

# THE BRIEF SABOTAGE HANDBOOK



Wreck a Brief, Save a Planet

# YOU'VE HEARD THIS TOO MANY TIMES...

The earth's atmosphere is on track to get very hot, and the human race is on track to get very dead.

You know advertising has something to do with this. You've heard your friend/uncle/favourite comedian say you're making people "buy shit they don't need". You've even said it yourself. It's evil, but it's not *Dr Evil* evil, and you find it easier doing this than any career involving Excel formulas.

What you might not know is that advertising is helping the actual *Dr Evil* (a.k.a the fossil fuel companies) do the biggest cover up in history. Over the past 30 years, the five biggest oil companies have forked out more than \$3.6 billion on ads to present themselves as 'energy companies', creating a booming market for shutterstock images of wind turbines.

In truth, these companies spend about 5% of their capital investment on renewables.<sup>1</sup> Five percent.

I mean, maybe it's not uncommon. Someone you went to school with is telling you to "live, laugh, love" on Instagram but even they'll admit they took the photos while "crying, crying, crying". It's just that the outcome of one deception is to give you FOMO, while the other one makes you, well, dead.

It doesn't have to be this way. When you're asked to work on a brief for an oil or gas company, you can just say "no". You don't even have to use that word: you can fluff it up in an email. You can tell them you're "stacked" or "at capacity".

If that won't float, you tell them the truth. That your world view (i.e the view that you want to have one) simply makes it impossible for you to produce the effective creative work that this client deserves.

You might not think your actions can make any difference, or that someone else will just take the brief. But trust us: that someone doesn't have your talent. The agency is totally dependent on young creatives like you to bring the spark and cultural bite that's dried up in the senior team, who are pathetically desperate to recreate their glory days on that Guinness ad from 1998.

So this is a user manual for sabotaging that fossil fuel brief: helping you siphon off millions of dollars from those ad budgets into unimaginably bad and ineffective work.

The principles in this book will also work on the likes of EasyJet and BMW, but we encourage you to use them responsibly. Tonight in a dream, you will be visited by the spirit of David Ogilvy. Unsurprisingly he's plugging his book "Ogilvy on Advertising" even from beyond the grave. Good on him. Before you wake, he recites to you one of his most famous quotes:



**“Advertising is only evil  
when it advertises evil things.  
Like Shell, or pop tarts.”  
— David Ogilvy**

So go downstairs, make a pop tart, and think to yourself “Today I'm going to fuck up that BP brief”

# HOW TO WRECK A BRIEF



# 1 SMASH THE STRATEGY.

When the client's money is seemingly endless, you know a brief can stay in agency for years without any work ever being made. What if you stopped trying to get your ideas through at all, and started doing the opposite?

Here's how you smash the strategy.

## Quiz the planner:

When planners ask you if you want to chat about the brief, they do so safe in the knowledge that nobody ever does. Most briefs rarely make sense, and with a little prodding, they start to crumble.

## Ask questions.

Ask questions. Lots of questions. Unpick ambiguities in their choice of words. Read their proposition back to them in a slow, slightly puzzled way. Politely interrogate the truth of their consumer insight with an anecdote about your mum. Maybe reference a Steve Jobs quote.

At this point the planner's logical mind and own imposter syndrome will get to work. They'll be stalking their uni friends who did law on LinkedIn, wondering if they made the wrong career decision after all. At 9pm you'll receive an email back from them. The paragraphs look long and there are many of them. Job done. The planner is confused.



# 2 DO BAD WORK.

You need to delay producing any ideas for as long as possible. If you can, take a week for the first response. “Well, there wasn’t a lot of time, so we’ve just managed to get to territories” is a good opener. Eventually though, you’ll need to produce something.

It’s not enough to just produce bland work. It needs to be bad. The kind of bad that causes the client to question their judgement, loses the agency the account, and prompts the wellness team to buy everyone at work a Headspace subscription.

In fact, Andy at Headspace writes you a lovely email thanking you for the business you’ve brought in. His written prose is fantastic, and you feel a sense of calm and well-being wash over you. This is your goal.

Have fun and be uncreative with it!



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**TIP:**

Do not at any point propose work with pictures of penguins.  
Penguins are always effective.

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**“Make it simple.  
Make it memorable.  
Put the Jenners in it.”  
—Leo Burnett**

# 3 BLOW THE BUDGET.

It might seem like fossil fuel companies have bottomless pockets – and they do! – but continually renegotiating production budgets can put a real strain on your agency’s relationship with the client. That’s what we want.

Here are some quick tips for making the production process as unproductive (and expensive) as possible.

## Poke Bowls:

Whether it’s late working, edit sessions, or off-site meals, you should be ordering poke bowls *all the time*. Poke bowls are expensive, and extra toppings are a rip-off. If anyone ever questions this, say that all the poke bowls were plant-based, and it would be hypocritical to decline these expenses on an environmental brief.

## Fix It In Post:

For this tip you will have to get naked, and run fast. Position yourself far in the background of every shot (far enough that nobody will notice). Running around a lot will make it more difficult to paint you out in post. Even at expensive post-house “The Mill”, VFX artists struggle to remove fast-moving naked people.

## Neck Oil:

Similar to the first tip. Opportunities will arrive where you will reasonably be able to expense drinks on the job. Invite as many tangentially involved ‘colleagues’ as possible and order the Neck Oil. Sometimes it’s basically £8.



# 4 KILL THE CAMPAIGN.

By now you've sent the brief through development hell, prepared a PR disaster, and wasted plenty of the client's hard-earned dollars. You're in a win-win scenario, but the best thing you can do at this point is still to kill your campaign. This is the easiest step, and people will usually do this for you.

## **Account Managers:**

In meetings, say something like "I can't believe they're letting us do this!" or "Let's talk award categories". This will make the account team think that potentially risky or good work is being made. They will likely return in a few hours with an obscure item in the news that your campaign could possibly offend. The words you want to hear are "Maybe next year". This is account manager lingo for "dead forever".

## **Legal:**

Ask the question "Should we check with legal?" as much as possible. Even if there are no problems, legal will find one.

## **Burn The Files:**

Arson is very risky business and should be practiced with extreme caution, so that nobody is hurt. The files to the campaign will likely be backed up and on server farms abroad. You must burn them all. If fire isn't readily available, employ hackers.

If you followed these steps correctly, congratulations, you just killed a fossil fuel brief.



# DELAY. DITHER. BUNGLER. **WRECK THE BRIEF.**

Fossil fuel companies need your talent to hide the truth.  
They're drilling wells and pumping gas like there's no tomorrow.

Your creativity can make or break their chances  
of destroying our future.

So come in like a wrecking ball.  
Join the sabotage.

