

**THE ROLE OF ALTERNATIVE BRAND CONTACT PLANNING IN THE SOUTH  
AFRICAN MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY**

by

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**This study is dedicated to Marieke and Albert Enslin**

My gratitude to:

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Professor North, for your guidance

The Veganites, for your wisdom and magic

Gordon Cook, for your brand passion and leadership

## SYNOPSIS

This study explores the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. The concept of alternative brand contact is embedded in integrated brand contact management. Based on the outside-in and zero-based planning philosophy of integrated brand contact management, the alternative brand contact is defined as a planned point of contact with the brand that is experienced by consumers as unexpected and unconventional. The alternative brand contact is thus media neutral. It is the unexpected and unconventional appeal of the alternative brand contact that defines its status and not the use of one medium as opposed to another.

The study of literature explores the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact to deliver a central research proposition and primary research objective, namely:

**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 literature study furthermore identifies a myriad of barriers and requisites to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof. These are evolved into integral research propositions and related supporting research objectives.

A qualitative exploratory research study is conducted to engage the opinions, attitudes and motivations of the South African marketing and communication industry on the defined central and integral research propositions. For motivated reasons, exploratory focus groups are conducted with senior account teams in a sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. This first phase of research is followed by two further phases of research namely, semi-structured depth interviews with key clients of the senior account teams and semi-structured depth interviews with key players within the senior account teams.

Thus depth of thought and opinion is gained on the nature, role and planning of unconventional and unexpected points of brand contact.

The qualitative exploratory research study produces one primary and fifteen supporting key findings. The key findings are employed, in conclusion to this study, in the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

It is envisaged that those agencies and clients that are responsive to the explorative and experimental nature of alternative brand contact planning will find the proposed conceptual model to be of immediate strategic value. Companies and agencies in need of empirical evidence can apply the key findings of this study in the development of hypotheses for future research.

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## Chapter 1

### The Focus and Architecture of the Study: An Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction

The objective of this introductory chapter is to present in essence, the focus and architecture of the study.

The focal point of the study, that is the concept of alternative brand contact and alternative brand contact planning, will firstly be addressed. The architecture of the study, as designed through six chapters, levels of literature and primary research and the development of an ultimate end product namely, a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning will be presented thereafter.

#### 1.2 The Focus of the Study

This study explores the concept of **Alternative Brand Contact**. The Alternative Brand Contact is introduced as a planned form of contact with the brand that is experienced by consumers as **unconventional** and **unexpected**.

The nature and role of the alternative brand contact and alternative brand contact planning is defined, based on the study of literature, as **to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand**. It is this central proposition that presents the primary objective of the qualitative exploratory research that is conducted in this study.

The alternative brand contact is positioned in context of Integrated Brand Contact Management as it can only be considered effective if it contributes to

the integrated brand contact strategy to build the brand. Also, the alternative brand contact is defined from the perspective or mindset of integrated brand contact planning, that is from an outside-in and zero-base.

The alternative brand contact is essentially explored on two levels. Firstly through an investigation of literature and secondly, through a three-phased qualitative exploratory research study that engages with the opinions and attitudes of the marketing and communications industry in South Africa. Thus the title of the study – **The role of alternative brand contact planning in the South African marketing and communication industry**, is addressed.

### **1.3 The Architecture of the Study**

The architecture of this study comprises of six chapters, the implementation of secondary literature research and primary industry research and the design of a model to alternative brand contact planning, to capture literature insights and research findings and ultimately to reflect in full, on the title of the study.

Chapters Two, Three and Four present the literature study. Chapter Two sets the foundation with the outside-in approach to Brand Contact Management. Chapter Three is devoted to the core construct of the study namely, the Alternative Brand Contact and the planning thereof. The research methodology to the primary research study is discussed in detail in Chapter Four of the study.

Chapter Five has the dual purpose of discussing the implementation of the primary research study and presenting the results and interpretation thereof. Closure is created in Chapter Six with the presentation of the key research findings and the design and discussion of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

A brief discussion of the focus of the individual chapters follows.

### 1.3.1 Chapter Two – The Outside-in Approach to Brand Contact Management

Chapter Two presents the context to and platform of this study. The Chapter commences with a brief investigation of the nature and role of the individual classical promotional tools (Advertising, Sales Promotions, Direct Marketing, Personal Selling and Public Relations), to present the overriding objective as brand building.

Businesses in today's competitive arena are driven to attain a distinctive and valued brand position in the minds of customers and potential consumers. The essential aim of marketing communications as an integrated force is therefore to build brands through consistent communication messages. Hence the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications.

Chapter Two however proceeds to argue that the brand is a complex strategic tool and involves the entire process of managing consumer perceptions and not only those created through planned marketing communications. A brand is built through every level of contact, through marketing and promotional activity, in consumer and customer markets. Thus the concept of **brand contacts**, as applied by Schultz and Barnes (1995:8), is introduced. Every form of contact communicates and either adds to, or erodes the value of the brand in consumers' minds.

Of significance is that the brand contact approach follows an outside-in (consumer oriented) thinking and planning pattern. Consumers do not differentiate between the myriad of contact point experiences. In brand contact planning the consumer's experience of the brand and its marketing and communications processes is consequently viewed as the point of departure in working towards a consistent, unified brand identity. Companies must therefore develop a holistic and integrated marketing and communications mindset to acknowledge the collective effect of all marketing and communication activities on the status and identity of the brand in consumers' minds.

Chapter Two essentially sets the strategic platform to this study as the process of brand communications is defined from the outside-in, that is from the consumer's point of view. The study is thus based on brand contact methodology.

Chapter Two then proceeds to argue the need for integrated brand contact management and the development of brand positioning strategies that are relevant, distinctive and single-minded. Brand identity is the cornerstone of brand strategy and the outside-in approach to brand contact methodology advocates that all points of brand contact must be integrated to reinforce and communicate the core identity of the brand. The identity of a brand is defined by its positioning and as is reasoned in this chapter, without a clear positioning there can be no true integration.

Chapter Two furthermore highlights that brand positioning is challenged in the modern market place by increasing competition, levels of product and brand parity and communication clutter. It is established that brand positioning strategies need not only deliver consumer relevance and meaningful differentiation, but also a single-minded thrust. Integrated brand contact management is governed by total focus in brand identity and positioning. The strategic aim is to take ownership of a consumer relevant and differentiated positioning on a clear-cut and singular level. The more focussed the brand positioning, the greater the brand contact synergy or integration.

In continuation and support of the brand contact approach and the concept of contact integration, the nature and scope of integrated brand contact planning is discussed and four levels or sources of brand contact are identified. These are product based, service based, planned (marketing communication messages) and unplanned (for example, word-of-mouth) sources of brand contact. It is argued that an integrated brand identity is achieved when the brand positioning communicated through planned points of contact, is consistent with the performance of product and service contacts and confirmed by unplanned points of contact.

Of significance is that the sources of brand contact can originate from several internal company sources as well as external sources such as the Advertising Agency. The process of integrated brand contact planning and management can not be defined to a single department. Chapter Two thus introduces and debates the value of a cross-functional orientation and the introduction of a Brand Contact Task Team, that will function as brand champions to promote the interests of the brand at all times and in all places.

It is within context of the outside-in approach to brand contact management and the cross-functional approach of a dedicated task group, that Chapter Two introduces a next mindset requisite to integrated brand contact planning. Inside-out preconceived contact ideas or judgements must give way to a zero-based planning platform that is based on consumers' current experience of points of brand contact. Chapter Two thus proceeds to present the Brand Contact Audit as a platform neutral foundation to brand contact planning. The aim of which is to identify the key contact issues facing the brand, from an outside-in and zero-based planning perspective and accordingly to develop appropriate brand contact objectives, contact strategies and bottom-up budgets.

In completion to the discussion of the nature and scope of integrated brand contact planning, Chapter Two addresses the need for a Brand Charter. The purpose of which is to capture brand learnings and to codify the brand identity and brand positioning strategy. The Brand Charter can accordingly be implemented by the Brand Contact Task Team as the strategic guide to the process of integrated brand contact planning and management.

Chapter Two concludes by arguing the role of the advertising agency in integrated brand contact planning. According to several authors outside-in, zero-based and cross-functional brand contact planning is enhanced as the advertising agency is involved as an objective and valued strategic partner in the process. However, to play a meaningful role and add value, the traditional advertising agency will have to evolve into a strategic partner that delivers integrated brand communications solutions.

Thus the need for Integrated Communications Agencies that provide holistic, integrated communications solutions and profound strategic advice is debated. To attain this goal and to practice outside-in and zero-based planning it is argued that the agency must be structured into cross-functional account teams rather than specialised departments. Strategic, creative, media and specialised promotional skills are thus integrated to deliver holistic brand contact solutions.

A partnership philosophy between the Brand Contact Task Team and cross-functional account team within the Integrated Communications Agency, will then ultimately optimise the process of integrated brand contact management. The truly Integrated Communications Agency thus delivers effective, integrated planned brand contact strategies and also has the skill and expertise to compliment and advise on the holistic integration of all points of brand contact.

With Chapter Two as a theoretical and strategic foundation, Chapter Three establishes the concept of alternative brand contact. The alternative brand contact is introduced in context of the scope of planned points of brand contact and clients increasing need for innovative planned brand contact solutions that will break through communication clutter barriers.

**Of vital importance to this study is that the alternative brand contact is positioned as a means to break through commercial clutter barriers to communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. It is for this reason, the ultimate purpose of achieving branded impact, that Chapter Two is viewed as a critical foundation to the study. It is argued that the alternative brand contact must add value to the integrated brand contact strategy and contribute to the process of brand building. The alternative brand contact is furthermore introduced on the grounds of integrated brand contact thinking, in other words, outside-in and zero-based thinking.**

### 1.3.2 Chapter Three – The Alternative Brand Contact

Chapter Two essentially establishes that a relevant, differentiated and single-minded brand positioning must be communicated at every level of contact (product, service, planned and unplanned) with consumers, to achieve an integrated brand identity. Chapter Three introduces the alternative brand contact, as a planned form of brand contact on the premise of the outside-in and zero-based planning mindset of integrated brand contact planning.

Chapter Three commences to argue that the concept 'alternative' is greatly applied in the marketing and communications industry from the inside-out. That is, from the practitioner's point of view in context of industry media classifications, such as above-the-line mass media versus below-the-line 'alternative' media. In the context of the outside-in and zero-based brand contact planning philosophy, it is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative brand contact appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. In keeping with the outside-in and zero-based planning approach, the alternative brand contact is media neutral and qualifies as any unconventional or unexpected point of brand contact, whether in a traditional or non-traditional media environment.

Chapter Three identifies and investigates two key motivators for the growth of alternative brand contacts. Firstly, it is established that clients are increasingly seeking innovative brand contact solutions within and beyond the traditional scope of brand communications. Secondly, and also in support of the first motivating factor, rising levels of expected communications clutter is resulting in target audiences increasing their commercial defenses, in the form of selective exposure and attention measures.

It is reasoned that advertisers should not only rely on the creativity of the planned brand communications message to break through clutter, but that creative strategic thinking must be applied to produce alternative brand contacts that will reach audiences that have become jaded by the brand communications onslaught. The challenge is to move beyond, or to

manipulate traditional communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner, when and where they least expect to encounter a brand message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind. Within this context, Chapter Three demonstrates and discusses the growth of alternative brand contacts in the traditional media environments and in new media or ambient media environments.

To break through the clutter and produce alternative brand contact solutions, innovative thinking and creative strategic planning is required. The planning of alternative brand contacts is discussed in Chapter Three with this principle at heart. Dru's (1996:54; 2002:19) theory of disruption and the need to apply creative strategic thinking to develop contact solutions that will break through clutter to build the brand, is discussed in this regard. Of importance is Dru's disruption theory which reinforces that to develop alternative brand contact solutions, the account team will have to move from the outside-in, from a zero-base and media neutral planning platform and establishes that creative-strategic thinking needs to be applied in the process of doing so.

In further investigation of the concept of creative strategic thinking, Chapter Three also briefly explores the concept of creativity (that which is both novel and appropriate/relevant), in brand communications planning. The outcome reflects that the critical dimension is the mindset and sense of purpose of the team involved in the creative process. The mindset of the account team and its sense of purpose are more important in alternative brand contact planning than the development and implementation of creative techniques to produce creative solutions.

For this reason Chapter Three revisits the nature and role of the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency, as the make-up and planning environment of the account team will inevitably affect its mindset and sense of purpose in alternative brand contact planning. Chapter Three establishes that the integrated and cross-functional account team, with the confluence of strategic, media and creative resources, presents an organic environment conducive to innovative creative strategic thinking and thus alternative brand

contact planning. It is also argued that to produce alternative brand contact solutions, an environment or culture that welcomes and stimulates exploration and experimentation is required.

Finally, in order to ensure that an objective assessment of the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact is achieved, also in context of the purpose of integrated brand contact planning, Chapter Three identifies a number of barriers to the concept and process. These are identified as:

- The departmentalised agency structure
- Inside-out thinking in brand contact planning
- Media-biased and commission based brand contact planning
- Total reliance on message creativity
- Reliance on media planning systems and measurement data

An integrated assessment of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning reveals that the greatest collective barrier is mindset. An inside-out, departmentalised, media-biased and research bound strategic planning mindset, lacking in creative strategic purpose and thinking is certainly not conducive to alternative brand contact planning.

To alleviate and address the identified barriers to alternative brand contact planning, Chapter Three next identifies and discusses alternative brand contact requisites. Given the vital influence of mindset, the requisites are introduced on the premise that an outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset and sense of purpose, is encouraged and practiced by the client, Integrated Communications Agency and account team. The requisites then are as follows:

- Impact and the novelty of the alternative brand contact
- Impact and the communication effectiveness of the alternative brand contact
- Impact and communicating a single-minded brand identity

- Impact and target audience relevance
- Continued impact of the alternative brand contact

**Chapter Three ultimately presents the alternative brand contact as a planned form of brand contact, in the context of integrated brand contact planning. Its nature and role is explored on the premise of outside-in and zero-based thinking. The nature and role of the alternative brand contact is thus defined as to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.**

**In line with the core purpose of the alternative brand contact, the barriers and requisites to the unexpected and unconventional brand contact and the planning thereof, present the key insights gained from the literature study and vital constructs to the primary research study.**

### **1.3.3 Chapter Four – The Research Methodology**

Chapter Four presents a theoretical analysis and motivation for the working research methods applied in the primary research phase of this study.

The framework of this research study is created through motivated research steps, to present the process of research. For the purposes of this introductory chapter the steps will be identified and their application to the study briefly stated. A complete research argument is presented in Chapter Four of this study.

- **Defining the research problem**

The study of literature reveals that the brand communications arena today is highly competitive and cluttered. Consumers, as Ries and Ries (2000:26)

argue, live in an over-communicated society. In defense against the onslaught of commercial messages consumers increasingly erect selective awareness and attention measures. Marketers are thus challenged to break through the expected commercial clutter barriers to ensure that their brand communication messages impact on consumers.

The study of literature indicates that marketers are consequently expecting of their communication partners to develop unconventional and unexpected brand contact approaches that will break through commercial clutter barriers. The literature study ultimately proposes that the alternative brand contact can fulfill this role. The research problem exists in that it remains to be seen whether the marketing and communication industry in South Africa is in agreement that:

*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 above stated suggestion presents the **central proposition** to the primary research study. This study does not aim to produce inferences purporting to be conclusive but rather findings that can serve as guidelines to the development of hypotheses that, with further future research, can be tested to represent a proof.

The research problem is however more layered as the study of literature establishes 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 found to depend on a set of requisites. These requisites consequently present the **integral propositions** to the primary research study and also need to be assessed to produce findings, that can in future be applied in the formulation of hypotheses for empirical research studies.

The purpose of the primary research study is to explore the central and integral research propositions in real world terms.

- **The research objectives**

To present clear-cut research objectives specific research questions must exist for the formulated propositions. Also, the scope or boundaries of the research study must be clearly defined. The latter presented the challenge. The literature assessment of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning indicates that an inside-out, media-biased and measurement bound planning mindset void of creative strategic thinking, inhibits the process of alternative brand contact planning. The barriers to alternative brand contact planning are consequently employed to set parameters to the primary research study. The primary research study therefore explores the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients.

It is not assumed that all Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa exhibit a wholly outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning mindset. The assumption however is that they are, based on an integrated brand communications planning focus, a great deal closer to a planning mindset that is conducive to alternative brand contact planning, than their traditional counterparts. Equally so, and as motivated in Chapter Four, it is assumed that the clients of Integrated Communications Agencies demonstrate a need to develop a relationship with a brand communications partner that will meet expectations and add greater value to the process of brand building.

Specific research questions are formulated in Chapter Four to address the central research proposition (primary research objective) and integral research propositions (supporting research objectives), based on the defined parameters. The primary research study will thus explore the primary and

supporting research objectives as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients.

- **The research design**

To answer the research problem and objectives, a qualitative exploratory primary research study is pursued. As argued in Chapter Four, a qualitative exploratory research design is required because as a norm, only a fraction of existing knowledge in a field or industry is put into writing. Added to this, the research area of alternative brand contact planning is defined as fairly new, in which case many possible unknown variables may exist. Furthermore and importantly, a qualitative exploratory study is required because in-depth attitudes, opinions and motivations need to be revealed.

- **The research method**

Given the intention of this study, that is to explore the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact and the focus on a qualitative exploratory research design, self-report data source selection methods and in specific, exploratory focus groups and semi-structured depth interviews, are implemented.

Exploratory focus groups are firstly conducted with senior account teams (teams with range and depth of insight and experience) in Integrated Communications Agencies. The key motivator for using focus groups as a data source selection method is to explore a concept in context of group dynamics. The planning of the alternative brand contact, in turn is reliant on the dynamics of the account team as a cross-functional unit. The data produced and key insights gained from the focus groups are then employed to enrich the defined research propositions in preparation of the next two phases of research.

The final two phases of research involve semi-structured depth interviews with the key clients (Marketing or Brand Managers) of the senior account teams and then also with the thought leaders or key players (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors), in the senior account teams. The aim is to ensure that the fundamental reasons underlying respondents' attitudes are uncovered and that all personal opinions on the enriched research propositions are expressed on own terms. The semi-structured depth interviews with clients precede the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams. The research propositions are therefore again revisited before the final phase of research, to address the insights gained from interviews with key clients.

An Interview Guide to the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams is presented and discussed in Chapter Four. Likewise, a working format Interview Guide is designed for the semi-structured depth interviews with clients and thought leaders or key players in the senior account teams. The latter, as mentioned, is revisited in the process of research to address the development of enriched research propositions.

The data collection methods and process are comprehensively motivated in Chapter Four and are essentially based on the concept of integrated brand contact planning and the nature of alternative brand contact planning therein, as established through the secondary study of literature. The core purpose is to explore attitudes, opinions and motivations toward the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, in depth.

- **Sampling procedure**

The population of interest and two target sub-groups to this study are senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa and their key clients (Marketing or Brand Managers).

The sample frame, size and sampling method presented a particular challenge to the primary research study. The sample frames of Marketing or Brand Managers and thought leaders or key players in the senior account teams, as per the research methodology, would emerge organically from the frame of identified senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The latter two phases of research could thus be managed with relative ease in terms of sampling procedure. However, as a starting point, no frame or list of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa exists. The agencies that are positioned as Integrated Communications Agencies exist in and amongst the current frames of 680+ Advertising or Communication Agencies in South Africa. Consequently, screening was pursued as an option to research frame development. The opinions of six independent industry experts however negated this measure. Immediate doubt and skepticism was expressed as to the objectivity of screening agencies. Given the growing demand for integrated brand communications planning, every advertising agency will inadvertently profess to be operating as an Integrated Communications Agency. The independent industry experts did however identify, with considerable overlap in opinion, the agencies that they believe to be integrated or working towards developing integrated brand communications solutions.

With the value of information approach as a premise to setting sample size, three experts in the field of marketing and advertising research in South Africa were consulted. The following sample sizes were proposed and agreed upon:

- Six focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies
- Ten semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and
- Fifteen semi-structured depth interviews with key players (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors), within the senior account teams.

The qualitative exploratory nature of this study, the challenge presented by the sample frame, the critical questioning of industry experts and the need to develop a sample size of six senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies, lead to the application of a non-probability sampling method. More specifically, purposive judgment sampling prove to be the appropriate sampling method to this study.

The Delphi Approach to Forecasting guided the process and assessment of industry experts' judgement, to identify six Integrated Communications Agencies and the sample to this study. The Managing Directors of the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies in turn identified a senior account team in the agency. As previously stated the sample of Marketing and Brand Managers and the sample of key players within the senior account teams, evolved organically from the identified sample of senior account teams.

**Chapter Four presents the research methodology to the qualitative exploratory research study. The primary objective of which is to determine:**

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

**The identified integral propositions or supporting objectives, originally defined as requisites to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof, are also addressed in the process of research. The implementation of the research process, the analysis of data and the results produced through the three-phased research design, are presented in Chapter Five of this study.**

### **1.3.4 Chapter Five – Research Implementation, Results and Interpretation**

Chapter Five commences with a brief discussion of the real world dynamics encountered in the process of implementing the three phases of this qualitative exploratory research study. The Chapter is thereupon devoted to the research results and the interpretation thereof.

The data produced through the research study is analysed through thematic content analysis as the tool of analysis. Each of the three phases of research is treated as individual phases in the process of content analysis and the presentation of research results and interpretations. This measure is applied in accordance with the research methodology, to ensure that the central and integral research propositions are revisited, reflected upon and enriched in preparation of the next phase of research. The data analysis and results are thus presented in terms of the identification and discussion of main themes that were produced and results that were gained per research phase, to address the proposed interview guide to the next planned phase of research.

The main themes identified through thematic content analysis, essentially reflected in both the case of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams and the semi-structured depth interviews with clients, on the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact and the requisites and barriers to alternative brand contact planning. The exploratory focus groups naturally produced these main themes and consequently the semi-structured depth interviews, as guided through the revisited interview guide, naturally revolved around these main themes.

The high levels of correlation encountered in attitudes, opinions and motivations through these first two phases of the research process resulted in the development of a far more focussed interview guide to the final set of semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the interviewed senior account teams. Consequently, key areas that required greater depth in exploration could be focussed upon.

**It is revealed in Chapter Five that the qualitative exploratory design of this research study has indeed been successful. Depth of opinion and thought was gained and fresh thinking was produced in the process. The central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting objectives to the primary research study are consequently addressed in full.**

### **1.3.5 Chapter Six – Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations for Future Research**

Chapter Six commences with a brief reflection on the focus and architecture of this study, whereupon the key findings to the qualitative exploratory research study are presented. Thus, sound guidelines to the development of plausible hypotheses for future research are produced and a solid platform is created for the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

This study is concluded with the design and discussion of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. It is envisaged that those agencies and clients, who recognise and acknowledge the experimental nature of alternative brand contact planning, will find the model of immediate value in the planning of alternative brand contact strategies.

It must be noted that the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of the alternative brand contact did emerge in the study of literature and the primary research conducted in this study, as a potential barrier to alternative brand contact planning. The majority of key clients interviewed in this study, nonetheless reasoned that they are prepared to invest in 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. The proposed Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning places branded impact at its heart.

However, some marketing and communication professionals in South Africa may not share in this outlook. Those agencies and clients who are in need of conclusive evidence of the effectiveness of the alternative brand contact, can then apply the key findings that are presented in this chapter, in the development of hypotheses for further research studies. The proposed Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning can thus be confirmed, altered or improved upon.

The theoretical foundation to the study, is the point of departure. As discussed, the theoretical foundation is established through Chapter Two – The Outside-in Approach to Brand Contact Management, Chapter Three – The Alternative Brand Contact and Chapter Four – The Research Methodology. All references made can be found in the reference list to the study.

## Chapter 2

### The Outside-in Approach to Brand Contact Management

**“It’s a new brand world”**

**Tom Peters**

#### 2.1 Introduction

Ries and Ries (2000:2 - 4) argue that the broad range of marketing functions have one common goal and that is to build brands. “The essence of the marketing process is building a brand in the minds of consumers”. The concepts of marketing and branding are so inextricably linked that it is futile to separate them.

Core to the process of marketing and branding, is promotions or marketing communications. Rix and Stanton (1998:405) observe that virtually all marketing activities require effective promotion. Marketing Communications play a vital role in brand building.

Chapter Two will set out to investigate the classical role and function of promotions in marketing. The strategic focus of the various promotional tools (Advertising, Direct Marketing, Public Relations, Personal Selling and Sales Promotions) will briefly be discussed, with a view to addressing the shift to Integrated Marketing Communications. The aim of which is to ensure that all promotional messages communicate in one voice, to build a consistent brand identity.

Kapferer (1997:25) however argues that the brand is a focal point for consumer impressions created through a myriad of contacts with the brand. The brand image results from contacts that stem from both the marketing and communications domains. To develop a synergistic brand identity all levels of consumer interaction with the brand must be addressed and not only those delivered through planned marketing communications efforts.

The effective planning and management of the identity of a brand therefore demands a holistic understanding of the integrated nature of marketing and communications.

Chapter Two will move beyond Integrated Marketing Communications to introduce and discuss an outside-in, consumer oriented approach to brand creation. The concept of brand contacts will be introduced and the importance of integrating all levels of consumer interaction with the brand will be argued. As Duncan (2002:324) advocates, strategic integration must be achieved across all points of brand contact to build an integrated brand identity.

According to Trout and Ries (1972:51-53) and Aaker and Meyers (1987:125) the identity of a brand is defined by its positioning. The development of a focussed brand positioning is paramount to the process of creating contact synergy and building a consistent brand identity. The role and value of a single-minded brand positioning strategy, in effective brand contact management, will therefore also be explored.

Chapter Two will furthermore investigate the process of brand contact planning and will hone in to explore the role of the Brand Contact Task Team and the Integrated Communications Agency, in the development and management of points of brand contact.

The outside-in, holistic and consumer oriented assessment of brand communications is paramount to the focus of this study. It is within this context that brand contact thinking is enforced and that the nature, role and planning of alternative points of brand contact in the South African market place, are discussed and explored through secondary and primary research.

## 2.2 Marketing Communications in Context

Kotler (1997:9) defines the function of Marketing as a “social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and exchanging products (goods, services, and ideas) of value with others”. According to the American Marketing Association, marketing essentially involves the process of planning and executing the conception, distribution, pricing and promoting of ideas, goods, and services to create, as Engel, Warshaw and Kinnear (1994:4) confirm, exchanges that satisfy the goals of the individual and that of the organisation.

Marketing evidently comprises of a total system of business activities designed to generate and facilitate exchanges to satisfy human needs or wants. The concept of exchange is core to marketing and occurs, according to Etzel, Walker and Stanton (1997:4), whenever “one social unit (person or organisation) strives to exchange something of value with another social unit ”.

The act of exchange defines the *marketing concept*. As Berkowitz, Kerin, Hartley and Rudelius (2000:21) explain, an organisation should strive to satisfy the needs of consumers while also aiming to achieve the organisation’s goals. Thus, the purpose of marketing is to create, grow and sustain the transfer of value in order to ensure an organisation’s long-term success.

To achieve and grow exchanges, the focus of marketing is, as Rozin and Magnusson (2003:185) agree, on the needs and wants of the consumer and the core objective is to effectively market the consumer benefits that are built into products and services.

Perreault and McCarthy (1996:35) furthermore observe that for marketing to be effective it must be an organisation-wide effort. To satisfy customer needs on an ongoing basis, must be the driving force behind all business activities.

Bearden, Ingram and LaForge (2001:4) agree that satisfying customer needs demands integrated and coordinated efforts throughout the organisation.

Bearden et al. (2001:4) and Berkowitz et al. (2000:21) are of the opinion that an organisation should therefore foster a market orientation. An organisation's efforts must consistently be focussed on "collecting information about customers' needs and competitors' capabilities, sharing this information across departments, and using the information to create customer value". Understanding consumers and customers must be an organisational philosophy, to create customer value and develop sustainable relationships.

The development of a marketing strategy then involves the planning and implementation of an overall marketing offer, to appeal to defined groups of consumers and/or organisations with whom a business wants to create marketing exchanges and develop long term relationships. According to Bearden et al. (2001:10) the process of strategy development involves decisions in primarily four areas, namely product and brand development, pricing, distribution and marketing communications. These decisions are effectively blended into a mix designed to serve the target market.

The role of marketing communications according to Burnett and Moriarty (1998:3) as a function of the marketing mix, is to communicate product or service information to "those who have significant potential to respond to the communication messages".

The strategic focus of the marketing communications function is therefore also embedded in customer need satisfaction. Communication efforts aim to inform, persuade and remind the target market of product and/or service benefits, with the objective to influence their attitudes and consumption behaviour.

The role and scope of Marketing Communications has classically been defined in context of the Promotional Mix. Rix and Stanton (1998:405) define the promotional mix as an "organisation's combination of promotion

techniques”. Organisations employ the functions of Advertising, Sales Promotions, Personal Selling, Direct Marketing and Public Relations to communicate and persuade target audiences to buy and ultimately become loyal to products and services. Each of the promotional methods or tools has distinct features that determine the strategic context in which it will be most effective.

A brief description of the promotional tools follows.

### **2.2.1 Advertising**

According to Bearden et al. (2001:393) Advertising is the activity that consumers most associate with the term marketing. Arens (2002:7) defines Advertising as “the structured and composed nonpersonal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media”.

Advertising generally involves the buying of space and time in mass media (such as TV, radio and magazines) to communicate messages to large audiences, often at the same time. Herein lies its core strength – the ability to create broad-based awareness and intensify demand amongst a mass audience (Burnett and Moriarty 1998:279).

Duncan (2002:511) explains that Advertising adds value to a brand by creating brand awareness, long-term brand images and brand positions. Advertising has the ability to increase and reinforce brand knowledge effectively. Ormerod (1999:48) and Percy, Rossiter and Elliott (2001:4) conclude that advertising plays a pivotal role in building positive brand attitudes and strengthening the brand promise.

The marketing communications tool does however have its limits. Burnett and Moriarty (1998:279) highlight that Advertising is increasingly perceived as intrusive and as cluttering the environment. Duncan (2002:516) and Ries and

Ries (2002:xix) furthermore argue that credibility is not a strength of advertising, because consumers today recognize advertisements as paid messages delivered on behalf of a brand.

The use of mass media, which are non-personal, presents a further shortfall of Advertising as a marketing communications tool. As Berkowitz et al. (2000:495) point out, Advertising does not have an immediate feedback loop, as does Personal Selling or Direct Marketing. The advertising message can not be personalised to the extent that the direct and personal communications message can be tailored to address consumer needs and wants and ultimately to build long-lasting and profitable customer relationships.

An adversarial relationship exists between Advertising and the other marketing communication tools. Because of its high profile, Advertising has traditionally received high investment levels, with Public Relations, Personal Selling and Sales Promotions for example, taking a back seat. Krige (2001:11) confirms that in South Africa, “about 80 per cent of marketing budgets were spent on mass media” in the past, with the balance going to other promotional activities.

However, a paramount shift in investment levels has occurred. Krige continues that today, more than half the allocation is spent on other marketing communications activities. This is greatly the result of marketers’ demand for more accountability in an increasingly competitive environment and companies’ strategic intent to retain existing customers by building lifelong customer relationships.

Burnett and Moriarty (1998:280) however emphasise that the power of Advertising in building brand image and creating broad-based demand can not be negated. A correlation between money spent on advertising, sales, and profitability does exist. The Strategic Planning Institute and the Ogilvy Center for Research and Development (1986), have proven that businesses with higher relative advertising-to-sales ratios earn a higher return on investment. Advertising expenditures and market share are related.

The strategic challenge today, is to maximise the strengths of Advertising relative to other marketing communication tools.

### **2.2.2 Personal Selling**

Unlike Advertising, Personal Selling involves interpersonal communication in which a seller's objective, according to Belch and Belch (1998:21) is to "assist and or persuade prospective buyers to purchase the company's product or service or to act on an idea". The two-way flow of communication between a seller and buyer is purposefully designed to influence the buyer's purchase decision. Rix and Stanton (1998:421) point out that the goal of all marketing efforts is to satisfy long-term market needs and wants in order to increase profitable sales. Personal Selling is the major promotional method or tool used to attain this goal.

The power of Personal Selling resides in the ability to customise the product offering and communications appeal and to deliver an immediate response to customer feedback. As Perreault and McCarthy (1996:449) argue, an effective sales person responds to and assists the customer in the buying process, by understanding and responding to the customer's needs.

Belch and Belch (1998:8) furthermore observe that the focus of market-driven companies is on developing and sustaining customer relationships.

Customers have firstly become more demanding and require superior value in products and services that are competitively priced, supported by excellent customer service, and tailored to their specific needs and wants. Secondly, investing in the lifetime value of the customer has become more profitable as it is more cost effective to retain customers than it is to acquire new customers.

In a highly competitive market place the focus is on the continued satisfaction of customers to ensure, as Perreault and McCarthy (1996:448) and Arens (2002:318) urge, that the relationship between the customer and the company

continues to be mutually beneficial. Personal Selling plays a powerful role in customer relationship marketing. Bearden et al. (2001: 374) conclude that the dynamic nature and flexibility of Personal Selling makes it an excellent communications medium for creating and nurturing customer relationships to attain customer loyalty.

The high cost of Personal Selling is, however, its major disadvantage. Arens (2002:319) confirms that on a cost-per-contact basis, Personal Selling is generally the most expensive promotional element to employ.

### **2.2.3 Direct Marketing**

Like Personal Selling, Direct Marketing is an interactive promotional tool with the ability to personalise communication messages and gain customer feedback. Duncan (2002:600) explains that Direct Marketing is a “closed-loop, interactive, database-driven messaging system that uses a broad range of media to create a behavioral response”.

Direct Marketing is primarily based on the effective development and management of a direct mail database (customer file). Duncan (1995:7) elaborates that the primary aim of the customer database is to profile customers and track their behaviour. Databases make it possible for companies to become learning organisations which means that the company better understands and satisfies customer needs. A database is employed in Direct Marketing, as Percy et al. (2001:231) advocate, to enter into purposeful and ongoing personalised dialogue with customers.

According to Burnett and Moriarty (1998:378) one or more advertising media is applied in the direct marketing process, to communicate with target consumers and to “effect a measurable response and/or transaction at any location”. Direct Marketing communication can take on many forms including, direct mail, catalogue marketing, telemarketing, direct response advertising and online marketing. Direct Marketing can therefore occur anywhere at any

time without the assistance of a sales person or requirement of a retail store environment. The direct marketing medium can in effect function as the market place.

Although all marketing communications aim to achieve measurable results, Direct Marketing objectives are generally more action-specific, such as purchase or request for information. Direct Marketing thus has a further strategic advantage in that the achievement of goals can be effectively measured.

Bearden et al. (2001:469) conclude that Direct Marketing communications have two primary objectives. The first is to create relationships by soliciting a direct and immediate response from prospects or customers. Direct Marketing communications often employ deadlines for action and offer incentives for immediate action. The second, and increasingly important objective, is to maintain, as well as enhance customer relationships.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:256) agree that a key element to success, in a highly competitive marketplace, is to retain present customers and build sales or volume over time. According to Belch and Belch (1998:13) the growth and development of Direct Marketing, as opposed to mass media communication, can be attributed to its relationship building potential.

#### **2.2.4 Sales Promotions**

Sales Promotions aim to stimulate immediate sales by providing extra value or incentives to the sales force, distributors or the ultimate consumer. Kotler (1997:661) states that “where advertising offers a reason to buy, sales promotion offers an incentive to buy”. Percy et al (2001:4) similarly argue that the strategic purpose of Advertising is to turn consumers toward a brand whereas the strategic intent of a promotion is to move the consumer forward. Sales Promotional activities are specifically employed by marketers to perform well in the short term.

This promotional tool involves the development and implementation of both trade-oriented (push) strategies, for example, price and performance deals, display allowances and cooperative advertising; and consumer-oriented (pull) strategies, for example, price promotions, competitions and samples.

Trade Sales Promotion at the wholesale and retail level is employed to push products through the marketing channel. The core objectives are to gain the support of resellers and to defend competitive actions.

Consumer Sales Promotion pulls a product through the channel of distribution, with the primary objectives to stimulate trial and consumption, and neutralise competitor offers. Schultz and Barnes (1995:211) elaborate that most consumer sales promotion programmes aim to change purchasing behaviour by creating purchase acceleration, stockpiling and or consumption increases. Duncan (2002:572) concludes that Consumer Sales Promotion is ultimately designed to motivate prospects and customers to make a decision and purchase the brand.

Both sales promotional push and pull strategies are, as Carefoot (2000:73) asserts, employed to “generate short-term volume, improve trade relations, and interdict competitive efforts to erode a manufacturer’s sales”.

Although Sales Promotion can accomplish a variety of objectives, Bearden et al. (2001:435) warn against an over-reliance on the tool, to the extent that “consumers may come to see the deal as more important than any other real or perceived brand difference”. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:235) agree that when consumers “are conditioned to respond to the best deal, that’s exactly what they will do – forgetting all about brand loyalty”.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:216) argue that Sales Promotion must achieve more than immediate sales. The residual market value of Sales Promotions is a vital strategic variable. The Sales Promotional strategy must ultimately contribute to the brand identity and image in the market place.

### **2.2.5 Public Relations**

The function and practice of Public Relations, according to Grunig and Hunt (1984:6) entails the “management of communication between an organisation and its publics”. Public Relations comprises a broad range of diverse activities with the core objective to build the corporate name and to create and cultivate public goodwill. Corporate Identity Advertising, Internal Company Communications, Publicity, Sponsorship and Event Marketing and Customer Relationship and Social Responsibility Programmes, all form part of the vital process of promoting the vision of an organisation.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:241) and Duncan (2002:537-559) differentiate between Corporate Public Relations and Marketing Public Relations. The corporate public relations area is primarily concerned with image and goodwill management activities. The strategic intent is to identify, establish, and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the various publics on which it depends. Employees, customers, stockholders, suppliers, community members, and the government are examples of the publics targeted in the process of goodwill creation and image management. The general public also increasingly believes that companies have obligations to more than their customers and stockholders and that they should behave responsible toward society as a whole.

Corporate Public Relations is therefore focussed on building and maintaining a harmonious relationship between an organisation and its different target publics and ultimately, as Skinner and Von Essen (1999:7) confirm, between the organisation and its environment. The ultimate challenge of Corporate Public Relations is, as Duncan (2002:541) explains, to merge the image and reputation of the brand, to create integrity.

Marketing Public Relations, as defined by Harris (1993:12) entails the process of “planning, executing and evaluating programs that encourage purchase and consumer satisfaction through credible communication of information and impressions that identify companies and their products with the needs, wants,

concerns and interests of consumers”. Marketing Public Relations is primarily focussed on the successful introduction and growth of a company’s products in the marketplace.

Harris (1993:48-50) identifies three strategic options for Marketing Public Relations: push, pull and pass. A push strategy is focussed on channel members to gain their support and encourage promotion of the product to the consumer. In a pull strategy the emphasis is on drawing the attention of the consumer and stimulating demand for the product. A pass strategy aims to gain the support of gatekeepers such as special interest groups within the marketplace. Duncan (2002:544) observes that Marketing Public Relations is essentially employed to “build brand credibility, make product news announcements, and reach hard-to-reach target audiences with articles in special interest and trade publications”. Marketing Public Relations is most often employed in new product launches when brand publicity is introduced to broaden awareness and brand knowledge.

Rossiter and Percy (1996:28) conclude that the core objective of all Public Relations activity is to develop and maintain a positive company and/or brand image and to defend negative communications from external sources. According to Ries and Ries (2000:28) Public Relations has eclipsed Advertising as the most powerful force in brand building. Publicity plays an influential role in this regard as the opinion of the media achieves higher levels of credibility than paid for advertising messages – “what others say about your brand is so much more powerful than what you can say about it yourself”.

Belch and Belch (2001:19) identify a further form of marketing communications in the shape of Interactive/Internet Marketing. The dramatic advances in technology and the growth of interactive media, in particular the Internet, enables users to participate in and modify information, make inquiries, respond to questions and purchase products and services in real time terms.

The Internet as Belch and Belch (2001:19) continue to reason is a medium that in fact can be applied “to execute all the elements of the promotional mix”. The Internet is thus a medium that can be utilised in the development and execution of Advertising, Sales Promotional, Direct Marketing, Personal Selling and Public Relations strategies.

The function of Marketing Communications or Promotional Management traditionally entails the evaluation of all of the above promotional tools in view of identified promotional objectives. Simply put, a company will for example, employ an Advertising campaign should the core objective be to create large-scale national awareness of a new product or service, and a PR driven Direct Marketing programme should the objective be to forge relationships with core customer groups.

Jones, as quoted in Ormerod (1999:49) observes that “no company can afford everything it would like to do. Resources have to be allocated. The essence of strategic planning is to allocate resources to those areas that have the greatest future potential”. The objective is to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the various promotional options in lieu of the campaign objectives and brand communications budget.

As Belch and Belch (1998:21) confirm, a company combines the promotional mix elements by balancing the strengths and weaknesses of each, to develop an effective promotional campaign.

A company’s promotional mix presents the combination of one or more of the promotional elements it chooses to employ to achieve defined marketing communication objectives.

## **2. 3 Brand Building and the Concept of Brand Contacts**

It is evident that each of the promotional methods plays a focussed and valuable strategic role in the process of communicating with markets and creating sales. **The strategic intent and value of the various tools in the development of a promotional strategy is not the topic of study. The overriding and ultimate objective in undertaking and in investing in promotions however, is key to the investigation.**

### **2.3.1 The Value of the Brand and Elevated Role of Marketing Communications**

According to Kapferer (1997:15) the 1980s marked a turning point in Management's focus, as companies realised that the principal asset was in fact the brand names. Brand awareness and positive brand attitude have come to deliver real-time value as businesses set out to invest in attaining a distinctive and valued brand position in the minds of customers and potential consumers.

Ries and Ries (2000:77) claim that a company's very existence today depends on building brands. Quoted in The Economist, Clifton (2001:30) asserts that brands are the ultimate accountable institution. "If people fall out of love with your brand, you go out of business".

Cleaver (1998:312) in agreement reasons that the only definite thing to catalyse business success is the brand. According to Cleaver the challenge for any organisation is to acknowledge the importance of brands as the key assets of the business, and to involve the entire organisation in building and living the brand. Brand building therefore not only creates valuable assets but is vital for the success and survival of an organisation.

Consequently the new competitive arena is brand value. As products, pricing and distribution increasingly become commodities the focus shifts to the value

of the brand, which as Duncan and Moriarty (1997:xi) argue, creates long-term, brand relationships. Business Week (2001: 46) observes that brands are now taking center stage “in a sweeping shift that some compare to the wave of mass marketing that occurred in the years following World War II”. The brand has evolved from an abstract concept to a valuable corporate asset.

A strong brand acts as an ambassador when companies launch new products or enter new markets. Brands today, define the corporate strategy in determining which strategic initiatives are in keeping with the brand concept and which are not. A brand ultimately has the power to “command a premium price among customers and a premium stock price among investors” (Business Week. The Best Global Brands 2001:46). As Duncan and Moriarty (1997:xii) conclude, brand equity now accounts “for the majority of many companies market value”.

The building and management of brand equity has consequently, according to Keller (2000:157; 2001:13), become a priority for companies of all sizes, in all types of industries, in all types of markets. The purpose of branding is fundamentally to endow products and services with the power of brand equity.

Aaker and Biel (1993:69) define brand equity as the value of a company beyond its physical assets used to manufacture and deliver goods and services. In other words, as Duncan (2002:47) explains, a company’s total value (what it would sell for), minus its net physical assets, presents brand equity. Hence the widely held accounting term for brand equity is ‘goodwill’.

Keller (2001:13) further explains that brand equity relates to the fact “that different outcomes result in the marketing of a product or service because of its brand, as compared to if that same product or service was not identified by that brand”. Brand equity results from developing and implementing an effective brand building programme.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:17) elaborate that brand equity comprises brand name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty. Brand equity ultimately encapsulates the territory that a brand occupies in consumers' minds. It involves as Cooper (1999:154) confirms, "the sets of associations, attributes and imagery which consumers vest in the brand", and ultimately the strength of consumers relationship with a brand. From strong brand equity flow customer loyalty and profits.

Keller (2001:14) concludes that brand equity is inherently defined by the knowledge that the consumer has of the brand. The consumer's ability to recall a brand name and connect it with associations that are strong, favourable and unique, is core to the concept of brand equity.

The power of a brand ultimately lies in the mind of the consumer or customer, in what has been experienced and learned about the brand over time. The true value or equity of a brand rests with consumers and their knowledge of the brand. This bond defines the essence of brand equity.

Core to the process of brand building is the function of marketing communications. Kapferer (1997:15) observes that the newly found power in brands is confirmed by the increasing importance that so many marketers place on the promotion of their own brands. Marketing Communication is recognised as a powerful tool in defining and building the identity of a brand. The essential aim of marketing communications, as Ries and Ries (2000:4) conclude, is to build a brand in consumers' minds.

**Duncan (1995:4) asserts that marketing communication has become the key integrating force, not only in the promotional and marketing mix but throughout the organisation.**

The elevated focus on marketing communications as a brand building tool resulted in a critical assessment of the total impact value of the array of promotional tools in the development of a clear brand identity. Berkowitz et al. (2000:502) observe that in the past the promotional elements were regarded

and treated as separate functions, by experts in separate departments. The result was an uncoordinated and inconsistent communication effort.

Brand strategists and academics now reason that the various tools need to work together to present an integrated brand identity. Communication messages that are delivered through the spectrum of promotional tools must be coordinated to present a consistent brand message to customers and consumers. As Bearden et al. (2001:374) observe, the strategic integration of the multiple means of marketing communications must be attained “to form a comprehensive, consistent message”.

This outlook resulted in the birth of the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications. The move towards Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is described by Belch and Belch (1998:11), as one of the most significant marketing developments of the 1990's. The American Association of Advertising Agencies (the 4 A's) defines IMC as “ a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines – for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact” (Schultz 1993:17).

The intent is to develop a marketing communications plan in which the communication disciplines work together as an integrated whole, to achieve maximum communications impact and deliver a consistent brand identity.

### **2.3.2 From IMC to Managing Brand Contacts**

Kotler (2000:404) identifies the American Marketing Association's definition of a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”. Marketers today have come

to realise that branding is, As Kotler (2000:404) quotes, “the art and cornerstone of marketing”.

The identity and reputation of a brand is however not solely the result of planned marketing communications with target consumers. A brand, as Kapferer (1997:25) explains, represents “a focal point for all the positive and negative impressions created by the buyer over time as he comes into contact with the brand’s products, distribution channel, personnel and communication”. Meyers (2000:x) agrees that the identity of a brand is created through many cues, including the product itself, its appearance, its function, its colour, its packaging, its advertising, its name and so forth.

The brand concept has evolved into a complex strategic tool and it involves, as Robertson (2000:18) concludes, the entire process of managing consumers’ perceptions. Oosthuizen (2000(a):50) refers to the realm of the brand as a broad conceptual appeal across all marketing and communication applications, whilst Sampson (2000:63) defines the brand as a total experience - or as the Americans term it, 360 degrees branding. Hofmeyr and Rice (2000:29) in agreement confirm that the brand is simply everything that attaches to a product and gives it an identity in consumers’ minds.

**The brand encapsulates the perceptions of consumers and these perceptions are created through a myriad of marketing and communication cues. A brand is built through every level of contact, through both marketing and promotional activity, in consumer and customer markets.**

Consumers’ perceptions of the Diesel Jeanswear brand, for example, are based on exclusive outlets that are positioned in high profile shopping environments, the shop layout and merchandising design, the implementation of a premium pricing strategy and the development of a controversial advertising campaign. As Oosthuizen (2000(a):51) elaborates, Diesel has created a cult identity that is the result of their total marketing and

communications approach. Consumers conceptually buy into the total Diesel brand experience.

To treat the functions of marketing and promotions as separate practices defies the basic premise of branding. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:xv) forewarn that “integrating the marketing communications is futile if contrary, more powerful messages are being sent by other actions of a company”. An integration of marketing and communications activities must be achieved to develop a consistent brand identity.

Burnett and Moriarty (1998:63) refer to the concept of Integrated Marketing. The aim is to coordinate all company based marketing messages – “those sent by the marketing mix, the unplanned messages (such as a dirty parking lot), and planned messages sent through marketing communications”. Belch and Belch (1998:9) submit that companies fail to recognise that the wide range of marketing and promotional tools must be coordinated not only to communicate effectively but also to present a consistent image to target markets. Kotler (1997:23) agrees that consistency in brand identity will only be achieved if the company works as a co-ordinated force and specifically, if the functions of marketing are integrated.

Companies therefore need to develop a holistic and integrated marketing and communications mindset, and must acknowledge the collective effect of all marketing and promotional activities on the status and identity of the brand in the consumer’s mind. As Runnalls (2002:24) and Dru (2002:66) argue, an enterprise-wide approach to brand building is required. Branding is not confined to either marketing or communications as it encapsulates the entire domain of business. A multiple of sources are sending messages to consumers through a multiple of marketing and communication media. Brands are formed, as Duncan and Moriarty (1997:9) explain, on “bundles of brand messages that stakeholders automatically integrate”.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:3-8) debate that the consumer’s perception of a company and/or its brands, is the result of a synthesis of messages received

at every level of contact with the company or brand. The authors further argue that it is strategically fatal to define, categorise and plan advertising and all other forms of marketing communications from the practitioner's point of view, a mindset that the authors define as inside-out thinking. "Consumers do not differentiate between, for example, a piece of print advertising and a direct mail piece, between consumer and trade sales promotions, or between events and sponsorships". Everything that a marketing organisation does to promote the company and/or its brands is perceived by consumers as a form of advertising.

The above theory, as presented by Schultz and Barnes (1995:3-8), is based on a random survey conducted by the Leo Burnett advertising agency in 1992 in the USA. A list of 100 forms of marketing communications was generated by the agency. Ninety-four of the identified forms of marketing communications were described by respondents as 'simply advertising'. Eighty percent of the respondents agreed that the list just identified various types of advertising.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:8) level the marketing and communications playing field in a profound manner. The many means through which a brand makes contact with consumers and through which consumers come into contact with the brand, are referred to as *brand contact points* and every form of contact with the company or brand communicates. "The brand never stops communicating with customers and consumers. It communicates whenever and wherever the consumer comes into contact with it".

Duncan (2002:138) points out that the concept of brand contact was first popularised by Jan Carlson, former chairman of Scandinavian Airlines Systems (SAS), who coined the term "moments of truth". All situations, where consumers or customers have the opportunity to be exposed in some way to a brand message, whether initiated or uninitiated, establishes a moment of brand truth. Brand contacts find their origin in both the marketing and communication practices of companies.

Hofmeyr and Rice (2000:29) refer to brand contacts as “touch points” and confirm that “we commonly talk about touch points when we describe how brand identity is created”. As every form of contact communicates, it either adds to the value of the brand in consumers’ minds or it erodes the value of the brand. McLean in Dru (2002:261) likewise apply the term ‘connections’ as anything and everything that exists between a brand and its target audience – that communicates the brand identity. O’Malley and Birge in Dru (2002:277) conclude that the concept of brand connections thus encompasses every aspect of a brand’s interaction with its audiences, from product design to, for example, fair trade policies. The common line of reasoning is that consumers do not differentiate between the various brand contacts, connections or touch points in developing an image of the brand.

To the consumer it is of little concern whether contact with the brand stems from the marketing domain, for example, an impression of the distribution outlet, or the communications domain, for example, the impact of a 30’ second television advertisement. Nor do consumers concern themselves with the nuances of a direct mail piece in comparison to that of an event marketing effort.

Of significance is that the brand contact approach follows an outside-in thinking and planning pattern. The consumer’s experience of the brand and its marketing and communications process is viewed as the point of departure in working toward a consistent, unified brand identity.

As Ries and Ries (2000:108) state, the view from the outside is very different from the view from the inside. The perceptions that consumers have and hold of a brand are the result of a myriad of interwoven brand activities and it is vital that brand communications planning be undertaken from the consumer’s frame of reference.

Drucker, as quoted by Webster (1994:7) concludes that marketing is not a specialised activity at all, as it encompasses the entire business. “It is the whole business seen from the point of view of its final result, that is, from the

customer's point of view". Belch and Belch (1998:10) agree that all of a firm's marketing actions and not just promotion, communicate with its customers. Marketing encapsulates all activities that create and shape perceptions in consumers' minds.

A holistic and total marketing and communications approach is found in the brand contact theory. The brand is the result of all positive and negative perceptions created at every level of consumer contact with the company and/or its brands. The brand contact approach embraces the continuous nature of brand communications with the core objective to achieve continuity in brand identity at every level of contact.

**The traditional boundaries between marketing and communications and between advertising and the other forms of marketing communications fall away, as the process of brand communications is defined from the consumer's point of view. This study is rooted in brand contact methodology.**

## **2.4 The Need for Integrated Brand Contact Management**

According to Moon (2000:57) brand identity represents a gestalt of images and perceptions that customers and consumers associate with products, services and the company behind it. Brand identity, Moon argues, "constitutes what most people call a brand".

Kapferer (1997:94) more specifically differentiates between the identity and the image of a brand. The brand image is represented by the consumer's perception of the brand and its communication messages. Image research focuses "on the way in which certain groups perceive a product, a brand, a politician, a company or a country". Gordon (1996:33-56), in agreement, elaborates that the image of a brand is compiled by consumers through their direct experience of the brand. Brand image is created through exposure to advertising and promotion, to packaging, and even through observation of

what kind of people use the brand as well as the occasions and situations in which the brand is used.

The brand identity on the other hand, is crafted by the sender of the brand message and defines the meaning of the brand and what it aspires to stand for. Of importance in the management of a brand is that the development of the brand identity precedes the brand image. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:x) confirm that the construct of brand identity guides the brand building process. Brand identity is the cornerstone of brand strategy.

The outside-in approach to brand contact methodology advocates that all points of consumer and/or customer contact with the brand must be integrated to communicate and reinforce the core identity of the brand. Robertson (2000:21) confirms that the process of creating a cohesive brand identity, should be driven by a broad perspective and an assessment of real time consumer experience of the brand - "There should be cohesion between the brand promise and the reality".

Runnalls (2002:23-24) further comments that when brand communications are not effectively synergised, brands often tend to send conflicting messages. The result is that the public becomes confused and come to disbelieve the brand promise – trust in the brand is eroded. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:70) agree that a lack of consistency in brand messages will create a brand identity that is "unfocused, diffused, and fuzzy".

Synergy in brand contact communications is core to the building of a cohesive brand identity. All brand contacts therefore have to be integrated to present a consistent and synergistic brand identity.

Duncan (1995:5) observes that the word integration stems from the Latin root *integere*, meaning 'oneness, wholeness, anything complete in itself'. The basic concept of integration is synergy, "where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts". The intent is to deliver communication contacts that

compliment and reinforce one another to produce an effect that is greater than if each contact were to communicate in isolation.

All brand contact messages must compliment and reinforce one another by presenting a consistent brand identity. The development of a clear brand identity is thus paramount to the process of integrated brand contact management.

#### **2.4.1 Brand Positioning in Developing an Integrated Brand Identity**

Trout and Ries (1972:51-53) and Aaker and Meyers (1987:125) assert that the identity of a brand is defined by the positioning that a company or brand aims to attain in the minds of consumers, relative to competitors. Brannon (1995:23) further argues that without a clear brand positioning, “there can be no true integration”. The positioning of the brand is the single focus around which every aspect of communication must be constructed. As Keller (1999:43) concludes, the brand positioning must be at the heart of all marketing activity. Brand positioning is key to effective brand contact management. To develop an integrated brand identity all brand contact messages must effectively communicate and reinforce the positioning of the brand.

The challenge to the development of an effective brand positioning is essentially two-fold.

The brand positioning must firstly be relevant to the needs and wants of identified target consumers by capturing the benefit/s sought from a relationship with the brand. Keller (2000:148) states that the brand must excel “at delivering the benefits customers truly desire”. Consumers must ultimately identify and associate with the brand’s promise. Carter (2001), in agreement, observes that consumers come into contact with a lot of brands, but they only purchase the ones that “recognise their lives and play a role in it” or as Rozin and Magnusson (2003:194) state, that they find meaningful. The brand and its

positioning must, as Bedbury (2002:74) confirms, resonate with consumers. The brand positioning must therefore achieve relevance to develop a satisfying, intimate and potentially long lasting relationship with consumers and customers.

Secondly, the brand positioning must be clearly differentiated from competitors' brand promises. Keller (2000:150) argues that the brand positioning must create points of parity in those areas where competitors have or aim to establish an advantage whilst, at the same time, a point of difference must be created to achieve an advantage over competitors. The strategic objective, as Keller, Sternthal and Tybout (2002:85) explain, is to announce the points of parity, the frame in which the brand is positioned, but to compete on the point of difference. As Rice (2000:37) concludes, the brand must be effectively differentiated to occupy a unique niche in target consumers' minds.

With regards the two-fold challenge of developing an effective brand positioning, Robertson (2000:20) asserts that the brand must have a 'reason to be'. This means that the brand has to be both relevant and distinctive in its appeal to the consumer. To truly distinguish a brand from competitors it must demonstrate differentiation that is meaningful to consumers. Bedbury (1999:2) confirms that only then will a brand's level of differentiation resonate deeply with consumers to create a human connection. Brands will only survive and prosper if they are effectively differentiated and have the scale and scope to meet fundamental and enduring consumer needs.

The development of a relevant and distinctive brand identity is however challenged by the dynamics and demands of a complex market place. The following two variables, in particular, impact on the development of an effective brand positioning strategy:

- According to Ries and Ries (2000:115) consumers “have a cornucopia of choice”.

The brand communications arena is highly competitive and, in most sectors, cluttered. The result is a proliferation of commercial messages directed at the consumer, creating communication overload. Ries and Ries (2000: 26) explain that we live in an “over-communicated society”, or as Duncan (2002:29) states, a “commercial message cocoon”, where each consumer gets hit with hundreds of brand communication messages daily.

This trend is of mounting concern. Consumer audiences are simply inundated by the communication overload and general clutter of the commercial market place. As Schultz and Barnes (1995:23) observe, “too many messages, too many advertisers, too much noise, and too much stimulation to the consumer”.

- In addition, product and service categories are characterised by extreme levels of parity.

Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn (1993:43) explain that “traditional marketing functions – pricing, distribution, product – have become relatively commoditised, and therefore are seldom capable of sustaining competitive advantage”. Duncan and Moriarty (1997: 32) confirm that the majority of companies are able to match competitive product, pricing, and distribution improvements within months.

A sustainable, consumer relevant and differentiated positioning in the tangible attributes of a product does not often exist. There are simply so many similar offerings available in the market place that functionality rarely succeeds as a point of differentiation. Bedbury (1999:2) concludes that today, in almost every industry, product parity is encountered.

The development of brands has largely been driven by the state of product parity. Cleaver (1998:309) asserts that it is the brand that usually

differentiates the product offering of one supplier from that of another. Relevance and differentiation is achieved by the identity or personality created through and around the product or service. FitzGerald, quoted in *The Economist* (2001:28) deduces that brands thus “matter more and more as choices multiply” and levels of product parity inevitably increase.

Increasing competitive activity and the development of brand positioning strategies that fail to trigger distinctive and meaningful levels of consumer relevance are however resulting in growing levels of brand parity. Duncan (2002:28) confirms that there are more brands competing against each other than ever before, and that there are often very few differences between those brands. Oosthuizen (2000(a):52-53) agrees and asserts that effective branding and integration is not about “a parity application of a brand name across packaging, creative application and media”. The result, Oosthuizen argues, is that perceptual parity has become the norm today.

Joachimsthaler and Aaker (1997:6) elaborate that weak management of the brand identity further increases levels of brand parity. This is firstly the result of a lack of shared vision amongst those responsible for brand communication messages (a lack of a clear and unified brand identity) and secondly, because “the brand is allowed to drift, driven by the often changing tactical communication objectives of product or marketing managers”. The brand loses its focus as brand communication messages address only tactical objectives and neglect to communicate and reinforce the core identity of the brand.

Robertson (2000:20) concludes that where consumers can not see the brand differences and do not appreciate the brand appeals, sectors become commodotised and price consequently becomes the key determinant to purchase. Farquhar (1999:5) agrees that when consumers fail to recognise any meaningful brand differences, brands become blurred, are treated as commodities and increasing pricing pressures are experienced. When brand formulations and experiences are on a par and are perceived as such by the market, parity rules will apply and price will come to dictate behaviour.

The increasing competitive nature of categories and resulting levels of product and brand parity and communication clutter necessitates focus and clarity in brand identity. To succeed in the market place of today brand positioning strategies need to deliver not only consumer relevance and a meaningful point of differentiation but a single-minded thrust to brand contact messages. It is as Sampson (2002:71) reasons, vital that a brand acts as a point of reference, delivers a point of difference, remains relevant and is “totally focussed”.

#### **2.4.2 Brand Contact Integration requires a Focussed Brand Positioning**

Ries (1997:103) asserts that powerful brands are built through focussed positioning strategies. A successful brand, in the competitive, cluttered and parity-ridden market place of today, is based on the concept of singularity. The objective is to take ownership of a consumer relevant and differentiated positioning and define it on a clear-cut and singular level.

Ries and Ries (2000:44) describe the strategic challenge as follows: “You have to reduce the essence of your brand to a single thought or attribute. An attribute that nobody else already owns in your category”. Moon (2000:48) likewise refers to the brand’s ‘defining idea’, the one word or concept that captures the brand’s essence and ultimately delivers a focussed brand positioning.

Farquhar (1999:5) defines the challenge as the ‘rule of one’. A brand should strive to own a single, relevant benefit or value that will uniquely differentiate it from all other brands in the market. The key to successful brand positioning is singularity and singularity demands “ a consistent focus on one (and only one) benefit or value”.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:45) in support of singularity and focus in brand identity, propose that a brand essence statement be developed. A brand essence statement embodies the single thought that resonates with

customers, provides differentiation from competitors and “captures the soul of the brand”.

According to Duncan (1995:5) Nike has for example, achieved a single-minded brand positioning: “Phil Knight can define his company Nike in one word, ‘performance’. Every message, no matter about which product directed at which consumer, reinforces this concept”. In comparison Apple, as Dru (2002:65) reasons, revolves around the idea that it does not manufacture computers but “tools for creative minds”. The Apple brand essence is core to what type of hardware it makes, its ‘think different’ internal and external brand communications and its radical retail experiences in the way it takes Apple products to market.

Ries (1997:103) argues that by finding a word or concept to own in consumers’ minds, a brand is defining its position. Duncan (1995:5) reasons that the more focussed the brand positioning, the greater the brand communications or contact synergy will be. As every form of contact between a brand and a consumer communicates, it stands to reason that every contact is an opportunity to introduce, build or reinforce the brand’s identity. Cleaver (1998:312) observes that power brands consequently live and demonstrate a focussed brand positioning through every point of contact with the consumer. “There is one brand, one kind of relationship and one message”.

The aim of integrated brand contact management is to take ownership of a relevant, distinctive and focussed brand positioning through every form of contact with the consumer. This is what the integration of brand communications implies. Brand credibility is lost, and the reputation and equity value of the brand suffers when brand contact messages do not reinforce a focussed brand promise with consistency.

## **2.5 The Nature and Scope of Integrated Brand Contact Planning**

The brand contact approach is firmly embedded in an outside-in, consumer oriented planning philosophy as opposed to an inside-out, company or product driven planning approach. Core to this philosophy is the holistic understanding of the brand concept.

The brand is a focal point for all the impressions created by consumers over time. These impressions result from a myriad of consumer contacts with the brand. To build a focussed brand identity it is vital that all the points of contact consistently communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. For this reason, Ries and Ries (2000:116) argue that a company can not apply an inside-out branding system to a market “that sees things differently”. The integration of marketing communications activities only will not ensure that a focussed and consistent brand identity is created.

### **2.5.1 The Sources of Brand Contact**

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:78) and Duncan (2002:129) indicate that points of brand contact primarily stem from four major sources of brand messages. These are planned, product, service and unplanned messages.

- **Planned Points of Brand Contact**

Planned points of brand contact are encountered in the traditional scope of marketing communications. The notion of Integrated Marketing Communications originated with the strategic intent to build a consistent brand identity through Advertising, Sale Promotional, Public Relations, Direct Marketing and Personal Sales messages. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:78) reason that consistency in brand identity development is more

readily achieved in this domain, because brand communication messages are purposefully planned and can be controlled.

The building of a consistent brand identity however requires more than the coordination of planned promotional messages. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:xiii) observe that as companies have grown bigger and more departmentalised and their marketing communication agencies have grown more specialised in their function, customers and other stakeholders have increasingly received mixed messages about brands and companies and as a result feel increasingly more disenfranchised. The integration of marketing communications alone, according to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:xiv), does not offer a holistic brand identity solution, as it represents only the tip of the integration iceberg.

- Product related Points of Brand Contact

Further intrinsic brand contacts affect the process of brand building. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:97) observe that these points of contact exist automatically as part of the buying, performing and servicing process of the product / brand. Product related points of brand contact present messages that are inferred from the product itself, such as its appearance and performance, the points of distribution and the pricing as a cue of product quality.

Price and distribution, for instance, are often not considered as brand building elements. Price and distribution however positions a brand, stating how the brand compares to competitor offerings. The frequency and extent of price promotions, for example, communicate a lot about the brand. For example, the more a brand is on sale and the greater the discounts are, generally the more ordinary the consumer considers it to be (Duncan 2002:132).

- Service Contacts

Brand messages furthermore originate from service contacts shaped through personal interactions with an organisation and its employees. Service contacts are highly influential as they usually involve personal interaction, which as Duncan and Moriarty (1997:84-85) reason, is the most persuasive form of communication. A service that is correctly delivered is ultimately a fulfilled promise. Service contacts are furthermore particularly powerful because they involve real-time interfaces between a company and a customer or consumer.

With regard managing the breadth and depth of service contacts Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1998:12-40) and Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:135) refer to the principle of SERVQUAL. Five combined service measures are related to the sources of service messages. Tangibles include the experience of the physical facilities, including the appearance of service providers. Reliability involves the consistency of performance. Responsiveness refers to the promptness and quality of response. Assurance involves the ability of service providers to evoke confidence and trust. Empathy, as the final variable, relates to service providers' ability to experience consumers or customers 'pain' – to identify and associate with their needs and wants.

The service contact experience is complex and layered and as Duncan (2002:135) concludes, "one negative service message can more than counter the effects of dozens of positive, planned messages".

- Unplanned Points of Brand Contact

A myriad of contact points deliver further unplanned brand messages, for example, actions, findings, rumours and comments by the trade, employees,

government, research institutions, the media, competitors and interest groups that often lead to publicity and word-of-mouth.

Clift (2001) observes that new technology such as e-mail has furthermore empowered the scope and speed with which unplanned contacts are delivered. Publicity and word-of-mouth are fully leveraged in the virtually connected world. Companies and brands are exposed and consumers are able to galvanise opinion as never before.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:8) reason that unplanned points of brand contact occur “almost through serendipity” and are particularly impactful as the message sources are perceived as experts on the company or as objective protectors of public interest. These points of contact are also particularly difficult to control, as Duncan (2002:135) points out, because they often come from sources outside of the company.

### **2.5.2 The Integration of Sources of Brand Contact**

The process of planning and managing the array of brand contact message sources must be undertaken from the consumer’s point of view. All points of contact with the brand communicate and must reinforce the single minded positioning of the brand, in order to build a consistent brand identity. Schultz and Barnes (1995:8) submit that both the continuousness and continuity of points of brand contact must be noted. Consumers accumulate brand impressions from the entire spectrum of brand contacts.

In this respect, Duncan and Moriarty (1997:90) propose an integration triangle. An integrated brand identity is achieved when the brand positioning communicated through planned communication contacts is consistent with the performance of product and service contacts, and are confirmed by unplanned points of brand contact.

Duncan (2002:138) more specifically deduces that there are thus three forms of brand contact that need to be identified and integrated: company-created, intrinsic and customer-created brand contacts. In other words, all planned marketing communications, existing product and service contacts experienced when buying and using the brand, and all customer-initiated communication contacts must be identified, influenced and controlled to communicate and reinforce an integrated experience of the brand.

Duncan (2002:328) concludes that “all the ‘say’ messages delivered by marketing communication must be consistent with all the ‘do’ messages of how products and services perform, as well as with what others say or ‘confirm’ about the brand”. Gaps between the points of brand contact will undoubtedly result in an unfocused and diffused brand image. Herein lies the strategic challenge to the planning and management of brand contact points.

It is evident that the sources of brand contact messages are not confined to specific departments within an organisation, nor to the organisation alone. Product, service, planned and unplanned points of brand contact can originate from several internal company sources as well as external company sources, such as the advertising agency.

### **2.5.3 Cross-functional Management in Brand Contact Integration**

Dimancescu (1994:232) asserts that organisational synergy is ultimately created through the cross-functional integration of information. Points of brand contact evidently flow across functional lines. To create an integrated brand identity all points of contact must, irrespective of function or department, communicate a focussed positioning of the brand.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:40) comment that inside-out oriented companies are however, typically organised according to function or area of specialisation, by markets, by product or product line. The obvious flaw in inside-out organisational designs is too little focus on the consumer, and total

focus on the product and sales, volume or profit goals. The lack of cross-functional awareness and integration of the consumer's brand contact experience inhibits the brand building process.

Senge (1990:24) warns that in companies that draw on functional divisions "the complex issues that cross functional lines, become a perilous or non-existent exercise". The process of brand contact management can not be confined to a specific department. Every department and function within a company has a communication dimension and will influence and shape consumers impressions of the brand. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:10) confirm that everything a company does and sometimes does not do sends a brand message. A cross-functional management orientation must be instilled to ensure an integrated brand identity is communicated at every point of contact with the brand.

The process of integrated brand contact management must be applied as a cross-functional goal. Consistency in brand identity is achieved through the cross-functional integration of the company, its marketing operations and communication messages. Integrated brand contact management thus requires an approach that, as Hammer and Champy (1993:3) explain, "looks across and beyond functional departments to processes".

Duncan (2002:8) supports the idea that integrated brand contact management must be embedded in a cross-functional management approach and process. The primary challenge is to develop systems that permit cross-functional planning and coordinated execution, both within a company and between a company and its communication agencies. A cross-functional process integrates all of the players working on a brand, in order to plan and manage all of the brand contact messages that are sent to and received from customers, prospects and other stakeholders.

The implementation of a cross-functional management process however demands that companies make significant changes in how they are organised and in what they consider to be a corporate priority.

According to Duncan (2002:90) and Gronstedt and Thorsen (1993) the cross-functional integration of points of brand contact requires the implementation of a dedicated task group. To create a consistent brand identity, Gronstedt and Thorsen suggest that representatives from every major department and division be involved in a task group that will plan and manage the integration of all points of brand contact. Duncan (2002:90) asserts that cross-functional planning “involves multiple departments and functions”.

Hankinson and Hankinson (1999:38) support the implementation of a cross-functional task team and observe that the team should function as “brand champions with the vision and passion to promote the interests of the brand at all times and in all places”. According to Schultz and Barnes (1995:42), Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:298) and Duncan (2002:90) the core function of the task group is to ensure that the brand identity is in place and that all brand communication messages are integrated throughout the entire organisation.

#### **2.5.4 The Zero-based Mindset of Integrated Brand Contact Planning**

Duncan (2002: 202) encourages the introduction of a dedicated cross-functional task group but argues that the planning mindset of the group must be conducive to the outside-in, consumer-oriented approach to brand contact planning. Brand contact planning must evolve from a zero-based frame of mind with analysis that is function neutral. This implies that objectives and strategies are based on current brand and marketplace conditions.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:148) elaborate that zero-based planning requires that points of brand contact be planned based on an “assessment of what needs to be done now”. The process is function neutral in that it is founded in and guided by an analysis of consumers current experience and impressions of points of brand contact and not by historical brand contact patterns.

An inside-out, preconceived commitment to previous marketing and communication functions is counter productive to the process of brand contact

planning. Duncan (1995:7) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:298) assert that in contrast, conventional brand communications planning unfortunately tends to begin and end with advertising. This, Duncan believes, is largely because advertising agencies are the dominant force in the planning of brand communication messages and because most advertising agencies approach communication problems with the preconceived notion that “advertising is the answer, now what is the problem?” Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:298) and O’Malley and Birge in Dru (2002:276) agree that traditional advertising agencies, as the purveyors of the 30’ second spot, are simply too committed to advertising.

This type of inside-out thinking must, according to Duncan (1995:7) and Billet quoted in Rogers (2003:17) give way to a planning philosophy that is founded on a platform-neutral or zero-based, clean slate of communication options. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:148) in agreement conclude that the effective management of brand contact points depends on a zero-based planning approach rather than internal, preconceived judgements. Points of brand contact and communication options must be built up from clear-cut brand communication objectives that evolve from a zero-based, outside-in analysis of the status of a brand’s points of contact in the market place.

According to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:97) the communication management of points of brand contact requires that the entire brand communications network is analysed, both internally and externally, from a zero-based platform. Duncan (2002:731) proposes that an audit be done with the main purpose to identify process gaps and barriers to the development of consistent brand contact messages.

### **2.5.5 The Brand Contact Audit as Foundation**

The audit of the brand communications network firstly entails the identification of every form of contact that delivers a brand message and thus influences the positioning of the brand in consumers’ minds. As Duncan (2002:129)

asserts, once sources are known to the brand contact task group, they can be assessed and strategies can be developed to influence and control messages so that strategic consistency can be attained.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:35) reinforce that the outside-in identification of brand contact points must be based on actual in-market behaviour and experiences. The process of identifying points of brand contact “starts with the consumer or prospect and works inwards toward the marketer, brand, product, or service”. Insight into the consumer’s field of contact with the brand is therefore a prerequisite to the identification of points of brand contact.

Secondly, the points of brand contact must be prioritised on the grounds of their impact. According to Muller (1996:85) impact encapsulates the impression made by a brand message on a consumer or customer. High on impact points of brand contact, are those that create more powerful impressions of the brand, whether positive or negative. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:155) refer to these points as key brand contacts. The task team’s immediate challenge is to ensure that the most impactful negative messages are changed and that the most impactful positive messages are reinforced and leveraged.

The communications audit will thus entail an analysis of all brand contact messages with particular focus on the key points of brand contact. It is essential that contact messages are analysed to assess the extent to which the single-minded positioning of the brand is effectively communicated and reinforced in consumers’ minds. The process of integrating the brand identity will focus foremost on key points of brand contact to then include all further brand contact points. The outcome of which is a fully integrated brand contact strategy that reinforces the single-minded brand positioning with consistency.

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:149) and Duncan (2002:203) propose that the identification and assessment of points of brand contact be undertaken through a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis according to Duncan, is a “structured evaluation of internal situations (strengths and weaknesses) and

external situations (opportunities and threats) that can help and hurt a brand”, and is applied to categorise and prioritise brand conditions from a strategic viewpoint. Duncan and Moriarty submit that a SWOT analysis is conducive to the outside-in brand contact planning process as it logically leads to zero-based planning. The degree to which points of brand contact are succeeding in communicating and reinforcing the brand identity with consistency, is the focal point of the brand contact SWOT analysis.

Duncan and Moriarty (1995:149) elaborate that strengths and weaknesses are internal brand contact factors under the company’s control. Opportunities and threats are external brand contact factors over which the company has little or no control but on occasion can influence. The strategic objective is to build on brand contact strengths, turn-around the brand contact weaknesses, neutralise the brand contact threats and leverage the brand contact opportunities.

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:271- 275) present a comprehensive set of question areas in conducting a brand communications audit, such as:

- How aware are internal brand contact sources of the company’s central vision and/or the brand’s positioning?
- Is there cross-functional awareness of brand communication objectives?
- Are the internal sources of brand contact messages aware of key points of brand contact and are they managed from the outside-in?
- Is there clarity in roles and functions to achieve brand communication objectives?
- Above all, does a culture of integrated brand contact management exist?

Integrated brand contact planning is however based on an outside-in, consumer oriented assessment of points of brand contact. The brand is the result of consumers’ experience and impressions of the myriad of brand contact messages.

Schultz et al. (1993:12) and Duncan (2002:205) conclude that the brand contact audit and SWOT analysis must ultimately be applied from the consumer's point of view, that is from the outside-in. The SWOT analysis must take an outside-in perspective, rather than solely relying on internal judgements to analyse the company, the brand and its points of contact, and the competitive situation. Perceptions ultimately determine to what extent customers and prospective consumers will buy the brand.

Duncan (2002:205) observes that "not only do managers perceptions differ from customers' perceptions, but managers' are not always in agreement on the brand's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats". It is important that the brand contact task team employ customer and market research to gain an accurate outside-in assessment of the brand and its points of contact. In this regard, Duncan (2002:205) proposes that customer surveys, analyses of service calls, interviews with sales force, observation studies of customers shopping, supplier and channel member surveys and planned brand contact reviews are for example, implemented. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:274) specifically propose that service contacts in particular, be regularly assessed through techniques such as mystery shopping or phantom calling because they are so highly influential, complex and layered.

Ward and Hebert (1996:28-31) furthermore urge that content analysis of brand messages is undertaken to determine the extent to which the strategic intent of brand contact sources are in fact practiced in brand contact message delivery. Content analysis findings are thus compared to the views of message sources. The gaps in the company's brand contact performance will subsequently emerge.

With an outside-in assessment of points of brand contact the focus thus shifts from an internal analysis of the product and its competitors to the consumer's perspective on how the brand compares to competitor offerings. The analysis shifts from a comparative price analysis to an assessment of the consumer's price perceptions and from a distribution and brand penetration analysis to an

appraisal of the consumer's view on purchase convenience and the purchase environment.

Finally, rather than solely focussing on promotional redemption figures and brand tracking studies, Schultz et al. (1993:12) and Duncan (2002:205) urge that the consumer's experience of the brand communication environment and brand contact points direct the analysis. This approach is in keeping with Duncan and Moriarty's (1997:78) assessment of the sources of brand contact. The SWOT analysis must ultimately move outside-in to investigate the consumer's impressions of the brand as created through product, service, planned and unplanned sources of brand contact.

However, Duncan and Moriarty (1997:165) further highlight that companies that communicate with several different stakeholder groups and customer segments experience a more complex challenge to the integration of the brand identity. Planning and monitoring for consistency becomes more complex and consequently demands more attention from the cross-functional brand contact task team. A brand that, for example, relies heavily on publicity messages released by the media must be equally sensitive to the media journalist's insight into and portrayal of the brand's identity. In this instance the media acts as an influential stakeholder group and point of consumer contact with the brand. Service companies, likewise rely on the brand message delivery of front-line staff. To create an integrated brand experience it is imperative that staff is managed as an influential stakeholder group and point of customer brand contact.

Creating a consistent brand identity across stakeholder groups and customer segments is particularly a challenge for companies that are building an overarching master brand identity. The Virgin master brand for example, provides an umbrella under which many of its businesses such as, Virgin Airlines, Virgin Rail and Virgin Cola operate.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:119) explain that exposure in one context can affect brand impressions in other contexts. Although sub-brands have

distinctive associations, the master brand identity must be enforced and managed with consistency at every point of brand contact. A lack of consistency will result in brand anarchy and inefficient and ineffective brand building.

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:157) therefore propose that the cross-functional task team identify and assess the brand impressions and influence of all stakeholder groups in the analysis of points of brand contact. This will lead to a succession of focussed SWOT analyses that Duncan and Moriarty (1997:270) suggest must be prioritised on the basis of stakeholders impact on key consumer audiences and ultimately on the development of a consistent brand identity. An integrated assessment of stakeholders' impact on key consumer audiences will then determine the key points of brand contact and will focus the process of integrating the brand identity.

The analysis of a brand's points of contact through an outside-in and zero-based SWOT analysis will, according to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:150), ultimately illuminate the key contact issues facing the brand. The gaps between the internal and external perceptions of the company, its products, and its operations will be identified, analysed, assessed and prioritised. A comprehensive SWOT analysis enables the task team to create a zero-based platform from which to focus and plan the brand contact strategy and integrate brand contact messages.

The process of integrated brand contact planning however takes place in real-world circumstances. It is therefore also important that the brand contact task team consider, as Duncan (2002:139) suggests, the ability of the company to influence the contact point experience and specifically the cost of making each contact a positive and integrated brand experience.

### **2.5.6 Appropriation of the Process of Integrated Brand Contact Management**

The brand communications audit and application of a comprehensive SWOT analysis assists in the vital role of planning budget appropriation in the brand contact strategy, primarily because it involves a current assessment and accordingly identifies and prioritises brand contact issues.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:143) propose that the process of budgeting the brand contact strategy is likewise, developed from the outside-in. The objective is to base budgeting on the objectives and goals to be achieved. In integrated brand contact planning, funds can hardly be determined in advance of a sound analysis of the brand situation.

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:155) confirm that the appropriation of spend must be guided by the brand communications audit and brand contact objectives and must not be set by historical precedent. Investment in brand contact planning is based on what needs to be done to achieve an integrated brand identity.

The brand communications investment must therefore be developed zero-based from the bottom-up, rather than from the top-down. Appropriation in integrated brand contact planning is determined by the brand contact objectives derived from the zero-based brand contact audit and not by previous budgeting patterns or formulae. It is as Schultz and Barnes (1995:143) confirm, the “value-back, not investment-in, that drives the outside-in approach” to integrated brand contact planning.

### **2.5.7 The Need for a Brand Charter in Integrated Brand Contact Planning**

It is evident that the brand contact audit presents the foundation to, and framework for integrated brand contact planning. The audit delivers insight into the status of a brand’s points of contact in consumers’ minds and

identifies the key issues and objectives facing the process of brand identity integration. The brand contact audit both focuses and directs the integrated brand contact planning strategy and the appropriation thereof.

Keller (2001:21) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:91) in conclusion, urge that the insights gained through the brand contact audit be summarised in a Brand Charter or Brand Manual. The purpose of this document is to capture brand learnings and to codify the brand identity and positioning strategy.

The Brand Charter captures the essence of the brand to present a platform through which the brand can communicate with a consistent voice. The Brand Charter thus serves as a strategic guide to the process of brand contact planning, by providing as Keller (2001:21) asserts, long-term strategic brand direction and guidelines to short-term brand tactics.

The key role and function of the brand contact task team is thus as Schultz and Barnes (1995:42) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:298) propose, to ensure that the Brand Charter is codified and ultimately employed by all sources of brand contact in the development of an integrated brand identity.

The task team must therefore also effectively communicate the strategic purpose and value of the brand charter document to all sources of brand contact. The aim is to ensure, as Farnfield (1999:256) asserts, that the brand positioning is incorporated into the way the organisation behaves and the way in which it communicates.

Gronstedt and Thorsen (1993) and Duncan and Moriarty (1997:269) support the role and value of a dedicated task team to manage and ensure the integration of all points of brand contact. The authors do however stress that a thorough understanding of the philosophy of integration, the dynamics of brand communications and importantly, the ability to assess points of brand contact objectively, is paramount to conducting a valid and insightful zero-based brand communications audit.

Consequently, Duncan and Moriarty (1997:269) propose that the brand communications audit be co-conducted by an outside team. Duncan and Moriarty argue that the integration of points of brand contact can be hindered by internal company politics and departmental turf battles. Companies rooted in an inside-out and departmentalised culture will especially experience initial anxiety in developing a cross-functional, zero-based brand contact planning mindset.

O'Brien, quoted in Senge (1990:271) asserts that organisations also grow so accustomed to their own approaches and conditions, that they take it for granted and eventually don't even notice it. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:269) agree, and reason that an outside team will "more accurately see things as they are".

The task team responsible for the integration and management of points of brand contact need objective guidance and support to fulfil their role and function. It is in this regard that the potential role and value of the advertising agency must be considered.

## **2.6 The Role of the Communications Agency in Integrated Brand Contact Planning**

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:231) are of the opinion that the advertising agency can fulfil an integral, value-added role in the process of integrated brand contact planning and management. To do so, the traditional advertising agency will however have to reposition itself.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:46) assert that agencies can no longer afford to be perceived as mere suppliers or vendors of specialised communication services when effective brand building requires insight into the total array of brand contact communications. O'Malley and Birge in Dru (2002:277) argue more blatantly that it is the traditional advertising agency's stubborn adherence to the specialisation of advertising and the traditional business

model that accompanies it, that has led to the agency's "apocryphal journey down the food chain". Fitzgerald (1995:46), Dawson in Dru (2002:80) and Scorer in Rice (2003:32) consequently conclude that to play a credible role as brand custodians, advertising agencies will have to evolve as strategic partners to deliver integrated brand communications solutions and add meaningful value to clients' brands and ultimately, business.

However, a pitfall resides in the belief that integrated brand communications solutions are delivered by making the full spectrum of communication functions available to companies. Georgescu (1991:7) observes that such an approach delivers the cross selling of services rather than effective strategic planning. A full service offering by the agency does not assure integration at the strategic level.

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:257) agree that for advertising agencies to have a competitive advantage in the new brand communications environment, "they need to redefine the business they are in and what it really means to be a full-service agency. They need to take charge of their future as communication managers". To deliver integrated brand communications solutions the advertising agency will have to deliver value beyond its access to and delivery of brand communication tools and services.

### **2.6.1 The Integrated Communications Agency**

According to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:232) the modern advertising agency must exhibit the strategic and creative insight and skill to add value on all levels of brand contact. The agency must be apt in assessing, integrating and presenting solutions to product, service, planned and unplanned sources of brand contact. The focal point of the advertising agency will have to shift from the practice of predominantly traditional mass media advertising, to the brand and its communication needs.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:25) confirm that the concept of integrated brand contact management is critical to today's advertising planners. No longer is the management of brand communications limited to messages that appear in traditional mass media. The advertising agency must sensitise itself to "all the things that make up and reinforce the brand in the minds of consumers". Integration is as Lascaris (2000:63) states, the crucial driving force in holistic brand communications planning.

To play a meaningful role in the process of integrated brand contact management advertising agencies must transform into brand contact management consultants. Oosthuizen (1996:35) reasons that the advertising agency will thus have to deliver holistic solutions and profound strategic advice. The classical advertising agency will have to evolve into a strategic partner and as Duncan and Moriarty (1997:231) propose, an Integrated Communications Agency.

As a result, Schultz and Barnes (1995:46) argue that the role of strategic or account planners within advertising agencies, will become increasingly more important. The role of the strategic planner, as Duncan (2002:98) confirms, is to gain insight into the consumer's experience and impressions of the brand, to determine relevant brand contact communication objectives and to assist in the development of an integrated brand contact strategy. It is evident that the strategic or account planner plays a pivotal role in ensuring that an outside-in, consumer focussed planning approach is applied in the development and integration of points of brand contact. Wessels (2001) thus proposes that the Integrated Communications Agency be driven by a strategic, zero-based and media neutral planning mindset. The agency must be led by strategic planners with the insight and skill to deliver holistic brand contact solutions and the expertise to direct and coordinate the development of brand contacts across the different communication domains.

Wessels's (2001) point of view is in synergy with Duncan and Moriarty (1997:148) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2000:298) approach to brand contact management. A zero-based and cross-functional planning mindset is

paramount to the development of holistic, relevant and integrated brand contact solutions.

### **2.6.2 Introducing Cross-functional Account Teams in Tandem with the Brand Contact Task Team**

To enhance cross-functional and integrated management within the advertising agency further, Duncan and Moriarty (1997:252) suggest that the agency be organised into brand or account teams rather than specialised departments. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:299) explain that the goal is to create teams with multiple communication capabilities rather than ineffective teams with limited focus.

Schultz and Barnes (1995:44) likewise agree that the Integrated Communications Agency must employ a structure that allows it to serve the client and ultimately the brand. This implies that the strategic, media, creative and specialised promotional skills needed to deliver effective brand contact solutions, must be integrated into cross-functional account groups or teams. The expertise of team members is thus maximised and the opportunity to develop integrated brand contact solutions is optimised.

However, to ensure holistic cross-functional management and the development of an integrated brand identity across all points of contact, the working relationship between the communications agency and the brand contact task team must also be addressed. The agency and client relationship must be founded on what Duncan and Moriarty (1997:245) describe as a “partnership philosophy” in which the brand is the focal point.

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:269) propose that the strategic or account planners leading account teams be involved in the brand contact audit. The collaboration of skills and expertise will ensure that strategic synergy is achieved between the brand contact task team and the account team within the agency. The joint assessment and planning of points of brand contact to

achieve an integrated brand identity will also ensure that a close working relationship is established and maintained. The Integrated Communications Agency will thus be firmly positioned as a strategic partner.

The strategic question that remains is who should lead the integration of a brand's points of contact – the communications agency or the client? Duncan and Moriarty (1997:252) submit that the answer is both.

The client is in the best position to ensure that points of product and service contact are effectively planned and integrated and are ideally, reinforced through unplanned points of brand contact. The strength of the Integrated Communications Agency resides more specifically, in the field of planned brand contact messages. In Duncan and Moriarty's (1997:252) opinion, few clients are able to keep up with all of the changes and opportunities on offer in the new media and marketplace. An Integrated Communications Agency with an outside-in and zero-based planning mindset should know better than its clients what communication tools and programmes are most effective, to ensure that an integrated brand identity is created (Duncan and Moriarty 1997:234).

The Integrated Communications Agency must however add value within and beyond the scope of planned brand contact messages. Although the agency is expected to excel in the development of effective, integrated planned brand contact solutions, it must have the skills and expertise to compliment and advise on the holistic integration of all points of brand contact.

The integration triangle introduced by Duncan and Moriarty (1997:90) can be achieved through a productive and efficient partnership between the brand contact task team and the Integrated Communications Agency. A fully-fledged Integrated Communications Agency will have the potential to add value to the process of integrated brand contact management to maximise brand synergy.

## 2.7 Conclusion

Brands are the key assets of business. Ries and Ries (2000:77) confirm that a company's success today, depends on building brands.

A brand, as Kapferer (1997:25) stipulated, represents a focal point for all impressions, created by consumers over time, as they come into contact with the brand's products, distribution channel, personnel and communications. Branding entails the entire process of managing perceptions in consumers' minds.

Brand impressions are evidently created through a myriad of contact points. To build a credible and meaningful brand identity, all points of contact with the brand must communicate and reinforce a single-minded, relevant and differentiated brand positioning strategy. Integration of only the marketing communications activities is typical inside-out thinking and negates the process of brand identity creation. The challenge as Duncan (2002:324) reinforces is not only to achieve "one-voice, one-look" consistency in all points of planned brand contact, but to achieve strategic consistency across all points of contact with the brand.

The core principle of the integrated brand contact strategy is that the strength of the brand begins and endures with its ability to consistently deliver on a single-minded brand positioning or promise, at every point of contact. As Schultz and Barnes (1995:167) conclude, "the greater the consistency, the greater the impact and the greater the persuasion".

The need for integrated brand contact planning and management has redefined the classical roles of marketing and communications. Effective brand building demands an integrated and consumer oriented perspective to marketing and communications planning. Hence the shift from inside-out to outside-in thinking and from integrated marketing communications to integrated brand contact planning.

The process of integrated brand contact planning therefore also starts with a consumer oriented, outside-in audit of points of brand contact. All points of brand contact are identified to assess their impact on consumers' impressions of the brand. As Duncan and Moriarty (1997:155) assert, the process of integrated brand contact planning will commence to change the most impactful negative messages and to reinforce and leverage the most impactful positive messages.

The brand contact audit is ultimately applied to assess the extent to which the single-minded positioning of the brand is being communicated through all product, service, planned and unplanned points of brand contact. The brand contact audit therefore presents a foundation to, and directs the process of integrated brand contact planning. The goal of which is to ensure that a relevant, distinct and single-minded brand positioning is communicated and reinforced at every point of contact with the brand.

An analysis of the process of integrated brand contact planning however highlights two important management issues:

- Firstly, to ensure that all product, service, planned and unplanned points of contact are assessed, planned and managed to ultimately communicate and reinforce a focussed positioning of the brand, a brand contact task team must be introduced.
- Secondly, to enhance the zero-based, outside-in assessment, planning and management of points of brand contact, the task team must find a strategic partner in its advertising agency.

This implies that the advertising agency will have to evolve its role and function into that of a holistic Integrated Communications Agency. Although the advertising agency is expected to excel in the field of planned points of brand contact, it must demonstrate strategic insight and skill on all levels of brand contact planning.

The Integrated Communications Agency must therefore exhibit an outside-in, zero-based and media-neutral planning mindset, to add value to the process of integrated brand contact management. This goal can best be achieved by introducing cross-functional account teams rather than adhering to an inside-out oriented and departmentalised agency structure. The focus of the agency is then on the development of a planned brand contact strategy that communicates and reinforces the brand's positioning, to contribute to the process of creating a holistically, integrated brand identity.

It is within the realm of integrated brand contact planning and specifically the scope of planned contacts, that the nature and role of the alternative brand contact will next be introduced and explored.

The planned brand contact environment is faced with a number of challenges, if not threats. To add value to the process of integrated brand contact planning the Integrated Communications Agency will have to take cognicense of these conditions to present alternative solutions to tried and trusted planned brand contact approaches. Little value can be added to the process of integrated brand building if conventional planned points of contact fail at their first challenge and that is to be noticed.

The nature and role of alternative brand contacts will be explored in context of the framework of integrated brand contact planning. Any new approach to planned brand contact planning will have to acknowledge, respect and support the cardinal role of building a single-minded and integrated brand identity in target consumers' minds.

Chapter Three will proceed to investigate the nature, role and planning of alternative points of brand contact to set a sound foundation to the primary research study. The aim of which is to investigate the perspective of the South African marketing and communications industry on the subject.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Alternative Brand Contact**

**“Resist the usual”**

**Raymond Rubicam**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.2 Defining the Alternative Brand Contact**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.3 The Growth of Alternative Brand Contacts**

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

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

### 3.3.1 Client Demand for Innovative Contact Planning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.3.2 Breaking through Commercial Clutter Barriers**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **a) New Alternative Contact or Ambient Media Offerings**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **b) Alternative Brand Contacts in Traditional Media Environments**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.4 The Planning of Alternative Brand Contacts**

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

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

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

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

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

- Insight into the Conventional

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

- Disruption

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

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

- Brand Integration

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.4.1 Creative Strategic Thinking in Alternative Brand Contact Planning**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.5 Alternative Brand Contact Planning and the Agency Structure**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **a) Organisational Structure**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **b) Organisational Culture and Human Resource Practices**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.6 Barriers to Alternative Brand Contact Planning**

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

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

### **3.6.1 The Departmentalised Agency Structure**

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

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

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

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

### **3.6.2 Inside-out Thinking in Brand Contact Planning**

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

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

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

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

### **3.6.3 Media Biased and Commission-based Brand Contact Planning**

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

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

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

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

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

#### **3.6.4 Total Reliance on Message Creativity**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.6.5 Reliance on Media Planning Systems and Measurement Data**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.7 Requisites to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof**

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

#### **3.7.1 The Alternative Brand Contact Planning Mindset**

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

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

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

### **3.7.2 Impact and the Novelty of the Alternative Brand Contact**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.7.3 Impact and the Communication Effectiveness of the Alternative Brand Contact**

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **3.7.4 Impact and Communicating a Single-minded Brand Identity**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.7.5 Impact and Target Audience Relevance**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.7.6 Continued Impact of the Alternative Brand Contact**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3. 8 Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The Alternative Brand Contact Planning Mindset

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

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

- Impact and the Novelty of the Alternative Brand Contact

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

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

- Impact and the Communication Effectiveness of the Alternative Brand Contact

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

- Impact and Communicating a Single-minded Brand Identity

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

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

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

- Continued Impact of the Alternative Point of Contact

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Chapter 4 The Research Methodology

**“The excitement of exploring new territory”.**

**Thomas Kuhn**

### 4.1 Introduction

Research involves systematic and organised processes of inquiry, investigation, examination and experimentation. For research to be meaningful, Sudman and Blair (1998:6) assert it must be purposeful, have clearly defined objectives and planned procedures, be objective and demonstrate sound analysis, reporting, conclusions and recommendations.

Research methodology plays an important role in this regard as it entails the theoretical analysis and assessment of the research methods appropriate to a field of study. A sound research methodology is bound to contribute to the development and implementation of a meaningful research process to deliver valuable conclusions and recommendations. This Chapter will commence with a theoretical analysis of and motivation for the working research methods to be applied in the primary research phase of this study. Cooper and Schindler (1998:15) in accordance with Sudman and Blair, conclude that good research follows the standards of scientific method. This implies that:

- The purpose of research is clearly defined.
- The research procedures are clearly detailed.
- The research design is thoroughly planned.
- High ethical standards are applied in planning, conducting and analysing research.
- Limitations of the research are frankly revealed.
- Research findings are presented unambiguously.
- Conclusions are justified.

- The researcher's experience is reflected.

The chapters to follow will endeavour to achieve the standards of scientific method with the primary aim to address the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of planned brand contact as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals.

In order to conduct a systematic, organised and scientific research enquiry a sound research framework must be developed. The framework of a research study is according to McDaniel and Gates (1996:37), Sudman and Blair (1998:8-9), Burns and Bush (1998:58-69), Cooper and Schindler (1998:57) and Aaker, Kumar and Day (1998:41-60) defined by the steps encountered in the process of research. The research process provides as Aaker et al. (1998:41) stress, a systematic and planned approach to the research project and ensures that all aspects of the research process are consistent with each other, in particular with the research purpose and objectives. For reference a diagrammatic summary of the research process as developed by Cooper and Schindler (1998:57) is attached as Appendix A.

To ensure a logical flow and clarity in direction, Chapters Four and Five are structured according to the primary steps involved in research. Burns and Bush (1998:58-59) do however indicate that although theoretical frameworks of the research process suggest an orderly, step-by-step process, any given research process in practice becomes more interactive as the researcher engages with the process to set and order steps appropriate to the research project at hand. Given the approaches of various authors and the nature and purpose of this study, the following research steps will be applied to produce a research process and methodology that is clear, concise and appropriate:

- Defining the research problem and purpose
- Defining the research objectives
- Developing the research design
- Determining the research method: The selection of data sources

- The design of data collection procedures
- Selecting the sampling procedure

Chapter 4 will present a discussion of the research process to be pursued in this study. Chapter 5 will commence with a discussion of the practical execution of the research study and will predominantly focus on the analysis of data and the research results of the study.

#### **4.2 Defining the Research Problem**

In Cooper and Schindler (1998:56), Burns and Bush (1998:62) and Aaker et al. (1998:42), view of the research process, the research question or problem and its origin, selection, statement, exploration, and refinement, is unquestionably the most critical step in research design. The formulation of the research problem or question is essential in the research enterprise, as a poorly defined problem will misdirect the entire process.

Cooper and Schindler (1998:29–34) furthermore argue that perspective or research reasoning, is a key variable in effectively defining the research problem and in developing an appropriate research design. The term 'research reasoning' specifies that meaning is conveyed through argument. The researcher is expected to explain, interpret, defend, challenge and explore meaning. Cooper and Schindler elaborate that two types of argument are of great importance to the process of research reasoning. These are induction and deduction.

Induction involves the drawing of a conclusion from one or more particular facts or pieces of evidence. The conclusion thus explains the facts, whilst the facts support the conclusion. Induction occurs as a fact is observed and the question, 'why is this?' is posed. A tentative explanation is advanced in answer to this question. The tentative explanation is considered plausible given the available information and is defined as the hypothesis. McDaniel

and Gates (1996:41) elaborate that a hypothesis is thus a “conjectural statement about a relationship between two or more variables that can be tested with empirical data”.

Deduction on the other hand, is a form of inference purporting to be conclusive. The conclusion necessarily follows from the premises (reasons) given. These premises imply the conclusion and represent a proof. For a deduction to ultimately be viewed or accepted as correct, it must be both true and valid. The premises (reasons) given for the conclusion must agree with the real world. Research reasoning or argument thus moves to a more specific level to determine whether a hypothesis is plausible.

The literature study presented in Chapters Two and Three is focused on a key observation namely the introduction and growth of alternative (unexpected and unconventional) points of planned brand contact through traditional and new forms of media. The literature study and resulting inductive reasoning around the question - why is this, culminates in the following **suggestion or proposition**, namely that:

**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 above stated proposition as derived from an extensive investigation of current literature, is central to the primary research study and also presents the research problem of this study.** The reasoning being that the process of induction pursued thus far, however intensive the study of literature, can not be considered complete without engaging with the real world. The core purpose of this study is to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by the South African marketing and communication industry. Cooper and Schindler (1998:135) however point out that only a fraction of the existing knowledge in a field or industry is put into writing. It is therefore vital that the analysis of secondary (literature) data sources be extended with a primary research study to explore

the concept of alternative brand contact – its nature and its role, as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals.

The primary research study is thus undertaken to address a specific problem. That is, it remains to be seen whether the alternative point of brand contact is perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals, to break through clutter to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. The inductive process of research reasoning must be extended to involve a primary research study to ultimately produce findings that can serve as guidelines to the development of hypotheses that can in future be tested empirically. It must be stated clearly that the above statement exists as a suggestion or proposition, not as a conjectural statement. This study does not aim to produce inferences purporting to be conclusive but rather findings that can assist in the formulation of hypotheses that with further future research and deductive reasoning can be tested to represent a proof.

The literature study and process of inductive reasoning also produced a number of further propositions that are integral to the above stated **central proposition**. The literature study conducted in Chapter 3 is concluded with an analysis of alternative brand contact requisites. These requisites were found to be critical to the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact. **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 the identified requisites.** The research problem thus becomes more layered as the alternative brand contact requisites present further suggestions or **integral propositions** to be explored through the primary research study.

To support the above stated central proposition and to define the integral propositions, the key insights gained from the literature study will next be reinforced. This step is vital as the central proposition and further integral

propositions are core to the problem and purpose of the primary research study.

#### **4.2.1 The Central Proposition and Integral Propositions in Context**

The core premise of integrated brand contact planning is that the strength of the brand begins and endures with its ability to consistently deliver on a single-minded brand positioning or promise, at every point of contact. Hence the shift from inside-out to outside-in thinking and from Integrated Marketing Communications to Integrated Brand Contact Planning.

Two important management issues arose from the literature study and analysis of integrated brand contact planning in Chapter Two of this study. Firstly, a Brand Contact Task Team must be introduced to ensure that a brand's points of product, service, planned and unplanned contacts are assessed, planned and managed to deliver a relevant, distinctive and single-minded brand positioning.

Secondly and importantly, to enhance the zero-based, outside-in management of points of brand contact, the task team must find a strategic partner in its advertising agency. The agency must demonstrate strategic insight and skill on all levels of brand contact and must ultimately excel in the development of integrated planned brand contact strategies that will contribute to the building of a focussed brand identity. The Integrated Communications Agency best achieves this goal and thus differentiates itself from the traditional departmentalised advertising agency, by a structure and culture based on account teams that apply outside-in, zero-based and media neutral thinking in the development and execution of integrated planned brand contact strategies.

It is within the context of integrated brand contact planning and specifically the scope of planned brand contacts that the nature and role of the alternative brand contact is explored and defined in Chapter Three of this study. **The**

**alternative point of brand contact is presented, in keeping with the outside-in and zero-based mindset of integrated brand contact planning, as an unexpected and unconventional point of planned brand contact, whether in the form of traditional or new media.** It is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. The qualifying factor is the unconventional and unexpected experience of the point of contact. The challenge is to move beyond, or to manipulate traditional communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner, when and where they least expect to encounter a commercial message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind.

Two key and interrelated motivating factors establish the need for alternative brand contacts in the planned brand contact environment. Firstly, clients are demanding innovative brand contact solutions within and beyond the tried and trusted, traditional planned brand contact methods. Brand contact innovation is needed in an increasingly competitive, cluttered and fragmented brand communications environment. Secondly, consumers are, as Duncan and Moriarty (1997:91) assert, psychologically conditioning themselves to ignore the brand communications clutter encountered in the market place. As brand communication contacts become more recognisable and cluttered, consumers erect more intensive selective exposure and attention measures. The alternative point of brand contact answers clients' need to introduce unexpected and unconventional points of brand contact that will cut through traditional commercial clutter barriers to reach and impact on consumers when their defenses are down. The alternative brand contact draws attention and achieves impact because it deviates from and is incongruent with expected brand communications activity. The need to apply creative strategic thinking and to innovate alternative brand contact solutions is then also demonstrated through the recent growth of new media owners and the search for unconventional contact opportunities in the traditional media environment, as discussed in Chapter Three (3.3.2).

It is evident that the planners of brand contact strategies can not solely rely on message creativity to break through the commercial clutter barrier. Creative strategic thinking must be applied to introduce unexpected and unconventional brand contacts that will create impact and communicate a single-minded brand positioning. Dru's (1996:35) theory of disruption is particularly pertinent in this regard. An analysis of Dru's theory and creative strategic thinking, with reference to alternative brand contact planning, reveals that insight into the conventional brand communications environment must be applied to formulate brand communication problems or challenges. Creative strategic thinking then delivers alternative perspectives and solutions to the defined challenges. The aim is to develop alternative brand contact solutions that are novel and appropriate to the overall brand contact strategy. Creative strategic thinking is therefore problem-solving in nature and the concept that is produced must as Rossiter and Percy (1997:181) reinforce, be attention getting but also catalytically relevant to the brand positioning. The alternative point of brand contact must be novel, to cut through communications clutter and be noticed, and appropriate, to fulfil its strategic role within the integrated brand contact strategy.

Various creative problem-solving techniques can be employed to stimulate and develop creative ideas, as discussed in Chapter Three (3.4.1). Of greater importance is the mindset of those developing creative ideas. It is the intention to be creative and to break with conventional thinking at the strategic level that is instrumental and therefore vital to creative strategic thinking. The mindset and approach of the account team is paramount in applying creative strategic thinking to produce unconventional and unexpected brand contact solutions.

The cross-functional integration of strategic, media and creative skills and expertise into account teams presents an organic structure conducive to creative strategic thinking and the development of innovative brand contact solutions. An assessment of the roles and functions within the account team (Chapter Three: 3.5.1), reveals that the strategic planner's aim to develop a brand contact strategy that will cut through clutter to impact on consumers

and communicate a focussed positioning of the brand, is in synergy with the creative team's motivation to produce fresh and intrusive creative concepts and in keeping with the media planner's goal to deliver contact efficiency. The alternative brand contact is the product of an outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning process fostered within the account team.

The secondary research study culminates in an analysis of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning and thereupon the requisites to effective alternative points of brand contact.

**The identified barriers and requisites by and large present a holistic and integrated view of the critical measures that affect the role and nature of the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof. The barriers and requisites are consequently highly pertinent to the focus and orientation of the primary research study.**

The barriers to alternative brand contact planning are of particular significance to the primary research study in that they will be applied to set clear parameters to the research objectives of the primary research study. The influence and application of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning will receive close attention in 4.3 of this chapter.

The literature study is concluded with an in depth analysis of alternative brand contact requisites (3.7 of Chapter Three). The alternative brand contact requisites are critical variables to be explored in the primary research study because they present the propositions that are integral to the central proposition, as previously argued. In other words, **the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers, to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand, if the following requisites, now defined as integral propositions are demonstrated:**

- **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 a sustainable alternative brand contact that can be improved upon must be employed.**

The literature study reveals that the alternative brand contact requisites are critical measures to the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact and thus present integral propositions that must be explored in the primary research study. Further influential variables or possible integral propositions may also exist in the real world that have not been revealed and documented in literature sources. The research study and its design must address this possibility to ensure richness of data is delivered in the process of exploring and defining the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact.

To conclude, the purpose of this study, as a whole, is to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals. The literature study suggests that the nature and role of the alternative brand contact, as an unconventional and unexpected point of planned contact, is to break through clutter to impact on consumers and communicate a single-minded positioning of the brand. This proposition is central to the primary research study. However, to succeed in this strategic goal the alternative point of brand contact must exhibit the requisites identified and stated as integral propositions.

The purpose of the primary research study is to explore the formulated central and integral research propositions in real world terms. The research problem being that the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact can not be justly addressed unless real world perceptions of the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact are fully explored. It remains to be seen whether the alternative brand contact is perceived by the marketing and communication industry in South Africa, to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. To effectively address the research problem and purpose of the primary research study, specific research objectives will next be set.

### **4.3 The Research Objectives**

Burns and Bush (1998:63) and Aaker et al. (1998:48 - 49) explain that a research objective is a statement, in as precise terminology as possible, of what information is needed to satisfy the research purpose. Research objectives are thus related to and determined by the problem definition and when achieved, provide the necessary information to solve the problem.

According to Aaker et al. (1998:48 – 49) certain components must however be in place to present clear-cut research objectives. Specific research questions

must exist for formulated research hypotheses or propositions. Also, and importantly, the scope or boundaries of the research must be clearly defined.

The latter will firstly be addressed in lieu of key insights gained from the literature study, specifically the identification and analysis of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning. The assessment of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning indicates that the alternative brand contact is greatly dependent on a planning environment conducive to the development of unexpected and unconventional brand contact solutions. The barriers to alternative brand contact planning are discussed in depth in 3.6 of Chapter Three and are briefly as follows:

- A traditional departmentalised agency structure, as the cross-functional integration of strategic, media and creative skills and expertise into account teams, is conducive to alternative brand contact planning;
- A lack of outside-in thinking, as seeing the world through the eyes of the consumer will highlight the importance of developing unexpected contact approaches within the cluttered and conventional world of brand communications;
- Media and commission bound biases, as alternative brand contact planning commences from a zero-based, media-neutral planning platform to deliver unexpected and unconventional contact ideas;
- A total reliance on brand message creativity to achieve impact, as alternative brand contacts require that creative strategic thinking is applied to enhance the impact of brand communications;
- Total reliance on computerised media planning systems and measurement data. Alternative brand contacts remain to be judged and require of the client and agency to engage in investigative and explorative strategic activity.

The greatest collective barrier to alternative brand contact planning is mindset. An inside-out, media-biased and measurement bound planning mindset, void of creative strategic purpose and thinking inhibits the process of alternative brand contact planning. It thus stands to reason that a primary research study involving highly departmentalised advertising agencies that exhibit inside-out and media commission based biases and are wholly reliant on computerised media planning systems and measurement data in the planning of brand communication strategies; will stifle the research purpose of this study. Such a study will deliver further insight into the constraints experienced by traditional advertising agencies in developing unconventional and unexpected brand contact solutions but will not necessarily present a richness of data with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. Equally so, involving inside-out, media-biased and measurement bound marketers who are hesitant to engage creative strategic thinking, will inhibit the purpose of this research study. As Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297) point out, clients and agencies alike must exhibit a willingness to investigate and break with conventional moulds to be experimental.

To achieve the purpose of this study and to address the defined research problem the barriers to alternative brand contact planning are employed to set parameters to the primary research study and to define research objectives in precise terminology as possible. **The primary research study will therefore explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients.**

It stands to reason that the Integrated Communications Agency has purposefully rid itself of the planning constraints experienced in a highly departmentalised and traditional agency environment. To be totally objective and realistic it must not be assumed that all Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa exhibit a wholly outside-in, zero based, media neutral and creative strategic planning mindset. The assumption however is that they are, based on an integrated brand communications planning focus, a great deal closer to a planning mindset that is conducive to alternative brand

contact planning. The organic nature of the integrated account team, as reasoned by Robbins (1994:400) and Monge, Cozzens and Contractor (1992:250-274), is a catalyst for integrated strategic and creative brainstorming and therefore for alternative brand contact planning. Equally so, it is assumed that clients of Integrated Communications Agencies demonstrate a need to develop a relationship with a communications partner that will meet expectations and add greater value to the process of brand building.

With full cognisance of the parameters to the primary research study, specific research questions will next be introduced, as proposed by Burns and Bush (1998:63) and Aaker et al. (1998:49). The research questions specifically address the identified central and integral research propositions with the ultimate aim to solve the research problem. The research questions to follow then also serve as the objectives to the primary research study:

Given the central proposition as defined in 4.2 of this chapter the **primary objective** of the research study is 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?**

To address the research problem and purpose of this study effectively, the propositions that have been identified as integral to the central research proposition must also be explored in real world terms. The alternative brand contact requisites or integral research propositions identified in 4.2 of this chapter consequently 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 presents the primary and supporting objectives to the primary research study. If these objectives are effectively carried out as Burns and Bush (1998:63) argue, the data produced will solve the research problem. The role and nature 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 be effectively explored to ultimately produce findings that can guide the development of plausible hypotheses for future empirical testing.

In further pursuit of a systematic and planned approach to the research project, as Aaker et al. (1998:41) advocate, an appropriate research design will next be introduced with the aim to address the above formulated research objectives.

#### **4.4 The Research Design**

The research design presents the plan to be followed to answer the research problem and objectives. In context of the purpose and objectives of the research study, Cooper and Schindler (1998:130) reason that a study is viewed as either exploratory or formal. The distinction is essentially based on the degree of research structure and research question crystallisation and will furthermore influence whether the study lends itself to quantitative or qualitative research design and output. These dimensions will next be investigated whereupon the research design of this study will be introduced.

##### **4.4.1 Exploratory Research**

According to Cooper and Schindler (1998:134) an exploratory research design is appropriate when the research area is new and vague, when important variables may not be known or may as of yet, not be clearly defined. Exploratory research is characterised by a loose research structure to gain a better understanding of the research environment relevant to the research problem. The primary purpose of exploration is to clarify and crystallise research propositions and/or questions in order to conduct further research.

According to McDaniel and Gates (1996:39) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:60-61) exploration typically begins with a thorough secondary research study. This involves a search for published data and the opinions of well-informed people who have clearly stated positions on the controversial aspects of the study. Cooper and Schindler (1998:135) however point out that although secondary research is a rich source of possible proposition and

hypothesis formulation, only a fraction of the existing knowledge in a field or industry is put into writing. It is therefore important that the analysis of secondary data be extended with primary exploratory research.

Exploratory research consequently entails sourcing of information from insightful sources with experience in the field of the study rather than sourcing of information from a cross-section of the population. The research approach is therefore also flexible in that it allows further investigation of avenues that emerge during the study. The research information obtained, coupled with a thorough secondary study of the research field then enables the researcher to clarify and/or crystallise research questions and propositions to enable the future development of hypotheses to formal research studies.

#### **4.4.2 Formal Research**

A formal research study is employed to test hypotheses or validate deductions. According to McDaniel and Gates (1996:42) the first challenge is to determine whether the formal research study will be descriptive or causal. This decision is based on the objectives of the research study.

A descriptive study is conducted to answer who, what, where and how research questions. Implicit in descriptive research is that the underlying relationships of the problem area are understood. McDaniel and Gates (1996:42) and Burns and Bush (1998:65) continue to explain that a causal research study in turn investigates whether one variable causes or determines the value of another variable. A variable is defined as a symbol or concept that assumes any one of a set of values. An independent variable is presumed or expected to cause or influence the dependent variable. The independent variable being the symbol or concept over which the researcher has some control or can manipulate to some extent. The dependent variable being the symbol or concept expected to be explained or caused by the independent variable. A causal study will, for example, investigate whether

the level of advertising (independent variable) determines the level of sales (dependent variable).

The relationship between descriptive and causal research is a supportive one. Descriptive research will determine that two variables are somehow related. It sheds light on relationships or associations and thus supports the selection of variables for a causal study. The causal study in turn will provide reasonable proof that these relationships or associations exist.

#### **4.4.3 Quantitative or Qualitative Research Design and Output**

Given the nature of the research design, explorative and/or formal and the decision to implement descriptive or causal formal research methods, a study lends itself to quantitative or qualitative research design and output. McDaniel and Gates (1996:174-175) explain that the concept of quality essentially describes the essential measure of something, whilst the concept of quantity defines the amount thereof. Kinnear and Taylor (1996:305) and Aaker et al. (1998:186-187, 203-204) elaborate that qualitative research seeks information related to respondents' motivations, beliefs and attitudes.

An intuitive approach is encountered in gathering data and the format of data collection is open-ended. Qualitative research is not intended to deliver statistically or scientifically accurate data but rather data with depth, richness of context and new insights and perspectives. Quantitative research on the other hand is employed to quantify or precisely measure a research problem. Sophisticated statistical procedures and scientifically drawn samples are implemented, to ultimately produce conclusive research.

The purpose of explorative research is to source meaning. Exploratory research, according to Cooper and Schindler (1998:134) and McDaniel and Gates (1996:174-175), thus rely more heavily on qualitative rather than quantitative research techniques. The challenge is to gain much information per respondent through probing questions. Smaller numbers of respondents

and a longer, more flexible relationship with the respondent are therefore encountered in the research process. The analysis of research data, as also confirmed by Kinnear and Taylor (1996:305), is more interpretative.

Quantitative research on the other hand, tends to be more descriptive or causal and analysis more statistical and summarative. Structured questions with predetermined response options are typically employed, with a large number of respondents involved.

The popularity of qualitative research in particular is, according to McDaniel and Gates (1996:175), growing unabated. This is not only because qualitative research is cheaper than quantitative research, but also and more importantly, because qualitative research delivers much insight into in-depth motivations and feelings. McDaniel and Gates support that data delivered through qualitative research are “rich, human, subtle and often very revealing”.

#### **4.4.4 The Research Design of this Study**

Global as well as local published data and recognised industry publications and journals have been consulted and analysed in Chapters Two and Three of this study, to gain insight into the concept of integrated brand contact planning and the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. The opinions of international and local industry professionals on the topic have been investigated and discussed.

Although the secondary research study has presented a rich source of proposition formulation, it must be extended with primary exploratory research. As previously argued (4.2), the process of inductive reasoning will be incomplete if not supported by primary exploratory research. Firstly, because as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134) reason, the research area is new and important variables may not be known. The study positions the shift from Integrated Marketing Communications to Integrated Brand Contact Planning as a recent phenomenon and the unconventional and unexpected

point of brand contact as a new concept. Secondly, because as Cooper and Schindler (1998:135) forewarn, only a fraction of the existing knowledge in a field or industry is normally put into writing.

An exploratory research design is highly relevant and appropriate to this study. The perceived nature and role of the alternative brand contact in the environment of integrated brand contact planning is yet to be fully explored. The central and integral research propositions derived from the literature study must be explored in real world terms to investigate the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals, in specific Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients. An investigation of the nature of the alternative brand contact will explore its status as an unconventional and unexpected brand contact and the need for outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic thinking and planning therein. An investigation of the role of the alternative point of brand contact will explore its perceived means of breaking through communication clutter, to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

This study is explorative and will source and probe meaning to investigate the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. This study will therefore also be qualitative in nature to reveal in-depth attitudes, opinions and motivations. It is not the intent of this study to prove that a causal relationship does in fact exist between the alternative brand contact (independent variable) and its ability to break through clutter, to create impact and communicate the focussed positioning of the brand (dependent variables). Although such a study will add significant value to the field of brand communications planning, it is vital that the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact first be explored, as perceived by South African Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients. It must firstly emerge that the variables involved in this study are perceived as related, before the actual relationships can be put to the test.

This study presents a qualitative exploratory research design that will shed light on the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact in cutting through clutter to create impact and communicate or reinforce a single-minded brand positioning. The research study will therefore present a solid foundation to a possible future formal causal study by developing and presenting findings that can be applied in the development of hypotheses.

#### **4.5 The Research Method: The Selection of Data Sources**

The literature study (Chapters Two and Three) presented an investigation of the context, nature and role of alternative points of brand contact, based on an analysis of pertinent global and local academic books and periodicals - industry magazines, newspapers and academic journals. To conduct a scientific primary research study, it is equally important to identify and apply an appropriate method of primary data source selection.

According to Sudman and Blair (1998:88) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:131) primarily two methods of primary data source or information selection are encountered in research. The first entails monitoring or observational studies, which imply that people, objects or events are observed. The researcher inspects the activities of a subject or the nature of material without eliciting responses. The behavioural patterns of people, objects and occurrences are systematically recorded without questioning or communicating with them. Observational data is however only applicable if the phenomenon of interest is observable and if it occurs often or predictably enough, to be studied within a realistic period of time. According to McDaniel and Gates (1996:44) observation research is typically descriptive.

The second form of primary research is based on interrogation or communication processes in the questioning of people, and is referred to as the self-report data method. The researcher questions subjects to collect their responses by personal or impersonal means. Sudman and Blair (1998:83)

explain that respondent self-report data methods essentially involve survey interviews, focus groups and depth interviews. McDaniel and Gates (1996:44) point out that survey research is often descriptive in nature although it can also be applied in a causal research design. Kinnear and Taylor (1996:321) furthermore reason that depth interviews and focus groups in turn are typically employed in exploratory research.

A third method of data collection is identified by McDaniel and Gates (1996:44) in the form of experimentation. Experiments almost always aim to measure causality. One or more variables are changed to observe the effect of change on another variable. The research aim is to demonstrate that a change in one variable causes some predictable change in another variable.

Given the intent of this study, that is to explore the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact and the focus on a qualitative exploratory research design, the self-report data method will be investigated in greater depth.

#### **4.5.1 The Self-Report Data Method**

The three self-report data measures identified by Sudman and Blair (1998:83) are survey interviews, focus groups and depth interviews and will next be discussed with reference to the research purpose of this study. The specific data measures to be employed in exploring the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact will receive close attention.

##### **a) Survey Interviews**

Survey interviews are a commonly used self-report method and entail the development and use of a fixed questionnaire with pre-specified questions. According to Sudman and Blair (1998:154) surveys are typically conducted in one of four forms, namely, personal surveys, interceptive surveys, telephone

and mail surveys. Broad coverage of the respondent population can be obtained as the relatively low cost of the method allows for contact with many respondents. The relatively low demand on respondents also tends to encourage high participation.

However, the greatest weakness of the survey method and the reason why it is not an appropriate data source method for this study, is that respondents' seated opinions, feelings and hidden motivations can not be probed effectively. Although solid data about the population at large can be obtained, limited data about the individual respondent can be gained.

Depth attitudes, opinions and motivations must be sourced to effectively explore and describe the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact as perceived by South African Integrated Communication Agencies and their clients. Two further self-report data methods can be instrumental in achieving this, namely focus groups and depth interviews.

### **b) Focus Groups and Depth Interviews**

As is the case with surveys, focus groups and depth interviews apply self-reports to obtain information. These methods do however not use fixed questionnaires. Kinnear and Taylor (1996:305) explain that focus groups and depth interviews are unstructured-direct techniques. No rigid format is followed but respondents are queried directly about the issues at hand. The objective is to cover identified topics to moderate a respondent's flow of thoughts on the topics. Sudman and Blair (1998:184) also argue that with focus groups and depth interviews, a longer period of time (90 to 120 minutes for focus groups and 30 to 90 minutes for depth interviews) is devoted to cover a narrow range of topics. Individual opinions and motivations can therefore be probed to produce rich and revealing data.

Sudman and Blair (1998:184) explain that both focus groups and depth interviews are based on the philosophy of psychoanalytic interviewing. The

unstructured discussion approach allows respondents to divulge and share their own opinions and beliefs in their own natural language employing their own natural structure. Psychoanalytic methods are based on the premise, that true attitudes and feelings will emerge as a topic is discussed at length.

Sudman and Blair accordingly conclude that the strength of focus groups and depth interviews is essentially three fold:

- A great deal of information can be obtained from each respondent.
- Complex information about attitudes or motivations can be gained.
- How respondents structure the topic of interest can be uncovered.

The advantages delivered by depth interviews and focus groups as data collection measures do however come at a cost. The length and personal requirements of these methods make them very expensive and consequently limit the number that can be conducted. The number of respondents willing to co-operate are also reduced as a result of the length of the interview.

However, given the research purpose of this study, the value of the focus group and depth interview by far outweighs the above constraints. The concept and practise of alternative brand contact planning is not widely documented in secondary research data and emerges as a new phenomenon in the field of marketing communications. The alternative brand contact concept is in an exploratory research stage. Attitudes, opinions and motivations with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact must therefore be investigated through data collection measures that will allow for exploration and probing. A fixed questionnaire with pre-specified questions as applied in survey interviews, will not be conducive to the research process and purpose. To effectively investigate the formulated central and integral research propositions and achieve the identified research objectives, the opinions, attitudes and motivations of respondents must be explored. Research time must be invested to tap into a carefully selected sample of respondents' flow of thought on the nature, role

and planning of alternative points of brand contact, rather than to obtain more limited data from the population at large.

Both focus groups and depth interviews will be employed to support the qualitative explorative design of this research study. The nature of both these data collection instruments will next be discussed whereupon their role and merit within the context of the study will be reasoned.

#### **4.6 The Individual Depth Interview**

The individual depth interview entails an unstructured conversation or personal interview on a defined topic between a respondent and an interviewer. It is a one-on-one research method that aims to probe and elicit detailed answers to questions. Kahan (1990:8-9) states that the depth interview aims to get below respondents' surface responses to uncover the more fundamental reasons underlying the respondent's attitudes. Opinions and motivations are thus obtained that will, in all probability, not surface in a structured interview.

Kinnear and Taylor (1996:321) point out that both the focus group and the depth interview are primarily employed in exploratory research and are valuable techniques in developing hypotheses. In comparing the depth interview to the focus group, McDaniel and Gates (1996:198) and Sudman and Blair (1998:196), however, argue that the depth interview essentially ensures that all respondents express their opinions on the same topic. Group dynamics and possible group pressure that can be encountered in the focus group are eliminated to ensure that the individual respondent is the focus of attention. More information is revealed as more time is devoted to an individual respondent. The respondent can thus be probed at length to elicit true motivations. Greater flexibility furthermore exists as casual remarks and tangential issues that may provide valuable insight can be further questioned and explored. Payne, quoted in Tull and Hawkins (1993:445) thus confirms that depth interviews do not only provide more detail but also deliver personal

preferences and idiosyncracies. Subtleties, nuances and shades of difference masked in focus groups are more readily revealed. Rogers (1989:9-10) elaborates that in the depth interview the interviewer also establishes a higher level of rapport with the respondent. Responses are, as a result, given more freely than in focus groups. Depth interviews consequently deliver greater depth and point of view.

Dillon, Madden and Firtle (1993:141) and Tull and Hawkins (1993:443) thus conclude that depth interviews are particularly appropriate when:

- Detailed probing of respondents' opinions and attitudes are required.
- Subject matter tends to be personal or confidential.
- Subject matter is of an emotionally charged nature.
- Acceptable norms exist that may result in conformity in a group discussion.
- Detailed decision-making patterns are required.
- Professional people are interviewed on subject matter related to their jobs.

#### **4.6.1 Types of Depth Interviews and Related Procedures**

Kinnear and Taylor (1996:320), in agreement with Sudman and Blair (1998:184), confirm that depth interviews generally last an hour or more to provide sufficient time to probe respondents opinions and motivations on a range of research topics. Aaker et al. (1998:189-190) and Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock (1999:64) collectively identify three basic types of depth interviews, namely, non-directive, standardised and semi-structured or focussed interviews. The difference between the data collection instruments essentially lie in the amount of guidance provided by the interviewer.

In the non-directive interview, as also reinforced by Dane (1990:129), the respondent has the maximum freedom to respond within the confines of topics of interest to the interviewer. According to Aaker et al. (1998:189) the success of this method depends on the interviewer's skill in creating an open and relaxed relationship and probing responses to pursue motivations without

biasing the content of responses or losing control over the focus of the interview. A standardised interview on the other hand employs strict protocol. The interviewer works with a formal interview schedule, question wording is exactly repeated and the order in which questions are listed is observed. Where further information is required the interviewer employs prompts in a standardised and neutralised way.

It is the semi-structured interview, as a third depth interview vehicle, that is particularly appropriate to this study. The semi-structured or focussed depth interview is designed to promote an active, open-ended dialogue, as does the non-directive interview. The interviewer does however retain control of the terms of the discussion by referring to an interview guide that identifies the issues to be covered. Lindlof, quoted in Deacon et al (1999:65) thus describes the semi-structured interview technique as a *conversation with a purpose*.

Although the interviewer covers a specific list of topics or sub areas in the form of predetermined questions, the timing, exact wording and sequencing of questions are left to the interviewer's discretion. Dane (1990:129) and Tull and Hawkins (1993:442), in agreement, point out that because the interviewer has the freedom to create questions and apply probing, the network of meanings in responses are uncovered in a semi-structured interview. Respondents are able to articulate their thoughts and opinions on their own terms, which enhances the opportunity to explore complex and sensitive issues. Comprehension is enhanced as the freedom to elaborate exists and questions can be rephrased to ensure understanding.

Deacon et al. (1999:69) however point out that the greatest threat in a semi-structured interview is interviewer bias. The researcher and/or interviewer must at all times be sensitive not to encourage certain types of responses or to demonstrate any biased interviewing influence. The challenge is to give respondents the freedom to develop their thoughts in the order they want without any biased intervention, while retaining a sense of the research framework and purpose. The authors do however also conclude that the semi-structured interview, when effectively managed, is enormously valuable when

investigating “complex and uncharted areas”, as are frequently encountered in exploratory research.

Aaker et al. (1998:189) furthermore elaborate that the semi-structured interview is especially appropriate to interviewing busy professionals or ‘thought leaders’. As Dane (1990:129) explains, the focussed interview is typically used to research specific groups chosen for their familiarity with the research topic. In this type of depth interview a quid pro quo, such as a summary, is often also employed to gain co-operation, direct and manage the interview.

The semi-structured interview approach is highly appropriate to this study. As previously reasoned, the alternative point of brand contact is a new concept, and the context in which it is applied namely, integrated brand contact planning, is a recent phenomenon. An interviewing technique that will allow for respondents to articulate their thoughts and opinions whilst exploring new ideas that may arise, will be conducive to the nature and purpose of this study.

Professional people are furthermore involved in this study and the aim is to probe their personal perceptions, possible charged opinions and underlying motivations with regard the nature and role of the alternative brand contact in breaking through clutter to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded brand positioning.

#### **4.7 The Focus Group**

Tull and Hawkins (1993:450) and Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1) reinforce that the focus group as a data collection method, is particularly valuable in qualitative exploratory research. It is an innovative method to gather data, especially when limited information is available or when the topic of interest is a new one. The focus group as an exploratory research technique thus enables the development of hypotheses for future testing.

Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) define the focus group as a “loosely structured interactive discussion conducted by a trained moderator among a small group of respondents simultaneously”. A focus group usually consists of six to twelve fairly homogeneous respondents, led by a moderator in an in-depth discussion on one particular concept or topic. The moderator allows for subjects to be explored in discussion and ensures that respondents stimulate one another in the process. As opposed to the role of the interviewer in depth interviews, the moderator as Aaker et al. (1998:191) point out, plays a more passive role. The aim is to learn what respondents have to say and why. They are given the freedom and are encouraged to talk at length and in detail about the subject at hand. The moderator must however ensure that interesting comments, related to the objectives of the focus group, are followed up with probing questions. Proctor (1997:155) states that guided by the moderator, minds thus range freely and through interaction with each other, respondents “produce ideas and suggestions that exhibit synergy”. Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308), in agreement, believe that the value of the focus group lies in its potential to discover the unexpected, through the free-flow of group discussion.

The focus group method is however criticised, in comparison to individual interviews, because less information is gained from individual respondents. Focus groups, as Tull and Hawkins (1993:451) point out, are deemed to be less complete at the individual level as respondents may not all comment on all topics covered in the discussion. May (1993:95) and McDaniel and Gates (1996:178) however conclude that the key motivator for using focus groups, as opposed to depth interviews, is to investigate group dynamics. The researcher employs a focus group to study a concept in context of group interaction. The essential postulate is the idea that a response from one individual becomes a stimulus for another. An interplay of responses are consequently generated that may yield more than if the same number of people had contributed independently. More about a topic is told and in greater depth, as respondents are encouraged to act spontaneously.

The less structured nature of focus groups presents, according to Morgan (1988:12) and Dillon et al. (1993:138), more detailed in-depth responses and information that will otherwise not have been obtained. As Morgan (1988:12) reasons, focus groups produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. Tull and Hawkins (1993:450) and Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1), in agreement, confirm that the group synergy encountered in the focus group offers more stimulation and fosters more creativity. As a result, the focus group provides greater range of thought, ideas and experiences. The advantages of focus groups are summarised by Kinnear and Taylor (1996:319) as follows:

- Synergism: The combined group effect of the focus group produces a wider range of information, insight and ideas.
- Snowballing: Individual comments trigger responses from other participants.
- Stimulation: Respondents want to express their ideas as the involvement level of the group increases.
- Security: Respondents generally realise that opinions are not greatly different and become more willing to express their own ideas.
- Spontaneity: Responses become more spontaneous and less conventional thus revealing a more accurate picture of respondents' true opinions.
- Serendipity: More often in focus groups than in depth interviews ideas will "drop out of the blue".
- Scientific scrutiny: Data can be recorded and played back for scrutiny.

#### **4.7.1 Types of Focus Groups and General Procedures**

Calder (1977:353-364) and Aaker et al. (1998:192-194) classify focus groups into three major categories namely, clinical, experiencing and exploratory groups.

- *Clinical focus groups* present qualitative research in its purest form. Research is undertaken as a scientific endeavour to uncover the true motivations and feelings that are subconscious in nature. A highly skilled moderator with expertise in psychology and sociology probes beneath the level of consciousness, employing clinical judgement, to entice participants into revealing their true motivations.
- *Experiencing focus groups* are frequently employed in marketing research to gain insight into how consumers for example, experience products in use. The researcher is thus enabled to experience the emotional framework in which a product is used. Consumer satisfactions, dissatisfactions, rewards and frustrations are consequently better understood.
- *Exploratory focus groups* as reinforced by Aaker et al. (1998:192), are typically used at the exploratory phase of the research process in order to assist generating hypotheses for testing or concepts for further research. In this context Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) assert that the topical objective of the focus group is to explore a new concept through free discussion. This quality is particularly conducive to exploratory research as unexpected and new opinions and attitudes can emerge and a depth of understanding is gained on the core research issues. The qualitative data produced by exploratory focus groups is then applied to enrich research propositions or hypotheses, and to present guidelines for identifying effective future research design options. Proctor (1997:158) concludes that exploratory focus groups present a unique value: “they can explore customary ways of doing things or customary beliefs, and possible reactions to something new. They can try to determine why such conditions exist and what can be done to change them”.

As previously stated by Sudman and Blair (1998:184) the typical focus group lasts 90 to a 120 minutes. This period of time is needed, according to Kinnear and Taylor (1996:311), to establish a rapport with respondents and to explore in depth their beliefs, attitudes and opinions.

According to Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) the focus group procedure is marked by three stages:

**Stage One:** The moderator establishes rapport with the group and clearly communicates the objectives of the discussion. Templeton, quoted in Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) points out that in conducting the focus group it is appropriate to initiate a predisposition discussion and introduce materials in the form of for example, a concept.

**Stage Two:** The moderator provokes intense discussion in areas relevant to the research objectives. Tull and Hawkins (1993:319) reason that respondents must feel stimulated to want to express their ideas and feelings.

**Stage Three:** The moderator summarises the group responses to determine the extent to which agreement exists and requests of respondents to complete a brief demographic questionnaire before leaving.

Potts (1990:12-13), Henderson (1992:20-23) and McDonald (1994:161-168) assert that the role of the moderator is of prime importance to the success of focus group procedures. The moderator must ensure that the stages of the focus group, as outlined above, are effectively managed, that the degree of probing and depth of insight are sufficient to achieve research objectives and that no bias is introduced into the findings. Henderson (1992: 20-23) specifically stresses that the moderator must have skill, experience and knowledge of the research topic and must also exhibit intuitive insights into the nature of group dynamics to create and maintain a high degree of interaction within the group.

Focus groups are most frequently captured on video and/or audiotape to be transcribed to a typed record. The aim is to draw important themes or ideas from the transcript and to write a narrative that reports these ideas as well as their implications. The emphasis is not on a quantitative report of how many respondents said something but rather on what was said. Verbatim comments must be used to illustrate themes and ideas. According to Sudman and Blair

(1998:195) a focus group report must “ read like a story rather than a series of tables”.

This study is based on a qualitative exploratory research design as previously motivated. The application of focus groups and in particular the exploratory focus group as a data collection instrument, is thus highly appropriate to the research focus of this study. The value of the semi-structured or focussed depth interview and the exploratory focus group will next be discussed in context of the nature and purpose of this study.

#### **4.8 The Depth Interview and Focus Group in Application**

The decision to apply both semi-structured depth interviews and exploratory focus groups is based on the nature of integrated brand contact planning and the role of the alternative brand contact within the planned brand contact strategy. As discussed in Chapter Three of this study, the process of integrated brand contact planning involves both the client Brand Contact Task Team and the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency. Both role players must be involved in the primary research study to gain an objective and balanced view on the identified research propositions and related research objectives. The application of exploratory focus groups will firstly be considered in terms of the research purpose and appropriate data collection, whereupon the role of semi-structured interviews will be reasoned. In completion a diagram that demonstrates the data collection phases and procedures to be implemented in this study, will be introduced.

##### **4.8.1 The Exploratory Focus Group in Application**

The account team functions as a strategic partner to the client. Firstly, to compliment and advise on the holistic integration of all points of brand contact and secondly, to excel in the development of effective, integrated and innovative planned brand contact solutions. The alternative brand contact

relies on the cross-functional integration of skills and expertise within the account team. The development of a point of contact that is both novel and appropriate to the brand contact strategy involves as Nickerson (1999:419) eludes, a confluence of resources. Creative strategic thinking is possible because the strategic goal to break through clutter to create impact and communicate a focussed brand identity, is in synergy with the creative motivation to produce concepts that are fresh and intrusive and in line with the media objective to deliver contact efficiency. The organic nature of the integrated account team, as justified by Robbins (1994:400) and Monge et al. (1992:250-274), is a catalyst for integrated strategic and creative brainstorming and thus for alternative brand contact planning.

Given the above assessment, a clear line of synergy emerges between the nature of alternative brand contact planning and that of the focus group as a data collection instrument. The focus group like the account team involves a group of fairly homogeneous individuals and relies on the premise that respondents stimulate one another in discussion to produce ideas and suggestions that exhibit synergy. The key motivator for using focus groups, as May (1993:95) and McDaniel and Gates (1996:178) point out, is to investigate a concept in context of group dynamics. The development of an alternative point of brand contact, in turn is reliant on the dynamics of the account team as a cross-functional unit.

The alternative brand contact is furthermore the product of creative strategic thinking, within the account team. The group synergy encountered in the focus group in comparison fosters as Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1) assert, more creativity and therefore provides for a greater range of thought, ideas and experiences. Proctor (1997:158) specifically addresses the unique value of the exploratory focus group in this regard. Customary ways or beliefs can be investigated and challenged to explore new possibilities. This quality in particular, presents the exploratory focus group as a relevant and appropriate method for exploring the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact, as perceived by account teams within Integrated Communication Agencies.

Aaker et al. (1998:192) furthermore reason that the exploratory focus group is typically applied in the exploratory phase of the research process to assist generating hypotheses or developing concepts for future testing. With reference to this study the focus groups with account teams will be employed to assist in enriching the central and integral research propositions. To attain this objective to the full and to ensure that **rich and revealing data is produced this study will focus on senior account teams, the teams with range and depth of insight and experience, in Integrated Communications Agencies.** Deacon et al. (1999:56) also state that focus groups are defined on either a pre-constituted (already existing) or researcher constituted (self-created) basis.

This study will involve pre-constituted exploratory focus groups in the form of existing senior account teams, to leverage the organic nature of both working models, in exploring the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact through free discussion. The data produced and key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups will then be employed, as proposed by Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137), to enrich the defined research propositions.

#### **4.8.2 The Semi-structured Depth Interview in Application**

The depth interview as Kahan (1990:8-9) asserts, is employed to ensure that the fundamental reasons underlying respondents attitudes are uncovered and that all respondents as McDaniel and Gates (1996:198) and Sudman and Blair (1998:196) confirm, express their personal opinions on the defined research propositions. For these reasons the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies will be followed with two layers of semi-structured depth interviews.

The focus group exploration with senior account teams will firstly be followed with semi-structured depth interviews involving clients of the interviewed senior account teams. Secondly, semi-structured depth interviews involving

the thought leaders, as described by Aaker et al. (1998), or in context of this study, the key players within the interviewed senior account teams, will follow. This approach to data collection aims to ensure that the central and integral research propositions and key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups are effectively and objectively researched. The application of semi-structured depth interviews with clients will firstly be addressed whereupon the interviews with key account team members will be motivated.

#### **a) The Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Clients**

Clients are increasingly demanding of their communications partners to produce unconventional and unexpected brand contact solutions. As Oosthuizen (1996:35), Duncan and Moriarty (1997:5), Herber (2000:7) and Duncan (2002:369) assert, clients are seeking brand contact solutions beyond the tried and trusted, mostly traditional brand communication methods. The need for alternative points of planned brand contact is enforced by clients as they expect of their communication partners to develop points of contact that will break through commercial clutter barriers to create impact and communicate or reinforce a focussed brand positioning. It is therefore vital that the marketers of brands are involved in the research study to explore and describe their opinions, attitudes and motivations with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. However, the primary research study will not involve the entire Brand Contact Task Team in this regard.

The Brand Contact Task Team fulfils an integral role in ensuring that all points of product, service, planned and unplanned brand contact communicate and reinforce a single-minded and integrated brand positioning. To achieve integration of brand communication messages throughout the organisation the Brand Contact Task Team comprises, as Duncan (2002:90) and other authors explain, of representatives from every major department and division. Although this study is contextualised in the practice of integrated brand contact management, it is not the primary focus of the study. The focus is on the planned brand contact environment and the nature and role of the

alternative point of brand contact therein. **For this reason the primary research study will involve the Marketing or Brand Manager responsible for briefing and managing the senior account team within the Integrated Communications Agency.** The aim is then to effectively explore and describe his/her perceptions of the nature and role of the alternative brand contact in breaking through commercial clutter to create impact and communicate or reinforce a single-minded brand positioning.

The core motivator for applying the semi-structured depth interview, as a one-on-one data collection method, to explore and describe the perceptions of the Marketing or Brand Manager is that, as Dillon et al. (1993:141) argue, their personal and potentially charged opinions can be uncovered. Considering that clients are putting greater pressure on their communications partners to deliver solutions beyond the expected, depth interviews are ideally suited to ensure that Marketing or Brand Managers divulge and share their thoughts, opinions and beliefs on their own terms. The semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers will also be focussed on the enriched research propositions, as developed in response to key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams. The Marketing or Brand Managers will therefore be responding to not only insight gained from a study of literature but also to the opinions, attitudes and motivations of real-life and experienced account teams.

#### **b) The Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Key Account Team Members**

In completion to the data collection procedures, the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and the individual depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers will be followed with a final set of semi-structured depth interviews. These interviews will involve as Aaker et al. (1998:189) propose, the 'thought leaders' within the interviewed senior account teams. The final set of semi-structured depth interviews will therefore focus on the Strategic Planner, Media Planner and

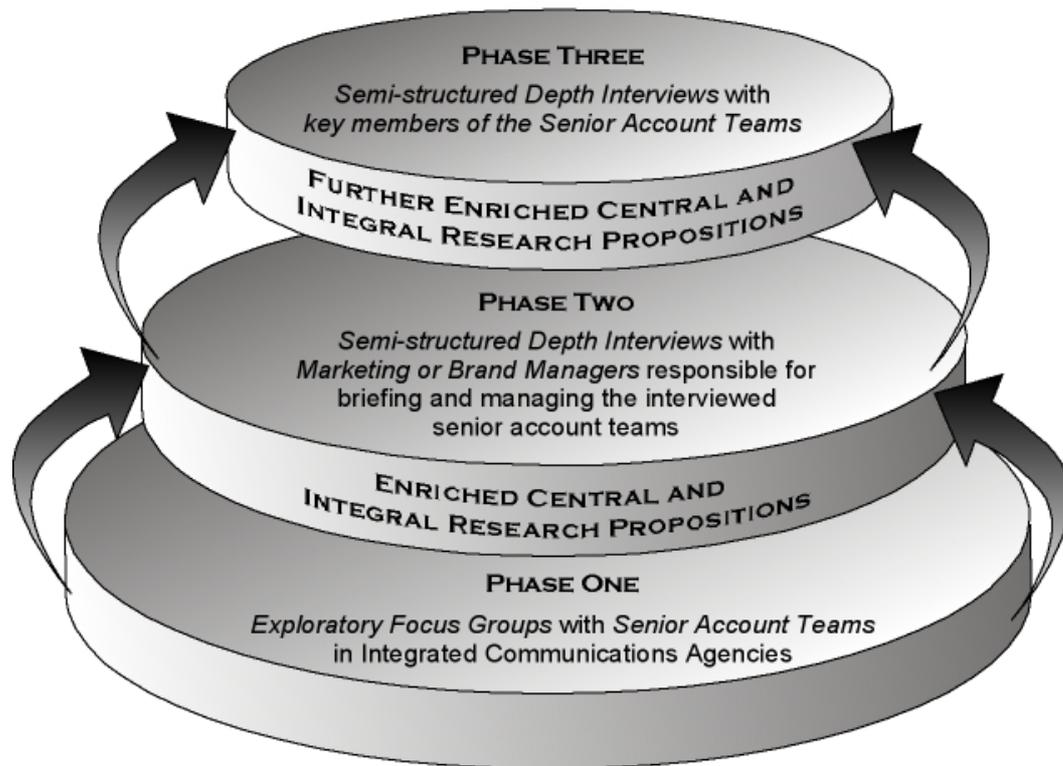
Creative Director within the senior account teams involved in this study. The roles of these account team members were identified and discussed in 3.5.1 of Chapter Three and as motivated, are interrelated and jointly critical to the planning of alternative points of brand contact.

The semi-structured depth interviews with the thought leaders in the interviewed senior account teams are undertaken in completion of data collection procedures, for four critical reasons:

- Firstly, the aim of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies is purely to explore the perceived nature and role of alternative points of brand contact through free discussion. So doing, new or fresh attitudes and opinions will be uncovered. The focus group insights will then be applied as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) propose, to enrich the defined central and integral research propositions. The aim of the semi-structured depth interviews with key account team members is to purposefully address and explore the enriched research propositions in order to gain depth of thought.
- Secondly, the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers are employed to uncover personal opinions and beliefs with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, as defined through the enriched central and integral research propositions. A balanced and objective assessment of the research propositions can only be obtained if the same measure is applied with key account team members.
- Thirdly, the alternative point of brand contact is ultimately the product of the outside-in, zero- based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset fostered within the account team. Rich and revealing data will be obtained as the semi-structured depth interviews with key account team members will not only focus on the enriched research propositions produced by the exploratory focus groups, but also on the key insights gained from the individual depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers.

- Fourthly and finally, as Dillan et al. (1993:141) and Tull and Hawkins (1993:443) assert, possible norms that may have existed within the focus groups with senior account teams and consequently may have masked shades of difference, will be uncovered through the depth interviews. As more time is devoted to individual respondents, personal thoughts and opinions can be articulated in greater depth and true motivations uncovered as respondents are probed at length.

The following diagram (Diagram 1: Research Method Process), has been designed to illustrate the phases of data collection to be implemented in this study. The diagram demonstrates that exploratory focus groups will firstly be conducted with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The key insights gained from the free flow in discussion on the perceived nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact will be employed to enrich the defined central and integral research propositions. The exploratory focus groups are then followed with semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the interviewed senior account teams and thereupon with key members of the senior account teams. The semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers will essentially focus on the enriched research propositions developed in response to the focus group findings. The semi-structured depth interviews with key account team members will also encompass key insights gained from the interviews conducted with the Marketing or Brand Managers.



**Diagram 1: Research Method Process**

A set of two interview guides will next be introduced with the aim to present a clear and focussed research design to the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key account team members.

#### **4.9 The Interview Guides**

Two individual interview guides will direct on the one hand, the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and on the other, the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key members of the senior account teams.

The research questions in the interview guides are purposefully designed in keeping with the nature of the semi-structured interviewing method and the free-flow purpose of the exploratory focus group. Consequently, open-ended questions, as opposed to closed questions, are introduced. The open question unlike the closed question does not provide response categories. According to Sudman and Blair (1998:268) a richness of data is thus obtained as respondents articulate their responses and as new ideas are presented and explored. Deacon et al. (1999:72) furthermore assert that when perceptions, attitudes and beliefs are being explored, as is the case in this research study, the interviewing technique must allow for a disparate range of issues pertaining to the research objectives, to emerge. An open question approach attains this aim and ensures true perceptions, opinions, attitudes and motivations are uncovered.

The respective interview guides are furthermore designed to initiate, as Lindlof (1999:65) reasons, conversations with purpose in the semi-structured depth interviews and a loosely structured and interactive free-flow in focus group discussions, as Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308), propose. The qualitative and exploratory nature of the data collection techniques applied in this study consequently also has a direct bearing on the ordering and presentation of questions. Deacon et al. (1999:72-74) accordingly suggest that single blunt questions must be avoided and that general, easy to address questions must be employed to create a relaxing and reassuring environment before challenging, detailed or complex reasoning commences.

The researcher/moderator can also ensure that clarification and amplification of responses are gained as the interview or discussion progresses, by applying follow-up guidance and encouragement, formally known as probing. Webb (1950:363) in support reasons that the more naturalistic the interview conversation the better. The more the focus group or depth interview resembles everyday talk, the more forthcoming the information. The interview guides developed for this study will thus reflect a natural conversational structure and an open questioning approach allowing for probing, to create an

interview approach that is ideally suited to the qualitative exploratory purpose and design of this research study.

The interview guides, their structure and content, will next be discussed in lieu of the research design and purpose of this study. The primary research purpose being, to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact, as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies (in the form of senior account teams) and their clients (as represented by the Marketing or Brand Managers). The interview guide to be applied in the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams will firstly be addressed. The interview guide to be employed in the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers, as well as key members of senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies, will be discussed thereafter.

#### **4.9.1 The Interview Guide to the Exploratory Focus Groups**

Aaker et al. (1998:191), Proctor (1997:155), Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) point out that the moderator purposefully plays a more passive role in a focus group. The aim is to ensure that respondents are given the freedom to explore, to interact with one another and to discover unexpected ideas, through the free-flow of group discussion. New opinions and attitudes produced in the focus group can then, as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-37) reinforce, be applied to enrich research propositions or to develop hypotheses. The purpose of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies is therefore to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact through free flow discussion and to produce fresh opinions, attitudes and motivations in doing so. To this end, a more loosely structured and interactive approach is employed in the design of the interview guide to the exploratory focus groups, as Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) propose.

The stages involved in the focus group, as defined by Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) and discussed in 4.7.1 of this Chapter, also played a guiding role in the design of the focus group interview guide. To establish a rapport with and between respondents and to ensure clarity of the purpose of the discussion, Templeton, quoted in Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) suggests that a concept supportive of the research topic is introduced. For these reasons the focus group discussions with senior account teams will launch with a brief description of the alternative point of brand contact, as derived from the secondary literature study. This description will not be presented as a fait accomplie, but rather as a first and critical point of discussion, to ensure further exploration of the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact.

The description of the alternative point of brand contact will be introduced by reaffirming the brand contact concept. Considering that senior account teams within Integrated Communications Agencies are involved in this research study, this strategic approach should be a commonly held strategic orientation. The alternative brand contact will then be described applying a conversational style, to create a comfortable discussion platform. The description of the alternative point of brand contact will however not allude to any of the defined research propositions to be explored in the primary research study. Research objectivity will therefore not be compromised with and through this introductory step to the focus groups. The description of the alternative point of brand contact to be presented to senior account teams, is as follows:

***Brands communicate through a myriad of contacts with consumers. This discussion will focus on one of the areas of contact, namely planned marketing communications point of contact.***

***The alternative brand contact is planned and implemented in context of the brand communications or marketing communications strategy. An alternative brand contact is presented as a point of contact, in and/or***

***beyond traditional media that will be experienced by the consumer as unexpected and unconventional.***

As reasoned, the above description of the alternative brand contact is introduced as a starting point to the focus groups, to establish a rapport with respondents, to ensure clarity in the aim and direction of the discussion and to initiate and stimulate a free-flow and interactive discussion. The description will be presented verbally and in a typed format to respondents and will furthermore be supported with examples of alternative points of brand contact drawn from Chapter Three of this study (Refer to Appendix B for the examples presented to respondents). The free-flow focus group discussion will then be supported and directed with the following single open-ended question:

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

This open-ended question addresses the central research proposition and the primary objective of the research study in broad terms. The central research proposition as stated in 4.2 of this Chapter, suggests that the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded brand positioning.

Tull and Hawkins (1993:319) elaborate that the focus group moderator must however provoke intense discussion in areas relevant to the research objective/s. The responses that are delivered in the free-flow discussion that are relevant to the stated central and also the integral research propositions, will therefore be probed. The interview guide to the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams will consequently contain the central and integral research proposition statements as presented in 4.2 and 4.2.1 of this Chapter. The interview guide will then serve as a trigger for the moderator to apply probing in areas relevant to the objectives of the research study.

Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) furthermore and importantly, reinforce that the value of the focus group and the free-flow of group discussion, essentially lie in the potential to discover the unexpected. To leverage the full potential of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams, the interview guide will also prompt the moderator to recognise and probe responses that present newly identified dimensions of the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact. As Tull and Hawkins (1993:450) and Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1) confirm, focus groups are ultimately employed to produce greater range of thought, ideas and experiences.

Finally, Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) propose that the moderator, conclude focus group sessions with a summary of group responses, to determine the extent to which agreement exists within the group. The interview guide is therefore concluded with a final prompt to the moderator in this regard. A copy of the interview guide to the exploratory focus groups is attached as Appendix C.

#### **4.9.2 The Interview Guide to the Semi-structured Depth Interviews**

To fully and objectively research the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, the opinions and attitudes of both clients and key members of senior account teams toward the defined central and integral research propositions, must be explored. A single interview guide is designed, as a current working format, to guide the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and key members (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors), of the senior account teams.

The interview guide with open-ended questions, as will next be presented, delivers a working format because it will be revisited, as motivated in 4.8 of this chapter, at later points in this study. This measure will firstly be employed to accommodate the enriched research propositions developed in response to

key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The interview guide will therefore firstly be revisited when focus group data analysis has been conducted, valuable results have been presented and the central and integral research propositions have been enriched. The revisited interview guide will then specifically be applied in the semi-structured depth interviews with the Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the senior account teams involved in the focus groups.

As further explained in the design of the data collection model, in 4.8 of this chapter, the semi-structured depth interviews with key account team members will be conducted in completion to data collection procedures. The depth interviews with senior account team members will therefore also purposefully encompass key insights gained from the semi-structured depth interviews conducted with Marketing or Brand Managers. The interview guide will therefore be revisited once more in preparation of the semi-structured depth interviews with senior account team members, as valuable insights from the depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers is integrated into its design.

Aaker et al. (1998:189) and Dane (1990:129) are of the opinion that the semi-structured depth interview is particularly appropriate when interviewing professional 'thought leaders' and argue that a quid pro quo such as a summary can be employed to gain co-operation, direct and manage the interview. The semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key members of the senior account teams will therefore also launch with the literature description and examples of the alternative point of brand contact, as presented in 4.9.1 of this Chapter. Although key members of the senior account teams will have been exposed to this description in the exploratory focus groups, it will be restated and discussed briefly to refresh and confirm the purpose of the individual depth interview.

The process of exploring the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact, as initiated by the description and examples

of the alternative point of brand contact, is then supported with an Interview Guide that consists of a series of open-ended questions. As a semi-structured interview technique is employed, questions may be rephrased to ensure understanding. Probing is also encouraged where and when elaboration on or amplification of responses is required.

The following open-ended questions have been developed, to support and follow the introductory description and discussion of the alternative point of brand contact. The open-ended questions essentially address the central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting research objectives as presented and discussed in 4.2.1 and 4.3, of this Chapter.

### **Question One**

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

This question addresses the primary reason why the research discussion is taking place. The question embraces a key construct in the title and central research proposition of this study, namely the perceived role of the alternative point of brand contact. Given the natural flow of conversation, the question will most probably verbalise what respondents are already instinctively contemplating. It therefore also ensures that exploration deepens whilst the discussion comfort zone is being established.

Immediate responses to this open question will in all probability be positive (yes, the alternative point of brand contact has a role to play). Two probing questions will therefore be applied. The first being, ***what is its role?*** and the second being, ***why is (this) important ?*** These prompts are vital for two reasons. Firstly, because the alternative brand contact is either going to be perceived as a potential means to break through commercial clutter to create impact, to be noticed, to achieve awareness and build brand knowledge, or not. Secondly, responses will confirm or elaborate on the two interrelated

motivating factors for alternative contact planning namely, clients' need for innovative brand contact solutions that will create impact in an increasingly competitive, fragmented and cluttered environment in which consumers are erecting more intensive selective awareness and attention barriers.

Respondents may furthermore introduce other motivating factors for pursuing alternative brand contact planning that have not been identified through the literature study.

## 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?**

This open-ended question addresses the first supporting research objective identified in 4.3 of this Chapter. The dual aim of the open question is to explore to what extent mindset is perceived to be a critical variable and to investigate the perceived type of mindset that is required in the planning of alternative points of brand contact. Responses to this question will, if necessary, be probed with the question – ***What type of mindset is needed to undertake alternative brand contact planning?***

The open-ended question and prompt are purposefully vague to assess objectively the degree to which outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic thinking naturally emerge as key requisites to alternative brand contact planning. The researcher does not expect these concepts to surface as defined, but rather that the notion and intent of the concepts will emerge in respondents' own language and terms. The researcher also estimates that respondents will confirm and/or elaborate on the identified barriers to alternative brand contact planning, as a means to introduce and motivate their opinions on the mindset required in the planning of alternative points of brand contact.

Should the discussion, centred around Question Two, fail to fully engage any one of the concepts (outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral or creative strategic thinking) identified as key requisites in the mindset toward alternative brand contact planning, a relevant open-ended question will be tailed on. The following open-ended questions will therefore be employed as deemed necessary:

- ***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?***

The need for an outside-in approach to alternative brand contact planning will thus be established. The literature study reveals that it is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative appeal of the brand contact. A point of contact that is not experienced as unconventional and unexpected by the consumer can not be defined as alternative.

- ***Some argue that a zero-based, function-neutral or clean-slate strategic mindset is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. What is your opinion on this?***

The extent to which a zero-based strategic mindset and approach is required in the planning of alternative points of brand contact will thus be revealed. The literature study indicates that alternative brand contact planning relies on a function neutral or clean-slate frame of mind, based on current brand and marketplace conditions. The planning of alternative points of brand contact must be based on the consumer's experience of the brand contact environment. Traditional, historical or preconceived brand contact ideas will in all probability present a barrier to the process of alternative brand contact planning.

**• *An argument exists that media-neutral thinking is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. What is your opinion?***

Although closely related to the previous question, this open-ended question will specifically reveal respondents' opinions and attitudes on whether media-biased strategic planning constrains alternative brand contact planning. The constraint of a media-commission bound remuneration approach, is most likely to surface in responses to this question. Likewise the perceived need for a fee and/or performance-based planning and remuneration environment, to effectively plan and implement alternative points of brand contact, is likely to emerge.

**• *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?***

Respondents' understanding of the concept of and perceived need for creative strategic thinking in the development of unconventional and unexpected points of brand contact will be revealed. Requisites and barriers to applying creative strategic thinking, for example, the need for a cross-functional account team environment and the constraints created by measurement or media-bound planning systems and decision-making, may also emerge in responses to this question.

### **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?**

This open-ended question addresses respondents' perceptions of the concept of impact in totality and explores their opinions and attitudes toward the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact therein. Question Three in

the Interview Guide thus embraces the following critical alternative brand contact requisites or integral research propositions as identified and discussed in 4.2.1 and 4.3 of this Chapter:

- 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).

Although the above stated open-ended question draws on the assumption that previous questions, in particular Question One, will have established a link between the unconventional and unexpected point of contact and its role in breaking through clutter to create impact, it does not depend on it. Should respondents disagree with the approach, the question presents sufficient leeway to argue the alternative point of brand contact's inability to create meaningful impact.

The open-ended question is purposefully designed to explore the nature and role of the alternative point of contact in its entirety, in context of impact as a holistic concept. The nature and discussion flow of the semi-structured depth interviews will be inhibited, become too fragmented and too researcher lead (even biased), should each of the above alternative brand contact requisites or integral research propositions be addressed individually or separately in relation to the concept of impact. The depth interviews may furthermore then also fail at introducing and pursuing new ideas or concepts, which is a primary motivating factor for employing a qualitative exploratory research design in this study.

This open-ended question broadly addresses the alternative point of brand contact, in relation to impact, to create the opportunity for the above mentioned alternative brand contact requisites and further real world measures that have not been identified in secondary literature sources to surface, to be explored and defined. However, should any one of the stated requisites not emerge in discussion, the following prompts will be applied as deemed necessary and appropriate:

- ***Is there any particular quality that the alternative point of brand contact must exhibit to break through clutter, to create impact, to be noticed?***

Responses to this question will establish whether the alternative brand contact must firstly be perceived as novel and original, as unconventional and unexpected, to succeed in breaking through commercial clutter barriers, to be noticed and gain consumers' attention.

- ***Some argue that the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning to attain impact. What is your opinion?***

Respondents' will in all probability be in agreement, as the impact of brand communications is generally perceived to depend on the ability to communicate effectively, to create brand awareness and build brand knowledge. The intent of this open question is thus rather to probe respondents opinions on the issue and specifically in relation to the alternative point of brand contact. Firstly, to establish ***what meaning or understanding the alternative point of contact must ultimately convey?*** Responses will reveal whether the meaning that is conveyed by the alternative brand contact, must ultimately instil and contribute to the building of a relevant, distinctive and single-minded brand identity. Greater clarity as to the role of the alternative point of brand contact in the integrated brand contact strategy will thus be obtained. Secondly, respondents will be probed to ascertain ***how the alternative brand contact should express (this) meaning to create impact.*** The

literature study establishes that the meaning created through both the form of alternative contact and the message that is conveyed, must reflect a relevant, distinctive and single-minded understanding of the brand's positioning in order to create meaningful impact. Responses will therefore indicate whether both the message content and form of the alternative brand contact is important in expressing brand meaning and whether other real world variables need to also be explored in this regard.

- ***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 open-ended question raises the possible influence of consumer or target audience relevance on the impact of the alternative point of brand contact. The question purposefully does not point at the influence of any variables (lifestyle patterns and interests and state-of-mind or aperture) in particular. It therefore stimulates respondents to explore the issue at hand and to consider target audience variables that they deem to have an influence on the impact of the alternative brand contact. The variables that have been identified as important constructs in achieving target audience relevance and ultimately alternative brand contact impact will thus have an opportunity to emerge naturally. So doing, possible new concepts that have not been identified and explored in the literature study may also arise in discussion.

#### **Question Four**

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

The final question in the interview guide addresses the alternative point of brand contact's ability to maintain its unconventional and unexpected appeal. Responses to this question will reveal whether there is a perceived concern with the maintenance of the alternative point of brand contact, whether respondents agree that the impact value of the alternative brand contact will diminish as it grows stale, as it is no longer perceived as unconventional and unexpected. To explore this issue and to acquire insightful data, respondents will be probed with the following open-ended question: ***how does one ensure that an alternative point of brand contact maintains an unexpected and unconventional appeal?*** Respondents may in discussion confirm that novel alternative points of brand contact will have to be developed continuously or that sustainable alternative brand contacts that can be improved upon be employed. The discussion may also produce new thoughts and ideas as to how impact through the unconventional and unexpected appeal of the alternative brand contact can be assured over time.

The proposed interview guide (working format) to the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key members of senior account teams, consists of four key open-ended questions with ranges of identified prompts, that will be applied as required. The design of the interview guide presents a semi-structured interview approach, conducive to the qualitative exploratory research orientation of this study. The aim is to produce conversations with purpose, as Lindlof quoted in Deacon et al. (1999:65) suggests. The challenge is to address the defined central and integral research propositions whilst stimulating freedom of thought, to produce a richness of data on the research issues at hand but also to uncover and explore real world concepts that have not emerged in the literature study.

In completion to this chapter and with a view to conducting the exploratory focus groups and semi-structured depth interviews, the sampling procedures to be employed in this research study, will be introduced, discussed and motivated.

#### 4.10 The Sampling Procedure

Cooper and Schindler (1998:215) explain that the basic premise of sampling is that by selecting some of the elements in a population (universe), conclusions can be drawn about the population at large. In context of research and sampling procedures, a population element refers to the subject on which measurement is taken whereas the concept population refers to the total collection of elements about which inferences are to be drawn.

Lohr (1999:3) furthermore reasons that a perfect sample will be a scaled-down version of the population and will thus mirror every characteristic of the whole population. Although a perfect sample seldom exists for complex populations, the quality of a sample design is none the less based on how effectively it represents the characteristics of the population it purports to represent. Dillon et al. (1993:214) thus argue that a sampling procedure must enable the researcher to make informed decisions in the absence of perfect knowledge. The data gathered from a sample must ultimately reflect the population that is of interest to the researcher, as accurately as possible. A valid sample is therefore regarded as one that produces the characteristics of interest in the population as closely as possible.

According to McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:219) a set of key decisions must be made in order to secure a valid sample. These decisions essentially pertain to the relevance of the population and the parameters of interest, the sample type and the sample size. Malhotra (1996:360) and Proctor (1997:71) elaborate that sampling thus consists of a series of key steps, namely:

- The development of a definition of the target population.
- The development of a sampling frame.
- The selection of a sample design.
- Determination of the sample size and
- Selection of appropriate sample members.

The decision areas and key steps will next be discussed and applied in context of this study.

#### **4.10.1 The Population of Interest**

McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) point out that there are no specific rules to follow in defining the population of interest. The researcher is required rather, to apply sound logic and judgement. The basic premise is to specify the characteristics of the population elements from which information must be obtained, to meet the research objective/s.

McDaniel and Gates (1996:449), Cooper and Schindler (1998:220) and Sudman and Blair (1998:334) consequently suggest that clear population parameters must be introduced to assist the researcher in defining the population of interest, as directed by the research objectives. Population parameters essentially are summary descriptors of variables of interest in the population. Important or particular sub-groups of interest to the researcher may for example exist within the population. Population units and boundaries are thus defined in relation to the focus of the study and the area or phenomena of interest. Cooper and Schindler (1998:215) and Malhotra (1996:360) conclude that once the population of interest has been defined, it is referred to as a target population. The target population then exists as Malhotra (1996:361) explains, of elements or sampling units, that possess the information that is sought to meet research objectives.

Research parameters, in the form of barriers to alternative brand contact planning, were introduced, discussed and applied in the process of setting clear research objectives to this study (4.3). Consequently, the population of interest to this study was also revealed. Aaker et al. (1998:375) in confirmation state that if the research objectives of a study are well thought out, the target population definition will be clear. The primary objective of this study is 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 population and two target sub groups of interest to this study are thus Integrated Communication Agencies in South Africa and their clients. Furthermore, and as is evident in the research focus, design and application of data collection methods to this study (4.8), specific variables introduce more finite profiles of the target sub groups of interest. Firstly, the alternative brand contact is the product of creative strategic thinking fostered within the integrated account team. To ensure that rich and revealing data is produced in the focus groups, senior account teams with range and depth of insight and experience will be interviewed. Secondly, the primary focus of this study is not the process of integrated brand contact planning but rather the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact therein. The semi-structured depth interviews will therefore involve the Marketing or Brand Manager responsible for briefing and managing the senior account team and not the Brand Contact Task Team as a whole.

The nature, role and context of the alternative brand contact must be reflected in both the data collection and sample design of the primary research study. The population or universe of marketing and communication professionals, is consequently narrowed down by reasoned research parameters to the following two defined target population groups of interest to this study:

- Senior account teams within Integrated Communications Agencies and
- Marketing/Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies.

#### **4.10.2 Sample Frame, Size and Method**

Sample frame, size and method presented a particular challenge to this study. The researcher established that this is greatly because the primary objective of the study is to explore the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact as perceived by a South African target population of *Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients*. The challenge manifested as follows and will be addressed in context of the frame, size and method of sampling to this study.

##### **a) Sample Frame**

The data collection design of this study indicates that firstly, exploratory focus groups will be conducted with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The exploratory focus groups will be followed with semi-structured depth interviews with the Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the interviewed senior account teams and then also with key members of the senior account teams.

Given the data collection process to this study, it is evident that a frame is needed from which a sample of Integrated Communications Agencies can be drawn to conduct focus groups with their senior account teams. The sample frame of Marketing or Brand Managers on the other hand will naturally evolve as represented by the clients of the sampled senior account teams. The sample of key members of the senior account teams will in turn emerge as they are identified in the focus group sessions.

Malhotra (1996:361) and McDaniel and Gates (1996:452) explain that a sampling frame is a list of the population elements from which a sample is selected. A sampling frame is thus a list or system that identifies eligible sampling elements or units. Sudman and Blair (1998:338) are of the opinion that lists are generally the preferred sampling frame employed and that the quality of lists that already exist, although subject to error, are normally as

good or better than lists developed from a zero base for the purposes of research. The use of an existing list is also more time and cost efficient than generating a new list.

Sudman and Blair (1998:340) and Aaker et al. (1998:377- 378) however elaborate that lists do often pose research problems. Firstly, omission can occur as some population members are omitted from a list. Secondly, listed elements may not be members of the target population and are thus ineligible for inclusion in a sample. Thirdly, population members may be duplicated on a list and fourthly, clustering may exist as two or more population members correspond to a list. Fifthly, lists may simply not be current.

A close investigation of current available lists of the members of the Advertising and Communications Industry in South Africa revealed that the second problem namely, ineligibility does in fact pose a framing problem to this research study. This study requires that the sample frame and sampling process be based on a complete and correct target population frame of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa. Koekemoer and de Klerk from the Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA) and Brewer from the Brewers List are fully acquainted with databases of the communications and advertising industries in South Africa and were interviewed in 2002, in this regard. The individuals established that no such frame exists. The agencies that have positioned themselves as Integrated Communications Agencies exist in and amongst the current frames or databases of 680+ Advertising or Communication Agencies in South Africa. However, according to Koekemoer, the most representative, frequently updated and thus complete sampling list or frame of the South African Advertising and Communications Industry, is the Brewers List. Established in 1989, Brewers maintains three major databases of the South African communications industry. The three databases present a media directory, information on advertising agencies and information on companies active in the South African market place.

Sudman and Blair (1998:343) reason that the problem of ineligibility in lists is straightforward. Ineligible elements should not be selected. They are not in the target population and should therefore not be in the sample. With reference to this study, the traditional advertising agencies are not in the target population of the study and should not be selected. The challenge is thus to address the eligibility or ineligibility of sampling units in a recommended frame such as the Brewers List.

Sudman and Blair (1998:343) reason that the problem of ineligibility is dealt with in one of two ways. Firstly, the entire list can be screened to delete all ineligibles. Such a step is however not always practical as the ineligible factor may not be visible in the list. This is certainly the case with existing lists of Advertising or Communication Agencies in South Africa. As Koekemoer and Brewer confirm, the information contained in these lists are of a demographic and geographic nature and does not enable one to differentiate between those agencies that are positioned as Integrated Communication Agencies and those that are not.

The second approach to dealing with the problem of ineligibility is more practical and entails that selected elements from an appropriate frame are screened for eligibility after sampling, at which point the ineligibles are dropped from the frame. Sudman and Blair (1998:343) reason that the implication then is that the desired sample size must be adjusted to allow for shrinkage. The adjustment of sample size as described by Sudman and Blair (1998:343-344) is managed as follows: The desired sample size is determined ( $n$ ) and the percentage of eligible elements' ( $e$ ) is estimated. On the principle of  $n/e$  an adjusted sample size is then calculated and delivered. Sudman and Blair (1998:344) further explain that the percentage of eligible elements is obtained from prior experience or by studying a small sample size. No insight could however be gained from literature research with regard the percentage of Integrated Communications Agencies (eligible elements), in South Africa. Consequently, prominent and independent industry experts who track and report on issues and trends in the South African advertising industry were consulted in 2002, in this regard. Based on the Delphi Forecasting

Method, as described by Aaker et al. (1998:745) and Sudman and Blair (1998:78), the industry experts were firstly approached to deliver an independent judgement on the percentage of Integrated Communication Agencies in South Africa.

The experts who were consulted are:

Tony Koenderman – Editor of the Tony Koenderman AdReview and Associate Editor of Finance Week,

Wilma de Bruyn – Freelance writer for Sake Beeld (the business section to the Afrikaans newspaper Beeld),

John Farquhar – Editor-in-Chief of Advantage (a leading industry publication),

Chris Moerdyk – Media and marketing commentator and founder of Marketing Web,

Gordon Cook – Managing Director of Vega. The Brand Communications School and

Nina de Klerk – Executive Director of the ACA (Association for Communication and Advertising).

The immediate responses of the experts were unsettling and consequently greatly influenced the sampling orientation of this study. Immediate doubt and scepticism was expressed as to the objectivity of screening advertising agencies for integration or placing an estimated percentage on the agencies in South Africa that may be functioning as Integrated Communication Agencies. Koenderman, for example, argued that given the international norm of above- versus below-the-line expenditure (45:55), it is evident that South African advertising agencies are still oriented toward classical above-the-line advertising expenditure. Few agencies in Koenderman's opinion demonstrate a balanced and therefore a well integrated communications expenditure profile. Koenderman based his assessment on the Financial Mail Adfocus 2002 survey of major league agency rankings by income from fees, commission and mark-ups (Appendix D).

The primary and collective concern however was, that given the growing demand for integrated brand communications planning and delivery, all advertising agencies will inadvertently profess themselves to be operating as Integrated Communications Agencies. Koenderman, Moerdyk, Cook and de Bruyn for example, stated in unison that a screening exercise would deliver superficial results, as every agency would claim to be integrated. Farquhar confirmed this by stating that “agencies pay lip service to integration”. These observations resulted in a critical assessment of the research objectivity in approaching agencies for screening purposes. Drawing a sample of agencies, as Sudman and Blair (1998:334) propose, to determine eligibility will in all probability, based on expert opinion, result in an inaccurate and unreliable frame.

Of significance is that the experts did identify agencies whom they personally believe to be delivering or working towards delivering integrated brand communication solutions. Furthermore, in the independent and unbiased conversations with the industry experts, clear overlap in the identification of some Integrated Communication Agencies occurred.

As a result, sample framing, size and method possibilities to this study were scrutinised. The primary research study is a qualitative, exploratory study. As previously discussed and motivated (4.4.1), in exploratory research information is acquired from insightful sources with experience in the field of the study rather than from a cross-section of the population. McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) also observe that smaller samples are consequently generated more informally and organically, as opposed to the larger sample sizes that are generated, based on statistical precision, in quantitative research. It is the value of information that is obtained from a carefully chosen sample, as Dillon et al. (1993:42-43) conclude, that is of importance in qualitative and then also, exploratory research.

The nature and purpose of qualitative exploratory research and the insightful opinions of the independent industry experts with regard the integrated status of advertising agencies in South Africa, directed research decision-making in

developing an appropriate sampling design. To ensure clarity in research purpose and direction, sample size will however firstly be addressed, whereupon a sampling method will be introduced in response to insights gained from the industry experts.

## **b) Sample Size**

The sample design to be implemented in this study must reflect the nature and purpose of the primary research study. Exploratory focus groups will be employed to gain insight into the attitudes, opinions and motivations of senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. Semi-structured depth interviews are to be conducted with clients (Marketing/Brand Managers) of the senior account teams and also with the identified thought leaders (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors) within the senior account teams. The number of focus groups and depth interviews needed to deliver accurate and reliable research results is an important point of decision making and will influence the selection of appropriate sampling methods. For this reason sample size will next be discussed and decided, whereupon an appropriate sampling method will be presented and implemented to draw a research sample of Integrated Communications Agencies.

Sudman and Blair (1998:333) reason that the validity of a sample depends on two core constructs. Firstly, a sample must be accurate, or in other words, unbiased. No known or unknown influence must be allowed to create a variation in measure to cause scores to lean in one direction as opposed to another. Secondly, a valid sample must exhibit precision of estimate. Sampling error must therefore be minimised by limiting the possibility that the sample may not reflect the populations' true characteristics. Sampling error is generally controlled by sample size. The reasoning being, that the greater the size of the sample, the less the chance of producing results uncharacteristic of the population as a whole.

Sudman and Blair (1998:333) and Deacon et al. (1999:42-43) however elaborate that the focus on sample size is often misplaced and particularly so when conducting qualitative research. In a qualitative research study it is vital that the right information be gathered from the right people. Sampling bias is consequently viewed as an important factor and is dealt with by clearly defining and framing the population, selecting an appropriate sample design and drawing a valid sample group.

In qualitative research it is far more important that a sample is selected that represents the entire population of interest fairly. Qualitative studies are less concerned with generating an extensive perspective and more so focussed on providing intensive insights into more complex phenomenon. Smaller samples are consequently generated more informally and organically in comparison to the larger sample sizes based on statistical precision, employed in quantitative research. McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) conclude that the premise is that a relatively small but carefully chosen sample can quite accurately reflect the characteristics of the population.

Dillon et al. (1993:231) and Deacon et al. (1999:42-43) thus conclude that where qualitative problem-solving research is undertaken the value of information to be obtained becomes more critical. According to the authors quality of information can not effectively be managed by employing statistical precision. A 'value of information' approach is thus pursued to ensure that an accurate, unbiased sample is delivered. This approach will be investigated and applied because it is decision focussed and particularly relevant to the nature of this study.

The value of information approach is based on the principle that each new unit of information, each depth interview or focus group, provides some marginal improvement (value) in the knowledge about or insight into the topic of study. The marginal value subsequently decreases from unit to unit, because the more is known, the less value is gained from additional units of information. The purpose is not to build up large numbers of similar cases to make broader inferences, but rather to stop gathering information when data

collection fails to reveal new insights. Information gathering is brought to a halt as evidence starts to repeat itself and as a saturation point is reached. In qualitative research samples are deemed to be illustrative of thinking within the target population, rather than strictly and generally representative.

Within context of the value of information approach Dillon et al. (1993:231) propose that non-statistical approaches be considered to set appropriate sample sizes. Sample sizes can accordingly be set to reflect past and current typical practices and/or by asking experts to suggest sample sizes. Setting sample sizes according to past and present practices would involve an investigation of industry norms to then follow suit. Industry experts can furthermore be consulted in which case the research project is described, the expert considers several possible approaches and recommends a sample size.

Deacon et al. (1999:56) furthermore suggest that the size of samples be directed by the ultimate purpose of the research study. Corner (1996:299), in agreement, reasons that larger numbers of focus groups and or depth interviews must be conducted if the research purpose is to explore and describe a broad range of variables. If the purpose, on the other hand, is to engage with a particular issue, with a particular social or professional sample group, less are required.

The value of information approach to sample size determination will be pursued in this study. The purpose of this study is to engage with a particular issue, namely the alternative point of brand contact, with a particular professional sample group, namely senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients (Marketing and/or Brand Managers). As argued by Corner (1996:299) a smaller sample group is thus required to produce viable research results. Furthermore, to ensure a valid sample size is set, as proposed by Dillon et al. (1993:231), the nature and purpose of this study was described in 2002, to three leading industry professionals active in the field of marketing and advertising research in South Africa. Given current industry norms and the research purpose of this study,

Eric du Plessis - MD of Millward Brown Impact, Heather Kennedy - Manager of the South African Marketing Research Association and Lee Kotze – a specialist in qualitative research and MD of Solution Workshop, proposed that four to six focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies be conducted. In keeping with the value of information approach, the industry specialists elaborated that if by the fourth focus group data collection fails to reveal new insights the data gathering process should be brought to a halt.

As previously established, the frame of Marketing or Brand Managers and the sample of thought leaders within the senior account teams, with whom semi-structured depth interviews are to be conducted, will naturally evolve from the sample of senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. Consequently, the following sample sizes were set, in accordance with an assumed number of six focus groups, and presented to the industry professionals for comment and approval:

- Ten semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the senior account teams.
- Fifteen semi-structured depth interviews with key members or thought leaders (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors), within the interviewed senior account teams.

The proposed sample sizes were approved by the industry professionals and commented on by Kotze, as “more than sufficient”. The proposed and approved sample sizes to the exploratory focus groups and the semi-structured depth interviews enabled the researcher to revisit the question of sample frame and to consider an appropriate sampling method. As previously reasoned, the opinions of independent industry experts challenged the objectivity of screening advertising agencies to determine their status as Integrated Communications Agencies. Also, the industry experts independently identified agencies that in their experience and opinion do

present or are working towards delivering integrated brand communications solutions. This insight coupled with the knowledge that a base of six exploratory focus groups need to be conducted to deliver reliable research data, enabled the researcher to evaluate and select a meaningful and appropriate sampling method, as will next be elaborated on.

### **c) The Sample Method**

Two general sampling methods or designs are encountered in drawing a research sample namely, probability and non-probability samples. The decision as to which method to follow is, according to Proctor (1997:76), guided by the acceptability and likelihood of a method to deliver accurate data.

Probability or random samples rely on chance and employ a random process to select population elements for a sample. Every population element has a known, non-zero chance (probability) of selection. As McDaniel and Gates (1996:455) explain, in probability sampling precise selection procedures are followed to ensure that the law of probability is in effect. The aim is as Dillon et al. (1993:221) reason, to deliver projectable data that can be extrapolated to the entire population. In non-probability sampling, on the other hand, elements are not rigorously chosen but rather selected in a purposeful way, primarily by judgement, quota or convenience. Although estimates are then not statistically projectable to the entire population, as Dillon et al. (1993:229) point out, representative data can be produced, depending on the approach and controls used in sample selection.

As previously motivated, qualitative exploratory research involves smaller sample sizes that are as McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) reason, generated more informally and organically. The premise is that a relatively small but carefully chosen sample will deliver information of value and can quite accurately reflect the characteristics of the target population. According to Sudman and Blair (1998:350) probability sampling cannot be relied upon for a

representative sample that is small in size. The statistical law of large numbers suggests that a sample of twenty or more allows reasonable confidence that a probability sample is representative of the target population.

This research study will launch with a sample of six Integrated Communications Agencies. The samples of Marketing and Brand Managers and key account team members will organically grow from the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. It is evident that a non-probability sampling method is appropriate to the nature and purpose of this study.

This study is furthermore challenged by the critical questioning of industry experts who believe that the screening of advertising agencies, to determine their status as Integrated Communication Agencies, will not deliver objective results. Cooper and Schindler (1998:244) specifically reason that non-probability samples are often encountered in exploratory research and particularly when the research objective is to contact certain population elements that are atypical. This is the case in this study and for this reason a non-probability sampling method will be employed to deliver a sample of Integrated Communications Agencies and to overcome the challenge introduced in the framing of the target population. The scope of non-probability sampling methods will next be identified and discussed whereupon an appropriate sampling method to this study will be selected, motivated and applied.

According to Green, Tull and Albaum (1988:327), Dillon et al. (1993:229), Sudman and Blair (1998:348) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:245) non-probability samples essentially entail judgement, convenience, quota and snowball sampling.

- In *judgment sampling* the researcher controls sampling down to the element level and actively employs as Sudman and Blair (1996:469) point out, sound judgmental selection criterion and expertise regarding the representativeness of the elements. Purposeful nonrandomness is applied as certain sub-

segments of the population are systematically excluded or over represented. Green et al. (1988:327) and Sudman and Blair (1998:348) reason that the key assumption is that with expert judgment and an appropriate strategy, elements can be chosen and a sample developed that is suitable to the research objectives. According to Cooper and Schindler (1998:245) judgment sampling is particularly appropriate in the early stages of exploratory research.

- *Convenience sampling* involves no sample design. The most accessible or easily available population members, that are reasonable representative, are involved as a sample in the study. Volunteer sampling is often employed in this context. Sudman and Blair (1998:349) reason that the logic behind a convenience sample is that it is good enough for research purposes.

- *Quota sampling* is, according to Cooper and Schindler (1998:245), also purposive and is specifically used to improve representativeness. Quota sampling involves the meeting of quotas for the number of observations to be gathered in identified population groups. This entails that the relevant strata to the study are specified, their sizes are estimated and observations are gathered to meet the quotas in proportion of the identified strata. Quota samples are commonly selected in such a way that demographic characteristics of interest are represented in the sample in the same proportions as they are encountered in the population.

- *Snowball samples* (also known as multiplicity sampling), involve the selection of additional respondents on the grounds of referrals from original respondents whom may or may not be selected through probability methods. Green et al. (1988:329) explain that as referrals are then obtained from referrals, snowballing occurs. This method is applied in the case of low incidence or rare populations where elements are difficult to source and to contact.

The non-probability sampling method that is ideally suited to the nature, purpose and constraints of this study is purposive judgment sampling. The aim is to purposefully exclude the traditional advertising agency and to over represent the Integrated Communications Agency. The method is also appropriate to the early stages of exploratory research, as is the case with the primary research study. Of greater significance is that the independent industry experts whom were consulted in this study are sceptical as to the objectivity of screening and framing a target population of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa. The experts did however deliver judgment as to the agencies that do or are in their experience and opinion, working towards delivering integrated brand communications solutions, as mentioned in 4.5.2 (a) of this Chapter.

Green et al. (1988:327) and Sudman and Blair (1998:348) reason that with expert judgment and an appropriate strategy, a sample that is appropriate to the research objectives can be developed. Aaker et al. (1998:390) furthermore state that if the sample size is under ten, as is the case in this study, a judgment sample “usually will be more reliable and representative than a probability sample”. On this premise a sample of Integrated Communications Agencies will next be drawn.

#### **4.10.3 Drawing the Sample**

The various independent industry experts, as previously explained in 4.10.2 (a) of this chapter, identified the agencies that they experience to be or believe to be, offering or working towards delivering integrated brand communications solutions. Clear overlap is evident in the independent judgement of agencies and given the need to develop a sample of six Integrated Communications Agencies, the following strategy is implemented.

The agencies identified by the individual industry experts are tabled (Table 1). The agencies that received more than one mention are then isolated and ranked from the most received mentions to the least received mentions (Table

2). The six Integrated Communications Agencies that received the most mentions represent the proposed sample of agencies that exploratory focus groups will be conducted with (Table 2).

**Table 1: Identified Integrated Communications Agencies**

Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5	Respondent 6
TBWA Hunt Lascaris	FCB	TBWA Hunt Lascaris	FCB	The Jupiter Drawing Room	Interbrand Sampson
FCB	TBWA Hunt Lascaris	The Jupiter Drawing Room	TBWA Hunt Lascaris	Net#work BBDO	Enterprise
Net#work BBDO		Admakers	Net#work BBDO	FCB	O2 Communications
The Jupiter Drawing Room		Lowe Bull Calvert Pace	Sonnenberg Murphy Leo Burnett	Ogilvy& Mather RSTM	Ogilvy & Mather RSTM
Bester Burke D'Arcy		Net#work BBDO	Berry Bush BBDO	Gendel Interactive	King James
King James		FCB	Ogilvy&Mather RSTM	Klatzko & Waldron	J. Walter Thompson Co
				Sharrer/Fusion Advertising	FCB
				08 Seconds Branding & Design	TBWA Hunt Lascaris
				Inroads	The Jupiter Drawing Room
				Saatchi&Saatchi	
				Grey Worldwide	

**Table 2: The Sample of Integrated Communications Agencies in rank order**

1. FCB (6 mentions)
2. TBWA Hunt Lascaris (5 mentions)
3. Net#work BBDO (4 mentions)
4. The Jupiter Drawing Room (4 mentions)
5. Ogilvy&Mather RSTM (3 mentions)
6. King James (2 mentions)

In completion of the Delphi Approach to Forecasting, as described by Aaker et al. (1998:745) and Sudman and Blair (1998:78), the results of the assessment of expert opinion or judgement were presented to the six interviewed industry experts. The experts thus had the opportunity to compare their own previous judgements with those of others and to respond to the final selection of Integrated Communications Agencies.

All of the industry experts approved of the proposed sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. However, a valuable comment was delivered by one of the industry experts with reference to the second and third phases of research that focus on the clients of and the key players within the senior account teams within the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies.

The industry expert proposed that the phases of semi-structured depth interviews with clients and key players in the senior account teams include King James as the only small agency in the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. According to the industry expert the smaller agencies in industry tend to operate in a more integrated fashion purely because of their size and need to satisfy client demand in order to generate revenue. This observation incidentally also surfaced in initial discussions with two other industry experts who argued that small agencies tend to deliver more integrated brand communication solutions purely “because they have to satisfy client needs in order to stay in business”.

Based on the observations of three of the industry experts the phases of semi-structured depth interviews with clients (Marketing or Brand Managers) and key players within the senior account teams will be applied as follows:

Two clients and three key players (Strategic Planner, Media Planner and Creative Director) will be interviewed from each of the top four ranked agencies, all of whom are considered as large to medium sized agencies, to then also include King James, as a small agency. Thus 10 clients will be interviewed in the second phase of research and 15 key players (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors) will be interviewed in the third phase of research.

The Managing Directors of the identified six Integrated Communications Agencies will be contacted telephonically to discuss and gain their co-operation with regard the purpose and intent of the research study and to identify and make available their senior account teams for exploratory focus group research.

As previously reasoned, the frame of Marketing or Brand Managers will organically evolve from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams. The senior account teams will in other words be requested to identify two key clients. The sample of thought leaders or key members in the senior account teams will emerge as they are identified in the exploratory focus groups.

#### 4.11 Conclusion

The aim of this Chapter is to present a sound research methodology that will result in a meaningful research process and will ultimately produce valuable conclusions and recommendations.

The primary research study is based on a central suggestion or proposition, derived from an extensive secondary literature study. The central proposition to the primary research study is that *the unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand*. The literature study furthermore reveals that the ability of the alternative brand contact to achieve the above, depends on a set of requisites. These requisites form the integral propositions to the primary research study.

The research problem is presented in that it remains to be seen whether South African marketing and communication professionals perceive the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. The primary and supporting objectives to the primary research study are therefore closely aligned to the central and integral research propositions, to ensure clarity and focus in the research study.

It is the Integrated Communications Agency that is the focus of this research study. The Integrated Communications Agency functions as a strategic partner to its clients to present strategic insight on all levels of contact integration. Unlike its traditional counterparts, the Integrated Communications Agency pursues a holistic, outside-in, zero-based and media-neutral brand contact planning approach and with the cross-functional integration of skills and expertise into account teams, is best suited to undertake creative strategic planning in developing unconventional and unexpected contact solutions. The population of this study is consequently narrowed down from

marketing and communication professionals, to a target population of Integrated Communication Agencies and their clients.

It is not assumed that all Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa are structured into cross-functional account teams that demonstrate outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning in the development of integrated brand communication strategies. It is however assumed that the population of Integrated Communications Agencies as they stand, will present a planning mindset that is more conducive to researching the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, than that of their traditional counterparts. Equally so, it is assumed that the clients of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa, are in need of communication partners that can develop integrated and unconventional brand communication solutions.

The investigation of literature sources on research design indicates that the objectives of this study will best be achieved through a qualitative exploratory research study. Firstly, because the research area is new and important variables to the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact may not be known and secondly, because as Cooper and Schindler (1998:135) confirm, only a fraction of industry knowledge in a particular field, is put into writing. This study is furthermore qualitative in nature because depth attitudes, opinions and motivations need to be explored in order to gain insight into the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. Consequently, an appropriate method of data source selection is encountered in the self-report data method and particularly in the form of depth interviews and focus groups.

The reason for employing both data source methods is based on the nature of integrated brand contact planning and the nature and role of the alternative brand contact within the planned brand contact strategy. Integrated brand contact planning involves both the client's Brand Contact Task Team and the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency. To gain an objective and balanced view on the identified research propositions and

related research objectives, both role players must be involved in the primary research study.

However, the focus of this study is not on the concept and process of integrated brand contact planning but rather on the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact therein. The target profile of clients is thus narrowed down to focus on the Marketing or Brand Manager responsible for briefing and managing the account team in the Integrated Communications Agency. Also, to ensure rich and revealing data is produced, the target profile of account teams is narrowed down to the senior account teams, the teams with range and depth in experience, in Integrated Communication Agencies.

Exploratory focus groups will firstly be conducted with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The focus group is used to study a concept in context of group dynamics. The alternative point of brand contact in turn relies on the dynamics of the integrated account team as a cross-functional unit. The exploratory focus group is typically used in exploratory research and its aim as Aaker et al. (1998:192) reinforce, is to explore a new concept through free discussion.

The interview guide to the exploratory focus groups is purposefully designed to stimulate free discussion. The focus group discussions will be initiated through a description and examples of the alternative brand contact, as derived from the literature study and as recommended by Templeton quoted in Tull and Hawkins (1993:449). The description of the alternative brand contact will be supported with a single open-ended question namely, *How would you define the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact?* Probing will be employed to ensure that the research topic is fully explored, observations that are relevant to the central and integral research propositions are pursued and new or fresh insights are investigated. New attitudes and opinions that emerge in the focus group sessions will then, as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) propose, be applied to enrich the stated central and integral research propositions.

The exploratory focus groups with senior account teams will be followed with two layers of depth interviews. The first with a sample of Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the interviewed senior account teams and the second with key members or thought leaders (Strategic Planners, Media Planners, Creative Directors), within the interviewed senior account teams. The latter two samples will organically evolve from the sample of senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The depth interview technique selected for the interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key senior account team members, is the semi-structured depth interview. This method promotes an active and open-ended dialogue yet allows the researcher to retain control over the interview by referring to an interview guide. Respondents are thus able to articulate their thoughts and opinions and complex and sensitive issues can effectively be explored.

The interview guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers launches with the same description and examples of the alternative brand contact, as employed in the exploratory focus group research. The guide then also contains a set of four open-ended questions with relevant probing questions that address the central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting research objectives. It must be noted that the interview guide, as presented in 4.9.2 of this Chapter, presents a working format as it will be revisited to address the enriched research propositions developed in response to key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams.

As argued, a second layer of semi-structured depth interviews will be conducted. These interviews will involve the thought leaders or key members of the interviewed senior account teams. The interview guide to the depth interviews with key senior account team members will also reflect and address the insights gained from the depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers.

In completion to this Chapter sampling procedure is discussed. An immediate challenge was encountered in acquiring an appropriate frame of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa. Two clear factors define this challenge. Firstly, no frame of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa exists. Also, the problem of ineligibility is encountered in existing lists of advertising agencies in South Africa. The agencies that may be functioning as Integrated Communications Agencies are as Koekemoer, de Klerk and Brewer point out, interspersed in and amongst the available lists of advertising agencies.

Secondly, six independent industry experts in South Africa, who were consulted using the Delphi Forecasting Method to address the above constraints, are of the opinion that no clear estimation can be placed on the percentage of agencies in South Africa that are indeed operating as Integrated Communications Agencies. Of greater significance is that the industry experts believe that the screening of agencies, to ascertain their status as Integrated Communications agencies, will be a subjective and futile exercise. Lip service is paid to the concept of integration and if asked, all agencies as Koenderman, de Bruyn, Farquhar, Cook and Moerdyk argue, will claim to be integrated.

The industry experts did however identify agencies that they believe to be delivering or working towards delivering integrated brand communication solutions. Also, considerable overlap is encountered in the judgement of the individual industry experts. The individual interviews with industry experts consequently resulted in a critical assessment of the sampling procedure to this study.

In order to retain clarity in research purpose and to gain further insight into the challenge of selecting an appropriate and meaningful sampling method in sampling procedure, sample size was next investigated. For motivated reasons the value of information approach to setting sample sizes, was applied. The purpose and research design of the study was consequently described to three industry experts in the field of marketing and

communications research in South Africa. The following sample sizes were recommended and approved:

- Six exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies.
- Ten semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers of the interviewed senior account teams.
- Fifteen semi-structured depth interviews involving key members of the senior account teams.

Insight into sample size enabled the researcher to address the challenge of selecting an appropriate sampling method. Given the judgement of the independent industry experts, the qualitative exploratory nature of this study, the planned data source methods to this study and the approved sample sizes for the study, a non-probability sample method was employed. Cooper and Schindler (1998:224) confirm that non-probability sampling is typically applied in exploratory research when the aim is to research population elements that are atypical – in the case of this study, the Integrated Communications Agency.

The non-probability sampling method that is best suited to the nature, purpose and constraints of this study is judgment sampling. As Green et al. (1988:327) and Sudman and Blair (1998:348) explain, expert judgment and an appropriate strategy can produce a sample that is appropriate to the objectives of a study. Aaker et al. (1998: 390) furthermore assert that with a sample of less than ten, judgment sampling will present a more reliable and representative sample than would a probability sampling method. The following sampling strategy was implemented, leveraging the opinions of the independent industry experts, to produce the final focus group sample of Integrated Communications Agencies.

The agencies identified by the industry experts were tabled. The agencies that received more than one mention were isolated and ranked. The six Integrated

Communications Agencies that received the most mentions and collective approval of the industry experts, in rank order, are FCB, TBWA Hunt Lascaris, Net#work BBDO, The Jupiter Drawing Room, Ogilvy & Mather RSTM and King James. In keeping with the Delphi Method to Forecasting, the results of the assessment of expert opinion were presented to the interviewed industry experts to provide an opportunity to compare own previous judgements to those of others and to respond to the proposed sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. The proposed sample met with all of the experts' approval.

Three of the industry experts however reasoned that in their opinion smaller agencies, due to their need to meet clients' needs and generate revenue, tend to produce more integrated brand communications solutions. In response, the final two phases of research involving semi-structured depth interviews with clients and key players in the senior account teams, are structured as follows:

Two clients will be interviewed from each of the top four large to medium sized Integrated Communications Agencies. King James will then also be included as the only small agency, to produce a sample of ten depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers. Likewise, a sample size of fifteen key members from the senior account teams (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors) is produced.

It is envisaged that the theoretical and real world analysis and assessment of research steps and methods in this chapter, delivers a research methodology that is appropriate and meaningful. The practical execution of this qualitative exploratory research study, the analysis of data, the research results and the interpretation thereof, will next be presented in Chapter 5.

## 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**

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

**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)	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
<b>Agency and client confidence (5) and an integrated client-account team relationship (3)</b>	✓	✓ ✓		✓ ✓	✓	✓ ✓

**Barriers to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof**

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

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 there 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**

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>4.</b>	<b>5.</b>	<b>6.</b>	<b>7.</b>	<b>8.</b>	<b>9.</b>	<b>10.</b>
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, <b>but must communicate what the brand stands for (10)</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A brand communications planning philosophy and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Generates word-of-mouth and publicity, <b>but it must contribute to the process of brand building (10)</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The alternative brand contact is more memorable, <b>but memorability must carry brand meaning to be of value (10)</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The ambient alternative brand contact is more focussed and cost efficient, <b>but must reinforce the brand identity and integrate into the brand communications strategy to add value (10)</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Requisites to the Alternative Brand Contact and the Planning thereof**

An open-minded or outside-in, <b>zero-based but brand oriented</b> , 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)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
<b>Alternative brand contacts presented by the agency lack brand relevance (6)</b> Lack of confidence and lack of evidence(4)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Alternative brand contact strategies are more costly (4) but if they demonstrate potential brand impact, worth the investment (3)</b>	✓	✓	✓		✓					

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**

<b>Enriched Integral Propositions</b>	<b>Senior Account Teams (6)</b>	<b>Key Clients (10)</b>
1. An outside-in, <b>zero-based</b> , 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
<b>5. Agency and client confidence and an integrated client-account team relationship</b>	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
<b>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</b>	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**

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>
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**.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

“ It’s a way of thinking”

Jean-Marie Dru

#### 6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six will commence with a brief reflection on and reinforcement of the focus and architecture of this study. The purpose is to ensure that the context in which the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is developed and applied, is evident and clear.

The chapter will then proceed to present the collective key findings of the qualitative exploratory research study. These findings are the result of a planned and focussed primary research study based on research propositions and objectives derived from a comprehensive study of literature. The key research findings present the variables to the development and design of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The key research findings also present guidelines to the development of hypotheses for future empirical research studies. Individual variables within the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning or the model as a whole, can therefore be further researched to produce more finite empirical research results.

In conclusion to Chapter Six and this study, the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning will be presented and discussed. It is envisaged that those companies and agencies in industry that recognise and are responsive to the explorative and experimental nature of the alternative brand contact and alternative brand contact planning, will find the model meaningful and immediately applicable in own planning terms.

Recommendations for future research studies will be offered in conclusion to the study.

## 6.2 A Reflection on the Focus and Architecture of the Study

The focus of this study is the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof. The literature study presents the alternative brand contact as a planned form of contact with the brand that is experienced by consumers as unexpected and unconventional. The aim of the alternative brand contact is defined in the study of literature as to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact are explored on two levels. Firstly through an investigation of literature and secondly, through a three-phase qualitative exploratory research study conducted in the South African marketing and communications industry, hence the title of the study – **The role of alternative brand contact planning in the South African marketing and communication industry.**

The theoretical context and foundation to this study is set in Chapter Two with the outside-in approach to Brand Contact Management. It is established that a brand is built through every level of contact, through product, service, planned and unplanned points of contact, in consumer and customer markets. Every form of contact communicates and either adds to, or erodes the value of the brand in consumers' minds.

The brand contact approach pursues an outside-in (consumer oriented) thinking and planning pattern. Because consumers do not differentiate between the myriad of contact point experiences, all points of brand contact must be integrated to communicate and reinforce the core identity of the brand. The strategic aim is to take ownership of a consumer relevant and differentiated brand positioning on a clear-cut and singular level at every point of contact. The more focussed the brand positioning, the greater the brand contact synergy or integration.

It is within the context of the outside-in approach to brand contact management and the introduction of a dedicated cross-functional Brand Contact Task Team that the need for a zero-based planning platform that is based on consumers' current experience of points of brand contact, is motivated in Chapter Two. The Brand Contact Audit is consequently presented as a platform neutral foundation to brand contact planning. The aim is to identify the key contact issues facing the brand, from an outside-in and zero-based planning perspective (no preconceived ideas), and accordingly to develop appropriate brand contact objectives, contact strategies and bottom-up budgets. The development and implementation of a Brand Charter is then also promoted. The purpose is to codify the brand identity and brand positioning strategy. The Brand Contact Task Team implements the Brand Charter as the strategic guide to the process of integrated brand contact planning and management.

According to several authors, outside-in, zero-based and cross-functional brand contact planning is enhanced as the advertising agency is involved as an objective and valued strategic partner, in the process. Chapter Two is concluded with the argument that to play a meaningful role and to add value, the traditional advertising agency will have to evolve into a strategic partner that delivers integrated brand communications solutions.

Thus the need for Integrated Communications Agencies that comprises of cross-functional account teams that provide holistic, integrated communications solutions, profound strategic advice and outside-in and zero-based planning, is argued. The truly Integrated Communications Agency thus delivers effective, integrated planned brand contact strategies but also has the skill and expertise to compliment and advise on the holistic integration of all points of brand contact. A partnership philosophy between the Brand Contact Task Team and cross-functional account team within the Integrated Communications Agency is then made possible and the process of integrated brand contact management is optimised.

Of importance to this study is that the alternative brand contact is positioned as a means to break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve impact, to communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. The alternative brand contact must ultimately achieve branded impact, to contribute to the integrated brand contact strategy and the process of brand building. Chapter Two is thus regarded as a sound and valuable foundation to this study. The alternative brand contact is furthermore introduced on the grounds of integrated brand contact thinking, in other words, outside-in and zero-based thinking.

With Chapter Two as a theoretical foundation, Chapter Three investigated the concept of alternative brand contact as a planned point of brand contact, through the study of literature, in context of clients increasing need for innovative planned brand contact solutions that will break through increasing communication clutter barriers.

It is firstly argued that the concept 'alternative' is greatly applied in the marketing and communications industry from the inside-out, from the practitioner's point of view in context of industry media classifications, such as above-the-line mass media versus below-the-line 'alternative' media. Based on the outside-in and zero-based brand contact planning philosophy, it is established in Chapter Three, that it is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative brand contact appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. In keeping with the outside-in and zero-based planning approach, the alternative brand contact is media neutral and qualifies as any unconventional or unexpected point of contact, whether in a traditional or non-traditional media environment.

Two key motivators for the growth of alternative brand contacts were investigated. Firstly, clients are increasingly seeking innovative brand contact solutions within and beyond the traditional scope of brand communications. Secondly, and in support of the first, rising levels of expected communications clutter is resulting in target audiences increasing their commercial defenses, in the form of selective exposure and attention measures.

Chapter Three proceeded to argue that advertisers should not only rely on the creativity of the planned brand communications message to break through clutter. Creative strategic thinking must be applied to produce alternative brand contacts that will reach audiences that have become jaded by the brand communications onslaught. The challenge, as is argued, is to move beyond, or to manipulate traditional communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner, when and where they least expect to encounter a brand message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind.

To attain this goal, Chapter Three continued to reason that innovative thinking and creative strategic planning is required. Hence, Dru's (1996:54; 2002:19) theory of disruption and the need to apply creative strategic thinking to develop contact solutions that will break through clutter to build the brand, is investigated. Of importance is that Dru's disruption theory reinforces that to develop alternative brand contact solutions, the account team will have to move from the outside-in, from a zero-base and media neutral planning platform and apply creative-strategic thinking in the process of doing so.

Chapter Three proceeded to explore the concept of creative strategic thinking and specifically the nature of creativity therein. The outcome reveals that the mindset and sense of purpose of the team involved in the creative process, is the critical factor. It is established that the mindset of the account team and its sense of purpose are more important in alternative brand contact planning, than the development and implementation of creative techniques to produce creative solutions.

The nature and role of the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency, is therefore revisited in Chapter Three, as the make-up and planning environment of the account team will inevitably affect its mindset and sense of purpose in alternative brand contact planning. The integrated and cross-functional account team, with the confluence of strategic, media and creative resources, is found to present an organic environment conducive to innovative creative strategic thinking and thus alternative brand contact planning. It is also argued that an environment or culture that

welcomes and stimulates exploration and experimentation is required to undertake alternative brand contact planning and to produce alternative brand contact solutions.

Finally, to ensure that an objective assessment of the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact is achieved, also in context of the purpose of integrated brand contact management, Chapter Three identified a number of barriers to the concept and process. These were identified as:

- The departmentalised agency structure
- Inside-out thinking in brand contact planning
- Media biased and commission based brand contact planning
- Total reliance on message creativity
- Reliance on media planning systems and measurement data

An integrated assessment of the barriers revealed that the greatest collective barrier to alternative brand contact planning, prove to be mindset. An inside-out, departmentalised, media-biased and research bound strategic planning mindset, lacking in creative strategic purpose and thinking is not conducive to alternative brand contact planning.

In response to the above barriers, Chapter Three next identified and concluded with alternative brand contact requisites. Given the vital influence of mindset, the requisites are based on the premise that an outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset and sense of purpose is encouraged and practiced by the client, Integrated Communications Agency and account team. The requisites identified are as follows:

- Impact and the novelty of the alternative brand contact
- Impact and the communication effectiveness of the alternative brand contact
- Impact and communicating a single-minded brand identity

- Impact and target audience relevance
- Continued impact of the alternative brand contact

The primary outcome of the study of literature on the approach to brand contact management and the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact revealed that:

*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 above stated suggestion consequently presented the **central proposition** to the primary qualitative exploratory research study and also the research problem to the study. That is, it remained to be seen, whether the alternative brand contact is perceived by the South African marketing and communications industry as such.

The study of literature however also revealed that the ability of the alternative brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers, to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand is found to depend on a set of requisites. The research problem thus became more layered as integral research propositions were developed to encapsulate the identified alternative brand contact requisites. The purpose of the primary research study, as discussed in Chapter Four, was therefore to explore the central and integral research propositions in real world terms.

The research methodology to the primary research study was developed in Chapter Four through motivated research steps, to present the process of research. As motivated in Chapter Four, the central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting research objectives to the primary research study, were pursued through a three-phase qualitative exploratory research design that involves self-report data source selection methods in the form of exploratory focus groups and semi-structured depth

interviews. The core purpose of the three-phase qualitative exploratory research study was to explore attitudes, opinions and motivations toward the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact in depth.

The sample of six Integrated Communications Agencies was identified through non-probability sampling and specifically purposive judgment sampling. The Managing Directors of the agencies identified a senior account team in their agency. The samples of key clients (Marketing and Brand Managers) and key players in senior account teams, evolved organically from the sample of senior account teams.

Chapter Five was devoted to the real world dynamics encountered in the implementation of the three-phase qualitative exploratory research study, the analysis of data as assisted through thematic content analysis as an instrument and finally, the results produced through the three phases of research.

Exploratory focus groups were conducted with the six senior account teams from the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies, in the first phase of the research. The results produced in this first phase of research lead to the development of enriched research propositions and objectives, which were integrated into the design of the interview guide to the second phase of research. The second phase of research entailed semi-structured depth interviews with ten key clients of the sample of senior account teams. The results produced in this phase of research lead to the further enrichment of research propositions and objectives. This measure revealed a high correlation in senior account team and key client opinions and attitudes. It was concluded, at this point in the research study, that the senior account teams and key clients agree to the central research proposition and the vast majority of integral research propositions (Table 5 in 5.7 of Chapter 5). The primary research objective and most of the supporting research objectives were thus achieved in completion to the second phase of research.

Consequently, a more focussed interview guide was designed to the final phase of research - the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams. The researcher thus had the opportunity to focus on, and explore the propositions that did not reveal complete correlation in senior account team and key client attitudes and opinions and the propositions that were newly identified by key clients in the second phase of research.

The collective key findings of the qualitative exploratory research study will next be presented to lead to the development of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

### **6.3 The Key Research Findings**

Research results were progressively produced and propositions and objectives were progressively enriched through the stages of data analysis, as a result of the three- phase design of the qualitative exploratory research study.

**The key findings of the qualitative exploratory research study present the variables to the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. Importantly, the findings also present guidelines according to which hypotheses for future empirical research can be formulated. Sixteen key findings were produced through the three-phase exploratory study.**

The sixteen key findings will next be presented as one primary finding and fifteen supporting findings. The primary finding addresses the key finding to the central research proposition and related primary research objective. The supporting findings present the key findings to the integral research propositions and related supporting research objectives.

### 6.3.1 The Primary Finding

The central research proposition and primary research objective was confirmed and addressed by all of the senior account teams and key clients interviewed. It can thus be concluded, based on this qualitative exploratory research study, 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.**

This first key finding, in answer to the primary research objective, presents the **primary finding** produced by the qualitative exploratory research study.

### 6.3.2 The Supporting Findings

The following fifteen key findings were produced through the qualitative exploration of the original and thereupon the enriched integral research propositions, in the pursuit of achieving the supporting research objectives to the qualitative exploratory research study. These key findings, as stated, present the **supporting findings** produced by the qualitative exploratory research study and the variables to the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

- 1. The alternative brand contact differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional, but must communicate what the brand stands for.**

All of the senior account teams believe that the alternative brand contact differentiates the brand because it is experienced by consumers, as different from the norm. The use of an alternative brand contact per se, is perceived as a brand differentiation tool. All of the key clients interviewed agreed, but

insisted that what the brand stands for (single-minded brand positioning), must be communicated effectively. The aim is not only to position the brand as different, but also to communicate and achieve meaningful brand differentiation.

**2. Alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter.**

Four of the senior account teams are of the opinion that alternative brand contact planning should not be confined to tactical communication opportunities, but should be positioned and practised as a brand communications planning philosophy that “*spans all media*”. Three of the four senior account teams furthermore reasoned that alternative brand contact planning involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter.

All of the key clients interviewed are in agreement that alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy that should, as respondents for example argued, “*be applied in all brand communication contexts*” to “*disrupt the expected in order to deliver the unexpected*”.

**3. Alternative brand contacts generate word-of-mouth and publicity, but it must contribute to the process of brand building.**

Five of the six senior account teams believe that because of its unconventional and unexpected status, the alternative brand contact draws the attention of consumers to get talked about and the attention of the media to be reported about. All of the key clients interviewed agreed but elaborated that the talk value and publicity gained must contribute to the process of brand building. The alternative brand contact fails in its communication effectiveness

if it is solely recalled and talked about for its creative and unconventional approach and not also for its brand appeal.

**4. The alternative brand contact is more memorable, but memorability must carry brand meaning to be of value.**

Three senior account teams described the alternative brand contact as more memorable than traditional and expected points of brand contact, because of its unconventional and unexpected appeal. All of the key clients agreed, but were again (as is the case with word-of-mouth and publicity), concerned that the alternative brand contact may be remembered for its unconventional and not also its brand appeal. To be considered of value, memorability must, according to all key clients, carry brand meaning.

**5. The alternative brand contact in ambient media form is more focussed and cost efficient, but must reinforce the brand identity and integrate into the brand communications strategy to add value.**

According to three of the senior account teams the ambient alternative brand contact delivers strategic focus on target audiences – “*where they are*” and “*where they really live their lives*” and therefore achieves impact cost efficiently.

All of the key clients agreed but elaborated that to add value, the ambient alternative brand contact must reinforce the brand identity to integrate into the brand communications strategy. The ambient alternative brand contact that fails to achieve brand relevance is “*simply a gimmick*” that will be experienced by consumers as an “*intrusion*” or an “*invasion*”.

**6. To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind.**

All of the senior account teams believe that the target audience relevance of the alternative brand contact is critical to its ability to break through clutter to achieve impact. The relevance of the alternative brand contact to the lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind of the target audience, were addressed by the senior account teams in indirect terms.

However, all of the key clients, in context of the need for outside-in thinking in alternative brand contact planning, directly addressed the relevance of the alternative brand contact to the lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind of the target audience, as a requisite to achieving impact. As one respondent concluded, *“you must engage with their lifestyles, their day-to-day experiences, what they think and feel, their outlook, what they will and wont appreciate at a point in time, to present relevant and effective alternative brand contact solutions”*.

**7. 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 of the senior account teams are of the opinion that brand relevance is a critical alternative brand contact requisite. The teams established that the alternative brand contact must communicate and reinforce a single-minded or focussed brand positioning in terms of message and form of contact, to integrate into the brand contact strategy and contribute to the process of brand building. All of the key clients interviewed, perceived this to be a given. As one of the respondents stated, *“the brand is everything and brand relevance and integration must be achieved on every level”*.

**8. The alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed and expressive of meaning to attain impact.**

The two integral propositions: To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed, and: The alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning to attain impact, are integrated into a single key finding. The motivation for doing so is found in senior account teams and key clients' responses to these measures.

Both propositions were positioned and discussed as implicit alternative brand contact requisites by all respondents. Senior account team and key client responses revealed that it is a given that the alternative brand contact must be perceived as novel by consumers to be noticed and that it must be expressive of meaning, to successfully communicate and reinforce a focussed brand positioning.

Also, the alternative brand contact that is noticed by consumers because of its novelty, but fails in its expression of meaning, in the expression of a single-minded positioning of the brand, is relegated by respondents, to the level of a 'gimmick' that merely increases clutter and potentially damages the brand. All respondents and in particular key clients expressed this concern in more than one context on more than one occasion.

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

The above key finding is clearly multi-faceted. It is presented in this form because the concepts involved were perceived by the senior account teams as related and by the key clients as totally inter-related.

The mindset of alternative brand contact planning was found to be of paramount importance by senior account teams and key clients alike. The literature finding that mindset and sense of purpose are more important in alternative brand contact planning than the development and implementation of creative techniques to produce creative solutions is thus reinforced.

All of the senior account teams identified the need for consumer oriented, outside-in thinking in alternative brand contact planning. Five of the senior account teams furthermore believe that a zero-based and media neutral mindset is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. All of the key clients are in agreement, but elaborated that alternative brand contact planning must be zero-based to produce unconventional ideas, yet brand-oriented to ensure that the idea is relevant to the brand and what it stands for. In the final phase of research all of the key players in senior account teams acknowledged that alternative brand contact planning is both zero- and brand-based.

Five of the senior account teams and all of the key clients reasoned that the alternative brand contact results from creative strategic planning and that an integrated and cross-functional account team environment, is therefore a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. The confluence of creative and strategic expertise and skills in the integrated and cross-functional account team is found to produce creative strategic thinking.

Five of the senior account teams identified a media commission-based agency remuneration system as a barrier to zero-based, media neutral thinking and thus alternative brand contact planning. All of the key clients, in agreement, are adamant that a fee or performance-based agency remuneration system is a requisite to media neutral and creative strategic thinking and thus alternative brand contact planning.

All of the senior account teams and key clients devoted considerable time to discussing the mindset of alternative brand contact planning. The majority of requisites and barriers that were introduced by the senior account teams and

key clients also relate to the mindset of those involved in alternative brand contact planning. It can thus be concluded, based on a collective assessment of the opinions, attitudes and motivations of the senior account teams and their key clients, that the mindset of alternative brand contact planning is more critical a factor than the development of specific creative techniques to produce creative ideas.

#### **10. Agency and client confidence and an integrated client-account team relationship.**

Five of the senior account teams reasoned that agencies must have the confidence to undertake alternative brand contact planning and to present unexpected and unconventional solutions, to their clients. Clients in turn must, according to the senior account teams, have the confidence to implement alternative brand contact solutions. According to three of the senior account teams confidence in alternative brand contact planning and unconventional contact solutions will grow if an integrated client-account team relationship is developed, to encourage joint-decision making and to establish trust.

All of the key clients acknowledged that agency and client confidence in alternative brand contact planning is needed and that an integrated client-account team relationship is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. However, according to key clients an integrated account team relationship is needed more so, to ensure that alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the brand are produced.

It is in this regard that six of the key clients interviewed introduced a counter argument. According to six of the key clients, their confidence to undertake alternative brand contact planning is linked to one key barrier and that is that despite their integrated and hands-on approach in building a relationship, agencies often fail to present alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the brand. This issue was addressed and further explored in the

final phase of research with key players in the senior account teams. The next key finding presents the outcome.

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

Four of the senior account teams identified lack of client confidence, as a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. According to these teams, clients lack the confidence to implement unconventional brand contact solutions, greatly as a result of the lack of evidence of their effectiveness.

Six of the key client interviewed however reasoned that they would employ alternative brand contact solutions, despite the lack of evidence of their effectiveness, if they do demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to achieve branded impact. The barrier, according to these six key clients is rather that agencies fail to present alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the brand.

This issue was addressed in the final phase of research with the key players in the interviewed senior account teams. Ten of the fourteen key players acknowledged that clients do perhaps/maybe have a point. However, the key players identified two causes of the lack of brand relevance in alternative points of brand contact. Consequently, two further requisites to alternative brand contact planning are introduced in the final stage of research. Firstly, a single-minded brand positioning must be in place. As one of the key players stated, *“vague brand positioning strategies make for a lethal relationship”*. Secondly, a shared set of criteria must be set by the client and account team, from which alternative brand contact ideas can be developed and 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”*.

A holistic assessment of research data and key findings produced, reveals that the introduction of a single-minded brand positioning platform and a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contact solutions are developed and assessed, may address many of the identified concerns and barriers to alternative brand contact planning. Branded impact can be achieved if alternative brand contact planning resumes from and is evaluated against a single-minded brand positioning platform and a shared set of criteria. Thus clients will, given previous research results, have the confidence to implement alternative brand contact strategies, despite the lack of evidence of their effectiveness. It is also possible that less time and energy will then need to be invested in persuading parties involved, of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy as arguments can be developed from and against the criteria set.

**12. The unconventional status and impact of the alternative brand contact must be maintained. 'Great' alternative brand contact concepts leverage brand communication spaces to maintain impact - proactive innovative thinking is required.**

All of the key clients interviewed believe that the alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status to ensure it consistently breaks through commercial clutter barriers to achieve impact. According to clients innovative thinking is required to leverage or improve on alternative brand contact concepts.

All of the key players were in agreement and elaborated that 'great' alternative brand contact concepts demonstrate the potential to leverage brand communication spaces. To attain this goal and to ensure impact is maintained, the key players believe, in agreement with clients, that proactive innovative thinking is required.

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

Four of the key clients interviewed raised the cost of implementing alternative brand contact solutions, as a concern. Ten of the interviewed key players in senior account teams' however argued that in general, alternative brand contact strategies are not more costly to implement.

A closer investigation of the research data reveals that in essence no real conflict in client and account team opinion exists. Clients primarily raised cost as a concern with reference to alternative brand contact strategies that are implemented in magazines, as did four of the key players in the senior account teams. Two of the key players furthermore reasoned that the loaded costs encountered in implementing unconventional brand contact ideas in print publications, is sure to be less of a concern in future as *“print owner are coming to the party”*.

Also, three of the four key clients stated that they are prepared to invest in alternative brand contact strategies if they do demonstrate the potential to achieve branded impact. The cost-benefit argument that is presented by the key players within the senior account teams, as a requisite to alternative brand contact planning, is thus in keeping with client opinion.

**14. Alternative brand contact planning requires open-minded media planners and media owners.**

Four senior account teams confirmed that conventional media planning will constrain creative strategic planning and therefore does present a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. Four of the senior account teams also identified the resistance of media owners to implement unconventional brand contact solutions, as a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. All of the key clients were in agreement that media planners who work within the comfort zone of conventional media planning frameworks and that media

owners who solely operate by their medium's placement 'rules', will present definite barriers to alternative brand contact planning. Respondents argued that alternative brand contact planning requires open-minded media planners and media owners.

**15. The planning and implementation of alternative brand contacts is time and energy consuming.**

Three of the senior account teams experience alternative brand contact planning as time and energy consuming. Although the account teams view alternative brand contact planning as a "*planning philosophy and a passion*" and insist that they "*will persevere*", they are continuously challenged to invest time and energy in persuading clients and media owners, of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy. Eight of the key clients however commented that they are quite prepared to take the risk involved in implementing an alternative brand contact strategy, given certain requisites, but are likewise challenged to invest time and energy in persuading their management of the value of an alternative brand contact approach.

An objective and holistic assessment of data reveals that this barrier can perhaps be alleviated. The concern of both clients and senior account teams is the time and energy that is required to convince respective parties of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy. If, as previously argued (finding 11), alternative brand contact planning is based on a single-minded brand positioning strategy and is developed from and assessed against a shared set of criteria, this barrier or challenge will in all probability be addressed. It can be reasoned that armed with a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria, all parties involved are working from the same planning platform and can equally so employ such a platform in the process of persuading other parties, such as client management and media owners.

A more valuable finding to employ as a guideline in the development of a hypothesis for future research might thus be:

**Alternative brand contact planning is less time and energy consuming in terms of persuading parties involved of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy, when a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contacts are planned and evaluated, is employed.**

The above key findings, as previously motivated, confirmed the central and addressed the enriched integral research propositions and present the primary finding and supporting findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. It is the researcher's opinion that further research on any one of the above findings will contribute to a deeper understanding and possibly deliver empirical evidence of the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact.

Of immediate significance is that the key findings present the variables to the design and development of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The agencies and companies who recognise and are comfortable with the experimental nature of alternative brand contact planning, can apply the proposed model in own planning terms. Those companies and agencies that are in need of empirical evidence can apply the key findings as guidelines in the formulation of hypotheses for future research, to then confirm or improve upon the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

Chapter Six will now be concluded with the design and discussion of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

#### **6.4 A Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning**

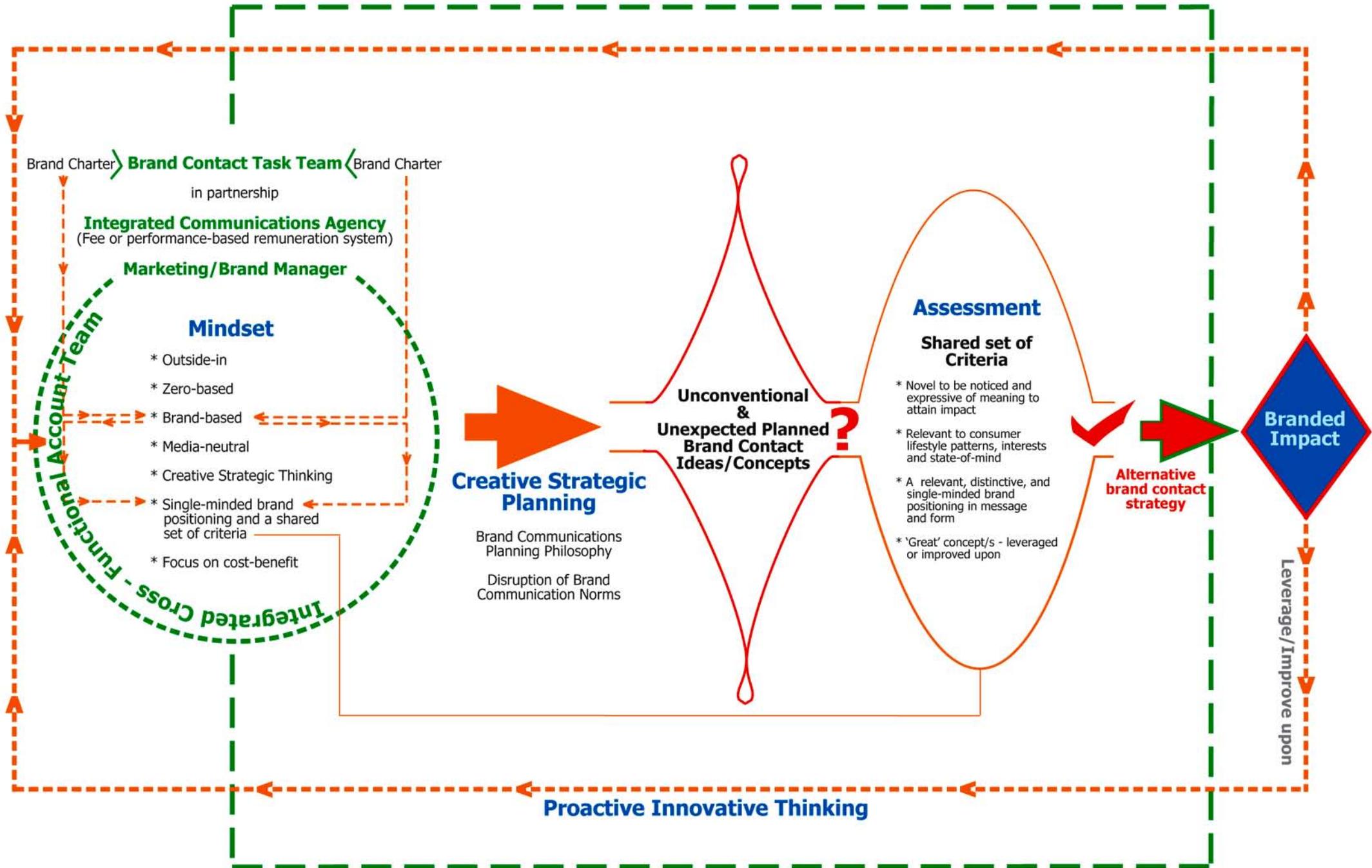
The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is designed in context of the nature and purpose of integrated brand contact management, to address the nature and role of alternative brand contact planning, as defined through the study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study.

**The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning thus aims to ensure that unconventional and unexpected points of planned brand contact that break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand, are produced.**

The primary finding delivered by the qualitative exploratory research study is the focal point and envisaged outcome of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The supporting findings present the variables of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The design of the model therefore acknowledges and reflects the supporting findings as they contribute to the desired outcome – the primary finding.

**Model 1: A Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.**

# Planned Brand Contact Environment & Commercial Clutter Barriers



Model 1: A Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning

The proposed Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning identifies four core constructs namely,

- The mindset of the integrated cross-functional account team and client.
- The process of creative strategic planning.
- The assessment of unconventional and unexpected planned brand contact points.
- Branded impact and the need for ongoing proactive innovative thinking.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is discussed by means of the four core constructs, with respect to the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. The model with its constructs and planning process flows from left to right.

#### **6.4.1 The Mindset of the Integrated Cross-functional Account Team and Client**

The model establishes that alternative brand contact planning is pursued in context of the nature and purpose of integrated brand contact management. The study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study confirm that the alternative brand contact strategy must contribute to the integrated brand contact strategy, to support the process of brand building. Alternative brand contact planning is also based on the outside-in and zero-based planning philosophy of integrated brand contact management.

For this reason the model presents the integrated client-account team relationship as representative of a strategic partnership between the Integrated Communications Agency and the Brand Contact Task Team. The model thus enforces that alternative brand contact planning is undertaken with the Brand Charter as the codified planning context. As is discussed in Chapter Two (2.5.7), the brand charter or brand manual captures brand learnings, the brand identity and brand positioning strategy, to serve as the strategic guide

to the process of brand contact planning. The Brand Contact Task Team with its Integrated Communications Agency as a strategic partner, implements the Brand Charter to ensure that all points of brand contact communicate in a consistent voice.

The model therefore also qualifies the status of the Integrated Communications Agency. The Integrated Communications Agency delivers holistic integrated brand communications solutions and exhibits the strategic and creative skill to add value on all levels of brand contact (Chapter Two – 2.6). The Integrated Communications Agency furthermore comprises of integrated cross-functional units (account teams), to ensure that effective integrated brand communications solutions are produced. In context of alternative brand contact planning, the study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study also establish that the confluence of strategic and creative skills into cross-functional account teams, is conducive to the development of alternative brand contact solutions that are both novel and relevant to the brand. The model also positions the Integrated Communications Agency, as an agency that operates on fee or performance-based remuneration systems. The study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study confirm that zero-based and media neutral planning are only made possible if the agency is not constrained by a biased media-commission based remuneration system.

The aim of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is to assist agencies and clients to develop unconventional and unexpected planned points of brand contact that will break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. The qualitative exploratory research study establishes that an integrated client-account team relationship and a mindset that is conducive to alternative brand contact planning are requisites to attaining this aim. The mindset of the agency, client and account team is found to be of paramount importance, more so than the development of specific creative techniques to produce unconventional solutions.

The **mindset** to alternative brand contact planning as identified in the model and determined by the study of literature and the exploratory research study requires:

- **Outside-in thinking**

Alternative brand contact planning is consumer oriented, as it is the consumer base (target audience) that will determine what is perceived and experienced as unconventional and unexpected.

- **Zero-based thinking**

Alternative brand contact planning is platform neutral and based on consumers current experience of the brand contact environment and therefore does not demonstrate contact prejudices, preconceptions or preconditions.

- **Brand-based thinking**

Alternative brand contact planning is brand-based in that the focus is on communicating or reinforcing a single-minded positioning of the brand or as so many of the respondents in the qualitative exploratory study argued, “what the brand stands for”, “a focussed brand positioning”.

- **Media-neutral thinking**

It is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative brand contact appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. The alternative brand contact is not defined by media type. As one of the senior account teams in the exploratory research study argued: “We shouldn’t be thinking in media moulds we should be thinking of communication spaces”. Alternative brand contact planning must therefore also not be constrained by media biases or, as previously argued, biased media commission-based remuneration systems.

- **Creative strategic thinking**

The alternative brand contact is, based on the study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study, the product of creative strategic thinking. The aim is to produce points of brand contact that are novel and relevant to the brand. It is for this reason that a cross-functional account team environment and an integrated client-account team relationship were identified in the qualitative exploratory research study, as requisites to alternative brand contact planning.

- **A single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contact ideas are developed and assessed**

Based on the qualitative exploratory research study alternative brand contact planning must depart from a single-minded brand positioning platform and a shared set of criteria (co-developed by the client and senior account team), from which alternative brand contact ideas can be developed and assessed. Thus, brand relevance can be achieved and a focussed brand identity created.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning identifies the need for a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria in the core construct: The Mindset of the Integrated Cross-functional Account Team and Client. A critical link is created on this level with the third core construct in the model namely: The assessment of unconventional and unexpected planned brand contact points, to demonstrate that the development and evaluation of the alternative brand contact is conducted against the same set of criteria. The need for a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria in the development and evaluation of alternative brand contact concepts will receive close attention with the introduction of the third construct to this model.

- **A focus on cost-benefit**

The qualitative exploratory research study establishes that alternative brand contact strategies are in general not more costly to implement. Also, research findings reveal that clients are prepared to invest in alternative brand contact solutions, if they demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to achieve branded impact. Client approach is thus in keeping with account team attitudes that when cost is considered, the focus in alternative brand contact planning should also be on the benefit gained, that is the potential to break through commercial clutter barriers to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

With the mindset of the integrated cross-functional account team and client as the first and paramount core construct to alternative brand contact planning, the model shifts into the process of creative strategic planning, the second core construct to the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

#### **6.4.2 The Process of Creative Strategic Planning**

The alternative brand contact is presented in the study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study as the product of creative strategic planning. Creative strategic planning, as previously stated, entails the development of unconventional and unexpected or novel solutions that are relevant to the brand. The challenge is to move beyond, or to manipulate traditional brand communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner when and where they least expect to encounter a commercial message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind.

The model identifies a further key research finding in relation to **creative strategic planning**. Alternative brand contact planning is identified as a brand communications planning philosophy that involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter. Based on respondents' attitudes in the qualitative exploratory research study, creative strategic

planning must be undertaken in all brand communication spaces, to disrupt brand communication norms and develop alternative brand contact solutions that will break through clutter.

The study of literature presents an investigation of the nature and purpose of disruption, as coined and explored by Dru (1996:56; 2002:19) and elaborated on by others (Chapter 3 – 3.4).

Disruption (Strategie de rupture) according to Dru (1996:54), is about finding the strategic idea that breaks and overturns marketplace conventions. It is evident that a clear line of synergy exists between the notion of creative strategic planning, as defined and researched in this study, and the premise of disruption, as introduced by Dru. This perhaps also clarifies why many respondents referred to alternative brand contact planning as a brand communications planning philosophy that involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter.

The study of literature reveals that disruption requires a three-step process:

- **Insight into the conventional:** Strategic ideas and activity that maintain the status quo and are therefore hardly noticed are identified.
- **Disruption:** Creative strategic thinking is applied to purposefully break with conventional strategic methods to produce unconventional ideas.
- **Brand Integration:** The ideas/concepts that most effectively communicate the brand positioning strategy are identified.

Dru's three-step approach to disruption seemingly also points at the need for outside-in, zero-based and media-neutral thinking (step one: insight into the conventional), creative strategic planning (step two: disruption) and brand-based thinking (step three: brand integration), in the development of unconventional strategic solutions.

The concept of disruption (step two), was not pursued in greater depth, in the qualitative exploratory research study, greatly because the mindset toward alternative brand contact planning was treated by respondents as of paramount importance and consequently, consumed most of the research time. Also the study of literature pointed out that mindset and sense of purpose is more important than the development and implementation of structured creative techniques to produce creative ideas. However, a worthy future research area exists in that the actual nature of creative strategic thinking and disruption can be investigated more closely in real world terms, to contribute to the planning of alternative points of brand contact.

#### **6.4.3 The Assessment of Unconventional and Unexpected Planned Brand Contact Points**

Creative strategic planning, as established, is undertaken in all brand communication spaces, to disrupt brand communication norms to develop alternative brand contact solutions that will break through clutter. The qualitative exploratory research study however revealed that clients are concerned that agencies present alternative brand contact solutions that are not relevant to the brand. Agencies (senior account teams interviewed) in turn, are concerned that alternative brand contact planning is undertaken with no single-minded brand positioning strategy and shared set of development and assessment criteria in place. Hence the following key finding was produced:

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

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning positions the need for a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contact ideas can be developed and assessed, as critical to alternative brand contact planning. This measure is introduced in the first core construct to the model namely: The mindset of the

integrated cross-functional account team and client, and is elevated and reinforced as the third core construct of the model: **The assessment of unconventional and unexpected planned brand contact points.**

To ensure that branded impact is achieved, alternative brand contact planning must be based on a single-minded brand positioning strategy. The qualitative exploratory research study revealed that clients and senior account teams alike believe that the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact must break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve impact, to communicate or reinforce a *“focussed”* brand positioning, as so many argued.

To undertake creative strategic planning, to produce ideas that are both novel and relevant to the brand, the account team must have clarity on what it is that the *“brand stands for”* or what it aims to *“take ownership of”*, as respondents stated. Equally so, the alternative brand contact concept or idea can hardly be assessed for brand relevance and potential branded impact, if a single-minded brand positioning strategy does not exist. As one respondent commented, a vague brand positioning strategy will make for a *“lethal relationship”*.

The proposed shared set of criteria to be considered by the account team and client in the process of alternative brand contact planning, is based on the premise that a single-minded brand positioning strategy is in place. The proposed set of criteria is furthermore constructed from the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. As indicated in the model the account team and client thus have the opportunity to assess whether the alternative brand contact concept is:

- **Novel to be noticed and expressive of meaning to attain impact?**  
Supporting finding: The alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed and expressive of meaning to attain impact.

- **Relevant to consumer lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind?**  
Supporting finding: To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind
- **Communicates a relevant, distinctive and single-minded brand positioning in message and form?**  
Supporting finding: 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.
- **A 'great' concept that can be leveraged or improved upon?**  
Supporting finding: The unconventional status and impact of the alternative brand contact must be maintained. 'Great' alternative brand contact concepts leverage brand communication spaces to maintain impact – proactive innovative thinking is required.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning suggests that alternative brand contact concepts that are approved, based on the above proposed set of shared assessment criteria, have the potential to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

#### **6.4.4 Branded Impact and the need for ongoing Proactive Innovative Thinking.**

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is concluded with the intended outcome of alternative brand contact planning and thus culminates in the primary finding produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. The alternative brand contact concept that measures up to agency and client assessment against the proposed set of shared criteria, has the potential to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on

consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The term **branded impact** is applied in the model to reflect the language used by respondents. The term branded impact was also applied in the study of literature. Darroll (2002) reasons that brand contacts can only be considered effective if they succeed to break through clutter to achieve branded impact – “to communicate in the name of the brand”, meaning that a relevant, distinctive and single-minded brand positioning is communicated to consumers.

The model identifies a further key finding produced by the qualitative exploratory research study with reference to branded impact and specifically the maintenance thereof. That is, that proactive innovative thinking is required to leverage the alternative brand contact concept in its brand communication spaces, to ensure it maintains its unconventional status and consistently delivers branded impact. The model thus suggests that alternative brand contact planning is an ongoing process. **Proactive innovative thinking**, as indicated in the model, is required with a mindset and planning approach that is conducive to alternative brand contact planning and is consistently focussed on the intended outcome – branded impact.

The qualitative exploratory research study produced a number of key findings that are not directly identified in the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. Based on these key findings, the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact delivers further value, if the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is pursued as proposed. It thus stands to reason that the alternative brand contact strategy has the potential to:

- Differentiate the brand because it is perceived as unconventional and to effectively communicate what the brand stands for (single-minded brand positioning).

- Generate word-of-mouth and publicity that contributes to the process of brand building.
- Create memorability with brand meaning – brand memorability.
- Introduce target audience focussed and cost efficient ambient alternative brand contacts that reinforce the brand identity and integrate into the brand communications strategy.

Equally so, it stands to reason that the implementation of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning, with its focus on achieving branded impact from a single-minded brand positioning and a shared set of criteria planning platform, will potentially grow and achieve:

- Open-minded thinking from media planners and media owners.
- Less time and energy consumption in terms of persuading parties involved of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning captures and reflects on all of the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. It can thus be applied on an experimental level by agencies and clients in the planning of alternative brand contact strategies. Also, further research on any one of the core constructs in the model or specific key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study can lead to empirical evidence of the nature, role and planning of alternative brand contacts, to contribute to the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

Chapter Six and this study will next be concluded with future research recommendations.

## 6.5 Conclusion and Future Research Recommendations

This study explored the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact on two levels. Firstly through an investigation of literature and secondly, through a three phase qualitative exploratory research study conducted in the South African marketing and communications industry, hence the title of the study – **The role of alternative brand contact planning in the South African marketing and communication industry**, has been addressed.

The qualitative exploratory research study confirmed the central research proposition and thus achieved the primary research objective to the study. The sample of Integrated Communications Agencies (senior account teams) and key clients that were interviewed in this study by means of exploratory focus groups and semi-structured depth interviews, 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.**

This key finding presents the primary finding produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. A range of supporting findings was also produced by the qualitative exploratory research study, in answer to the integral propositions and related supporting objectives to the study.

The study culminates in the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is designed in context of the nature and purpose of integrated brand contact management, to address the nature and role of alternative brand contact planning therein. The primary finding delivered by the qualitative exploratory research study presents the focal point and envisaged outcome of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The supporting findings are applied as variables in the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand

Contact Planning. The model thus reflects in full on all of the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study.

It is envisaged that the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning can be applied on an experimental level, by agencies and clients in the planning of alternative brand contact strategies. Further research can be focussed on any one of the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study to present empirical evidence of the nature, role and planning of alternative brand contacts. The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning can thus be evolved and improved upon.

Given the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as presented in this study, the researcher believes that future research in the following areas will also add further value to the understanding and application of alternative brand contact planning. The proposed research areas then also reflect the limitations of this study.

- The study defines and explores the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact from the outside-in, that is, from the consumers point of view. It will be of value to launch an empirical study that investigates the perceptions of the consumer toward the alternative brand contact and the possible influence of the unconventional and unexpected contact strategy on consumer behaviour.
- As previously reasoned, the qualitative exploratory research study did not investigate the concept of disruption in greater depth. A worthy future research area exists in that the actual nature of creative strategic thinking and disruption can be investigated more closely in real world terms, to contribute to the planning of alternative points of brand contact.
- Specific requisites and barriers to alternative brand contact planning may emerge in specific fields of brand communications for example, Sponsorship and Event Marketing, Customer Relationship Marketing,

Corporate Social Investment Marketing, On-line Marketing etc. In other words, the possibility that specific fields of brand communications activity may present alternative brand contact planning requisites and barriers that are unique to the field does exist.

- Alternative brand contact planning was explored in this study in the context of planned points of brand contact. The researcher believes that the principle and premise of alternative brand contact planning is also applicable to service points of brand contact. The proposition is that unconventional and unexpected service contacts can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.
- This study explored and motivated a strategic partnership between clients and Integrated Communications Agencies in context of the nature, role and planning of alternative points of brand contact. The advent and growth of brand communications consultancies in South Africa present a new and fresh dimension to the brand communications industry. A research study that is focussed on the mindset of the brand communications consultancy toward alternative brand contact planning may produce valuable insights and especially so if compared to that of traditional advertising agencies and Integrated Communications Agencies.



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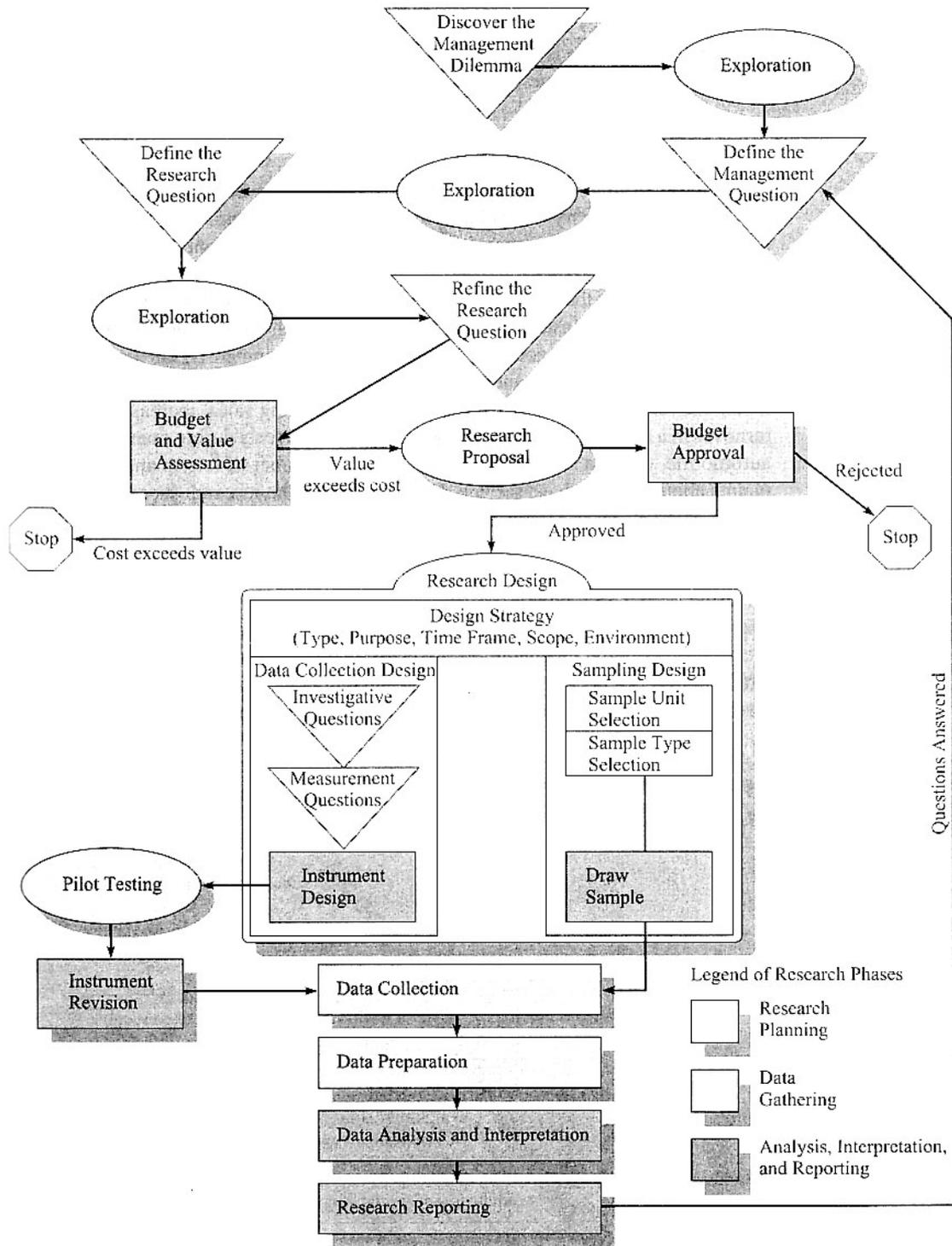
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**Appendix A: Diagrammatic summary of the Research Process as depicted by Cooper and Schindler (1998:57).**



## **Appendix B: Alternative Brand Contact Examples presented to Respondents**

### **Tobasco**

Tobasco's (the fiery American chilli sauce) innovative campaign in South African restaurants with the launch of a mild version of the product. Branded toilet paper carried the copy line: Don't you wish you'd had mild Tabasco instead?

### **Virgin Atlantic**

Virgin Atlantic placed egg trays with a wrap-around message 'Handled by Virgin Atlantic' on airport luggage conveyer belts to break through traditional clutter barriers and achieve impact in an unconventional and unexpected manner.

### **Cadbury's Flake**

The magazine insert campaign for Cadbury's Flake using the Flake wrapper with a post-it note – "Sorry just couldn't resist".

### **Audi Airbags**

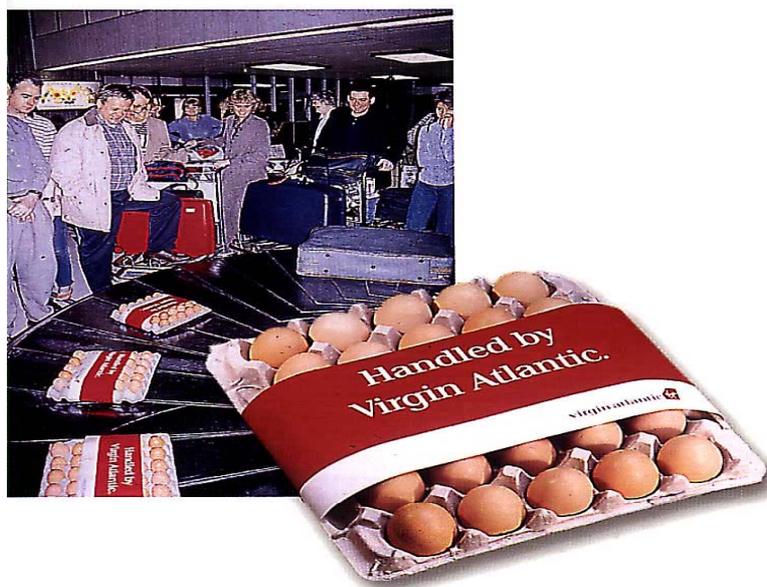
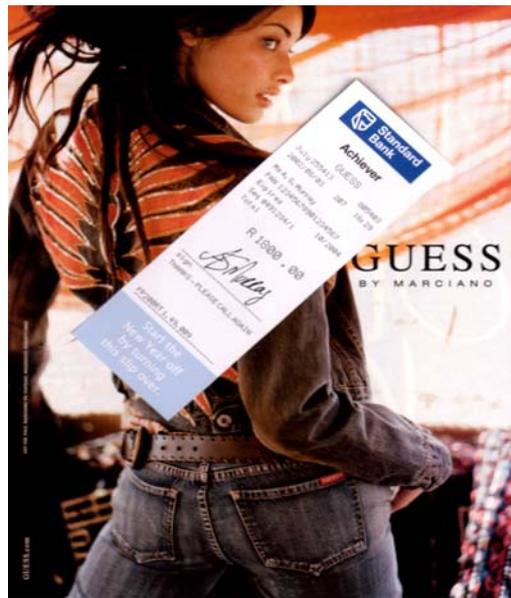
Audi used bubble wrap covers on magazines to advertise the benefit of Audi airbags.

### **Standard Bank – Achiever Plan**

Standard Bank's co-operative use of existing print advertisements for premium brands such as Guess. A look-alike original and signed credit card proof of payment slip is simply stuck onto the Guess print advertisement to create an unconventional contact experience for the Standard Bank Achiever account.

### **Nike on MTV**

The Nike brand message is transformed into editorial content. Nike penetrates MTV programming content with brand messages that resemble music videos.



## **Appendix C: Interview Guide to the Exploratory Focus Groups with Senior Account Teams**

### **1. Introduce the description of the alternative brand contact.**

*Brands communicate through a myriad of contacts with consumers. This discussion will focus on one of the areas of contact, namely planned marketing communications point of contact.*

*The alternative brand contact is planned and implemented in context of the brand communications or marketing communications strategy. An alternative brand contact is presented as a point of contact, in and/or beyond traditional media that will be experienced by the consumer as unexpected and unconventional.*

### **2. Introduce examples of alternative points of brand contact.**

### **3. Single open-ended question:**

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

(Probe responses that present newly identified dimensions of the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact).

### **4. Summarise group responses, to determine the extent to which agreement exists.**

**Appendix D: Financial Mail AdFocus (2002:30-31) Survey of major league agency rankings by Income from Fees, Commission and Mark-ups.**

**The Major League**

Marketing communications groups ranked by income from fees, commission and mark-ups

Ranking 2001	Agency 2000	Income Rm <sup>1</sup>			Media Billings <sup>2</sup>			Number of staff			Above-the- line %	No of clients	Five biggest clients
		2001	2000	% change	2001	2000	% change	2001	2000	% change			
1	1 FCB SA <sup>3</sup>	228,5	192,6	18,6	1 274,2	1 184,3	7,6	643	607	5,9	56	323	Shoprite, Toyota, Vodacom, First National Bank, Distell
2	3 TBWA SA <sup>4</sup>	215,8	181,6	18,8	1 054,4	511,6	107,0	535	544	-1,7	80	161	MTN, Spar, SA Tourism, Tiger Brands, Standard Bank
3	2 Ogilvy & Mather Rightford <sup>5</sup>	200,4	185,6	8,0	560,5	584,6	-4,1	454	520	-12,7	79	143	Old Mutual, Volkswagen/Audi, SA Breweries, BAT, MultiChoice
4	- Y&R Gitam <sup>6</sup>	101,5	57,8	75,6	495,0	405,0	22,2	272	189	43,9	70	52	Pick 'n Pay, Absa, Colgate, Ford, JD Group
5	5 Leo Burnett <sup>7</sup>	65,4	67,8	-3,5	389,0	284,4	37,0	148	191	-22,5			McDonald's, SAB, Mercedes-Benz, Incredible Connection, Golden Fried Chicken
6	7 Saatchi & Saatchi <sup>8</sup>	57,3	50,3	13,9	116,4	144,6	-19,5	142	150	-5,3	90	21	Guinness Africa, Uthingo, Engen, Visa, Metropolitan Life, Peugeot
7	4 The Agency	56,8	72,2	-21,4	325,0	383,2	-15,2	131	134	-2,2	50	52	Tellam, SAB, Technikon SA, Yellow Pages, SA Post Office
8	11 J Walker Thompson <sup>9</sup>	54,3	40,9	32,8	216,2	221,0	-2,2	106	134	-20,9	93	36	Unilever Home & Personal Care, Ford, Kellogg, Gilbey's Distillers, LG Electronics
9	10 The Jupiter Drawing Room	47,5	43,6	8,9	80,3	95,0	-15,5	130	147	-11,6	50	26	Neobank, United Retailers, NBS, Discovery, Red Bull
10	12 Lowe Bull Convent Pace <sup>10</sup>	42,9	35,7	20,2	300,2	276,2	8,7	128	114	12,3	75	53	Unilever, Investec, Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Johnson & Johnson
11	15 Net#work BBDO <sup>11</sup>	41,7	30,6	24,1	140,6	110,2	27,6	80	75	6,7	70	31	Cell C, Delta Motor Corporation, Rand Merchant Bank, Virgin Atlantic, SAB
11	16 Grey Global SA <sup>12</sup>	41,7	34,2	21,9	263,6	261,1	0,9	82	84	-2,4	80	49	Branding SA, Ford, P&G, GlaxoSmithKline, Barclays
13	9 Berry Bush BBDO	40,6	44,0	-7,7	130,0	180,0	-27,8	93	108	-23,9	75	28	Sonlam, Checkers, Distell, Cadbury, Ackermans
14	17 HardBoys McCann-Erickson	36,3	29,6	22,6	150,1	143,3	4,7	105	120	-12,5	97	42	Reckitt Benckiser, Caltex, Coca-Cola, SA Breweries, Gillette
15	13 DDB Communications Group SA <sup>13</sup>	32,7	35,1	-6,8	74,6	77,2	-3,4	43	52	-17,3	54	53	Unifoods, Mitsubishi Motors, Johnson & Johnson, Business Trust, Imperial Car Rental
16	18 Admakers <sup>14</sup>	26,8	26,8	-0,1	36,3	37,2	-2,4	19	16	18,8	75	38	Daewoo Motors, Prominent Paints, V&A Waterfront Marina, UCT, Mountrath Investments
17	19 Publicis Communications <sup>15</sup>	21,7	25,4	-14,6	113,4	146,6	-22,6	96	94	2,1	84	37	Distell, L'Oréal, Nestlé, Renault, Federal Marine
18	24 The Flagship <sup>16</sup>	14,9	12,7	17,3				52	35	48,6	55	42	Relyant, Ster-Kinekor Theatres, Reebok, Forsdicks BMW, Natal Sharks, Ukhozi FM
19	25 Bester Burke D'Arcy <sup>17</sup>	11,6	6,6	75,8	71,0	39,0	82,1	34	25	36,0	70	21	Yardley, Fiat, Roche, Distell, Procter & Gamble
20	- Magicom <sup>18</sup>	10,3	8,9	15,7	24,6	21,4	15,0	38	37	2,7	47	170	Metcash, Anglo Platinum, Ellabella, Nestlé, Clover
21	30 Harrison/Human Bates <sup>19</sup>	10,2	4,9	108,0	42,6	16,5	158,0	23	14	64,3	70	17	Pfizer, Wella, Imax, Exclusive Books, Eskom
22	23 KingJames <sup>20</sup>	9,4	7,8	20,5	26,7	22,0	21,4	34	32	6,3	55	14	Guinness UDV, 20twenty, National Brands, Allan Gray, Independent Newsp, Bromar
23	22 Alcom Rayner Marketing	9,3	8,9	4,5	25,3	22,8	11,2	18	20	-10,0	60	25	Mutual & Federal, PPS, Lafarge, Cobra Watertech, Petzelakis Africa
24	20 Te3P <sup>21</sup>	9,1	14,6	-37,7	21,1	34,4	-38,7	22	39	-43,6	51	46	Ster-Kinekor, Honda, Kellogg, Pikitup, Saica
25	26 Johnson Haydenbury Advig	6,7	6,3	6,8	13,6	10,1	34,7	14	15	-6,7	55	24	Price 'n Pride, Alpha Cement, Crabtree, Hellebrand Tyson, Harveyille
26	28 The Gap	6,4	5,4	18,5	19,7	16,0	23,1	17	16	6,3	75	9	BoE, American Swiss, Pernod Ricard, Jordan shoes, Weylandts
27	27 DWF Advertising	5,7	5,9	-2,2	21,2	20,3	4,2	16	15	6,7	49	40	Autopage Cellular, Comzetek, Bridgestone Firestone, Gestetner, Maxiprest
28	29 Troika Imagineering Works <sup>22</sup>	5,2	5,0	4,0	18,0			18	17	5,9	55	9	Prism, Darnell, Seppi, Dimension Data, Internet Solutions

**NOTES:**

In groups, subsidiaries in which the parent company holds 50% or more of the equity are fully consolidated in the figures; where less than 50% is held, only that percentage attributable to the parent company is reflected.

1. Income is defined as fees, commission and mark-ups for advertising-related services. Grossed-up billings are no longer shown. The figures in this column are confined to the income earned in SA offices.

2. Actual expenditure on time and space in the media for the agency's advertising clients, even if the buying is done by a specialist media agency. This is not a grossed-up billing figure.

3. FCB (Jhb, CT, Dbn), Azaguis Advertising & Marketing, FCB Activ, FCB Africa, FCB Design, FCB Electric Ocean, FCB, FCB Impact, FCB Investor Connection, FCB Jonssons, FCB Plato Healthcare, FCB Sponsorship, FCB Redline, Joe Public, Finset, co-operative member share of The Media Shop. Global income includes R19m from African network.

4. TBWA Hunt Laszaris (Jhb, CT, Dbn), Tequila (Jhb, CT, Dbn), TBWA Gavin Reddy, TBWA Digrati, Sassani Communications, the difference engine, member's share of Media Direction OMD.

5. O&M Rightford Searle-Tripp & Makin (Gauteng, Cape), Ogilvy One (Gauteng, Cape), Promotional Campaigns, Optimum Media, Matthews & Charter O&M, Ogilvy Healthcare, Zoom (Gauteng, Cape), Orange Juice Design, Ogilvy Interactive, Added Value Group, Bryan Singers Partnership, O&M Africa, Mindshare.

6. Y&R Gitam (Jhb, Cape), Y&R Gitam Direct, Bonsai, Strats Inc, Type 01, Y&R Hesley Byrne, Media By Storm.

7. Sonnenberg Murphy Leo Burnett, Red Nail, Scarcom, Manning Selvaage & Lee, Leo Africa.

8. Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising, S&S Cape, S&S Recruitment Advertising

9. JWT SA (Jhb, Cape), Thompson Connect, Logistix Kids, Mindshare

10. Lowe Bull Convent Pace (Gauteng, CT), Initiative Media SA, INB

11. Net#work BBDO, Network Naledi BBDO, Naledi Media Company.

12. Grey Worldwide, MediaCompe, Dicom Grey, Kagiso Grey

13. DDB SA, DDB Old Shanghai Firecracker Factory

14. Admakers, Admakers Web Design, Adbrands, Admakers Internet

15. Publicis (Cape, Jhb)

16. Flagship SA, Yellow Submarine, Black Inc, Galleon Productions, Echo Interactive, Hammerhead, Flagship PR, Ersgin, Stingray Interactive, Flagship Events

17. Bester Burke D'Arcy (Cape, Jhb)

18. Magicom, Bonny's Best Buys, Is'godi, Proman, Toll Reach, School Media, Now Unlimited Ideas

19. Harrison/Human Bates, Talk Bates

20. KingJames, KingJames RSVP, Mnemonic

21. Hercules II Advertising, The Penny Black Direct Marketing, Tri-Leisure Communications, Citidragon Merdia, The Imagination Design Corporation Warstreet Marketing.

22. Troika Imagineering Works, CI Online