

Great Ads: The Secret Formula

BY STEVE KLEIN

There's a secret formula to great advertising, a process by which an ad is conceived and comes to life. We all know that a great ad can bring dozens of new customers and thousands of dollars in new revenue to a business, but how do you breathe life into your advertising? How do you hit an advertising home run?

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

The process of designing a great ad begins long before the headline is written. Before your ad can come to life, you must "begin with the end in mind." You must know what its purpose is going to be and how you are going to attract a new customer and motivate them to buy from your business.

When developing an ad campaign, you should always begin by preparing a written Creative Brief. While the detail in a Brief can vary, it usually includes a) a clear description of the target market(s), especially who they are demographically and where they live, b) the personality and style of the ad and how this fits the target market(s), c) a description of what is being promoted in the ad, d) the offer, e) the call-to-action what action is to be taken

by a viewer or listener) and most importantly, and the results (such as a sales target) that are expected from the ad campaign.

SELL THE SIZZLE NOT THE STEAK

Your advertising should always promote at least one major benefit (and hopefully more) to a prospective customer. In the advertising industry, the word benefit can be defined as something about the product or service that helps or is advantageous to the customer. For example, the main benefit of owning a car equipped with eight airbags is that the driver and passengers are protected from serious injury in an accident.

Always remember one of the most often overlooked rules of advertising: benefits attract potential new customers and motivate them to buy, not the inherent characteristics (called features) of a product or service. Charles Revson, the founder of Revlon, once wrote, "In the factory we make cosmetics. In the store we sell hope."

Only by providing a compelling reason (or reasons) to choose your business will your ad succeed in attracting new customers. There's

a famous phrase in advertising folklore that summarizes this valuable lesson: “sell the sizzle, not the steak!”

But to “sell the sizzle” you must first determine what your primary benefit(s) will be. Ask yourself: what one thing makes my product or service different from my competitors? Why would a customer choose my product or service first? What exactly will the customer get by responding to my ad?

BREAKING THROUGH THE “AD CLUTTER”

The world is chock full of advertising. People are constantly being bombarded by promotional messages, as many as several thousand a day, and the competition for a customer’s attention is fierce. Only a blockbuster headline will help your ad to stand out and stand clear of all the rest.

Since so much of an ad’s success depends on the headline, it is crucial that you get it right. As advertising legend David Ogilvy once wrote, “The ad for the ad is the headline.”

To break through the ad clutter, your headline must sell your product or service’s most important benefit to a prospective customer. This benefit must be unique and it must be different from what’s advertised by your competitors.

The headline should be full of punch. It should literally jump out and proposition the customer.

In our social media dominated world of very limited (two to three second) attention spans, shorter headlines are always better.

I love using “power words” in my headlines. Words such as new, free, why and announcing are proven words that attract potential buyers. Make sure you give the headline the prominence it deserves. In social media ads, for example, headlines should be at least 30 to 40% of the ad size. And use a bold, easy-to-read font to make the headline as clear and legible as possible. In You Tube, Snap Chat, Spotify or Tidal ads, and spots on the radio or television, music or sound effects should be used to “announce” the headline and get the audience’s attention.

HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH THE CUSTOMER

The best ads tell a story and have a one-on-one conversation with the customer. The headline is the introduction to this conversation, and using quotation marks around the headline or adding punctuation (such as an exclamation point) will increase the immediacy and excitement about this conversation. Once the stage has been set by the headline, the conversation should continue in the rest of the copy.

WRITE COMPELLING COPY

As mentioned earlier, a great ad tells the customer a really interesting story - the story of the headline. Be brief. Write believable copy. Keep your story focused on the benefits of your product or service and your offer. Use verbs that incite action. Don’t overindulge in

adjectives that describe your product or service. Stick to words that clarify, inform and excite without exaggerating.

Avoid being cute or imitating a daytime talk show host in the copy. What seems funny to you may not be as well received by a prospective customer reading or listening or watching the ad.

And like all stories, your story should have a conclusion. There must be a call to action in your ad that invites the person to respond. Ask yourself: what do you want the customer to do after being exposed to the pitch in your ad? Have you enticed or invited him or her to call your business or visit your website? Have you repeated the call to action and made it easy to remember?

Give the Ad a Chance to Work

Like most things in life, an ad has a life expectancy. It will appear in a certain number of spots and take up a certain amount of space. This life expectancy will be mostly determined by your budget and the media you choose for your campaign.

Remember, like all living things, an ad must be allowed to “mature.” A new ad rarely delivers an immediate response. In fact, it usually takes an average of nine to 15 exposures to generate a response from a motivated buyer.

So be patient! Don't become a leaf in the wind, allowing your ads to appear randomly, here, there and everywhere.

THINK REPETITION, REPETITION, REPETITION

Advertising is a contact sport, a game of repetition. Don't be tempted to blow your budget on one or two large ads. You will be better rewarded by spreading the same amount of money on smaller ads over a longer period of time. Similarly, don't try to advertise in every possible venue for a short time. Choose a small group of media and stick with them. Sun Tzu, the famous ancient Chinese warlord, taught that there is huge power in a concentrated, focused effort, a lesson as true in advertising as it is on the battlefield.

DESIGN THE AD TO BEAT THE COMPETITION

When you advertise, it's not just your product or service that goes head-to-head with the competition; so does your advertising. Make sure that your ads are better than your competitors. Also be sure that you know what, where, when and how your competitors are advertising.

GO WHERE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE IS

It's not good enough to reach a lot of people; you've got to reach the right people. Opportunities for advertising are many and

varied, and choosing the right place to advertise can be a daunting task, even for the most experienced and informed advertiser.

You must consider all your options, factoring in your budget and detailed knowledge of the lifestyles, interests, habits and whereabouts of your target market(s). You've got to go where your audience is.

GET THE BEST PEOPLE ON YOUR TEAM

Smart CEOs and business owners surround themselves with the best people they can find for a key assignment. Similarly, it's worth assembling the best and most qualified team possible to work on your advertising. Whether

you choose an marketing agency or create your own ads, recognize that it takes both time and skill to produce a great ad. A client once asked me to design an ad the same day it was due at the TV station! This kind of approach simply does not work. Running around, out-of-breath, minutes before a looming deadline is not the way to create a successful ad.

Despite the millions spent on advertising in Canada each year, the fundamentals of great advertising are still not widely taught or known. The creation of a "great ad" is a delicate craft, to which many are called, but few are chosen. Your advertising is an integral part of the future growth and prosperity of your business. Be sure you are treating it with the time, effort and respect it deserves.



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