

Marketing in Tough Times

By Cathy Taylor

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When the economy is slow, companies often do the opposite of what's best for their business. Down times are when you need to escalate your marketing efforts, not reduce them. In fact, it's the most critical time to make a plan to get in front of prospects as well as re-connect with current clients. If you aren't, your competition will be more than happy to take care of your prospects and clients for you.

Whether marketing in a print medium, radio, television or just networking, you have a limited amount of time to get your message across. You want to initiate interest and be memorable when the contact has ended. Let's take a look at what it takes to win with print advertising.

Money-making Headlines

Winning headlines accomplish many things. They first attract your prospect's attention; communicate a strong benefit; and appeal to the self-interest of the reader. You know you have a healthy headline if it answers the reader's question, "What's in it for me?" A good headline reflects that intimate understanding of your target audience.

Tests show that a good headline can be as much as 17 times more effective than a mediocre headline even when the exact same body copy is used. Headlines are a powerful tool, and that's reason enough to get it right the first time. Successful marketers tell us to spend 70 percent of your time coming up with the headline in 17 words or less.

"On the average, five times as many people read the headlines as read the body copy. It follows that, unless your headline sells your product, you wasted 90 percent of your money."

David Ogilvy, Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide

Hot Button Benefits

Use strong verbs in your copy to communicate your most valuable asset – your benefits. Don't confuse benefits with features; one is the sizzle, the other is the steak. Sizzle always sells more. For example, a masonry business benefit is the security one feels when buying a durable, long-lasting solution. Bricks and blocks, and first-class assembly, are the features.

Benefits are always from the buyer's point of view; features are the facts about your products, which help build credibility. Both are necessary in your advertising, but benefits are what close the sale because people buy based on emotions, and then justify their decision with logic. Good headlines stir emotions and motivate response.

Here are 10 of the most powerful words used in successful headlines today:

Secrets of
Amazing

Breakthrough
The Truth
Free
Sale
How to
Discover
New
Facts You

Example headlines using these keywords:

Little Known Secrets of How Brick Buildings Withstand Earthquakes
10 Reasons New Contractors Need Highly Skilled Craftsmen
The Truth about Building Safe Schools from Stonework
Facts You might not Know about the Legal Issues of Ergonomics
Discover How Breakthrough Scheduling Provides Improved Quality

Compelling Body

No one likes to be sold or manipulated – they want to be communicated with and shown. If you have a product or service they want, your copy can't be considered too extensive as long as you keep them engaged. And that's the trick – you need to know intimately what your target market wants. Always put yourself in the reader's shoes when analyzing your promotion.

The body of your message is where you articulate your unique selling position. How do you differentiate your construction company from every other? Tell them how your solution solves the void in your marketplace (a void that they have as well). Your body copy should grow from what specific action you want your recipient to take. Make them an offer they can't refuse; for example, offer to educate them (free of charge) about your business. If you want them to pick up the phone and call your company for a quote or consultation, then give them a good reason to do so. Write each line so compelling that readers can't wait to get to the next one. Always test messages, track campaigns, and make changes as you go to improve those results.

Practical tips for telling your story include: always use fonts that are easy to read, such as Times New Roman, Arial and Verdana. Make it conversational instead of cute; you want to create rapport with your reader. Make use of subheads that break up large blocks of text and create critical white space. Use photographs that support your copy or graphics of past successful projects with dynamic captions. Include as many testimonials as you can; you can't have too many testimonials.

Call Them to Act

If you don't ask for the order, the answer is always "no." Your call to action is a beginning step to converting a prospect into a buyer. The best kind of advertising makes them an offer they find irresistible. Tell them exactly what actions or steps to take – for them to either call, fax, e-mail or write your company, as well as visit your website for more information.

If you send them to your website, make sure you have a two-step process in place that includes a second strong call to action so you don't lose them at that point. You could use case studies that depict your quality craftsmanship and on-time scheduling. Emphasize customer service and, while you have them, don't forget the opportunity to up-sell. What additional services might you offer that they could benefit from? You'll be amazed at what needs you can unearth just by asking.

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