

Six Steps To Successful Classified Ads

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Summary: In spite of their size, classifieds pack a powerful advertising punch. Here's how to make yours more effective.

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Mini-Persuaders --- Six Steps To Successful Classified Ads

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The skillful use of classified ads builds your business.

Classified ads are inexpensive and powerful, and are an excellent way to promote your business both online and offline. Online, you can place ads in ezines and on Web sites, and offline, run them in your local paper and in niche magazines.

If you've tried a classified or two to promote your business and were disappointed with the results, remember that a one-shot deal won't work.

You need to run your ads repeatedly. For months, not weeks. Run one classified a week in a newspaper, or one a month in magazine read by your target audience ---for at least four months.

The humble classified ad is the magic bullet of advertising. And like a bullet, it needs to be precisely aimed.

= Step One: Pick your bait

Somehow you've got to pack the copywriter's AIDA formula of an successful ad: Attract, Interest, Desire, and Action, into 30 words.

You attract interest, arouse desire and get the reader to take action, with an appealing bait.

Start by listing everything you can think of to say about your product or service. Don't limit yourself. Don't just cover all the features you usually cover. Write down *everything* you can think of. You should have a long list.

Let's say you're selling a German Shepherd puppy. You can include: color, age, sex, the pedigree, temperament, conformation, and vaccination history. Don't confine yourself to only these points however.

Add that he'll sit and drop on command, walks on a lead, loves the cat, and is greedy. The more attributes you list about your puppy, the more likely it is that you'll hit on a unique combination of words which will make your ad stand out.

In your 30 word ad, you can't cover everything, so you'll tailor your ad to your ideal buyer, by mentioning only those things which will appeal to that ideal buyer.

This pre-screens your buyers for you. It doesn't matter what you're advertising either, whether it's a car, a lawn mowing service, a job, or a business.

When you've listed everything, pick four or five things you think would appeal to your ideal buyer.

= Step Two: Write the headline

Your classified ad won't really have a headline, but the first line functions as a headline. It should stop the reader cold, and it must be part of your sales message.

Remember that in newspapers, classifieds run in categories with headed columns, so don't repeat words like "For Sale".

= Step Three: Write the body copy

You can't be too creative in a basic classified. Give the facts. You can add descriptive words like "charming", "classic", and "elegant" to spice up the copy. Use punctuation rather than linking words like "and".

Get enthusiastic about what you're selling. This enthusiasm will come across in the ad. Imagine yourself the buyer: using the item, applying for the job, or buying from the business.

This enthusiasm is vital when you're selling. If for some reason you're having a bad morning, put the ad away for a few hours until you can achieve genuine enthusiasm

If you're writing an ad for someone else, and you don't feel excited, it's usually because you don't know enough about what you're selling. Do a little more research.

= Step Four: Get the response

Don't forget to add the phone number, the address if required, or the online URL.

The response is usually placed last in a classified. However, you can make your ad stand out by giving the phone number or the URL, and then making one final selling point: "Three only", "free quotes", or "results guaranteed".

= Step Five: Write several versions

Write at least four versions of the ad. Then go and do something else. When you come back, you'll have more perspective so you can pick the best one.

Here's a successful technique: if you have so many selling points that the ad runs long, split it and run two ads.

= Step Six: Test your ad

Testing is a must for a business ad. Often changing the first line, or rearranging your selling points will double or triple the pulling power of an ad.

How do you test? The basic process is to run the ad, and record the response. Ask the people who responded what drew their attention to the ad.

Keep changing the ad slightly, and recording the response each time you run it. The ad you settle on for longterm use is the ad which pulled the most responses.

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