

What Advertising Can and Can't Do For You

By Karen E. Hipp

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Mostly, advertising is misused and misunderstood. A lot of people confuse "marketing" with "advertising." Advertising is a part of marketing, but not the whole thing! The downside of the "misunderstanding" is that small businesses look at this as their only means of getting sales for their business. Many times, the result is miss-spent money with little to show in return.

Advertising can be most effective when you are selling a mass-market product like laundry detergent or coke. However, many small and home owned businesses sell more of a specialized product or services that appeals to a much smaller "niche" market. To understand what can work for you, lets first clear up a few myths about what advertising is:

Myth 1: Advertising is what you have to do to get business. Advertising is simply the purchase of time or space in order to promote a product or service. There are many other marketing methods available such as publicity, promotions, signage and referral programs that could work better for your business.

Myth 2: Advertising is too expensive for small business. It doesn't have to be. You can find very cost effective advertising methods through local community papers, classifieds, "zoning" in your main papers local section (to hit certain zip codes only), industry newsletters and small ads that are placed repeatedly in the same spot of the paper. Cable TV can be targeted and cost-effective as well.

Myth 3: There is only one best advertising method. Just like investing in the stock market, it is important to diversify. You don't want to put all of your eggs into one basket, at least until you find what works best for you. There can be a lot of trial and error, which means that it's crucial to have some type of results mechanism in order to see what works and what doesn't. Sample several approaches all at once, once you have narrowed down the field to those you feel worthy. You will then find the best one or two methods that work for you. This also tells you to avoid any long-term contract with any media outlet until they have been proven a good source. You can even sometimes strike a bargain with a particular media source that you are interested in to allow you to "test" response at a reduced rate.

Myth 4: You only have to advertise on a limited basis. The success of advertising is all about "frequency." It can take up to 5 times before anyone notices your ad, then 10 or more times before

they might act on it. Therefore, you have to have enough money in your budget to test the ad over time. Remember that we are exposed to hundreds of ads a day. As a result, we act like "screeners", filtering out any information not useful to us. So, blowing your advertising budget on one 1/2 page ad in your local paper will surely not produce the results you are looking for.

Myth 5: Advertising does all the work for you. You can't place your ad, then sit back and wait for the phones to ring. Advertising is not a passive way to get business. The more active you are in promoting your business through a variety of marketing activities, the more effective your advertising will be. Plus, your promotion activities will greatly enhance your advertising efforts. Most ads produce leads from people that are interested. Therefore, you have to have your follow up messages in place. One of the key factors in this is to have your entire staff be knowledgeable of every ad that is placed, where, when and what their response should be. If someone calls to get more information about your ad, but the person who answers the phone knows little to nothing about it, bang. Dead lead. Have your staff be well prepared to answer all questions.

When a small business should advertise:

*When your target market is reachable by one or more media.

*When your target market is a decent sized mass-market.

*When this is one of the only ways you can reach prospects.

*When you are moving into a new market.

*When your budget permits for frequency.

*When you can reach the most people who can and will buy your product or service through cost effective advertising.

*When your competition does.

*When none of your competition does.

When a small business should not advertise:

*When it is not cost effective for the return on your investment.

*When your budget will not permit repetition.

*When you expect the advertising will bring in customers by the hundreds.

*When advertising will be your only method of reaching your market.

*When your advertising will be far less than your competition.

*When you cannot afford to have professional ads done.

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