

Improving the effectiveness of your advertising - 10 tips on make your advertising work harder

Creating hard working and effective advertising, whether that is press ads in newspapers or magazines, direct mail or TV advertising is all about understanding how to sell. Yes design plays a part in the effective communication of the messages, but all too often the basics are not given enough consideration – what are you trying to say and why should people believe you?

The following 10 tips look at practical techniques and approaches for improving the effectiveness of your advertising.

1. Benefits not features

It is basic sales technique but people buy the benefits of a product and not the features. Front-wheel-drive is a feature of a car. If this is your message you are making the assumption that people understand the implications and benefits of this. They won't. Far better to explain the benefits of front-wheel-drive – such as improved cornering.

2. Stories sell, facts only tell

Whenever possible use stories about the company, its customers and anecdotes to make key selling points. People have far more belief if they can have a real example of how your product has benefited someone, or why it has come about.

3. Write from the customer's perspective

It is important to avoid the 'I/we' perspective and talk in the 'you' perspective. Rather than say 'we build the most durable widget', say 'you will benefit from the durability of the widget'.

4. Strive for credibility

For most advertising it is targeting non customers. You need to prove your credibility, especially if you are a service where there is no tangible product. Think about what would most impress your customers? What are their fears about buying from you? If your industry has a less than savoury reputation, such as double glazing, you maybe need to include guarantees and testimonials from happy customers. If you are a relatively new sector, such as laser eye surgery, then showing how many procedures you have carried out and the qualifications and expertise of the practitioners would be very important.

5. Cut out the blurb

You don't necessarily need to have short copy but you do need to have 'lean' copy. We all tend to 'overwrite' and most professional copywriters will go back to their work over a couple of days, editing and pruning their words, getting rid of any superfluous ones. You also need to keep your sentence structure short as complex and long winded sentence structure can be very confusing and off-putting.

6. Allow for scan reading

As human beings, we very rarely read something from start to finish, especially advertising. We scan read the piece before deciding whether it is worth a more detailed read. This is why you need to allow for that and ensure that your main messages can be picked up in this scan reading process. Techniques for this include use of headlines and subheadings, bullet pointed lists, copy in tinted panels, captions on photos and graphics and flashes.

7. Create a sense of urgency

Can you add a sense of urgency to your advertising? If there is an offer can you put on a closing date? Could you give an 'early-bird' additional incentive for responding in the next few days?

Using tactical promotions and discounts can be very effective in advertising and having deadlines is a proven way of increasing your response rates.

8. Don't be afraid to dramatise your message

Although you cannot be factually incorrect in your advertising you can dramatise your message. One way of doing this is to use dramatic comparisons. For example, if you are selling a language CD system for £39.99, you could compare to the cost of a language course. Yes they are 'apples and pears' but it puts the price into context and makes it seem like a very cheap option. Job done.

9. Be careful with your use of imagery

Imagery can certainly make or break an advertisement. There is an advertising 'rule' that you either have a clever headline and a straight image, or a clever image and a straight headline. If you look at some of the most effective advertising, it follows this rule. Sometimes the temptation is to try and be clever with both your copy and your imagery and it can become confusing. If you have a very clever or quirky headline, you may not even need an image as it would detract from the words.

10. Don't let your layout let you down

You've put all this effort and consideration into your messages and copy, so don't blow it with a clumsy design. Poor typography, page layout and colour choices can be the death of a good ad. Very few non designers have the skills to do this effectively, so best to leave it in the hands of the experts.

For more information on how you can improve your advertising effectiveness,

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