

Making Print Ads that Work Better

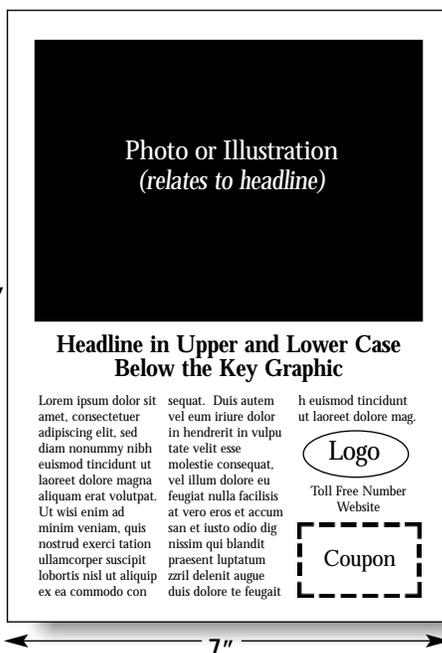
By Richard G. Webster

Regardless of the production techniques and expanded graphic capabilities available today, there are time-proven rules that, if followed, create more effective ads. Changed perception, increased readership and generated response are the three results all advertisers want, either individually, or in combination. Though important, sales is not always the most immediate objective; share-of-mind counts for a great deal with both frequent and considered-purchase buyers. Some advertisers, such as capital equipment makers, systems developers and non-profits will find that advertising effectiveness is very hard to trace through the cause and effect of advertising leading directly to sales. Perception, readership and response are fundamental to this discussion.

As with other things in life, good advertising has rules successful practitioners should follow. Some advertisers dispute this statement and point to huge consumer brands as proof. Truth is, many consumer brands have been around for years. They can break rules and keep on rolling by the sheer accumulated weight of their mass — and the enormous amount of money they spend to be remembered, usually just for their brand name only. But this does not mean you (or anyone else) should copy them.

Sometimes advertisers for less-frequently-purchased products (or low budget advertisers) get the rules confused or misapply them. If your brand is not the category leader or if your product is not markedly different from your competitors', you would be wise to stay within the boundaries of what has been proven to work in advertising.

For advertisers in this category, *perception, readership and response* are closely linked. The objective in making a good ad is to achieve one



or all, as your strategy dictates. The way to do it is by following the proven rules, not by breaking them. Being different or daring may make your ad stand out but, more often, it will detract from the message and distract the reader from the real reason you're advertising.

THE RULES:

1. Have an *idea* that creates interest, delivers a reader benefit or makes your product different from the competition. Put it in the headline. Developing the proposition is, of course, the most important step in development of an ad. Examine the competition, develop your differentiation and establish your "unique selling proposition" before finalizing your ad. Consult with your strategic advertising agency.
2. Connect your visual to your headline by interest — preferably direct. The more direct you are, the better. Although borrowed interest, metaphors and analogies can be more dramatic, to be effective they must contribute strongly to the selling proposition and not detract from it. Use them very cautiously.

3. Make the body copy both legible and easy to read. If the copy is interesting, length doesn't matter. Break it up with subheads and paragraphs, just as a textbook is set up. Readers will stay with your pitch if they are interested in your product category. Your copy must do these things:

- Give the reader information
- Deliver *believable* promises of benefits
- Make *supported* claims of performance
- Engage them emotionally

4. Print advertising is to be read, not viewed. *What works on a designer's Mac, (on television, the internet, or on any other electronic medium) may not work on paper.* Remember: many ads that will appear in a magazine or as pages in a brochure are designed on a screen. It is *imperative* that you review a printed copy or proof of the ad as it will appear in the magazines you have selected, and critique it *just as it will be seen by readers.*

5. Make it very clear *who* the advertiser is. The logo and company name are secondary to the selling message, but they should be clear and unmistakable. This "signature" must be large enough to clearly identify and locate your company: phone, fax, snail mail, e-mail, website, etc. Retailers should always list location, hours and phone number. Keep in mind that the message in the ad is the most important part, not the advertiser's logo.

6. Make your ad as large as you can afford. There is an immense body of research proving that readership is influenced by ad size and color. There are instances where budget or the "bigness" of the idea will affect size. If budget constraints indicate fractions, keep them simple and

clean. If the idea is bigger than life and can be transmitted in small space, use it and increase frequency or reach, as strategy dictates. Remember, each ad is a salesperson, especially in trade magazines, where readers are looking for information to improve their business life. If you run two facing pages (a "spread," or in newspapers, a "double truck"), you own 100% of the reader's attention until the page is turned.

- If you cannot afford spreads or the next best thing, a full page, or even a horizontal half page spread, try to get a unique space unit such as an "island half," "floating column," or "isolated square third." Whenever available, they are worth the space premium.
7. Use color. People see in living color. Full color. Four color. Readership scores for "seen" or "noted" will improve with the introduction of a second color for emphasis, such as red or blue, but you will be far more satisfied with your presentation if you can do it in full color throughout.
- Never show people or faces in anything other than full color or black and white, unless you are promoting a cure for envy or seasickness.
 - Be selective when you use color type in an ad unless it is for children or required by law.
 - Color lettering in a print advertisement should be the

logo, if part of the corporate identity. We were all taught to read from books set in black type on white pages. It may not be as imaginative, but it is what

works best and subconsciously makes people most comfortable when reading. If your product is paint, ink, or a software program using color, you probably will want to break this rule. If it isn't, don't even think of it.

8. Only use reverse (white type "reversed" from black or a solid dark color) in a very short, bold headline.

Running text copy in reverse makes it difficult to read, with the eyes bouncing from line to line. (The use of reverse white type on blue or green highway signs is an attempt to compensate for day and night and achieve optimum readability in all lighting conditions. Magazines are always viewed in good lighting.) Wide copy measures are also difficult, best to break long text into columns as the magazines and newspapers do. A copy line measuring from 55 to 65 characters, including spaces, is ideal.

9. When people photographs are in your ad, use *models*. If you must use untrained or real people, use them only as "extras" in distant focus. Most models have a trained camera presence, wardrobes, make-up and more. Regular people, friends, family or a bathing beauty draw attention away from the serious selling message of the ad. If you're selling to men, use male subjects in real-life situations. The

Reverse Type Works Here

But, When reverse type is used for text, it becomes very difficult to read. Ads that are hard to read are not effective and waste precious advertising dollars.

same for women. Resist the impulse to make a statement with a role/gender reversal such as a male nurse or a female tractor operator except in special circumstances. The “statement” detracts from the primary reason for advertising, which is, ultimately, to sell.

10. See a full-size pre-press proof. Electronic production has eliminated many of the bugaboos of print production: spelling errors, disappearing type, mixing in the wrong photo are pretty much history. But the gremlins are still there. Strange things can happen when a transparency is enlarged to page size, a misplaced letter can turn your “luck” or worse.
11. *When all is done, look at the ad as much as you can from a prospect’s point of view.*
 - Does it appear neat, orderly, well-organized? Is its hair combed, are shoes shined, fingernails clean? Your ad is, after all, the image you want to portray for your company to your public.
 - Is there a benefit in the headline that will attract readers who should be prospecting for your type of product? It’s making a sales call for you.
 - Do you show your product alone, or with satisfied users? Testimonials, direct or implied, are very effective.
 - Do you seek action in the ad, “ask for the order?” Make it clear what you want the reader to do next.
12. To improve your response, give readers an easy way to take action. Toll-free numbers, your website and e-mail, bind-in cards or a

coupon are among your choices. Trade publications readership studies indicate that toll free phone calls are the preferred response mechanism, with website visits and e-mail contact close behind. While the use of coupons in ads has all but disappeared in recent years, the dotted outline of a coupon attracts reader attention, as they know you’re making an offer. A bind-in card works with perfect-bound magazines where you don’t find staples. (The magazine places your ad adjacent to the binding station where your card is bound into the publication.) Make your toll free number and e-mail **Big & Bold** to maximize inquiries. Look at successful direct marketers’ ad techniques. You don’t see L.L. Bean or Lands End being too subtle about asking for the order.

CONCLUSION:

Now that you know what goes into making a good ad, it’s time to look at how to build a winning *ad campaign*. Although the answer is simple, an important element is missing from many campaigns: consistency.

Consistency is important in your graphic treatment of an ad. The ads should have a family resemblance. This has to do with a typeface that is consistent in headlines, body copy and other key elements such as captions and signatures.

Likewise, your copy tone should be “steady” from one ad to the next. Don’t shout in one ad and whisper in the next. Make the campaign of one voice.

Schedule your ads so that you have a strong chance of building awareness. Awareness has a direct influence on preference. Make your media selection for a given time frame and stick with

it. The key to media buying is to use the numbers but rely on your “gut feel.” When selecting media, be aware that publications do not remain the same over time; some get markedly better while others slide. So be sure to evaluate media at least on an annual basis for editorial approach, ad/edit ratio and circulation changes. Learn to read audit statements.

If your product allows you to do great advertising, don’t pass up the opportunity to be different and stand out. The synergy of a great idea and a solid media plan will pay big dividends. If you can’t do *great* advertising, then do *good* advertising, following the rules. Making good, even great advertising, is possible. Don’t forget that the march of a thousand miles begins with a single step. A winning campaign is having the correct selling message land on target, consistently.

Richard G. Webster has been involved in the marketing communications industry in the Philadelphia area for over thirty-five years. After release from active duty with the U. S. Navy, Mr. Webster joined Litton Industries, holding various advertising and marketing positions. He left Litton for Honeywell where he was director of advertising, public relations and sales promotion. He had responsibility for all strategic planning and management of international communications for Honeywell’s industrial products.

Mr. Webster left the corporate world for the agency business and joined Tierney & Partners to be an account supervisor on the Sperry account, responsible for Corporate and Product Advertising. During his time at Tierney, he worked on a variety of business-to-business and consumer accounts, including PECO Energy, Rittenhouse Trust Company, Air Products and Chemicals and many others.

His area of involvement included all aspects of communications, including strategic planning, advertising, sales promotion, public relations, inquiry handling and interactive website development.

Mr. Webster has been active in the Business Marketing Association and is a past president of the Philadelphia Chapter. He was inducted in the Hall of Fame in 1992. He remained active in the Naval Reserve after release from active duty and retired with the rank of Captain.

Mr. Webster is a Partner in Gaul Advertising, Inc., an independent, full-service marketing communications agency founded in 1988. The firm currently has 34 clients and capitalized billings of \$4 million.

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