

How to Develop the Situation Analysis: *Team Planning.*

We recognize that the sharpest communications strategies and the best brand-building executions come from having in-depth and up-to-the-minute insights into consumers' heads, hearts and everyday lives. Precisely where and how does a client's brand fit into people's lives? Why should they care about it at all? Why should they choose it in preference to the many other alternatives that are so readily available?

A research specialist who describes the lifestyle and desires of the ultimate consumer to the marcom team is often called an account planner.

We believe in the basic benefits of account planning, where firsthand and detailed knowledge of the consumer's life is brought into the strategic and creative processes. The planner not only understands but also *represents* the consumer to the client-based team and to the client's organization.

Account planning works. It succeeds because it digs deep. But we go *beyond* account planning to dig even deeper, better and faster on a client's behalf.

We call it *Team Planning*.

Since we operate in self-directed, client-based teams comprised of IMC specialists, team planning immerses the entire team – not just the research specialist – in the consumer’s reality.

Instead of the account planner venturing out alone into the consumer’s world and then reporting back to the rest of the agency, team planning uses a planner’s expertise to lead the team in experiencing in-depth, face-to-face and ongoing interaction with its client’s customers via store checks, focus groups or 1-to-1 interviews.

We encourage all team members to:

- Go through the buying process for our client.
- Go through the buying process for a competitor.
- Use the product.
- Use the competitors’ products.
- Call our client’s and the competitors’ customer service lines.
- Ask a question online.
- Monitor industry user groups and chat rooms.
- Talk to retailers.
- Watch and interview consumers at retail.
- Interview a trade magazine journalist or publisher.
- Interview a consumer magazine journalist.
- Ride with a company sales representative.

The Case for IMC

- Observe consumer focus groups.
- Speak directly to the participants in the focus groups.

This immersion in the customer and industry world should be an on-going modus operandi throughout the year, with special emphasis just prior to annual planning sessions. It yields true empathy and crucial insights for more relevant and meaningful strategies and creative thinking.

Unlike conventional account planning, which is usually limited to advertising, the team planning approach is applied to every aspect of the marketing communications mix.

The commitment to IMC and the team planning philosophy helps build brands that touch customers at virtually every point of media contact. It helps detect changes in attitudes, demographics and trends. It uncovers organizational and operational problems. This is one more way to put more brains on building the brand.