

How much is an idea worth?

 By [Chris Brewer](#)

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Charlie Piccirillo is reputed to have been sitting around his Madison Avenue office one day in New York, when the announcement came through that petrol prices were being significantly increased...

He immediately realised two things.

This announcement could have a significant effect on new car sales.

As Volkswagen had a good reputation for being economical to run, the additional costs need not be as severe for VW owners.

So, he immediately called for a creative meeting and went out to lunch.

Before he left, he had an idea for a copy line so he roughly drew out this sketch.



Piccirillo's much-published sketch...

When he finally got back to his office (my guess is after a few martinis), he was surprised by his creative team who'd taken his sketch, firmed up a few lines, produced the advertisement and placed it in newspapers everywhere - starting the next day. They'd assumed that it was the finished product.

The concept took him ten minutes. How much is it worth?

There are many arguments surrounding questions like these and they vary in intensity. One thing that most would agree on is that Charlie earned his high salary.

Some argue that it's "experience" and perhaps it is, although I once met a 19-year-old who'd won a Clio and was travelling around the world to see which agency he would work with. He had no more than a year's experience - so I'm not convinced that's the answer.

I tend to think it's a skill that some of us have and some don't. Just like having a great voice for singing, a great eye for painting or just being beautiful. It's the luck of the draw. You either got it or you ain't.

The question that remains however, is should he have been paid so much?

I don't care that it only took him 10 minutes to create because that has nothing to do with it. There was a problem and he fixed it (and capitalised on it, too).

My plumber's going to arrive later this morning and he's going to fix my leaking geyser. Again, I don't care whether it takes him 10 minutes or 10 hours - there's a problem and someone has to sort it out because I'd like to have hot water again.

When he's done his job, how much should he charge?

Having hot water is very important to me, so logically I should pay him a large amount.

Not as much as Charlie, perhaps, but it's getting close, don't you think?

The difference is that it's incredibly hard to charge for ideas by the hour.

If you're hiring an agency to do a campaign for you, don't automatically assume that Charlie's will be the best one for you - the 19 year old's agency may be better, but perhaps an unknown would be better still?

Generally speaking though, experience and a good track record will help you make up your mind. You can also check out their details on Brewer's Ad Agency App brewers.co.za.

Whatever you decide, if the guys deliver the right campaign for you, don't argue about their bill. Pay them what they're worth.

Of course, the obverse is equally true. If your agency just can't come up with a viable solution or if they're charging extortionate amounts for mediocre work, fire them very quickly.

There used to be a lot of jiggery-pokery with costings in agencies. In many cases it was simple theft and clients were being robbed blind. It doesn't happen so much any more, I'm pleased to say.

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