

3 Easy Steps to Controlling The Effectiveness of Your Ad Copy

As any retailer knows, there are few things more painful than spending marketing dollars on an ad that gets no response. Was it in the wrong publication? Was the ad placed too far back? Was it buried among too many other ads? Was it poorly designed?

While there are many aspects of advertising that you can't control, the most critical element is one you can control—the copy. If you have input into the copy of your print ads, there is a simple three-step process for writing ad copy used by Madison Avenue agencies that any entrepreneur can follow.

The most widely followed advertising formula 1) presents a problem or shows a need that potential customers have; 2) shows how to solve the problem; and 3) shows how that business, product or service offers the solution. A classic example of this formula is toothpaste advertising.

Most toothpaste ads present a problem or demonstrate a need either in their headline or in the main photo. For example, the headline may contain the message that cavities are bad, or the photo may show a frowning child in the dentist's chair. The copy then tells the consumer that brushing with a fluoride toothpaste fights cavities. The copy finishes by explaining that XYZ-brand toothpaste has fluoride.

Here's how to make this three-step formula work for you:

1) DEMONSTRATE A NEED OR SHOW A PROBLEM

If your headline or major piece of art stops consumers by pointing out a problem or need they have, they'll want to read on to find the solution. Successful advertisers know that selling the *benefits* of a product



or service is key to getting consumers to act. What is the main benefit you offer consumers? Expert advice and service? Lowest prices? Huge selection? In your headline, present your main benefit (without talking about yourself) as a need the consumer has.

An effective tool for presenting a problem in a headline is asking a question that the consumer must answer in a way that benefits you. The key to writing effective ad copy is knowing the

unique selling differential of your business and bringing it to the attention of potential customers.

2) PROVIDE A GENERIC SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

Give potential customers a real solution to a need or problem that they have. Remember, *you* are not the solution (although you may *offer* the solution), so resist the temptation to talk about yourself early in your copy. People are not primarily interested in you, they're interested in themselves, and nothing hurts an ad more than having the name of the business or product as the headline, or beginning copy with, "For over 20 years, ABC Company has..."

This step is critical to getting consumers to have an interest in you. Providing a generic solution to an acknowledged problem or need adds legitimacy to your message and allows the next step to work more effectively.

3) SHOW HOW YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE OFFERS THE SOLUTION

Let consumers know that you have the solution they are seeking. If you have properly executed the first two steps, consumers will be looking for a place to find the solution to their needs and you will be instantly and indelibly linked as the provider.

And end your ad with a "call to action," for instance, "Call today! 404/555-1234," or "Visit our Web site at www.mystore.com." The call to action is similar to the sales close you experience from reps who visit your store. Has a salesman ever visited your shop, showed his line, then left without asking for an order?

Now plug your own imagination and creativity into this formula. Not all advertisers deliver their message in an obvious manner. Nike's early "Just Do It!" ads, for example, which featured a man or woman running alone, in silence, with the company's slogan appearing only at the end, appealed to consumers' desires to get in shape, set goals or reduce stress. Recreational sport was the solution to their need, and without overtly saying it, Nike positioned itself as a provider of the solution.

Using this simple three-step process when writing the copy for your ads will greatly increase the chances that they are noticed, read and acted upon. ■

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To "close the deal," end your ad with a call to action.