

13 Elements of a Winning Small Business Advertisement

By David Frey

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Nobody can guarantee a winning ad. The only way to know for sure is to test it. But there are several elements that you can incorporate into your ad or sales letter to give it a better chance of being a winner. Use these elements as your own personal “winning ad checklist.”

Element #1 – Smart Ad Placement

The first step in positioning your ad for success is increasing its chance of being seen by your target market. Running the world’s best radio ad for your retirement planning services on a local hip-hop station wouldn’t be a good idea.

Find out what your target market watches (i.e. sports, cooking, business), where they watch it (i.e. car, home, airport), and how they watch it (i.e. newspaper, magazine, radio). Until you know this information, you cannot make smart choices about ad placement and you’ll likely end up wasting a lot of your hard-earned dollars on an ad that didn’t even get seen by your target market.

Element #2 – Focus on Your Objective

You’ll never get what you want if you don’t know what you want. This is true in your personal goals and also your advertising efforts. You must have a specific objective for your ad if you want people to act. Is it to call your office, come to your store, or go to your website?

Whatever your objective is, gear all the elements of your ad to persuade consumers to fulfill your objective. Suppose you want readers to call your toll-free telephone number, then your call-to-action should be, “call our toll-free number now!”

If you include a testimonial, have your endorser say something like, “when I made a call to your toll-free number...” or you might include copy that says, “one toll-free phone call can change your life forever.”

Multiple objectives will confuse your prospect and when people get confused, they usually do nothing.

Element #3 – Irresistible Offer

If you have ever seen the ginsu knife infomercial you have witnessed the anatomy of an irresistible offer. Not only do you get the set of ginsu knives, but also you get the “magic shredder”, the “never-dull chopper”, and the “easy egg slicer.”

BUT that’s not all – you also get the “2-in-1 blade sharpener” and if you order in the next 10 minutes you’ll also receive a second set of ginsu knives! Now that’s an irresistible offer. Who could resist all these bonuses for the price of one set of ginsu knives?

The secret to constructing an irresistible offer is to add valuable bonuses and extend risk-free, easy-to-pay terms. Continue heaping valuable bonuses on your customer until they throw up their hands and say, “Okay, I give!”

One last thought about your irresistible offer. Sometimes you can make your offer so irresistible that it appears too good to be true. Always tell the reason why you can make such a great offer. This will add credibility to an incredulous ad.

For example, you might be having a sale that advertises 70% off retail price. When people see “70% off” many will think that all you have done is boost your price 50% just so that you can advertise a 70% off price.

But if you tell them you can offer 70% off because the recent hailstorm caused some very slight damage to your product and you need to liquidate. People can now reconcile your great offer in their minds so that it makes sense and is believable.

Element #4 – Unique Competitive Advantage

Why should your prospect do business with you over any of your competitors. Even those that have lower prices! Do you have a “wider selection than anybody in the tri-county area” or do you “deliver within eight hours after the purchase”?

Often your unique competitive advantage is the biggest benefit you can offer your prospects so consider including it in your headline, bulleted copy, or your guarantee.

If by chance, you don’t have a unique competitive advantage(s) then you better get one...fast. Not having a unique competitive advantage with which to show value, results in competing solely on price - - and that’s a losing proposition (unless you have a significant cost advantage).

Element #5 – Advertorial Style

Studies have shown that consumers read new articles seven times more than they do advertisements. It is said that the average consumer is presented with over 3,500 ad impressions

per day. We have become jaded to promotions and commercials.

Cloaking your ad in a news style editorial format will not only pull more attention, but also instill credibility, which is one of the major roadblocks to consumer response. “Advertorial” (advertisement – editorial) type ads include compelling headlines, lots of informative, interesting text, quotes, and a judicious use of graphics.

The reason advertorial ads are so compelling is that people are tired of in-your-face sales ads and would prefer the silent, soft sell of an authoritative news article.

Element #6 – Compelling Headline

Your headline is the most important part of all the technical aspects of your ad. 80% of the success of the headline can be attributed to its headline. A powerful headline is either, (1) benefit driven, (2) news oriented, (3) curiosity driven, or (4) how-to oriented.

The following is an example of each:

Benefit Driven Example: “You Too Can Have a Slimmer Figure Without Dieting”

News Oriented Example: “Amazing New Formula Cures Arthritis Pain”

Curiosity Driven: “Are You Making These Deadly Hair Care Mistakes?”

How-to Oriented: “How to Flood Your Business with New Customers for Under \$50”

It’s a good practice to develop a minimum of 30 variations of your headline before you select the one you’ll use. Readers satisfy their interests by scanning headlines. If your headline doesn’t grab attention your ad will never be read, let alone noticed.

Element #7 – Sell the Benefits

Your prospects don’t care about you. They don’t care about your awards, the name of your business, how much you sell, or how good you think you are. They only care about how you, and what you offer, can benefit them. So leave out all of “me” copy and sell the benefits. Ultimately people only want two things, to (1) gain pleasure, or to (2) avoid pain.

Tell people how your offering will help them either gain pleasure or avoid pain by expressing them in the form of benefits. Don’t confuse this with listing the features of your product or service. People aren’t concerned as much with features as they are with what the features will do for them personally.

To do this, list each of the features of your product and then determine the benefits, both the potential of gain or the avoidance of pain, your prospects will receive as a result of each feature. Hint: Studies have shown people respond better to the fear of loss (pain) than they do to the promise of gain.

Element #8 – Make it Risk-Free

Consumers are naturally skeptical. With all the scams, rip-offs, and untruthful ads consumers have experienced, who knows what to believe anymore? You must make your ad credible and risk-free. The good news is that it's easy to do. Using a combination of these three strategies will provide a powerful risk-free offer.

Strategy #1 – Use Testimonials

Testimonials from real people are powerful. People don't like to be guinea pigs. If they've seen that someone else has received the promised benefits, it provides instant credibility. Hint: Including pictures of the endorser will double the effectiveness of your testimonial.

Strategy #2 – Offer a Strong Guarantee

Provide as strong a guarantee as absolutely possible. If you can't provide a strong guarantee for your product, perhaps you shouldn't be selling it. Unfortunately, too many small business people fear that customers will take them up on it. Let me ask you, when was the last time you took somebody up on their guarantee? Seldom do guarantees get exercised. Use a powerful guarantee.

Strategy #3 – Include Facts and Statistics

Use facts and statistics from reliable sources to bolster your claims. People find comfort in positive, scientific proof.

Each of these strategies will build credibility and reduce the risk prospects naturally feel when contemplating an offer. Above all, be truthful and honest!

Element #9 – Call to Action

When someone tells you that they don't like being told what to do - - don't believe it. People do want to be told what to do. In fact, people need to be told what to do and when to do it.

Phrases such as, "call now", "come in today", "sign up right now" trigger emotional response mechanisms that get your prospect to take action on an offer that secretly you want to take advantage of anyway. Make your call-to-action explicit and clear, so your prospect knows exactly what to do.

Element #10 – Urgency

Admit it, the vast majority of people are naturally lazy and like to procrastinate. Without a real or perceived sense of urgency your prospects will drag their feet. To compel your prospect to act immediately you must inject a feeling of "scarcity."

Scarcity is felt when the supply of either time or product quantity is limited. For instance, placing a deadline on your offer makes your prospect feel as though they have to take advantage of your offer before they lose the opportunity. An example of this tactic could be rescinding a discount offer or a special additional bonus within a specified period of time.

Another tactic is to limit the quantity available so that people will feel the need to take advantage of

your offer before your product runs out. It's not unusual to see offers stating, "while supplies last", or "only 50 available, first come, first serve."

If you use scarcity tactics (and you should), make sure that you hold true and keep your word by rescinding the offer when you say you will. If not, you will lose credibility and the tactic will backfire on you.

Element #11 –Simple to Respond

Most people buy on impulse rather than logic. If your prospect finds it difficult to take advantage of your offer during their moment of impulse, you will lose the sale. Make it easy to do business with you.

Many people communicate in different ways. Some like to call on the phone, others like to go to the Internet, and yet others will only fax you their order. It's important to offer multiple ways to be contacted such as telephone, fax, website, cell phone, pager, or any other communication method.

Studies have shown that the vast majority of people take advantage of impulse buying using the telephone more than any other method. The same studies show that when you offer a toll-free number, response rates increase. Finally, if you offer a recorded message with a toll-free number in which people can hear a message and leave their contact information, response rates increase even more.

Element #12 - Graphics

Using a graphic is the first step in a three-step system for getting your audience to read your ad. The first step is to attract your reader's attention with an exciting graphic, step two is to pull them into your ad with a gripping headline, and the third step is to persuade them to take action with your copy.

A good graphic can attract the attention of your prospect and draw them in to your message. However, a common mistake advertisers make is to add graphics that overpower the copy, leaving little space to tell their story. Although a picture is worth a thousand words, it can also be interpreted a thousand different ways, sometimes causing confusion.

Graphics should draw attention and add to your message. Exciting graphics showing action are always an eye pleaser. Including someone in your graphic from the target market you're trying to reach, actively using your product or service, is also a good choice that will add to your message.

Element #13 – Accountability

Small businesses don't have a lot of money to spend on advertising and; therefore, must hold their advertising dollars accountable. Without knowing what ads are pulling better than others, you could be wasting a lot of money.

To avoid this, you need to track the response rates of your ads. Instead of asking your customers where they heard about you, get definitive proof by implementing a process by which you can track

your ads.

For instance, using a separate phone line or extension number for specific ads can help you determine the source of the inquiry. Another tactic may be to use a unique landing page on your website for different promotions. If you're using lead generation by direct mail, tell the recipient that they need to bring the mailer in to take advantage of your offer.

If you are using radio or television as your primary medium, offer the audience a special report whether it is a paper report, audiocassette, or a video. This not only helps you track your response rate but give your prospect a good reason to respond.

Conclusion

As you track your ads, keep the best pulling ads as your "control" piece. Vary the different elements of the ad to determine if your new ad pulls better than your control ad. If it does, make that ad your new control ad.

Although, none of these elements alone can guarantee a successful ad, the combination of these elements will increase the potential for your ad to be a solid winner.

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