

How to double the power of your advertising

A personal message from Drayton Bird for the friends of ad+

This message was written for the friends of ad+ by the one of the UK's leading marketing Gurus, Drayton Bird.

In it Drayton gives 24 ideas to double the power of your advertising. And it is a subject that he is uniquely qualified to talk about since his business, The Drayton Bird Partnership, has handled direct mail and other marketing activities for clients that include Mercedes Benz, Gallaher Tobacco, Sodastream, Barclays Finance, and American Express. He is the author of "Commonsense Direct Marketing" - which is widely regarded as the "bible" on this subject. He also writes a weekly column in "Marketing" magazine.

We hope you enjoy this marketing message, and please feel free to contact us to discuss you could use these suggestions within your revised business plan.

The team at ad+.

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Sounds improbable? Even impossible? It isn't really. There are many proven, measurable ways to get better results from your advertising. Amazingly, many experts don't even know about them. Here are 24 practical suggestions – and four things to avoid.

I can remember - and I dare say many of you reading this can - when the professions weren't allowed to promote themselves at all, save through discreetly placed plaques.

You may therefore conclude that professional people are unlikely to understand the basics of marketing and advertising, because they haven't been doing it for very long – and you'd be right. But I have good news for you.

Most of the people in allegedly sophisticated marketing departments, in apparently advanced companies – and even those who run their advertising agencies - are also surprisingly ignorant of what works and what doesn't.

What is the reason for this apparent conundrum? Partly because people often have the wrong objectives. To explain this, let me tell you about some research conducted a few years ago. Creative directors of major UK advertising agencies were asked what they considered their principle objective.

The overwhelming majority, you may be stunned to learn, made no reference whatsoever to sales or profits. They were intent upon winning awards for their work from their peers. So although you may be advertising to improve your profits, the people you pay may have different criteria altogether.

What's more, ads that win awards aren't the ones that win sales. For instance, Ferrero Rocher ads are widely despised by advertising experts – but they sell like mad.

Nor can many experts tell you what will sell and what won't. This isn't just my opinion. Again, a few years ago the creative directors of the top US agencies were asked to say which current advertising they rated best. Their list of 100 best ads bore no correlation whatsoever to the 100 most effective ads in terms of sales.

That sobering introduction may make you wonder whether it's even worth advertising at all. But it is. A few years ago a research study was started with the initials P.I.M.S - Profit Impact of Marketing Strategy. It enlisted several hundred firms in the US and Europe, with the aim of finding out what works best in marketing.

Heavy advertisers make bigger profits

Many facts emerged but one was that firms that advertise most are most profitable. If you look round at the great companies in the world today, like Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Microsoft or Procter and Gamble this can hardly come as a surprise. But what does surprise me is how few people seem to learn from this fact.

In fact firms that advertise most are about twice as profitable as those that advertise least. This is particularly true when times are hard. Then, short-sighted firms cut advertising as a foolish economy, whilst those who keep going do better and emerge stronger afterwards.

So advertising is an investment, not a cost; but what kind of advertisements work best? And how can you ensure that your agency produces them?

Well, in 1985 the Gallup Organisation, the grandfather of research, you might say, did some studies to find out what makes ads work. They came out with 14 points.

What makes ads work?

- 1 The best ads command attention, communicate a message and persuade through illustrations, headlines and copy.
- 2 A successful ad rewards the reader by giving news or information, solving a problem, or appealing to the emotions.
- 3 You should repeat the message 3 times, in illustration, headline and copy.
- 4 Illustrations relating directly to the message work on average 32% better.
- 5 If you don't illustrate either the product or the idea, the ad is 27% less effective than average.
- 6 Stereotyped pictures - chatting people, loving couples, smiling sippers and ecstatic eaters kill ads. That's because they don't develop uniqueness.
- 7 Specific headlines work best. Vague headlines reduce impact by 11% on average. The most damaging headlines are brag and boast or sheer puffery.
- 8 Short headlines perform as well as very long ones.
- 9 New ideas, products, new ways to use a product, properly executed, add an average 24% to performance.
- 10 Humour only adds 10% on average, and then only when projected properly.

- 11 Celebrities can add 25% - but they don't guarantee success. If the celebrity is not relevant to the product, he or she does more harm than good.
- 12 Recipes deliver an average of 29% over average.
- 13 Coupons do not add much impact, but boost persuasion an average of 26%. (Other research shows they also increase readership significantly).
- 14 The most powerful effect comes from putting in a TV lift out (a frame from a TV commercial), which adds an average 42%.

Note how important repetition is. You can't say something once and hope people will be persuaded. Advertising is a process like teaching, and we learn through repetition. That is why a campaign often has to run a long time with the same sort of message repeated before you get real results.

Note also that humour doesn't work as well as you might imagine. The point that it must be projected properly cannot be over-emphasised. Other research shows that people like to buy from commercials they like – but that does not mean entertaining; it means relevant.

Many advertisers put something amusing in their advertisements because they are frightened of talking about the product. They hope to trick people paying attention to the message. Too often, though, the humour is not relevant.

As you see putting a TV commercial frame in your ad is the most powerful single technique. It underlines the importance of linking your campaigns in different media.

Note the point about coupons. Many advertising agencies hate putting coupons in advertisements because they think they spoil the design. In fact they're exceptionally powerful quite apart from the fact that they give you replies. By measuring your replies you can see which ads and media work best

What makes customers reply?

A few years ago I listed 10 factors I have found make advertisements, commercials and direct mail get replies.

- 1 They don't need to be clever or funny, though it may help if they are. They should never be more interesting than the product. You want people to buy, not admire your ads.
- 2 Talk about the prospect - not your firm. They are in love with themselves, not your business or your plans.
- 3 Give news of a benefit – what's in it for the prospect - with the incentive, if any, quickly seen.

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- 4 Get to the point. Quickly show why your service is better, as most ads are only seen for a couple of seconds, many mailings are either not opened or not fully read, and few commercials are remembered.
- 5 Have a powerful headline and picture or opening, if it is a commercial, because that is what people see first
- 6 Have strong benefits wherever people may look if it's printed material - because people can start anywhere
- 7 Give believable reasons why what you say is true. Otherwise people say, "well, they would say that, wouldn't they?"
- 8 Be easy to understand, because most people are not clever. In fact there are far more stupid people than clever ones – yet their money looks just the same.
- 9 Omit no sensible reason for action and overcome every reasonable objection. This means that – contrary to popular belief – long copy tends to work better than short if you want an immediate response.
- 10 Be surprising but relevant, because that makes them stick in the memory.

The last point is important. The composer Haydn said he liked every now and then to make a loud noise in his compositions "to wake the audience up". Indeed, you will probably recall he wrote a work called the "Surprise Symphony".

Really great advertising is surprising. It is the sense of surprise that lifts it out of the rut. A good example is an ad that has run for years, with the headline "Cash if you die – cash if you don't".

What leads to bad advertising?

Those are two lists of what will make your advertising do better. But why is so much advertising bad? It is usually because the brief is not precise - and often not even written down.

If you don't know what you want, you are not likely to get anything very good. Your agency is going to spend an awful lot of time wondering what they ought to do. They will search around for a clever idea, rather than searching for the right idea.

(It is not appreciated sufficiently that great creative work does not come from clever ideas or original ideas. Indeed to quote another great composer, Mozart, once said, "I never tried to be original in my life").

Apart from the content of your ads, consistency is extremely important to good advertising. The great US advertising man Bill Bernbach once noted that one average campaign run for 10 years is better than 10 brilliant campaigns, one a year. You will get bored with your campaign but to each new prospect it is fresh.

So, don't try to be clever; don't chop and change; avoid dull predictability; brief clearly - and bear the lists above in mind.

Look at some of the figures I have quoted. You will quickly conclude that doubling the power of your advertising, assuming it is not doing as well as you wish - is a fairly modest objective. Far greater things can be achieved.

Drayton Bird

The Drayton Bird Partnership

This message was written by marketing guru Drayton Bird for the friends of ad+.

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