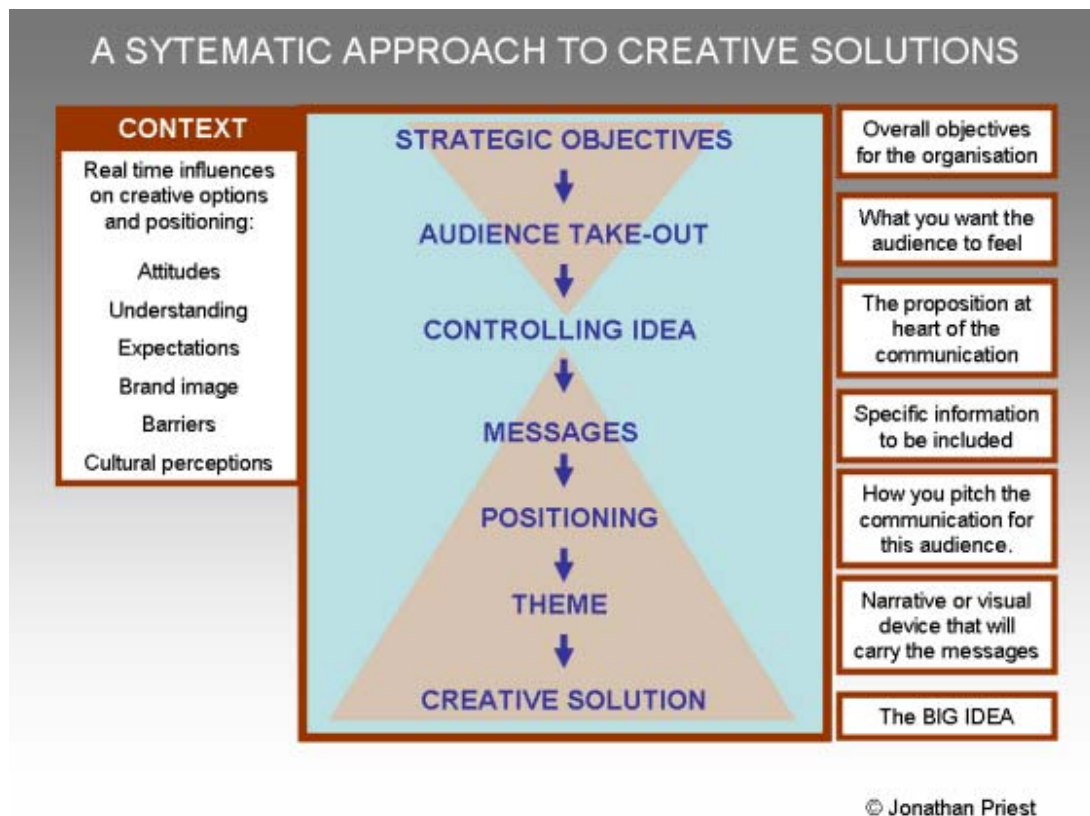


# WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

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If you want your communication to create an impression, you need a big idea, a theme that will convey the messages and promote your brand values. But there's more to big ideas than a flash of inspiration. If you have something to communicate, pause for a moment before you let your imagination run wild. Being creative and being systematic are not mutually exclusive.

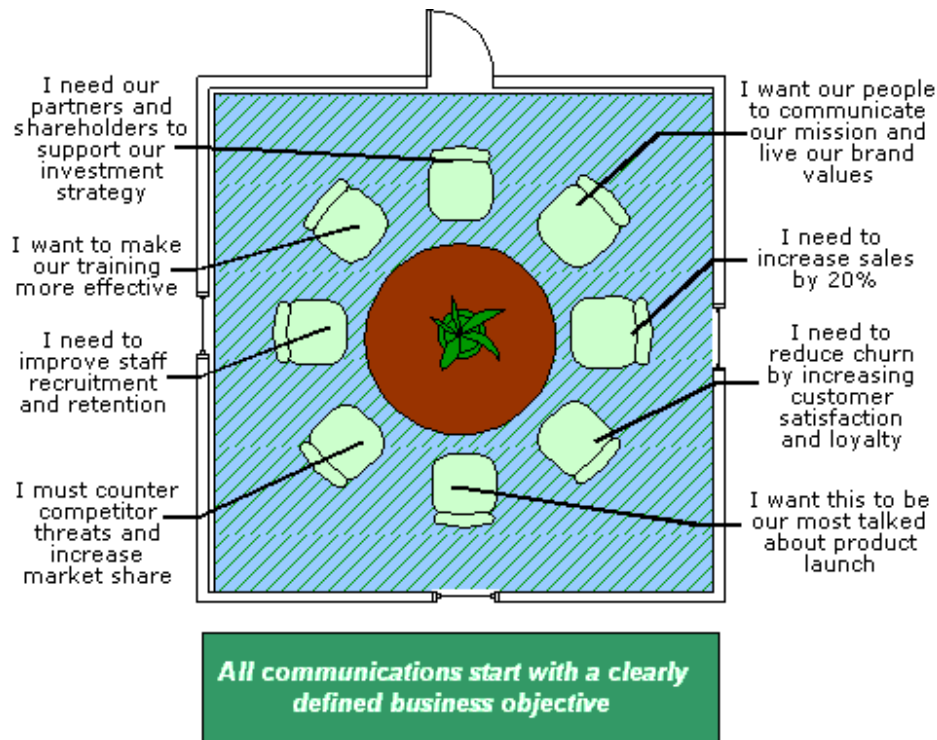


## Connecting with the audience

When ideas work, they seem so obvious and natural in the way they encapsulate the message and connect with the audience. When they are based on a creative whim, there's danger of conveying all the wrong messages. Big ideas are often the product of many hours of research and patient analysis which (in an ideal world) could go something along these lines....

## Strategic objectives

Every communication must have its roots in the overall strategic objective of the organisation whether it's to sell or serve or be a technology leader.



*"We need a brochure," is not a business objective, unlike "I want to increase sales by 10%," which sets clear goals and enables the client to ask challenging questions such as "How is communication this going to increase my sales by 10%?"*

### **Audience take-out**

A communication is designed to deliver a change in its audience so you need to define how you want to modify attitudes, understanding or behaviour.

### **Controlling idea**

This is a concise phrase that defines the central message or proposition. Screenwriters emphasise the importance of the controlling idea; it's the fulcrum on which the whole story turns, the essence of the movie. There are simple ones such as "crime doesn't pay" or "the ruthless pursuit of contemporary values will destroy your life" and more abstract ones such as "belief systems as systems of control" for the Matrix.

In corporate communication, controlling ideas are likely to be more prosaic:

"Arson can be prevented if everyone takes personal responsibility"

"Anti money laundering measures protect the bank's reputation and increase trust."

"Service is about the dialogue we have with customers."

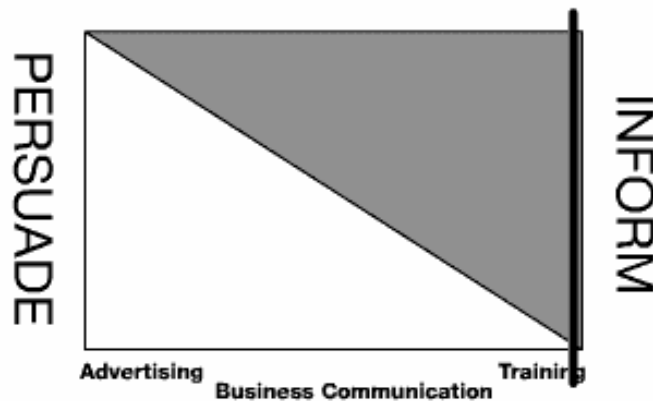
Simple though these ideas may be, you can see how they could provide a creative direction for the communication. So have I ever sat down and written a controlling idea, least of all had it approved by a client? Actually, no... but you can't write a word without a controlling idea, even though may be subconscious or unexpressed.

### Messages

If your aim is to win hearts and minds, there may only be one message. If it's a training programme, there will be several overall messages and sub-messages. These should be signed off before you get creative.

### Positioning

Positioning relates to how message are packaged to meet the needs of a particular audience. The tone of voice, the choice of metaphor and the format of the communication all vary according to whom you are communicating with. The main variable is whether a communication is designed to inform or persuade.



This diagram demonstrates the inverse relationship between information and persuasion in any communication. As you move the vertical line across the graph, the balance between information and persuasion changes - the more you need to do of one, the less you can do of the other.

### Theme

This is the creative glue that holds the messages together. Themes can combine visual metaphors or narrative elements. Sometimes the theme is extant, such as 'back to the future' or 'unseen heroes'. Or it may be an expression of the controlling idea such as taking a customer perspective. Without a theme, you will have an uphill struggle to make your communication work.

### Context

Context changes everything. It's the baggage that comes with every project; the history, the attitudes and expectations of the audience, it's the market conditions and what the competition did yesterday.

### **Creative solution**

The creative solution is the big idea that encapsulates all of the above. By being creative in the way you communicate your messages, not only do you produce something that is memorable and hence more effective, you also tell the audience something about yourself.

Over the years I have observed that executives who go with big ideas tend to be the ones that rocket up their organisations. This may reflect their attitude to risk, it certainly reflects their understanding of human psychology. We have all seen cheesy, patronising videos and presentations which do more harm than good and can understand why people would prefer to play it safe. However, if you follow these guidelines, it's very unlikely you will go wrong. And who knows, you might just make a name for yourself.

<p>Jonathan Priest Creative Communication <a href="http://www.creative-writer.com">www.creative-writer.com</a> <a href="mailto:solutions@creative-writer.com">solutions@creative-writer.com</a> 020 8767 0811 07973 406417</p>	<p>If you are looking for a big idea to help communicate your message, let's work together through the various stages of the creative process and develop concept that will connect with your audience.</p>
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