Concepting for Content Projects

When Booth is developing a plan for a new "feature" or ongoing franchise for any medium (print, digital, video, social, email), creative concepting based on a "creative brief" is essential. As a deliverable, "creative concepting" is most familiar in the world of advertising. However, as marketing, advertising, journalism, content marketing, and PR bleed together, the idea of "creative concepting" has extended into all those arenas.

For context, in the ad agency world, "creative concepting" historically involves a creative director or art director working with a copywriter, under the supervision of the creative leadership.

Based on the creative brief, the creative/copywriter team explores multiple creative solutions. There's no blueprint for the "right" process, but if you have no process, your chances of success and of delivering results over the long term are probably not great.

Here is some guidance of "creative concepting" steps that have been known to deliver good results, as a starting point and to ground your approach in industry "best practices."

1. **You need to develop multiple options: three is common, more than one essential if you're not Don Draper**
   Every creative problem has myriad possible solutions. In the concepting phase, narrowing down to one solution too quickly (because of deadline pressure, falling in love with an idea, etc.), is often a recipe for a mediocre outcome. A rule of thumb in agencies is the rule of three: deliver three possible solutions. Generally, one should deliver on the creative brief in the most direct (safe) way possible, one idea should pushes the boundaries and take risks, and a third perhaps marries the two, is a little more conservative but takes some chances.

2. **Do your research, and show your research**
   Concepting is hard work and much of what you do ends up simply showing what won't work. Once you do the research, give context to your concepts by showing salient research that supports your belief that this solution will work. These should be analogous brands/executions that show that what you're proposing has a track record of success and can be executed.

3. **Evaluate the execution "costs"**
   Think through how the execution of every concept would work: how much time, cost, and all details that would need to come together to execute successfully. Don’t be optimistic, plan conservatively. Look for ways to streamline execution, easy wins, cost-savings in planning, and also be wary of expensive "watch-outs" – video, animation, difficult approvals, internal politics, etc.

4. **It’s a team effort**
   The process involves individual research/work and face-to-face workshopping. But you’ll want to be in agreement on the final concepts. It's up to the core concepting team to work through the issues, concerns, disagreements, options, and be aligned, rather than asking the reviewers to solve problems.

5. **These are just concepts, these are not the final idea**
   Once you settle on the best concept, the work is not done. As a team, you'll need to refine based on feedback and also fully figure out the execution process. The feedback may steer you to create a fourth or fifth concept, especially if it's the first time presenting the ideas.

6. **Don't big reveal to your creative leadership, use them all along the way.**
   The big reveal is for partners or clients. Leverage the creative guidance available throughout the ideation process, and get your leadership feedback and buy-in before presenting. If you do a more formal presentation internally first, do it as closely as you would to the actual partner and be prepared as if the partner was in the room, so you can use it as a dry run.