

# Five tips for small advertisers

The first order of business for a small advertiser is to make some strategic decisions (including competitive points of differentiation, budget, schedule, web presence and co-op availability).

When it's time to move on to the ads themselves, consider these points:



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**1. Make an offer.** This tip goes for all advertisers, especially Mom and Pop businesses that are competing with large, national chains. If you don't give people a reason to buy from you, they'll buy from someone else. It's as simple as that.

Shoppers expect low prices from big box stores. A widget at Walmart or Best Buy costs less than the same widget at a local retailer. As a result, it is unreasonable for Mom and Pop to compete on every-day, item-by-item pricing. However, it is possible to generate traffic with occasional sales, discount coupons, and "buy one, get one free" offers.

"Free" is an important marketing word for small businesses. Offer free installation, free delivery, free training, free analysis or appraisal, or free extended warranties.

**2. Sell benefits.** Big boxes have the advantages of (1) low prices, (2) big selection, and (3) long hours. Advantages of small businesses include (1) customer service, (2) flexibility in available products and services, and (3) first-hand knowledge of the local market.

People don't buy features; they buy benefits. The challenge is to focus on benefits which resonate with the designated target audience.

**3. Avoid puffery.** Some small businesses have a tendency to use exaggerations in their advertising. They gush about "fantastic bargains," "unbelievable service," and "awesome products." And they drone on and on about being "the best" or having "the most." All of that puffery amounts to a great big zero on the scale of influence.

People exaggerate when they lack confidence in the truth. Or when they don't know how to communicate the truth.

Be specific. Tell readers exactly what makes that widget so awesome.

**4. Use legible typography.** In

his outstanding book "Great Print Advertising," Tony Antin refers to typography as "the voice of print." I like that comparison. Just like some voices are easier to understand than others, some type is easier to read than others.

Here are some quick guidelines: If you use all-caps, limit them to short headlines with short words. In body copy, serif fonts are easier to read than sans serif fonts. Stay away from script, Old English, and stylized fonts. If every word is bold, nothing will stand out.

**5. De-clutter.** Advertisers who run smaller ads are in a constant battle to stand out on the page. But too many of them try to be noticed by cramming everything in the world into their ads. The result is the proverbial ten pounds of potatoes in a five pound sack.

The truth is that clutter drives readers away. So when it comes to designing small ads, remember that less is more. Feature one dominant illustration, not ten little ones. Get rid of starbursts and reverses. Use white space. In other words, make the advertising inviting.

Advertising that invites reader-ship invites sales.

## How losing a sale can be good for business

"As crazy as it sounds, losing a sale can be good for business," Gerald told me. "It offers a unique chance to build rapport over a long period of time. And when they conduct another advertising review, I'll be in a better position than before."

To put it simply, a sales presentation has three possible outcomes: (1) yes, (2) no, or (3) not yet. The good news – for Gerald and other optimistic sales people – is that "no" can be interpreted as "not yet," instead of "never." This means there is hope for a future sale, even when the last attempt wasn't successful. Rapport is a huge element in turning today's "not yet" into next month's or next year's "yes."

"Selling advertising is all about relationships," he said. "When there's not good rapport, even an existing advertiser will find it easier to drop out of the paper if there's a bump in the road ahead."

Dale Carnegie wrote, "If you have a lemon, make a lemonade." With those words in mind, here are some tips to strengthen rapport after a lost sale:

**Step 1: Thank sincerely.** Gerald's strategy is to thank a

prospect immediately after a presentation. And if they decide not to buy, he thanks them again – with a handwritten note or an e-mail.

"Unless it is a rare circumstance, I drop the must-buy-from-me persona. Some sales people say, 'Thank you, and by the way, you should reconsider this list of selling points,' but I disagree. That not-so-subtle message is, 'You made a bad decision, and here's your chance to correct it.' That's no way to build rapport."

"I simply thank them for their consideration, wish them success – and tell them that I am looking forward to staying in touch."

**Step 2: Keep in touch on a regular basis.** "Okay, now that I've told them I'm going to stay in touch, I actually stay in touch," Gerald explained. "Top-of-mind-awareness is just as important in selling as it is in advertising. People like to do business with people they know."

Because Gerald is genuinely interested in people, it is easy to learn about their interests. He sends occasional links to articles about favorite teams and hobbies. And he makes sure to chat with them at various networking events around town.

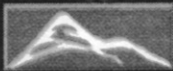
**Step 3: Monitor the advertising.** "Because I want another shot at their business in the future, I follow their marketing," Gerald said. "At some point along the way, they may ask for feedback on a particular aspect of their ads. The faster I respond, the better my chances of being heard."

"That's an open door to another sales presentation – and maybe a bigger sale than I would have made if they had said 'yes' the first time. The difference is that now we know each other pretty well."

Gerald has found another benefit. "I've gotten some unexpected referrals," he said. "People not only like to buy from people they know. They like to refer friends to people they know."

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