

How To Create A Great Ad

Step 1 - Develop a GREAT Headline

Armed with the solid knowledge of who your audience is, grab a pen and come up with a great headline. Not a good headline, a GREAT headline. You are the best person to do this, you know your business better than anyone else!

Headlines make ads work. The best headlines appeal to people's self-interest, or give news. Long headlines that say something out pull short headlines that say nothing. Every headline has one job. It must stop your prospects with a believable promise.

If you can come up with a good headline, you are almost sure to have a good ad. But even the greatest writer can't save an ad with a poor headline. You can't make an ad pull unless you can make people read your copy.

Usually this is by showing, offering, providing or proving the biggest benefit of using your product/service. An easy way to do this is to think of, "what is the best, the ultimate result that can happen when a customer uses my product/service?" Now craft that into a headline with impact. You have less than three seconds to capture the attention of the page-scanning reader.

The headline is the ad for the ad. If you have a mediocre headline, no one will read the brilliant copy that took you three weeks to write. No one will see the great offer you're making. They won't get that far. If your headline isn't the most captivating headline on the page, no one will bother to read the rest of the ad. They'll simply turn the page. You won't even get a second glance.

Your headline must make an immediate appeal to the reader about what your product/service is going to do for him/her, "**NEW PRODUCT/SERVICE OFFERS BENEFIT, BENEFIT, BENEFIT.**" When writing the headline - if it's not great, or it doesn't stress an immediate benefit to the reader, nothing else matters.

Write between 50 and 100 headlines. This may sound like a lot but stretch yourself!! Then over a period of a few days sift through them and select the one great one. The only purpose of the headline is to catch and hold the readers attention and demand he/she reads the rest of the ad.

Space permitting, use a sub-head. This appears in slightly smaller type, but continues the compelling reasons to keep the reader reading the ad. That's the purpose of the sub-head. Expound on the main benefit, or if there is a strong secondary benefit, add it here.

Step 2 - Develop Ad Copy Strategy

When developing your copy strategy, exactly what do you want readers to do? Call? Send money? Inquire? The body copy of the ad depends on this and on whether you plan a one-step sale - asking the reader to make a purchase directly from the ad; or an inquiry generating two-step sale - asking the reader to request more information (which gives you the chance to send a longer, harder hitting, direct mail package.)

Smaller or classified ads demand a two-step selling posture. Since you have only a few words, there isn't really enough copy to sell a product/service - so you must go for the inquiry.

Then decide on how tightly you want to qualify your prospects. Throw as loose or as tight of a qualification net as you like. A loose net is asking anyone and everyone to contact you: check off the reader service card, call you on your own toll free 800 number, or send back your reply card that is postpaid by you. This increases the response but adds plenty of expense from people who have no intention to buy.

A tight qualification net screens respondents in some way and increases the value of each response depending on the toughness of your qualifier. A minimal qualification may be to make respondents call at their expense; send back a reply card they have to place their own stamp on; or saying response cards won't be processed without phone numbers. On the high end, a tight qualifier may say a minimum investment amount of "so-much" is required, or that your sales rep will personally call on each inquirer in person.

Write the body copy enhancing the benefits. Make your offer sound sensational. To increase response, offer a free trial or a money back guarantee. Hammer home the benefits, and ask for the reader to call you several times and place their order. Give your phone number several times in the ad also.

Use simple words! Simple words are powerful words. Even the best-educated people don't resent simple words. But they are the only words many people understand. Remember too, that every word is important. Sometimes you can change a word and increase the pulling power of an ad. For example, the headline of an ad for an automobile repair kit was "How To Repair Cars." The headline was changed to, "How To Fix Cars." The ad pulled Twenty Percent more.

Step 3 - Go for the call.

For an ad to be successful, it must generate a response. So get the call. This is your number one priority and the objective of the ad. The objective of the ad is usually not to sell the product/service, it is to generate a response - and that's usually a phone call. Show the benefits to the readers - then sell the call hard - that is the secret of direct response advertising.

Direct writing out pulls cute writing. Don't save your best benefit until last. Start with it. You will have a better chance of keeping your reader with you. Don't stop by just telling people what benefits your product or service offers. Tell them what they will miss if they don't buy it. If you have an important point to make, make it three times--in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. At the end, ask for action. If people are interested enough to read your ad, they want to know what to do. Tell them what to do.

"Call now for free information. Call for free sample. Call now to place your order at this special price. Call Toll Free and order right now - you'll get" If a person doesn't call right now, your chances of any response drop off significantly with each passing moment. Request immediate action: offer a great deal or a limited time special.

On the bottom of the ad place your phone number again in fairly large type - so that someone who is thinking about calling can find it easily while they are reaching for the phone.

Read your ad again from the eyes of a prospect. If you haven't persuaded someone to call you by the end of the ad, start over and compose the ad again: no one will know you had to create the ad twice; they'll just see the end product/service and think it's great.

On the bottom of the ad place a small copy of your logo if you have one. The value of a logo is so people will recognize it and your firm when they see it again. If you are running a solid schedule of ads, your logo should be distinctive so people will remember it, not necessarily large. If you place ads occasionally, it's not a benefit to the reader and not that important to you either - use the space more wisely and show a bigger phone number.

Concentrate on anything that may increase your response. With every element in your ad, with every conscious decision you make, ask "does this increase my response?" If yes, leave it in. If no, trash it.

Finish writing your copy by letting it sit for a day or two, then coming back to it for a final editing and polishing. Edit severely. Then edit severely again. Cut out everything that doesn't make someone pick up the phone. If you don't cut your copy by at least 1/3, you aren't nearly tough enough on yourself. Let someone else do it.

Step 4 - Designing a Great Ad

The last step is the design. First choice is usually to use a compelling photo or illustration to capture the eye of the page-flipping audience and direct their attention to your space.

If you use a photo, make sure it has a caption, and that the caption is a strong benefit or makes the reader call. A photo caption has exceptionally high readership - what a great opportunity you waste if you describe the photo; readers can already see what it is. Better you should increase your response with this universally read hot spot.

Start out with some thumbnail sketches of how your ad will lay out. Pick up any magazine and find one to emulate. Draw some fast, smaller than actual size likenesses of all the elements in your ad. Hand letter the headline. Does it look better on one line, or two? Can you break the wording logically? Use straight lines to represent the body copy. One column or two? Will all the copy fit? Are you sure? Hint: better edit again.

When you get a thumbnail ad you like, move up in size. Draw a border the size your actual ad will be. It's easiest to trace the border of an ad the same size in a magazine. Now pencil in your ad copy following the thumbnail sketch you made as a guide. Don't spend a lot of time on this one, this is just a "rough." Does everything work? Everything fit? Enough room for the photo? You don't have to write the body copy, but rule some lines in its place to get a feel of what it will look like. Sketch in your logo and your company name and address at the bottom. Pencil in your phone number.

Now - do all this again. Tighten up the ad. Make your headline more perfect. Tighten where the copy will print. Exactly where will you place the headline, and where will the line break? Pencil in the subhead to size, and where does the break fall? Refine and define all the elements. Work out all the details.

Now make a third and final ad, crisp enough to show people. This is called a comprehensive layout or comp. If there are colors, show them. Show the border style. Everything should be as it will appear in the final ad, but in pencil. Don't hand write the body copy, but have it represented with straight ruled lines. Hand letter the head and sub head to approximate size. Shade in where the photo or illustration will be placed. Complete with your logo and name at the bottom and the large phone number. It should be nice enough to show around.

Now show it around. Does everyone like it? Get opinions. Do they read it? No, don't just ask if they would read it, hand them the ad and the typed copy on another sheet and SEE if they read it. Hint: If they don't smile the moment you show it to them, you're in trouble. If they don't read it in entirety, you're in deep trouble.

Did everyone like it? Did everyone Read it? Good. Now you have two choices: 1. set the ad on your computer, at a typesetting house, or a copy shop; or 2. take it to an advertising agency and have them set it. If you've selected door number 1, you're almost finished. The people at most copy shops are generally friendly and helpful. Everyone will respect you if you come in

with a well thought-out tight comp. Create your ad on their computer. Ask them to help you if you need help.

But I recommend option number 2. Since your ad is already written and in final layout form, it shouldn't be too expensive to have an agency look it over and get the type set. Included in the price - you'll get someone qualified looking over your work. They should let you know if you have any gross errors in your ad, or anything wrong at all.

Having the agency set your type is the final frontier for your ad before you place it. It's nice to have a knowledgeable stranger look over your work before it becomes very expensive to make changes or very expensive to run. An ad is only expensive if it doesn't work.