

An Advertising Primer

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Advertising, when done best, represents a series of decisions. The factors in a successful advertising program resemble the links in a chain, with the old axiom regarding the weakest link holding true. Disregarding any of the factors decreases the potential impact the advertising will have.

Key items that play a role in the impact your program will have include:

Budget

Creative strategy

Message creation

Media selection

BUDGET

While there are several methods of computing just how much to spend, it is important to realize that advertising should create sales, not be created by sales. Any process that creates advertising budgets from current sales levels is flawed. Budgets should be determined by projected sales. Any accepted methodology applied to projected sales will have the desired effect. Budgeting with a combination of methods, i.e. percent of sales and task/objective, should create budget figures that are similar. This similarity is affirmation of the objectivity of the budgeting process.

CREATIVE STRATEGY

The most effective advertising is sustained for a long period of time. Said another way, if your advertising achieves the desired results, you continue it. A structured, written creative strategy ensures that all messages in each media relate to the primary advantage that the company wishes to communicate to its target population. Supporting benefits are defined and prioritized so that they can be included as well but in a proper perspective. All advertising messages are then constructed and compared to the creative strategy benchmark to ensure that the advertising program is communicating those sales points that are the most advantageous to the company.

MESSAGE CREATION

While budget and content certainly are important, do not forget that the message itself communicates about the company. Just as there are differences in the quality of a mass

produced entry level and a custom built executive home, there are differences in the advertising methods used to produce creative materials. It takes skill and finesse to produce materials that are consistent with the perceived values of the target population. Perhaps the more difficult challenge is to create advertising messages for the lower price points that are not “over the head” of the targeted groups.

MEDIA SELECTION

All media outlets serve a purpose. Each has strengths and weaknesses. Newspapers provide detailed information that can be clipped and retained, but with the compromise of detail and color in reproduction. Television provides motion, color and sound but is packaged in short units that are not permanent. One of the more significant variables in media is the degree of intrusiveness each represents.

We are all aware of that most intrusive of media, telemarketing, where the sales pitch comes when we least expect it, camouflaged as a friendly call from a caring neighbor. Each advertising medium contains this same intrusiveness to a degree and advertisers should recognize it and use it to their advantage. But remember, it’s a relative term and concept.

Banners on web pages are probably the most intrusive. They pop up when you least expect them, or you need to navigate past them to review the material that you seek. At the other end of the spectrum, outdoor stands ready to educate you if it can only attract your attention. In between are newspapers, sectioned in such a way that you don’t expose yourself to undesired messages - read a good funeral parlor ad lately? And the broadcast media, you find yourself humming a catchy jingle only to realize that you have become a human media source. You deserve a break today...how long ago did that run?

If you wish to take advantage of the intrusive characteristics of media, your message needs to be tailored appropriately. In intrusive messages, you have to be attention getting and concise to take advantage of the situation. Less intrusive messages can be more subtle and detailed, inviting the prospect to spend more time. In general, print media is less intrusive than broadcast, but remember, the Internet is redefining the rules here too.

When you buy lumber for a house, you pay a differential for the available grades. The same happens in media costs. Do not make the mistake of counting the number of placements and buying based on unit cost. The cheaper positions or announcements are cheap for a reason. ALL media is priced based upon delivery. When you buy determine your target market first. Ask the media reps to provide you with a demographic profile of their audience in quantifiable terms. These absolute numbers are available from all outlets. Divide the unit cost of your advertising by the audience delivered and you get a cost per thousand (CPM). Use this number to evaluate the media you should buy. CPM’s are comparable directly in media (radio station A vs. Radio station B.) Mass media should be more efficient (lower CPM) than targeted media (newspaper vs real estate books.) The more versatile media will have a higher CPM that the less flexible (TV vs. Radio.)

Market competition will drive the CPM to a market floor. All media is basically negotiable, and this base CPM analysis will allow you to get the best price for the advertising you select.

Example: A radio spot cost \$20 each and delivers 5,000 adults in your target market.

The CPM is $\$20/5 = \4

A \$15 spot that delivers 3,000 adults in your target market would have a CPM of \$5 (\$15/3.)