

Effective Advertising

By Cathy Taylor

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How do you know when your advertising dollars are being well spent? First, let's expose two of the most common fallacies about advertising. Number one is that good advertising magically generates so many leads you have trouble keeping up with them. Number two is that advertising is some big executive's hyped idea that never worked in the first place. The truth, I propose, lies somewhere in the middle.

If no one knows about your company and its product(s) and service(s), then you can bet you won't be in business a long time. Advertising is just one method of getting your prospect's attention, and because we live in a society where we have to fight for any even small piece of "mind share," advertising has become even more of an art form.

When you learn a fine art such as painting, you discover how to put on the exact colors, utilize the right amount of raw material, as well as apply the proper strokes to shape your visual communication. So too in advertising. There are rules that take into consideration the psychological aspects of motivating your potential customer to intuitively respond to your message.

The first key in any marketing/sales process is building rapport – making a connection – and advertising can help create a "warm" environment where people become interested in listening to you. If you pique their interest with a good ad, as well as reach them at an emotional point where they need, or even better want, your product and services, you have a much better chance of getting the job or closing the sale. Advertising gives your company an edge by helping you to get your share of whatever business is around and by surpassing your competition.

What then comprises effective advertising? What are these aforementioned rules (not tricks) of the trade? Marketing experts have discovered three important elements in direct response advertising including direct mail and email campaigns that are "must knows." These elements are: the Target List, the Copy, and the Graphics.

The Target List

The key to knowing what mail or email list to buy lies within your company's strategic positioning and differentiation. Ask yourself, what type of companies would benefit from my products(s) and service(s), what interests them, and why would they want to buy from our company versus anyone else? Keep your focus narrow, and don't make the mistake of trying to provide everything to everyone.

Identify those firms within your geographical area (provided you have one) that you are willing to service. If the population is large enough, you may want to buy from a reputable list broker. If you can create the list yourself from regional resources, make sure to put the information into an open database and obtain accurate information. Most important, be sure you have the correct contact name and phone number of the person who would make the buying decision.

The Copy

Find your killer headline – that hook that makes them say “yes” so they continue to read your promotion and immediately recognize you in the future. Tell them why you are unique and the best choice to fulfill their construction needs. This, of course, requires you to know all of their needs – the more, the better.

Now state your benefits and then your features. Your benefits are what you provide that interests the prospect. Your features are what they expect to get. Good ad copy appeals to the buyer’s emotions first; then tells them what bang they are going to get for their buck. Then it asks for the order, or in the case of a longer sales cycle, requests action from the potential buyer; for example, to call you or visit your website for more information.

The Graphics

Graphics create associations that enhance your image regarding credibility and whether or not you are successful and to be trusted. Visuals need to be interesting and eye-catching so your ad stands out and helps facilitate an emotional response of well being.

In the case of for example, a construction company, ads can also point out your most high profile projects and the excellence of your work. If your company does not have established branding guidelines, then you might want to consult a professional to create the right message and deliver it in a consistent manner that significantly increases your chances for success.

For small business owners, the task of learning marketing can be overwhelming and the cost of hiring professionals prohibitive. It does take time to master these skills, but with a little attention on a consistent basis, one can learn enough to market their firm successfully. To be really effective, any information you receive from people who make a living at marketing or public relations should come from those who have years of experience in your industry.

Carefully plan your campaigns for maximum effectivity, and don’t forget to employ the tried and true tactics of testing and tracking. On an enterprise level, business software for tracking advertising includes MarketingPilot and Aprimo. Among numerous packages for smaller companies are Reanalyze, Clearmetric and AdRevolver.

Numbers don’t lie, and the smartest business decision is to reinvest additional advertising dollars into the areas that are actually showing results for your company.

Cathy Taylor is a marketing consultant with 20+ years experience. She specializes in strategy and plan development as well as management of communications and public relations programs in both the high-tech and small business sectors. She can be reached at Creative Communications: creative—communications.com.

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