the point of brand contact as unconventional and unexpected.

SRO 3: To attain impact the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning?

The study of literature, with specific reference to Adler and Rodman's (1997:17) and Tubbs and Moss's (2000:20) approach to effective communication, reasons that 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. As Schultz and Barnes (1995:188-189) and Belch and Belch (1998:292) reinforce, it is imperative that brand contact messages communicate in a clear, concise and complete manner to be convincing. Belch and Belch (1998:293) then raises the concern that so much emphasis is often placed on the creative execution that the brand's message is overshadowed. The point of contact is thus noticed but fails in its strategic intent to impact on target audiences, to communicate effectively and to create brand awareness and brand knowledge.

Although none of the account teams directly addressed the ability of the alternative brand contact to communicate effectively, the ability of the brand contact to communicate the brand identity successfully, was identified by all of the senior account teams as imperative.

Furthermore, the teams did indirectly reinforce Belch and Belch's (1998:293) concern, in that the alternative brand contact that does not communicate or reinforce the brand identity is perceived to be "*just another gimmick, not doing much of a branding job*". The point of contact or creative gimmick is thus noticed but fails in its strategic intent to impact on target audiences, to communicate effectively and to create brand awareness and brand knowledge. Rather, as previously discussed, the gimmick results in "*increasing clutter and brand damage*" as consumers "*perceive it as an invasion and get irritated*".

SRO 4: To create meaningful impact the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand?

All six of the senior account teams are adamant that to be considered effective, the alternative brand contact must communicate the brand identity in message and form. The terms "*brand identity*", "*brand relevance*", "*core brand concept*" and "*what the brand stands for*" were used more frequently than the term brand positioning, as qualified above.

SRO 5: To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer, in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of mind (aperture)?

Target audience relevance is perceived by all six of the senior account teams as an alternative brand contact requisite. The importance of lifestyle patterns and interests and consumer state-of-mind were addressed in indirect terms by all of the teams in focus group discussions.

SRO 6: To maintain impact, novel alternative brand contacts must be developed continuously or that a sustainable alternative brand contact that can be improved upon must be employed?

Maintenance of the impact of the alternative brand contact is presented in the literature study as an alternative brand contact requisite. The reasoning, as per Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) and Dru (2002:67), is that the impact of the alternative brand contact is primarily the result of an unconventional and unexpected experience. The impact value of the alternative brand contact will consequently diminish when the form of contact grows stale. For this reason Hollis, in Chronis (2000:65) proposes that either fresh alternative brand contacts be identified continuously, or that an alternative brand contact with sustainability must be developed, in which case the contact can constantly be improved upon in unconventional ways.

This requisite did not feature in direct or indirect terms in any of the free-flow focus group discussions with senior account teams and therefore does not appear in the summary of responses in Table 3 on page 254. The semi-structured depth interviews with clients of the interviewed account teams and key players within the senior account teams will however present insight on this requisite, as it is built into the interview guide designed for these research phases.

The exploratory focus groups with senior account teams presented one new or fresh opinion in the domain of alternative brand contact requisites, namely:

Agency and client confidence (5) and an integrated client – account team relationship (3)

Five of the senior account teams perceive agency and client confidence to challenge norms, identify opportunities and develop and implement alternative brand contact solutions, to be a requisite to alternative brand contact planning.

Three of the five teams believe that the confidence to take risks is established as an integrated working relationship is created between client and account team - *“Confidence in alternative contact planning requires mutual trust and joint decision-making. Everyone needs to work together to make it happen”*. In which case *“there is a shared and real willingness and desire to take risks, to challenge the norms”*.

This result will be employed in enriching the interview guide that has been designed for the semi-structured depth interviews with key clients of the interviewed senior account teams and key players within the senior account teams.

The themes that emerged as barriers to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof, will next be discussed.

5.4.3 Barriers to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

The discussion of potential barriers to alternative brand contact planning in the study of literature, was addressed through a secondary search for and the development of alternative brand contact requisites which in turn, as previously argued, evolved into the integral propositions and supporting objectives to the primary research study. It is therefore of value to identify the barriers to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof that arose from the focus group discussions.

The literature study reveals that the greatest collective barrier is mindset. An inside-out, departmentalised, media-biased and research bound strategic planning framework, lacking in creative strategic purpose and thinking, will make alternative brand contact planning near impossible. This was confirmed, as will next be seen, by the majority of senior account teams.

The following main themes emerged from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams with regard the barriers to the alternative brand contact

and the planning thereof. Table 3 on page 254 of this chapter will present a summary of the results.

a) Theme 1: Departmentalised structures with confined roles (5)

Five of the senior account teams perceive an integrated and cross-functional planning environment to be a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. Five of the six senior account teams conversely emphasized that a departmentalised planning environment, in which strategic, media and creative roles are confined, will present a barrier to creative strategic planning and therefore alternative brand contact planning.

b) Theme 2: A media commission-based agency remuneration system (5)

The literature study points out that media commission-based agency remuneration presents an immediate barrier to alternative brand contact planning. The strategic motivation is then, as Yeo (1998:49) and Heyns (2001:50) assert, to spend as much money as is possible in mass media. Within a fee-based remuneration environment on the other hand, as Walker (2000:3) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:299) indicate, the communications agency has the freedom to search for holistic, integrated and alternative brand contact solutions.

A commission-based agency remuneration system was identified by five of the senior account teams, as a definite barrier to media-neutral thinking. The teams vehemently discussed the constraints of media commission-based remuneration to argue that a performance or fee-based planning environment is a definite requisite to zero-based and media-neutral creative strategic planning and the development of alternative brand contact ideas. As two of the teams succinctly put it: *“No agency working on commission can function on a media neutral platform. No agency that earns commission can claim to*

be media neutral” and “we are media neutral because it does not effect our remuneration”. Another team concluded that: “a 100% fee or performance based environment is required to ensure platform neutral and creative contact planning”.

c) Theme 3: Lack of client confidence and lack of evidence (4)

Five senior account teams identified agency and client confidence to undertake and implement alternative brand contact planning, as an alternative brand contact requisite. Four account teams in turn identified the lack thereof as an alternative brand contact barrier. The noticeable difference however is that client as opposed to agency confidence, received the attention and presented the source of frustration.

The senior account teams reasoned that although clients express the need for alternative brand contact solutions, they are “*conservative*” and “*always choose the safe option*”. The following verbatim statements support the above:

“Clients are a lot more conservative, anything out-there makes them nervous”.

“Clients verbally express a need for unconventional solutions but they want the safe option plus 10%. Its like, we will take the one arm band off”.

“9 out of 10 times clients choose the safe option”.

“Clients perpetuate the same, the mould”.

“They don’t have the ability to take risk – when it gets to the crunch, the save option is chosen”.

“Clients must trust us – they employ us as the specialists, the professionals”.

“We get told that we are hired because we are brand consultants, but then they don’t trust us”.

The four senior account teams did however also proceed to debate why it may be that clients choose “*the safe option*”, “*perpetuate the same*” or are “*a*

lot more conservative". The teams concluded that the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of the alternative brand contact presents the key cause.

As evidence of the effectiveness of alternative points of brand contact is sorely lacking, as reasoned in the literature study and pointed out by Schultz and Barnes (1996:300, 303) and Shankar and Horton (1999:4) amongst others, they are handicapped by a lack of accountable audience research data. Clients are therefore not only challenged to shed inhibitions, but to take risk.

Confirming the above, the four senior account teams reasoned that "*clients stick to the traditional solutions because it's tried and trusted and it works*", "*because there is no proof and it can't be/is not measured, they'd rather go for the safe option*". "*The massive problem agencies have is that clients will say 'so prove it to me' – 'conclusively prove it'*". Clients, as one of the teams motivated, "*who are not risk takers, who do not go with their gut feel, demand a solid case*".

On probing, only one team produced a possible solution to the above and that is to "*present clients with the nature and value of disruption and alternative brand contact strategies in building brands*", prior to consolidating the brief and progressing with communications planning. The account team reasoned that their success in alternative brand contact planning is greatly the result of presenting and undertaking "*disruption workshops with clients before the real work starts*". Clients consequently bond with the value of alternative brand contacts as they grasp their role and value and are involved in the process of challenging conventional and expected brand communication norms.

d) Theme 4: Conventional media planning (4) and media owners resistance (4)

The literature study presents the reliance on media planning systems and measurement data as a collective barrier to alternative brand contact

planning. The key take-out is that alternative brand contact planning requires, as Schultz and Barnes (1996:292) argue, a step away from the various computerised media planning programmes that are based on audience research data. The media planner can thus not rely on the comfort of a conventional planning framework in the development of unconventional and unexpected brand contact solutions. The focus groups with senior account teams confirmed the above.

Although none of the interviewed senior account teams expressed a frustration with the media planning function and approach in their agency, four of the six teams believe that in general, conventional media planners do pose a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. The key motivation is that because alternative brand contact planning is not perceived as disciplined as conventional media planning, the conservative media planner will constrain the alternative brand contact planning process in serving the conventional planning approach that they are comfortable with.

The attitudes toward conventional media planning and planners revealed that *“conventional media planning is a massive stumbling block”* and that *“there really should be a greater willingness to experiment and put ideas to the test”*. Some harsh comments were delivered, such as *“media people are in general quite slow”*. One of the teams constructively discussed how the agency has dealt with conventional media planning as a *“stumbling block”*: *“We got told by media that we are difficult to work with. We got told that there is not enough discipline. But we did not change. We started to attract media people who are open-minded. The media guys who like to be in on the creative process”*. Alternative brand contact planning according to the senior account teams requires open-minded media planning in the creative strategic planning process.

Four of the senior account teams however identified a further media constraint and that is that *“the challenge is not only to convince clients but also to persuade media owners”*. According to the teams media owners present *“a lot of resistance, they have their procedures and will not rock the*

boat". Media owners "need to be convinced that it is going to add value to their readers experience of the media" or else "you have to through money at them". "You need to deal with them with tenacity. We often have to pick up the phone to convince their management that they want to associate their medium with it". Alternative brand contact planning does not only require, as one of the teams concluded "brave clients but also brave and open-minded media owners".

The senior account teams discussions on media constraints to alternative brand contact planning confirmed literature findings and also revealed a valuable fresh insight. Conventional media planning will, according to four of the senior account teams, constrain the creative strategic planning process and therefore does present a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. Four of the senior account teams also reasoned that a barrier is encountered in the resistance of media owners to the implementation of unconventional and unexpected brand contact strategies.

In conclusion, the analysis of senior account teams' attitudes and opinions on barriers to alternative brand contact planning reinforces that departmentalised structures with confined roles and media commission-based agency remuneration systems present a planning environment that is not conducive to creative strategic, zero-based and media-neutral planning.

Four of the senior account teams furthermore confirm that conventional media planning constrains creative strategic planning. A fresh insight is delivered as four senior account teams present media owners and their resistance to the implementation of alternative brand contact strategies, as a barrier. Based on the attitudes and opinions of the senior account teams alternative brand contact planning clearly requires "open-minded" media planners and media owners. Finally, four of the senior account teams also believe that a barrier to alternative brand contact planning exists in clients' lack of confidence to implement alternative brand contact strategies, greatly as a result of the lack of evidence of their effectiveness.

An integrated assessment of the results of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams will next be presented.

5.4.4 Conclusion to the Exploratory Focus Groups with Senior Account Teams

An integrated assessment of the focus group discussions, the three thematic areas and the main themes captured under each, is presented in Table 3 below. The exploratory focus groups mostly confirmed the literature findings and consequently also addressed the central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting research objectives. Of value is that the focus groups, true to their nature and purpose, delivered a number of fresh or new opinions, attitudes and motivations (highlighted in bold in the table below). Importantly, the vast majority of the fresh and new thoughts that were produced reinforced or elaborated on the planning mindset needed to develop and implement alternative points of brand contact.

**Table 3: A Frequency Summary of Responses of the Exploratory Focus Groups with Senior Account Teams
Nature and Role of the Alternative Brand Contact**

Main Themes	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
Breaks through clutter to achieve impact (6)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional (6)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Generates word-of-mouth and publicity (5)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
A brand communications planning philosophy (4) and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter (3)		✓ ✓		✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓
The alternative brand contact in ambient media form, is more focussed and cost efficient (3)	✓	✓		✓		
Planning and implementation is time and energy consuming (3)				✓	✓	✓
Is more memorable (3)	✓	✓			✓	

Requisites to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

Target audience relevance (6)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communicate and reinforce a focussed brand positioning in message and form (6)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
An integrated and cross-functional account team (5)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
An outside-in (6), zero-based and media-neutral planning mindset (5)	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Agency and client confidence (5) and an integrated client-account team relationship (3)	✓	✓ ✓		✓ ✓	✓	✓ ✓

Barriers to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

Departmentalised structures with confined roles (5)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A media commission-based agency remuneration system (5)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lack of client confidence and lack of evidence (4)	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Conventional media planning (4) Media owners resistance (4)	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓	✓ ✓

The exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies is deemed to be of significant value to the research study, as the research propositions and objectives and interview guide designed for the semi-structured depth interviews with clients of the interviewed senior account teams, could be meaningfully enriched. This measure will next be addressed, whereupon the data analysis and research results of the semi-structured depth interviews with clients will be presented, with referral to the focus group results with senior account teams.

5.5 The enriched Interview Guide to the Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Clients

An interview guide was designed, as a working format in Chapter Four (4.9.2), to guide the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key players (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors), in the senior account teams. As further motivated in Chapter 4 (4.8), the interview guide is to be revisited to accommodate the enriched research propositions and related objectives, as based on the insights gained from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies.

In response to the research results of the exploratory focus groups, as captured in Table 3, and the research methodology of this study, the research propositions and research objectives are enriched as follows:

The central proposition and related primary objective to the research study was addressed and affirmed through the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The focus is now on the clients (Marketing/Brand Managers) of the senior account teams and thus the central proposition and related primary research objective remains to be to determine:

If the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact is perceived by South African Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients, to be to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand?

The integral research propositions and related supporting objectives to the research study are based as previously reasoned, on a set of alternative brand contact requisites that have been identified through the study of literature. The ability of the alternative brand contact to deliver the central proposition is found to depend on these requisites. The exploratory focus groups with senior account teams greatly confirmed these requisites but also produced new and fresh opinions and attitudes. The integral research propositions and related supporting objectives are thus enriched to include these new contributions and will next be presented. The new contributions are highlighted in bold.

The study of literature furthermore identified a set of barriers to alternative brand contact planning (Chapter Three – 3.6). These barriers were directly addressed by developing a set of requisites to alternative brand contact planning, which in turn evolved into the integral propositions and related supporting objectives to the primary research study. Likewise, the newly identified barriers produced by the exploratory focus groups, present possible alternative brand contact requisites and consequently, further integral propositions and supporting objectives (also highlighted in bold), to this research study.

The enriched set of propositions and related objectives appears as follows.

5.5.1 The Enriched Research Propositions and Related Objectives

As stated above, the newly identified propositions and related objectives are presented in bold.

- Is the unexpected and unconventional point of brand contact irrespective of its context, whether in the form of traditional or non-traditional media, the result of:
 - an outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning process?
 - an integrated and cross-functional account team, enabling the practise of creative strategic planning?
 - a performance or fee-based agency remuneration system?
 - alternative brand contact planning as a brand communications planning philosophy that involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter?
 - **agency and client confidence and an integrated client-account team relationship, to develop and implement unconventional and unexpected points of brand contact?**
 - **open-minded media planners and media owners?**

It is evident that mindset, as an alternative brand contact requisite, has been enriched and that it is perceived by the senior account teams to be of paramount importance in the development of unexpected and unconventional brand contact solutions.

- To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed?
- To attain impact, the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning?

- To create meaningful impact, the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand?
- To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer, in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind (aperture)?
- To maintain impact, novel alternative brand contacts must be developed continuously or that a sustainable alternative brand contact that can be improved upon must be employed?

The qualitative exploratory focus groups with senior account teams also delivered fresh insights on the nature and role of the alternative brand contact. These focus group results present further integral propositions and supporting objectives to the primary research study.

- **The alternative point of brand contact differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional?**
- **Alternative brand contacts generate word-of-mouth and publicity?**
- **The alternative brand contact in ambient media form is more focussed and cost efficient?**
- **The planning and implementation of the alternative brand contact is time and energy consuming?**
- **The alternative brand contact is more memorable?**

The working format of the proposed Interview Guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with clients is next revisited to include the enriched research objectives, as presented above. The open-ended questions and probes

included in the working format to the interview guide were motivated in 4.9.2 of Chapter Four. The enriched supporting objectives have accordingly been developed into appropriate open-ended questions or probes, and integrated into the structure of the proposed interview guide to ensure a natural discussion flow. The enriched Interview Guide to be implemented in the semi-structured in-depth interviews with clients is as follows.

5.5.2 The enriched Interview Guide

The open-ended questions are, where relevant, supported with probing questions.

Question One

Do you personally believe that the alternative brand contact has a role to play in modern brand communications planning?

- *What is its role?*
- *Why is (this) important ?*

Question Two

Some argue that the mindset or orientation of the agency, the account team and the client has a vital influence on alternative brand contact planning. What is your opinion on the matter?

- *What type of mindset is needed to undertake alternative brand contact planning?*
- *Some argue that alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy that involves the disruption of brand communication norms. What is your opinion?*
- *There is an argument that it is necessary to look at points of brand contact from the consumer's point of view, in order to plan an alternative brand contact. What is your thinking?*

- *Some argue that a function-neutral or clean-slate strategic mindset is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. What is your opinion on this?*
- *An argument exists that media-neutral thinking is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. What is your opinion?*
- *Some argue that alternative points of brand contact can only be produced in a planning environment that demonstrates creative strategic thinking. What is your opinion?*
- *There is an argument that an integrated and cross-functional account team is required to undertake creative strategic planning and to produce alternative points of brand contact. What do you believe?*
- *Some argue that a media-commission based agency remuneration system does not support alternative brand contact planning. What do you think?*
- *Do you believe that agency and client confidence or the lack thereof and the extent, to which an integrated client-account team relationship exists, will effect alternative brand contact planning?*
- *Some argue that the mindset of media planners and media owners does effect alternative brand contact planning. What is your thinking?*

Question Three

To create impact, a point of brand contact must break through clutter to gain consumers' attention, to build brand awareness and knowledge. Do you believe the alternative brand contact can attain this goal? If so, what qualities must it exhibit?

- *Is there any particular quality that the alternative point of brand contact must exhibit to break through clutter, to create impact, to be noticed?*
- *Some argue that the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning to attain impact. What is your opinion?*

What meaning or understanding must the alternative point of brand contact ultimately convey?

How should the alternative brand contact express (this) meaning to create impact?

- *Do you believe that the nature or the identity of the target audience will influence the ability of the alternative point of brand contact to achieve impact?*

The following open-ended questions capture the enriched supporting objectives that relate to the nature and role of the alternative brand contact and did not surface as direct requisites or barriers in the focus groups with senior account teams. These supporting objectives essentially relate to the first question posed in the interview guide namely,

Do you believe that the alternative brand contact has a role to play in modern brand communications planning? (What is its role? and Why is (this) important?).

The researcher, however, believes that by integrating these supporting objectives into the very first question posed, respondents might be tainted in their response to latter questions. For this reason the following supporting research objectives are introduced as separate open-ended questions at this point in the interview guide.

Question Four

Do you think the alternative point of brand contact can differentiate the brand purely because it is perceived as unconventional? Why so / why not?

Question Five

Some argue that alternative brand contacts generate word-of-mouth and publicity. What is your opinion?

Question Six

Some argue that the alternative brand contact in ambient media form, is more focussed and cost efficient. What is your thinking?

Question Seven

Some believe that the planning and implementation of alternative brand contacts is more time and energy consuming. What is your thinking?

Question Eight

Do you think that an unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact can be more memorable? Why/Why not?

Question Nine

Considering that the alternative brand contact is defined by its unexpected and unconventional appeal, can you foresee any challenges in it maintaining its status?

- *How does one ensure that an alternative point of brand contact maintains an unexpected and unconventional appeal?*

The interview guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers now exists of nine open-ended questions with ranges of identified prompts to be applied as required.

The research analysis and results of the semi-structured depth interviews with the key clients of the senior account teams will next be presented. The analysis and results will be presented in context of the three core themes applied in the analysis of the focus group results. Firstly, because the interview guide thematically addresses the nature and role, requisites, and indirectly barriers of/to the alternative brand contact and alternative brand contact planning and depth interview discussions naturally evolved around these three core themes. Secondly, because the flow in cross-referencing and interpretation is thus enhanced.

The frequency of occurrence of themes is again indicated next to each theme. Verbatim statements are employed, as with the focus group analysis and

results, to illustrate opinions, attitudes and motivations. As previously motivated in Chapter Four – 4.10.3, the sample of key clients were produced by the senior account teams from Lindsay Smithers FCB, Net#work BBDO, TBWA Hunt Lascaris, The Jupiter Drawing Room and King James. A total number of 10 clients were thus interviewed.

5.6 Analysis and Results of the Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Clients

The semi-structured depth interviews with the key clients of the senior account teams in the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies greatly confirmed but also elaborated on the literature and focus group results as well as delivered valuable new attitudes, opinions and motivations.

As previously reasoned, the analysis and results of the semi-structured depth interviews with clients, will be presented in context of the three core themes that evolved from the application of the interview guide. The first of which is the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact.

A summary of the results of the semi-structured depth interviews with clients will be presented in Table 4 on page 287 of this chapter.

5.6.1 The Nature, Role and Planning of the Alternative Point of Brand Contact

In this regard client opinions and attitudes greatly confirmed literature study findings and focus group results. Although no entirely new thoughts arose with regard the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact, clients presented definite opinions on the topic. The greatest of which is that the brand and its single-minded positioning strategy, is central to the process of brand building and therefore also to alternative brand contact planning.

Of further importance is that total correlation in client opinions and attitudes were encountered on this level. The following results are thus equal in importance and are, according to the analysis of clients discussions, indisputable in their relevance to the point of alternative brand contact and the process of alternative brand contact planning.

a) Theme 1: The alternative brand contact breaks through clutter to achieve impact and target audience relevance and to communicate a focussed brand positioning in message and form (10)

All of the clients interviewed are of the opinion that the role of the alternative point of brand contact is to break through commercial clutter to achieve impact. Respondents for example stated that:

“If you just plug along in a conventional way, you drown in the clutter”.

“In today’s cluttered world you actually have to break through to get your advertising message across. And generally, consumers are sick and tired of advertising. They don’t want advertising shoved down their throats”

“Alternative contacts have massive potential to break through conventional clutter and achieve impact. Consumers are sick of the usual”

“In a cluttered environment you definitely need to keep on pushing the boundaries”

“The alternative brand contact will achieve impact because it is disruptive, it gets noticed, because it’s unconventional”

“The element of surprise creates impact”

“Noting of traditional ads are declining – there is a lot of wall paper. Unconventional approaches can break through the onslaught”

“We need a paradigm shift – from the staid and boring to alternative, fresh and innovative ways to capture attention and achieve impact ”

Clearly the opinions and attitudes of clients confirm those of the senior account teams and also the approaches of Duncan and Moriarty (1997:91), Belch and Belch (1998:113), Hollis (2001:50) and Duncan (2002:144), as

discussed in the study of literature. The increasing levels of consumer clutter and the resultant selective attention and exposure barriers erected by consumers, is indeed a concern. The need to break through commercial clutter barriers with unconventional and unexpected brand contact communications, as argued by Harris, quoted in Chronis (2000:67) in the literature study, is confirmed by all of the clients interviewed.

Of interest is that all of the clients, immediately linked the nature and role of the alternative brand contact to break through clutter and achieve impact, to the requisites of achieving target audience and brand relevance. Respondents for example reasoned that:

“It breaks through clutter but at the same time it must endorse the core identity of my brand and be relevant to the target audience”

“The brand essence defines it all - the chief objective is branding”.

“It’s about how we can break through the clutter to focus on the target audience in a relevant way, plus differentiate the brand. It must communicate what the brand stands for”

“Relevance is the issue. It must be relevant to the brand and it’s consumers”

“Target audience relevance and brand identity relevance is essential”

“It must communicate to the target audience and reinforce the brand essence”

“The brand is at the core, it’s everything. The critical point is creating a focussed brand positioning in your consumers minds”

The focus groups with senior account teams initially positioned the alternative brand contact as essentially a means to “*achieve attention*” and “*get people to sit up to take notice*”. All six of the senior account teams did however elaborate that the ability of the alternative brand contact to establish target audience relevance and communicate and reinforce the brand identity, are vital requisites to its effectiveness. In comparison, the semi-structured depth interviews with clients established an immediate and intrinsic link between the effectiveness of the alternative brand contact in breaking through clutter to achieve impact and its effectiveness in achieving target audience relevance and communicating a focussed brand positioning.

Within the context of communicating and reinforcing the brand identity, all of the senior account teams addressed the need for the alternative brand contact to communicate the brand identity both in terms of message content and form. This issue is also argued by Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) in the study of literature. On probing, clients perceived this to be a given. As two of the respondents for example concluded:

“The brand is everything and brand relevance and integration must be achieved on every level” and

“The brand and what it stands for must be reflected in everything”.

The client interviews consequently addressed and confirmed the central research proposition and related primary objective in its entirety. The nature and role of the alternative brand contact is perceived by clients to be to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce *“a focussed”*, single-minded brand positioning or as several clients argued, the core identity or essence of the brand. The *“brand and what it stands for”* must as clients also concluded *“be reflected in everything”* – in the message and form of the alternative point of brand contact.

It is furthermore within the context of achieving brand relevance and communicating a focussed brand positioning that clients agreed and also elaborated that:

b) Theme 2: The alternative brand contact differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional, but must communicate what the brand stands for (10)

All of the interviewed clients agreed that the use of an alternative brand contact per se, differentiates the brand from that of competitors and their

brand communications. All clients however reinforced that the aim is not only to position the brand as different, but also to succeed in communicating and achieving meaningful brand differentiation. Respondents for example argued that:

“Very high levels of communication parity exist in the market place. This approach differentiates the brand. If you do something out of the norm you automatically differentiate your brand. But it must be relevant to the brand and communicate what it stands for” and *“Yes, you differentiate the brand by being alternative but the brand promise is paramount”*.

c) Theme 3: Alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter (10)

All of the clients interviewed reinforced four of the senior account teams assessment and concern that alternative brand contacts are often positioned as *“tactical”* or *“once-off gimmick based”* communication efforts.

In agreement with four of the senior account teams, the key clients believe that alternative brand contact planning should be applied as a planning philosophy in all communication contexts. The reasoning, as one respondent for example concluded, is that *“the ultimate objective is to break through clutter in order to communicate or reinforce the brand identity”*.

Respondents furthermore argued that alternative brand contact planning does *“essentially involve disruption because that is what is needed to break through all the clutter”*, as one respondent put it. The following key client’s comments demonstrate and support the thinking that alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy that involves disruption:

“It’s a way of thinking. It should be applied in all communication contexts”

“Alternative brand contact planning is an integrated concept and approach that can and should be applied on all communication levels”

“You need to disrupt to break through”

“It’s not a separate or free standing discipline. It can and should be applied on every level”

“You have to challenge the conventional to create impact. We take the unconventional approach into everything we do”

“You aim to disrupt the expected in order to deliver the unexpected. It’s a way of thinking and planning”

d) Theme: 4 Alternative brand contacts generate word-of mouth and publicity, but it must contribute to the process of brand building (10)

All of the interviewed key clients, in agreement with five of the senior account teams, believe that alternative brand contacts stimulate word-of-mouth and publicity because of their unconventional and unexpected status.

Respondents for example stated that *“because they draw attention, they get talked about, and similarly receive publicity”, “they stimulate a lot of hype”* and *“break through ideas always get people talking”*.

However, all of the clients elaborated to argue that the word-of-mouth and publicity generated must ultimately contribute to the process of brand building.

Respondents for example argued that:

It is “of little value if the unconventional contact strategy is stimulating hype but it’s not in connection with the brand and what it stands for”

“The talk value must build the brand”

“It must endorse the brand”

“It draws attention and gets people talking. But, it must contribute to the process of building the brand”.

The concern of clients is that the word-of-mouth and publicity generated is “*idea based and not brand based*”, as one respondent stated. The concern raised by Belch and Belch (1998:293) in the study of literature is thus reinforced. The alternative brand contact will fail in its communication effectiveness if it is recalled for its unconventional idea or approach and not also, for its brand appeal.

e) Theme 5: The alternative brand contact is more memorable, but memorability must carry brand meaning to be of value (10)

In confirmation of three of the senior account teams assessment, all of the key clients are of the opinion that the alternative brand contact is potentially more memorable because of its unconventional and unexpected status. However, clients also consistently elaborated that:

“The alternative brand contact definitely has greater memorability but ask yourself is it for the right reason? Is the brand statement delivered? The brand promise is paramount”.

“The memorability factor must carry brand meaning to be of value”.

“The brand is the key element and must pull through”.

Again respondents were concerned that the alternative brand contact is remembered “*for the novelty factor*” and that the “*brand gets left behind*”, as one respondent put it. To be considered effective, memorability must, according to the key clients, carry brand meaning.

f) Theme 6: The ambient alternative brand contact is more focussed and cost efficient, but must reinforce the brand identity and integrate into the brand communications strategy to add value (10)

In line with three of the senior account teams all of the key clients interviewed agreed that the ambient alternative brand contact has the ability to, as one

respondent put it, *“hone-in on consumer lifestyle environments, cost efficiently”*. All of the respondents were however by far more concerned about the role of the ambient contact in reinforcing and successfully communicating the brand identity and thereby integrating into the overall brand communications strategy. The cost-efficiency of the ambient alternative brand contact is not as much the issue, as is its brand relevance.

It is, according to clients, vital that the ambient alternative brand contact achieves brand relevance, to add value to the consumer brand experience and the process of brand building. The ambient contact must *“be relevant to and reinforce the brand identity”* in order to *“integrate into the overall strategy and play a role in building the brand”*, as one respondent reasoned. If the ambient alternative brand contact fails on this level it is, as one respondent for example stated, *“simply a gimmick that does little in terms of building brand value”* in which case, as other respondents forewarned, *“the brand will be experienced as an invasion”* and an *“intrusion”*.

To conclude, a number of qualities that define the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, as discussed in the study of literature and identified in the focus group research, have been confirmed by all of the key clients interviewed. It is however clear that the ability of the alternative brand contact to break through clutter and achieve impact, to establish immediate differentiation, to hone-in on target audiences, to generate meaningful memorability, word-of-mouth and publicity, is entirely dependent on its effectiveness in communicating or reinforcing the brand essence. The brand and its identity are, based on client opinion, core to brand communications planning. Alternative brand contact planning is then also positioned by clients as a brand communications planning philosophy, that is relevant to all brand communication spaces.

The requisites to alternative brand contact planning and the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact, as identified, confirmed and

elaborated on by key clients of the interviewed senior account teams, will next be discussed.

5.6.2 Requisites to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

The following three themes emanated from the semi-structured interviews with key clients of the interviewed senior account teams, as definite requisites to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof.

a) Theme 1: An *open-minded* or outside-in, zero-based but brand oriented, media neutral and creative strategic planning mindset supported by an integrated and cross-functional account team and fee or performance based agency remuneration systems (10)

This requisite is clearly multi-faceted. It is however not deconstructed into individual themes as clients identified and discussed the concepts in a highly integrated fashion. The concepts are experienced as interrelated and are therefore presented and discussed as such.

All of the clients immediately and consistently argued that in order to develop unconventional and unexpected points of brand contact, both the account team and client would have to be "*open-minded*". In qualifying what an open-minded mindset implies, three alternative contact planning requisites, as identified in the study of literature and confirmed by the focus group research, emerged naturally in discussion with all respondents namely, a creative strategic, outside-in and media-neutral planning orientation.

Clients firstly argued that an open-minded approach is needed to undertake creative strategic planning. The term "*out-of-the-box*" thinking, was employed by the vast majority of clients as a definite attribute of a planning mindset that is conducive to developing unconventional and unexpected brand contact

solutions. Clients also clearly included their own ability to think out-of-the-box as they did the agency's ability to do so, in their line of reasoning. A respondent for example stated that, *“we need to find ways of doing things creatively to get better results – presenting strategic solutions outside of the box”*. In support, clients generally argued that a *“staid and traditional”* mindset or that *“traditional conservative thinking”* will certainly constrain creative strategic thinking and consequently, the development of alternative points of brand contact.

All of the respondents furthermore elaborated that an integrated and cross-functional account team environment is conducive to creative strategic thinking and therefore alternative brand contact planning. In synergy with the five senior account teams who defined this issue as a requisite to alternative brand contact planning, clients believe that an integrated and cross-functional account team produces creative strategic thinking because of the confluence of creative and strategic skills and expertise. Respondents for example reasoned that:

“You need an integrated and cross functional approach - I think the process should involve all of the players in the team to produce relevant creative ideas”

“The more ideas and the more opinions you have from different players, the better the chance that you will find an alternative brand contact idea that works”

“You need integration to ensure creative but relevant ideas are born”

“ Ideas can come from anywhere and you need all the skills to produce creative ideas that will achieve objectives”

“Strategy, media and creative should work in fusion – then you get the ideas and the synergy”

As demonstrated, clients are of the opinion that an integrated and cross-functional account team environment makes creative strategic thinking possible, which in turn is fundamental to alternative brand contact planning.

The second quality that was also naturally introduced and confirmed by all of the key clients, in terms of the mindset required for alternative brand contact planning, is the need for outside-in thinking. Respondents reasoned that:

“Consumer experiences and realities are the key”

“You would have to be open-minded and very aware of what is out there to be unconventional and to get into the consumers mind. You would have to really look at who you want to appeal to”

“You would have to know what consumers are watching, reading and how they live their lives to break through the clutter they are exposed to. Younger markets will differ from older markets”

“You would have to understand the people – how they live their lives, their behaviour and their motivations. What is conventional and what will be experienced as unexpected yet relevant to the brand and their relationship with it?”

“You must know what’s going on in consumers minds. You must be street conscious. Ideas come from being in touch with consumers”

“You must engage with their lifestyles - their day to day experiences, what they think and feel, their outlook, what they will and won’t appreciate at a point in time, to present relevant and effective alternative brand contact solutions. You really need to understand the people that you want to communicate with”.

It is evident from the above comments that outside-in, consumer oriented thinking is perceived by clients, as a requisite to developing alternative brand contact solutions that are appropriate to the target audience’s lifestyle patterns, preferences, interests and state of mind. The opinions of Schultz and Barnes (1995:301), Kotze (1999:81), Taylor and Rigby (2001:3), Hatfield (2001:31) and McLean in Dru (2002:267) as discussed in the study of literature, is thus directly reiterated by clients, whereas they were indirectly addressed by all of the senior account teams.

The need for media-neutral thinking was likewise, naturally confirmed by all clients with opinions and attitudes such as:

“You would have to be open-minded and consider all communication opportunities”

“You would have to be open-minded and think, so what else can be done?”

“You would need a less conservative mind – an open mind, to question all media opportunities”

“Alternative brand contacts can be applied in any way”

“Alternative brand contacts can appear in any relevant and effective brand communications space”

“Unconventional approaches can break through the onslaught in traditional and new environments”

Three of the ten clients instinctively elaborated that traditional media commission-based remuneration inherently constrains creative strategic planning. On probing, all of the clients were adamant that a fee or performance-based remuneration system is a requisite to media neutral and creative strategic thinking. As three respondents for example, concluded:

“Creative media-neutral thinking is vital and fee or performance-based remuneration is an absolute requisite. An agency will pursue the paths that will maximise its income – commission-based remuneration will certainly skew alternative brand contact planning”

“To innovate you need a media neutral remuneration system and media commission-based payments certainly do not stimulate innovation”

“The remuneration package must ensure impartial planning and advice”.

It is evident from the above analysis and in particular the approaches toward media-neutral planning, that clients indirectly addressed a zero-based mindset as vital to alternative brand contact planning. On probing, interesting results were however delivered. All of the key clients interviewed presented “yes, but” commentary to this requisite. Clients are in absolute agreement that media-neutral thinking and creative strategic planning are definite requisites to alternative brand contact planning and should not be skewed by preconceived ideas. As two respondents argued – “to disrupt you have to move from a clean slate” and “you must move from a zero-base to see the opportunities”.

However, with regard complete zero-based or clean-slate planning, clients' reason that alternative brand contact planning must be based on and depart from the brand platform. The following comments demonstrate client concern with a complete zero-based planning mindset:

“Yes, but we are talking strategy and the brand platform is fundamental, its sacred”

“Within that (the brand essence) the challenge is to be innovative”

“The brand platform is our biggest concern”

“Unconventional approaches must be generated with the brand and its identity as the source of ideas”

“Yes, no preconceived ideas but be relevant to the brand”

“We definitely move from a clean slate. That’s how you identify opportunities. But, again know what your brand stands for”

“You need to start with an open mind, but the brand positioning and character is the platform”.

The approach of clients and the concern with zero-based planning is possibly related to a perceived barrier to alternative brand contact planning that will shortly be elaborated upon namely, agency inability to present relevant alternative brand contact solutions.

From the above analysis it can be deduced that planning mindset is reinforced, as with the exploratory focus groups, as key to alternative brand contact planning. All of the key clients are in agreement that alternative brand contact planning requires a mindset that embraces outside-in, creative strategic and media-neutral thinking. This mindset must, as key clients reasoned, be supported with a cross-functional and integrated account team environment and a fee or performance-based agency remuneration system. Clients are however not entirely comfortable with the notion of complete zero-based planning. Although a clean slate approach is found to be important in disrupting norms and identifying unexpected communication opportunities, the brand and what it stands for, as a respondent for example stated, is *“sacred”*.

Alternative brand contact planning must, according to clients, be zero-based but brand oriented.

b) Theme 2: An integrated client-account team relationship (10)

All clients, in keeping with the opinion of three of the senior account teams, agreed that an integrated client-account team relationship is required and conducive to the development of alternative brand contact solutions. The key clients also treated the requisite of an integrated client-account team relationship, as somewhat of “a given”. Respondents for example, commented that:

“You need an integrated environment to stimulate and welcome creative thinking on all levels and to produce ideas that will work”.

“We are very hands-on and the agency is a natural extension of our team. They are purposefully exposed to and involved in everything we do and we are involved in everything they do. This open relationship is needed to develop innovative or unconventional solutions that will achieve brand objectives”

“You need integration to ensure creative but relevant ideas are born. The account team must understand the business. We get together in planning brainstorming. I think that has created enormous integrity in our communications and unconventional approaches”.

The senior account teams addressed the need for an integrated client-account team relationship in the context of growing agency and in particular client confidence, in alternative brand contact planning. Clients however produced a different line of reasoning and that is that an integrated relationship is needed to ensure that relevant unconventional ideas are produced.

The key clients are generally of the opinion that an integrated client-account team relationship is necessary to ensure the development of relevant

alternative brand contact solutions that will, to quote one respondent, “*achieve brand communication objectives*”.

However, as will later be noted in the discussion of perceived barriers to alternative brand contact planning, some clients do believe that despite their hands-on or integrated approach, agencies still fail to deliver appropriate alternative brand contact solutions.

c) Theme 3: The alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status – apply innovative thinking to leverage/improve on concepts (10)

The study of literature, as reasoned by Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) and Dru (2002:67), reveals that the impact value of the alternative brand contact will diminish when the form of contact grows stale. Hollis, in Chronis (2000:65) thus proposes that either fresh alternative points of contact should be identified continuously, or that an alternative brand contact with sustainability must be developed, in which case the contact can constantly be improved upon in unconventional ways.

The maintenance of the alternative brand contact is consequently introduced as an alternative brand contact requisite, and finally as an integral proposition and supporting objective to the qualitative exploratory research study. Although this requisite did not feature in direct or indirect terms in anyone of the free-flow focus group discussions with senior account teams, it is perceived by clients as key to effective alternative brand contact planning.

All of the interviewed clients are of the opinion that the alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional and unexpected status to ensure it consistently breaks through commercial clutter barriers - “*Keep on innovating to break the norms*”, “*You have to keep on innovating to break through the clutter*”.

According to all clients it is a question of applying ongoing innovative thinking to leverage alternative brand contact concepts to ensure impact is maintained. As respondents for example argued, the challenge is to:

“Leverage ideas to sustain impact”

“Innovate to the extent that you already know what your next move is going to be”

“Demonstrate how the concept can be stretched”

“Keep on innovating – the idea must be leveraged in its chosen environment or other relevant environments. You don’t want once off great ideas”

The suggestion made by Hollis in Chronis (2000:65) that sustainable alternative brand contact ideas that can be improved upon or as clients tended to argue leveraged, is thus reinforced by all of the clients interviewed. The key clients then also believe that innovative thinking must be applied on an ongoing basis to ensure alternative brand contacts are improved upon.

In conclusion, the semi-structured depth interviews with clients delivered three key requisites to alternative brand contact planning, again with very high levels of correlation with senior account team opinions, but fresh contributions in approaches and motivations.

Firstly, an *open-minded* or outside-in, zero-based but brand orientated, media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset supported by an integrated and cross-functional account team and fee or performance-based agency remuneration systems, is identified by all ten clients as key to alternative brand contact planning. The alternative brand contact planning mindset is thus according to clients, as it is to senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies, of paramount importance.

Secondly, all of the clients interviewed are of the opinion that an integrated client and account team relationship is necessary to develop innovative unconventional and unexpected points of alternative brand contact that will

build the brand. Whereas the senior account teams set this requisite to primarily create client confidence in alternative brand contact planning, clients set the requisite with a view to ensuring that their agencies deliver alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the brand.

Finally, all of the interviewed clients believe that the alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status in order to break through clutter and be noticed. The challenge is to apply ongoing innovation to improve on or leverage alternative brand contact concepts or ideas.

The barriers to alternative brand contact planning, as identified in the semi-structured depth interviews with clients, will next be analysed and discussed.

5.6.3 Barriers to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

The analysis of client opinions on the barriers to alternative brand contact planning confirmed several of the senior account teams concerns but also delivered insightful new thoughts and opinions. Two barriers identified by the senior account teams namely, the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of the alternative brand contact and the lack of client confidence in alternative brand contact planning, however produced a strong counter argument from clients.

a) Theme 1: Conventional media planning and media owner's 'rules' (10)

In synergy with four of the senior account teams, all of the key clients interviewed believe that media planners who work within the comfort of conventional media planning formats will constrain the process of alternative brand contact planning. Respondents for example argued that:

“You need to be fresh with your media planning. I would like to think that media planners are open-minded but they often slip into what they know”

“Current media planning platforms won’t give you insight into category communication norms, how to break them and how to create unconventional contact solutions” and

“Conventional media planning does not by any measure produce creative strategic solutions and unless media planners step out of it, they won’t get there”.

Again some harsh statements were delivered such as: *“Media planners are going to have to get a lot smarter. Your lazy media planners just go the conventional route”* and *“Media planners in general are lost in space. They plan based on existing media formats and known formulas”.*

All of the clients interviewed did however point out that they experience their media planners as more *“open-minded”* and *“progressive”*. Clients assigned this to the conscious and active integration of media into strategic and creative planning sessions. As a respondent for example stated - *“they brainstorm together to produce unconventional ideas”.*

Media owners were also, in reinforcement of four of the senior account teams’ opinions, perceived by all of the key clients as a potential barrier to alternative brand contact planning. Clients generally referred to the *“rules”* whereby media owners make placement decisions, as the barrier to the implementation of *“out-of-the-box solutions”*. Clients experience that some *“media owners can not think beyond their placement rules”* and that one has to *“continuously convince media owners that taking the risk is worth their while”*, as respondents for example, put it.

All of the key clients interviewed are in agreement with senior account teams that media planners who are *“entrapped in conventional planning approaches”* and media owners who solely operate by their medium’s placement *“rules”*, do present a barrier to the development and implementation of alternative brand contact ideas. Alternative brand contact planning requires, according to the key clients and as the senior account teams also reasoned, open-minded media planners and media owners.

b) Theme 2: Alternative brand contact planning and implementation is time and energy consuming (8)

In total agreement with three of the senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies, eight clients believe that alternative brand contact planning and implementation is “*definitely more time and energy consuming*”. Two of the ten key clients interviewed were ambivalent and delivered responses such as, “*maybe, but not that much more*” and “*it might be*”. All of the clients however, in some or other way, argued that it is “*just that much easier to do the conventional thing*”.

The reasons produced by the eight key clients were the exact same reasons delivered by the three senior account teams. That is, alternative brand contact planning is more time and energy consuming because all parties or players involved need to be convinced of the role and value of an alternative brand contact strategy. The senior account teams argued that although alternative brand contact planning is an investment in their part, in terms of time and energy, it is a challenge. The senior account teams reasoned that alternative brand contact planning is their “*philosophy and a passion*” and that although it is time and energy consuming, they “*will persevere*”.

Clients perceived the time and energy that need to be invested in specifically persuading their management of an alternative brand contact strategy, as a challenge and often a barrier to overcome. The marketing or brand managers interviewed reasoned that they “*are quite prepared to take the risk*” but are definitely challenged to invest time and energy in persuading management of the brand communications approach. Respondents for example stated that:

“I would have to justify it – who am I appealing to, is it relevant to the brand, what is the campaign objective? I would have to justify it to my boss”

“The barrier is CEO’s and top management, they are often out of touch. You have to have the guts and experiment. You need to keep on pushing”

“Management can be challenge. They are quite protective”

“If anyone proposes something out of our current approach, management still all get very nervous”

“I have to use all my powers of influence to convince the people that I need to – I report to the CEO and conventional wisdom tells you to retain your focus if it seems to be working”

“It’s difficult to get management to bond with alternative approaches – it takes more time and energy”

The time and energy that needs to be invested in persuading parties involved has now been mentioned by three of the senior account teams and eight of the key clients interviewed, as a challenge if not a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. This result consequently reinforces that alternative brand contact planning is a philosophy that needs to be embraced by the Integrated Communications Agency, its account teams, the client and their management, to ensure that it is more readily accepted and implemented.

c) Theme 3: Alternative brand contacts presented by the agency lack brand relevance (6)

Lack of confidence and lack of evidence (4)

Four key clients demonstrated the concerns of four of the senior account teams. In other words, the lack of confidence in alternative brand contact planning and the lack of proof of alternative brand contact effectiveness, are experienced and perceived as barriers to alternative brand contact planning. Two clients for example, commented that: *“I mean, a lot of the time you have no proof. So yes, it requires the ability to take risk”* and *“because there are no case studies and research, a lot of convincing needs to be done and it takes brave people to go with it”*.

However, six of the key clients interviewed linked their confidence to take risks, to experiment and to implement alternative points of brand contact, despite the lack of substantial evidence of their effectiveness, to one perceived key barrier. According to these clients, agencies are consistently challenged to deliver unconventional contact solutions but “often” or “mostly” fail to present ideas that are relevant to the brand. The perception of the six key clients is that although agencies are employed and encouraged to develop and deliver innovative brand communications solutions and although a hands-on and integrated client-account team relationship is cultivated, they “mostly” or “often” fail to deliver ideas with potential brand impact. The following statements substantiate this concern:

“The brand essence is everything, agencies often fail to perform on this level”.

“We are constantly challenging our agency to come up with alternative ideas. But we always need to reinforce – please come up with innovation but respect the brand values. Agencies must understand the brand character and how it behaves. It’s not about awareness at all costs”

“The agency teams don’t understand the relationship with the brand. We have to keep on drumming it in”

“A ‘this might be a nice idea’ approach won’t work – what does it actually do for my brand?”

“There are some (alternative brand contacts) that the agency dream up – that are not born out of brand strategy”

“It’s all about being creative but not in isolation! Like, yes that’s a great idea, and it is, but for Audi/BMW, maybe!”

“We are willing to experiment if there’s potential brand impact. But you need great ideas that are focussed on the brand”

“I will experiment and take the risk but only if it achieves brand relevance – if it fits into the whole strategy – we turn them down because its not grounded in strategy”.

As is evident in the vast majority of client responses discussed thus far in the analysis of the semi-structured depth interviews, the successful

communication and or reinforcement of the core brand identity, is perceived as fundamental to effective alternative brand contact planning. Six of the key clients interviewed acknowledge that confidence, risk taking, experimentation and integrated working relationships are part and parcel of alternative brand contact planning. However, contrary to the senior account teams, these clients do not view lack of client confidence and the lack of evidence of the alternative brand contact's effectiveness, as barriers to alternative brand contact planning. They are seemingly very willing to take the risk and to experiment, despite the lack of "*research on the table*". As one respondent commented: "*I am prepared to take the risk if it's relevant to the brand, even though the research is not on the table. We are happy to experiment. You can tell if it's a bloody good idea. You have a gut feel*". It is rather, according to these six clients, the agencies' inability to develop and present alternative brand contact strategies that demonstrate brand relevance, that erects the barrier to alternative brand contact planning and implementation.

d) Theme 4: Alternative brand contact strategies are more costly (4), but if they demonstrate potential brand impact, worth the investment (3)

None of the senior account teams indicated that the implementation of alternative brand contact solutions requires bigger budgets however, according to four of the key clients interviewed, the implementation of unconventional brand contacts are often more costly, which does present a barrier. Clients particularly referred to the cost of alternative brand contacts in magazines. According to clients, the "*special treatment*" that is required per publication will often have an adverse effect on the planned budget.

Respondents for example argued that:

"They are definitely very costly. For example, a treatment or special application in a magazine at R15 per mag?"

"Unfortunately a lot of break away advertising requires a hell of a lot more spend, especially in magazine advertising. Does the cost involved justify it?"

“Usually alternative brand contacts are expensive, some aren’t, but it often requires extra hand work or teams to execute it or implement it, like with magazines”.

However, three of the four key clients continued to reason that they are wholly prepared to implement and invest in alternative brand contacts, if they are creative strategic solutions that demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to build the brand. A respondent for example concluded by stating – *“we are willing to pay if it achieves branded impact”.*

Alternative brand contacts and in particular those that are implemented in magazines, are perceived by four of the key clients as costly. However, three of the four key clients continued to reason that they are prepared to invest in alternative brand contact strategies if they are novel and demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to create branded impact.

In conclusion, it is evident that all of the key clients, in synergy with senior account team opinions, believe that conventional media planning and the placement rules of media owners, are barriers to alternative brand contact planning. Unlike the senior account teams, the majority of clients do however not view the lack of client confidence and the lack of evidence of the alternative brand contact’s effectiveness, as barriers to alternative brand contact planning. Rather, six of the clients interviewed are of the opinion that their agencies often or mostly fail to present alternative brand contact solutions that demonstrate brand relevance.

In agreement with three of the senior account teams, eight key clients do believe that alternative brand contact planning is more time and energy consuming. The time and energy that need to be invested in convincing management of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy, present, according to these key clients, a barrier to alternative brand contact planning.

Finally, four of the key clients interviewed experience alternative brand contacts and especially those in magazines, as costly to implement. Three of the four clients did however continue to argue that they are willing to invest in an alternative brand contact strategy if it demonstrates the potential to break through clutter to achieve branded impact.

A conclusive assessment of the semi-structured depth interviews with the key clients of the senior account teams will next be presented. The aim of which is to further enrich the research propositions and objectives in lieu of the development of the interview guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with key players within the senior account teams.

5.6.4 Conclusion to the Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Key Clients

Table 4 presents the results of the semi-structured depth interviews with key clients of the interviewed senior account teams. New and fresh contributions are again highlighted in bold.

**Table 4: A Frequency Summary of Responses of the Key Clients of the Interviewed Senior Account Teams
Nature and Role of the Alternative Brand Contact**

Main Themes	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
Breaks through clutter to achieve impact and target audience relevance and to communicate a focused brand positioning in message and form (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional, but must communicate what the brand stands for (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A brand communications planning philosophy and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Generates word-of-mouth and publicity, but it must contribute to the process of brand building (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The alternative brand contact is more memorable, but memorability must carry brand meaning to be of value (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The ambient alternative brand contact is more focussed and cost efficient, but must reinforce the brand identity and integrate into the brand communications strategy to add value (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Requisites to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

An open-minded or outside-in, zero-based but brand oriented , media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset supported by an integrated and cross-functional account team and fee or performance based agency remuneration systems (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
An integrated client–account team relationship (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status – apply innovative thinking to leverage /improve on concepts (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Barriers to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof

Conventional media planning and media owners 'rules' (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Planning and implementation is time and energy consuming (8)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Alternative brand contacts presented by the agency lack brand relevance (6) Lack of confidence and lack of evidence(4)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alternative brand contact strategies are more costly (4) but if they demonstrate potential brand impact, worth the investment (3)	✓	✓	✓		✓					

With reference to the focus group results and with a view to addressing the research propositions and objectives and enriching the Interview Guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with key players (Media Planners, Strategic Planners, Creative Directors) in senior account teams, the following is highlighted.

a) Observations: Central Research Proposition and Primary Research Objective

Clients addressed the central research proposition and primary research objective in its entirety. The senior account teams elaborated that the alternative brand contact must achieve target audience relevance and communicate or reinforce a focussed brand positioning, thus setting these qualities as alternative brand contact requisites. All of the key clients interviewed however established an immediate and intrinsic link between the effectiveness of the alternative brand contact in breaking through clutter to achieve impact and its effectiveness in achieving target audience relevance and communicating a focussed brand positioning. All of the interviewed clients are therefore in answer to the primary research objective, in agreement that:

The unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact can (must) break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

b) Observations: The Nature, Role and Planning of Alternative Brand Contacts and Alternative Brand Contact Requisites

It is within the context of achieving brand relevance and communicating a focussed brand positioning that all of the key clients agreed and elaborated that:

- **The alternative brand contact differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional, but must communicate what the brand stands for.**
- **Alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter.**
- **Alternative brand contacts generate word-of mouth and publicity, but it must contribute to the process of brand building.**
- **The alternative brand contact is more memorable, but memorability must carry brand meaning to be of value.**
- **The ambient alternative brand contact is more focussed and cost efficient, but must reinforce the brand identity and integrate into the brand communications strategy to add value.**

In comparison to the senior account teams, clients naturally addressed the planning mindset required for alternative brand contact planning, in a highly integrated manner. The senior account teams identified and discussed outside-in, zero-based and media neutral planning and the need for an integrated and cross-functional account team in creative strategic planning, as separate although related requisites/themes to alternative brand contact planning. Media-commission based remuneration was likewise addressed as a barrier to alternative brand contact planning by five of the senior account teams. Clients in comparison addressed these issues as totally interrelated requisites. All of the clients are therefore of the opinion that alternative brand contact planning requires:

- **An *open-minded* or outside-in, zero-based but brand oriented, media neutral and creative strategic planning mindset supported by an integrated and cross-functional account team and fee or performance-based agency remuneration systems.**

Only in the case of zero-based planning as a dimension of the alternative brand contact planning mindset, did probing have to be applied. On this level clients delivered an opinion that must be explored further in the next phase of research. Clients consistently reinforced the importance of creating branded impact. They consequently, and in unison believe that although no preconceived notions can be indulged, the brand is sacred and must be integrated into the platform from which all planning is done.

All of the key clients interviewed, in agreement with three of the senior account teams, also identified the following to be a requisite to alternative brand contact planning:

- **An integrated client-account team relationship.**

Clients did treat this requisite as somewhat of a given but elaborated that an integrated client-account team relationship is needed to ensure that relevant unconventional and unexpected brand contact ideas are developed that will, as one respondent put it, achieve brand communication objectives.

One further requisite that did not feature in the focus groups with senior account teams but was, as a result of the application of an open-ended question in the Interview Guide, addressed by all the key clients is that:

- **The alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status. To do so, innovative thinking must be applied to leverage/improve on concepts.**

All clients were in agreement that in order to break through clutter and be perceived as unexpected, the alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status. Ongoing innovative thinking is thus required to improve upon or as clients argued, leverage alternative brand contact concepts or ideas.

c) Observations: Barriers to Alternative Brand Contact Planning

With reference to the barriers to alternative brand contact planning, the following was established:

- **Conventional media planning and media owners 'rules'.**

Four of the senior account teams believe that conventional media planning constrains creative strategic planning. Four of the senior account teams are also of the opinion that the resistance of media owners to the implementation of alternative points of brand contact, presents a barrier. All of the key clients, in full agreement, reasoned that conventional media planning and the placement rules of media owners do present definite barriers to the planning and implementation of unconventional contact strategies. The senior account teams and key clients are all in agreement that alternative brand contact planning requires open-minded media planners and media owners.

- **Alternative brand contact planning is time and energy consuming.**

In line with three of the senior account teams, eight of the key clients agreed that alternative brand contact planning is time and energy consuming. The key clients assigned this to the time and energy that is needed to convince their management of the merit of an alternative brand contact approach.

Two new opinions arose from the semi-structured depth interviews with clients, as definite barriers to the alternative brand contact.

According to five of the six senior account teams, agency and client confidence is a requisite and if lacking, as four teams reasoned, a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. The lack of client confidence in alternative brand contact planning exists, as the four senior account teams continued to reason, greatly as a result of the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of the alternative point of brand contact.

Six of the interviewed key clients addressed both these issues with one counter argument and that is that:

- **Alternative brand contacts presented by the agency, lack brand relevance.**

The clients' argument is that they will employ alternative brand contact solutions, despite the lack of evidence, if they do demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to create branded impact. Clients however reason that their agencies 'mostly' or 'often' fail to present alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the brand and what it stands for.

The final barrier that was newly identified by four of the clients is that:

- **Alternative brand contact strategies are more costly, but**

as three of the four key clients continued to reason,

if they demonstrate potential brand impact, worth the investment.

Four of the key clients are of the opinion that alternative brand contact strategies, and particularly those in magazines, are more costly to implement. However, three of the four key clients argued that they will, despite budget implications, go ahead to implement alternative brand contact strategies if they demonstrate the potential to create branded impact.

A holistic assessment of the key clients' opinions, attitudes and motivations reveals that the overriding concern is the brand. The importance of communicating and reinforcing a single-minded or focussed brand positioning is stressed time and time again. This is evident in clients' immediate integration of target audience and brand relevance into qualifying the nature and role of the alternative brand contact. It is evident in proceeding responses to many of the alternative brand contact requisites and it is evident in the final delivery of the barrier that agencies "mostly" or "often" fail to present alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the identity of the brand.

In response to the analysis of and results to the semi-structured depth interviews with the key clients and to set the foundation to the final phase of research analysis, the Interview Guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams will next be addressed.

5.7 The Interview Guide to the Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Key Players in the Senior Account Teams

As previously discussed, an interview guide was designed in Chapter 4 (4.9.2), as a working format, to guide the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key players (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors), in the senior account teams. As further motivated in Chapter 4 (4.8), the proposed interview guide was revisited to accommodate the enriched research propositions that were generated from the insights gained from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams. This step was executed in 5.5 of this chapter. The enriched interview guide, as presented in 5.5.2 of this chapter, was then applied in the semi-structured depth interviews with key clients of the interviewed senior account teams. Based on the research methodology, the process of enriching the interview guide is now to be repeated, to accommodate the insights gained from the semi-structured depth interviews with the key clients of the interviewed senior account teams.

A holistic assessment of the results of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams, the research propositions and related objectives enriched thereafter and the results of the semi-structured depth interviews with key clients (Marketing or Brand Managers), however revealed that a more focussed approach was needed. To leverage the full potential of the final phase of research, the researcher paid particular attention to those themes that exhibited correlation in account team and client opinions. Many of the themes that were produced by the senior account teams received very high levels of correlation in client attitudes and opinions. Further investigation of these themes may produce more insights. However, considering that this qualitative study is explorative, it is the new and fresh opinions that have arisen, that need to be investigated in the final phase of research. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that the sampling methodology of this study involves both senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and importantly, their clients. It will be of greater value to this study to explore the new opinions delivered, in particular those of clients, than to reaffirm opinions that have already attained high levels of correlation, through the first two phases of research.

With reference to Table 3 and Table 4, it is evident that the central proposition and related primary objective to this study has been addressed in full. All of the senior account teams and key clients view the alternative brand contact as a means to break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve impact. All of the senior account teams proceeded to elaborate that the alternative brand contact must achieve target audience relevance and communicate and reinforce a focussed brand positioning (identified as alternative brand contact requisites). All of the key clients presented these qualities as inherent to an effective alternative brand contact.

It can thus be concluded that all of the senior account teams and their key clients are in agreement that:

The unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact breaks through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the enriched integral research propositions and related supporting objectives (presented in 5.5.1 of this chapter), have received high correlation in senior account team and key client opinions and attitudes, as is demonstrated in the following table (Table 5). Some nuances do exist and need to be noted. **However, it can be concluded at this point in the research study, that these propositions have now emerged as key findings that can serve as guidelines in the development of plausible hypotheses for future research studies.**

Table 5: Correlation in Senior Account Team and Key Client Responses regarding the Enriched Integral Propositions

Enriched Integral Propositions	Senior Account Teams (6)	Key Clients (10)
1. An outside-in, zero-based , media-neutral and creative strategic planning process	6 and 5	10
2. An integrated and cross-functional account team, enabling the practice of creative strategic planning.	5	10
3. A performance or fee-based agency remuneration system	5	10
4. Alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter	4 and 3	10
5. Agency and client confidence and an integrated client-account team relationship	5 and 3	10
6. Open-minded media planning and open-minded media owners	4 and 4	10
7. To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed	6	10
8. To attain impact the alternate brand contact must be expressive of meaning	6	10
9. To create meaningful impact the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand	6	10
10. To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer, in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind	6	10
11. To maintain impact novel alternative brand contacts must be developed continuously or that a sustainable alternative brand contact that can be improved upon must be employed	0	10
12. The alternative brand contact differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional	6	10
13. Alternative brand contacts generate word-of-mouth and publicity	5	10
14. The alternative brand contact in ambient media form is more focussed and cost efficient	3	10
15. The planning and implementation of the alternative brand contact is time and energy consuming	3	8
16. The alternative brand contact is more memorable	3	10

The nuances to be noted is that the propositions numbered seven and eight, were confirmed by all senior account teams and key clients in indirect terms. In other words, the novelty and communication effectiveness of the alternative brand contact were clearly perceived by all respondents as implied or as somewhat of a given, and were therefore not directly identified as alternative brand contact requisites. Also, the requisite that the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind (number ten), was addressed by all of the senior account teams in indirect terms. However, all of the key clients addressed and confirmed this requisite in direct terms. It is also vital to reinforce that all clients were in agreement with the integral propositions numbered twelve, thirteen, fourteen and sixteen, but elaborated that the need to achieve branded impact, is essential to all.

Three of the enriched integral propositions (highlighted in bold), did not reveal complete correlation in senior account team and key client attitudes, opinions and motivations.

Firstly, with regard zero-based planning (number one), all key clients reasoned that alternative brand contact planning must be zero-based but brand oriented. No preconceived ideas must be allowed to constrain the process of alternative brand contact planning, but ideas and concepts must be developed from the brand platform.

Secondly, all key clients did acknowledge the need for client and agency confidence in alternative brand contact planning and did confirm the need for an integrated client-account team relationship (number five). Yet, six of the key clients believe that despite their integrated hands-on approach, agencies often fail to present alternative brand contact ideas or concepts that are relevant to the brand. The key clients argued that they have the confidence to, and will implement alternative brand contact strategies, despite the lack of evidence of their effectiveness, if they do demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to achieve branded impact.

Thirdly, it is clear that none of the senior account teams raised the maintenance of the unconventional status of the alternative brand contact (number eleven), as a challenge. All of the key clients however acknowledged it as an alternative brand contact requisite and continued to reason that ongoing innovative thinking must be applied to improve on or leverage alternative brand contact concepts.

It is evident that the above integral research propositions and related supporting objectives are in need of further exploration. Over and above the three identified integral research propositions and the newly identified motivations behind them, one new thought was produced by the key clients namely,

Alternative brand contact strategies are more costly, but if they demonstrate potential brand impact, worth the investment.

The above integral propositions that do not demonstrate complete correlation in opinion or are newly identified by key clients, are in need of further exploration. The research reasoning is thus that the time available with key players in the sample of senior account teams, must rather be employed to explore these propositions than to gain further confirmation of themes that, on all accounts, enjoy high levels of correlation in attitudes and opinions.

Based on the qualitative exploratory nature of this study, the research procedure pursued thus far and the argument presented above, a further set of integral research propositions and related supporting objectives were formulated to address the insights gained from the semi-structured depth interviews with key clients. In lieu of the above discussion the proposed Interview Guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams, was abandoned in the final stage of research. A new Interview Guide with greater focus was designed to address the enriched and

newly identified integral research propositions and related supporting objectives.

5.7.1 The Enriched and Newly Identified Integral Research Propositions and Related Supporting Objectives

The enriched and newly identified integral research propositions or related supporting objectives that evolved from those themes that did not demonstrate complete correlation in senior account team and key client opinions and those that were newly identified by the key clients, are as follows. It thus remains to be seen whether the key players within senior account teams agree that:

- **Alternative brand contact planning is zero-based but brand oriented?**
- **Alternative brand contacts presented by agencies often lack brand relevance?**
- **To maintain brand impact the alternative brand contact must sustain its unconventional status. Ongoing innovative thinking must be applied to improve upon or leverage alternative brand contact concepts or ideas?**
- **The alternative brand contact is more costly but if it demonstrates potential brand impact, worth the investment?**

The enriched or newly identified supporting objectives guided the development of the Interview Guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with key players (Creative Directors, Media Planners, Strategic Planners), in the interviewed senior account teams.

5.7.2 The newly designed Interview Guide

The following four open-ended questions directly address the enriched or newly identified integral research propositions or related supporting objectives stated in 5.7.1 above. The Interview Guide to the final stage of research thus appears as follows:

Question One

Many argue that although the planning of alternative points of brand contact requires a zero-based or clean-slate planning platform, it must be brand oriented. What is your opinion?

Question Two

Do you believe that advertising agencies often fail to present alternative brand contact ideas that are relevant to the brand? If so, why? If not, why not?

Question Three

It is argued that the alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status to maintain its impact. To do so, it is reasoned that ongoing innovative thinking must be applied to leverage/improve on concepts. What do you believe?

Question Four

Do you believe that alternative brand contacts are more costly?

If not, why not?

If yes, is it worth the investment if the alternative brand contact demonstrates potential brand impact?

The analysis and results of the semi-structured depth interviews with key players within the interviewed senior account teams will next be presented. Based on the research methodology, the final stage of research would have involved 15 semi-structured depth interviews (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors). However, as previously discussed (5.2.3), in the instance of one of the interviewed senior account teams, the media planning and strategic planning functions are fulfilled by one individual. The final sample thus involved 14 as opposed to 15 key players.

5.8 Analysis and Results of the Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Key Players in the Interviewed Senior Account Teams

The semi-structured depth interviews with the key players in the interviewed senior account teams focussed, as previously motivated (5.7), on those integral research propositions that did not demonstrate complete correlation in senior account team and key client attitudes and those that arose as fresh client opinions. The interview guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with key players, consequently exists of four open ended questions that address the four newly identified integral research propositions and related supporting objectives, as presented in 5.7.1 of this chapter.

The application of the newly designed interview guide and the analysis of conversations that ensued therefrom resulted in the identification of four main themes. These will next be identified and discussed with reference to previous results.

A summary of the results of the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams will be presented in Table 6 on page 310 of this chapter.

a) Theme 1: Zero- and Brand-based (14)

All of the key players in the senior account teams were in total agreement with their key clients that alternative brand contact planning should move from a zero-base but be brand-oriented. Respondents primarily argued that “a *balance*” should be achieved. In other words, alternative brand contact planning should be both zero-based as well as brand-based.

The objective, as two of the key players for example concluded, is to develop “*unconventional and unexpected ideas that are relevant to the brand*” because, “*an alternative brand contact idea needs to be both unique and relevant to achieve impact*”. The key players in the senior account teams essentially reinforced that alternative brand contact planning moves from a zero-base to ensure that unconventional and unexpected solutions are produced. Alternative brand contact planning then also moves, according to the key players, from a brand-base, to ensure that the solutions are relevant to the brand and will communicate and reinforce what the brand stands for.

b) Theme 2: A focussed brand positioning and shared criteria (10)

With reference to question two in the Interview Guide (Do you believe that advertising agencies often fail to present alternative brand contact ideas that are relevant to the brand? If so, why?), only one of the key players interviewed disagreed. The respondent stated that “*I don't believe it's happening and I have never experienced it happening*”.

Three of the respondents were uncomfortable with the question and follow-on probing resulted in vague and even contradictory responses. Respondents cited anything from *“it’s highly irresponsible and shouldn’t happen”* to *“perhaps we don’t always sell our ideas clearly”* and *“sometimes clients just don’t get it”*.

All of the other key players (10) responded with ambivalent statements such as *“perhaps”, “maybe”* or *“at times”*. However, these key players all identified and elaborated, in own terms, on two clear causes of brand irrelevance in alternative brand contact ideas.

Firstly, the key players argued that irrelevant alternative brand contacts are produced when clients are not clear on what their brands stand for and do not have a single-minded brand positioning strategy. Respondents for example stated that:

“Clients can be guilty of not being focussed with their brands”

“Vague brand positioning strategies make for a lethal relationship”

“We need a clear brand character to know how it can behave”.

“We must have a complete and shared understanding of the heart of the brand”

“Client’s are often not single-minded and it’s when they are not focussed that relevance is lost”

“Great clients are single-minded and focussed – that’s when we produce great unconventional ideas that are relevant to the brand”

“If you have a client that knows what his brand stands for, you are liberated and great unconventional work is done”

The study of literature and the primary research results presented thus far establishes that the nature and role of the alternative brand contact is to break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve impact and communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. However, according to the majority of key players, to achieve brand relevance in alternative brand contact solutions, the client must present the agency with a focussed and single-minded brand positioning. A shared understanding of what it is that the brand stands for will, as one of the respondents stated, liberate the agency to produce relevant unconventional and unexpected alternative brand contact solutions.

The second cause of brand irrelevance in alternative brand contact ideas that was identified by the key players is closely related to the first. The key players believe that the client and agency must develop and work from a shared set of criteria or platform, that will guide the development of alternative brand contact solutions and from which these solutions can ultimately be assessed. The brand and its single minded positioning, as has just been established, is considered as core to such a set of criteria. On probing, respondents generally found it difficult to identify exactly what other criteria should be considered. Over and above brand relevance, concepts such as target audience relevance and the ability to break through clutter, were reinforced by most of the key players. The development of a shared set of criteria or a platform will however, according to key players, ensure that alternative brand contacts that are relevant to the brand are produced. Respondents stated that:

“The agency and client should assess the alternative brand contact idea from the same set of criteria”

“There must be shared variables that we work from”

“There must be a joint approach or platform and a joint understanding of how alternative ideas will be assessed”

“We need to affirm criteria before the process starts. It’s very difficult to evaluate new alternative ideas if you don’t know what you are evaluating it against”.

“We co-write the platform and co-evaluate from it. Then the alternative brand contact idea is either on strategy or not. From a joint platform relevant ideas are born”

Two of the ten key players furthermore elaborated that without a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contact solutions are developed and assessed, a further danger exists. According to these two key players, the outcome will involve *“subjective”* assessment of alternative brand contact solutions on a *“personal level”* resulting in the *“second guessing of it’s potential effectiveness”*. The end result will be that *“the path of least resistance is taken”* and that *“contact strategies again become incredibly predictable and boring”*. According to these two respondents, alternative brand contact planning is perhaps even made impossible if not futile, if a shared set of criteria or platform are not put into place.

The researcher deems the above analysis and research result to be of particular significance to the focus of this study, and the final planned outcome of the study namely, the development of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. Ten of the interviewed key players, although somewhat ambivalent, do acknowledge that *“perhaps”* alternative brand contact ideas that are irrelevant to the brand, do get presented to clients. Valuable insight is subsequently gained as key players reinforce and establish the need for a single-minded brand positioning and a shared set of criteria, from which to develop and assess alternative brand contact solutions.

c) Theme 3: ‘Great’ alternative brand contact concepts leverage brand communication spaces to maintain impact - proactive innovative thinking is required (14)

All of the key players in the senior account teams agreed with all of the key clients interviewed that the alternative brand contact must maintain its impact. The key players were also in agreement that the alternative brand contact concept or idea must therefore be leveraged or constantly improved upon.

According to the key players, a “great” alternative brand contact idea or concept is one that can be leveraged within its chosen brand communications environment. Respondents for example reasoned that:

“A great concept will travel in a territory”

“Great concepts will leverage space – they have legs” and

“A great unconventional idea will lead to creative extensions”

However, all of the key players continued to reason that proactive innovative thinking is required to leverage brand communication spaces or territories. The key players are thus in agreement that alternative brand contact planning necessitates ongoing innovative thinking to ensure that the impact of the alternative brand contact is maintained. The key players forewarned that an alternative brand contact strategy can “*not become predictable*”. If the approach becomes predictable the alternative brand contact strategy will “*simply slide into the expected brand communications environment*”, as one respondent put it. The key players thus argued that alternative brand contact planning requires:

“Constantly keeping in touch with consumers experience of the alternative brand contact strategy to keep on innovating”

“Ensuring continuous impact and proactively thinking of what the next move will be”

“Putting innovation at the heart of the strategy”

“Proactive planning and constant innovation”

“You can’t be reactive – you must stay a step ahead and keep on innovating”

as one of the key players in summary of the above opinions, aptly concluded:

“Proactive innovative thinking is vital”

In keeping with key client opinions, all of the key players in the senior account teams believe that an alternative point of brand contact must be leveraged or improved upon, to ensure continued impact. ‘Great’ alternative brand contact strategies, according to the key players, leverage brand communication spaces to maintain impact. An alternative brand contact strategy, as key players reasoned and forewarned, can not become predictable and therefore, as one of the key players for example concluded, *“proactive innovative thinking is vital”*.

d) Theme 4: Alternative brand contacts are in general not more costly and the focus should be on the cost-benefit (14)

None of the key players in senior account teams believe that alternative brand contact strategies are, in general, more costly to implement. Four of the key players did however confirm the concerns of four of the key clients. The four clients viewed alternative brand contact strategies, with specific reference to those implemented in print publications, as more costly. In confirmation, one of the key players for example explained that, *“you generally pay loadings on preferential treatment in the print publications”*.

Two of the four key players however elaborated that the print owners *“are coming to the party these days”* because *“they know that you can take your idea elsewhere – to a more flexible publication that is prepared to experiment and negotiate a fair deal”*. According to these two key players the cost of

alternative brand contact strategies in print publications will in all probability *“be less of an issue in future”*, as media owners *“feel the competitive pressure”*.

Furthermore, all of the key players continued to argue that the focus should not solely be on the cost of an alternative brand contact strategy, but also if not primarily, on the benefit that is gained namely, the ability to break through commercial clutter to achieve impact. Respondents argued that:

“The value gained is the focal point”

“There must be a cost-benefit understanding”

“You can not consider cost outside of the value gained. You must focus on cost efficiency”

“Measure the idea not against cost but against the value of breaking through clutter and achieving impact”

“The issue is the return on investment – look at it objectively”

“Argue effectiveness. You have spent budget in a better way – it means more to the brand”

“Look at the big picture. It’s about the value of the investment. Measure cost against impact achieved”

A holistic assessment of key clients and key players’ attitudes toward the cost of alternative points of brand contact reveals that in essence no real conflict in opinion exists. Only four of the ten key clients interviewed raised cost as a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. Also, the four clients primarily raised cost as a concern in reference to the implementation of unconventional executions in print publications, as did four of the interviewed key players in senior account teams. Two of the key players, did however point out that the loaded costs encountered in implementing unconventional brand contact

ideas in print publications, will in all probability decrease in future as *“print owners are coming to the party”*.

Furthermore, three of the four clients interviewed stated that they are prepared to invest in alternative brand contact solutions if the potential to achieve branded impact is there. The cost-benefit focus argued by all of the key players within the senior account teams thus sits comfortably with client opinion on the matter. Client and account team attitudes toward the cost of alternative points of brand contact are seemingly not in conflict.

5.8.1 Conclusion to the Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Key Players in the Interviewed Senior Account Teams

In conclusion to the data analysis and results of the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams, the following can be confirmed based on very high levels of correlation in opinions, attitudes and motivations, as demonstrated in Table 6. New contributions are again highlighted in bold.

Table 6: A Frequency Summary of Responses of Key Players in the Interviewed Senior Account Teams

Main Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Zero-based and brand-based (14)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A focussed brand positioning and shared criteria (10)	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
'Great' alternative brand contact concepts leverage brand communication spaces to maintain impact - proactive innovative thinking is required (14)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alternative brand contacts are in general not more costly and the focus should be on the cost-benefit (14)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

- **Alternative brand contact planning should be zero- and brand-based**

All of the key players, in agreement with their key clients, are of the opinion that alternative brand contact planning is zero-based to produce unconventional ideas and brand-based to ensure ideas are relevant to the brand and what it stands for.

- **Alternative brand contact planning must be based on a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria**

Ten of the fourteen key players interviewed believe that relevant alternative brand contact strategies will be produced if the agency and client ensure that alternative brand contact ideas are developed and assessed from a single-minded brand positioning platform and a shared set of criteria.

- **‘Great’ alternative brand contact concepts leverage brand communication spaces to maintain impact – proactive innovative thinking is required**

According to all of the key players in the interviewed senior account teams the alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status to maintain its impact. The key players believe that ‘great’ alternative brand contact concepts demonstrate the potential to leverage brand communication spaces. To attain this goal and ensure impact is maintained, proactive innovative thinking is required.

- **Alternative brand contact strategies are in general not more costly and focus should be on cost-benefit**

The key players in senior account teams do not perceive alternative brand contact strategies, in general, to be more expensive. Only four key clients

raised cost as a concern and did so with reference to the implementation of alternative brand contacts in magazines. Four of the key players acknowledged that alternative brand contacts in print publications are more costly, although two of the key players continued to reason that it will be less so in future, due to media owners "*coming to the party*". All of the key players concluded that the focus should rather be on the cost-benefit relationship of the alternative brand contact. No real conflict in key client and key player opinion is thus encountered as three of the key clients concluded that they are prepared to invest in alternative brand contact strategies, if they demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to achieve branded impact.

The above results present the final insights drawn from the three-phased qualitative exploratory research study. A conclusion to the primary research study will next be presented upon which the final chapter to this study will be delivered.

5.9 Conclusion to the Primary Research Study

The three-phase design of the qualitative exploratory research study enabled the researcher to effectively explore the central and integral research propositions and to achieve the related primary and supporting objectives in real world terms. The opinions, attitudes and motivations of the senior account teams, their key clients and key players within the senior account teams, were progressively uncovered and probed to lead to the meaningful enrichment of research propositions and objectives, in completion to the research phases. Ultimately, insightful and meaningful research results were produced.

In the researcher's opinion the scientific standards of research, as advocated by Cooper and Schindler (1998:15) and Sudman and Blair (1998:6), were achieved. The research purpose, procedures and design were clearly defined, detailed, planned and implemented. A high ethical standard was applied in conducting and analysing the research. The research results are presented unambiguously, conclusions are justified and the researcher's experience is reflected.

It must be stated that the researcher did not detect and that research results did not deliver noticeable differences in the attitudes, opinions and motivations of the sample of senior account teams or key clients, related to the size of the Integrated Communications Agency. The observation delivered by three of the industry experts interviewed in the sampling procedure to this study (4.10.3), namely, that smaller agencies tend to operate in a more integrated fashion did not manifest in this study. This may be because the primary research conducted in this study has generally revealed that mindset defines the contact planning approach of the agency and how it structures itself to achieve integration.

Chapter Six, the final chapter to this study, will next commence with a brief reflection on the focus and architecture of the study. Thereupon, **the key findings of the qualitative exploratory research study** will be presented to establish a valid and reliable platform to the development of a **Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning**.