

Advertising - a necessary evil?

By Brigitte Heyer



"Advertising is the art of arresting human intelligence long enough to get money from it." Stephen Leacock

Every business needs advertising, like it or lump it. Although there are some geniuses around who have the knack to get it right, for most people effective advertising is a long, and often costly, learning experience.

You soon learn what does and doesn't work, and try bravely to withstand the lure of clever, well-trained reps working under the whip to get your dollars.

In this article I want to give you some helpful hints regarding ads in print - whether on a flyer, in a magazine, newsletter or paper, the strategy needs to be the same.



First of all - does the print medium target the same (or at least a good proportion) audience as your business?

Next - is the medium attractively presented (layout)? Or is it hopelessly cluttered?

What does a reasonable size ad cost? How often does the paper/newsletter etc. come out?

How will you be gauging your responses from the ad? How much income do you need to make running the ad worthwhile?

A word of caution: as a rule, one-off ads don't work, especially the small ones. Unless you're offering 50% off Nescafe by 12 noon the next day, or run a full page in The Canberra Times,

don't bother. Even if your first two or three runs don't result in an overwhelming response, set yourself a timeframe of several runs before making your assessment. Also consider seasonal influences, the economy, and so on.

Regularity gets results (your doctor will agree)!

Now to the method!

75% of white space is a good idea - think of power point presentations! The human mind, unless totally intrigued by the offer, has a short attention span and does not like reading ads that look like hard work.

Buying a space and cramming it full of words is a waste of money and effort. Less is more.



The ideal ad has 4 - 5 components:

- A catchy headline that TALKS DIRECTLY to the prospect
- A subheadline (optional), a bit more info, but brief and to the point
- The so-called body copy or blurb (be specific, and include words like *exclusive, new, special, prestigious, attractive, unique* etc., but avoid other useless "fillers").
- An image - cartoon, illustration, photo
- Where to buy it - company name, contact details.

Did you notice- the company name comes last!

Only if you're Woolies or Daimler-Benz does it make sense to say so at the top of the ad.



The top is the bait, the lure, the WIFM = What's In It For Me?, that hopefully gets your prospect to read what it is they desperately desire, and to follow the trail you so cleverly laid out to captivate them at the end!

(Which, of course, you will follow up with exceptional customer service. It makes you feel good, and if the experience was positive beyond your product or service, they will be back for more.)

Get your wording right, have a picture that emphasizes the most important part of your message (and adds humour, where appropriate - maybe not for a funeral parlor), give the

weary eye some resting space, and your ad is well on the way to success.

Another important point is typefaces, fonts and font sizes. Ideally, limit yourself to one or two fonts. Sans-serif (eg. Arial, Helvetica) for headlines and anything BIG, serifed fonts (Times New Roman etc) for body copy. It increases comprehension, and that's what we want.

Avoid capitals and underlining, and restrict bolding.

BOTH APPEAR LIKE SCREAMING. AND YOU KNOW HOW WELL YOUR KIDS LISTEN IF YOU SCREAM AT THEM!

Now even with the best ingredients, it can be a bit of a maze for people with talents in fields other than the visual.

Good placement is crucial! It's a bit like creating your front garden.

You want to make it inviting, alluring, enticing and interesting, without having visitors get entangled in the vines of your honeysuckle, or falling over coppers logs and getting scratched by your rose bushes in the process!

I see well-phrased ads with text squashed right against the sides. Or ads with all the right elements, plus the recommended 75% resting space, that look like your sewing cabinet after your toddler has been at it - bits and pieces all over the place!

A well-designed ad is like a piece of art, you could almost frame it. You don't get tired looking at it.

Before you place your next ad-tention getter, make a plan. See yourself as the intended recipient. Get some advice. And say goodbye to wasted dollars on space not used to the best of its capacity.



Advertise we must –
but how we do it,
makes all the difference.

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