

## What's in an ad?

Print ads generally have four written parts — headline, support copy, call to action, and company name — plus a strong visual that draws the eye and explains what you're selling.

## Strategy and copy

- The most important step is to set a single objective for the ad. Are you featuring a new product or service? Promoting brand awareness? Driving traffic to your website? Looking for a response to an offer? Your objective will dictate all factors of target audience, message, and timing.
- Your headline should clearly define your chosen objective. Assume that you have only five seconds to get the attention of your reader. Your ad's headline is often the only part of an ad that is read and so should refer to a benefit that appeals to your target market. Think of it as the final "mind-changing comment." It is not so much the words, but the ideas they express that sell. Determine your message, and then find words to convey it.
- Put yourself in the shoes of your audience and try to appeal to their needs and perspective. Speak your audience's language. A best practice before writing ad copy is to study the content of the magazine in which you are advertising.
- Write clear body copy in a consistent, apt tone and language. Keep jargon at a minimum. Copy should be concise but substantive enough to explain the headline premise and add secondary benefits. Where appropriate, use bulleted lists and call-out boxes. Following this copy, a sign-off is a call to action that urges the reader to respond ("Call for an appointment today," or "Visit our website for more information.").
  - List benefits followed by features. Your prospects want to know what's in it for them. The benefit is the need you're offering to fulfill; the feature is how you intend to do so. Avoid any claim that could be construed as deceptive.
  - Make sure the overall tone of your ad is upbeat and appealing. Emphasize the solutions you provide, not the problems you address. Your call to action should be crystal clear. Prospects should know precisely how to obtain the product or service.
  - Don't forget contact information. Keep it minimal. A phone number and website URL are ideal. Your company name, traditionally placed at the bottom of the ad, should include your website as the most prominent point of contact, but also include a phone number. The company logo should appear in a consistent area and should not compete with other visuals. Make your URL larger to help stimulate Web visits.
  - Proof and proof again. There is nothing more embarrassing than a typo, and nothing turns off prospects more than the wrong phone number or e-mail address when they are calling to buy! Get outside opinions on your new advertising concepts to be certain they carry the personality and message that you intend.

## Design

- Pick one image or focal point that depicts your objective. Cluttered design weakens your ad. Limit your use of fonts. Compare your ad with others in the publication to see if it stands out. The person composing your ad should preferably have design experience. Skill is required to make an ad look right, and the quality of your ad must compete with other ads appearing in the publication.
- Use color. Color ads are read more and are more frequently remembered than black-and-white ads.
- Maintain consistency. Make sure that your design is consistent with your website design and publications to achieve a branded look to all your communications.
- As a final check, lay your ad on a page of the publication in which it will appear to assure that it stands out from the articles and other ads on the page.
- Avoid having too much information/too many visuals in your ad. An ad crammed with ideas and features appears dense and uninviting. If over-designed, an ad can be more artistic than motivational, obscuring the sales message. If over-written, an ad can become too subtle or cute. Certainly, some of the best ads ever created are clever and visually arresting, but successful ads generate awareness and prompt readers to act.