



Marketing Messages

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Good advertising means knowing your target and choosing your medium

Have you heard or seen any good ads lately? Working in the marketing and advertising industry, my view of media has been forever tainted to look at the ads first. This insatiable appetite for a creative approach to selling through clever messages and media choices causes me to constantly evaluate the advertising we see around us. Good ads drive sales, not just win awards and good ads don't have to be expensive, just well targeted. Advertising which creates mind share means very little. Mind share still must be transferred into something tangible. Market share is all that really matters because it affects sales. I'm a fan of good creative, but only if it makes the cash register sing.

So what makes for great advertising? Let's look at the fundamentals.

1. The target market must be well defined.
2. You must understand explicitly the mindset of your target group; what motivates them, their values, attributes and characteristics.
3. You must have defined objectives and a desired outcome for the campaign. These usually include, among other things, an increase in sales.
4. Your message must resonate with your target audience, through the content and information conveyed and the creative chosen.
5. The media vehicles selected must deliver your target group and suit the campaign.

Sounds like Advertising 101 right? Then why do many businesses get it wrong?

Direct mail can be a very effective vehicle, but here's an example of a piece that missed its target miserably. I recently received a package from the Perfect Pen and Stationary Company. They had printed a pen with my company name on it, prefaced with the words "I stole this from". The letter kindly suggested I might like to buy 100's of these things to give to my clients. Now, why would I want to give my client a gift, a tacky one at that, with a message that effectively turns them into a thief? Is this a brand identity I want to create? Just what were they thinking? Perhaps I wasn't their target group. But then why did I receive the mailing? At the very least they misunderstood my values and what would motivate me to buy.

The series of Telus TV spots and print creative using cute animals, white space, a catchy soundtrack and message to promote the companies technology are right on target. The campaign objective is clear, the message resonates with the audience, the media vehicles are well chosen for the target group and the creative taps into the mindset and values of the target audience in a clever way. The spots are brilliant. And they almost make me forget any problem I've ever had with Telus!

But sometimes what seems like brilliant creative can miss the mark completely when it comes to driving sales. An example of advertising creative which got a lot of buzz, was a TV spot for Miller Life beer. It featured two women dining at a café, a scene that quickly turned confrontational when they both wanted the same beer. A "female cat fight" ensued. Aimed at young males, the spot had strong sexual overtones mixed with humour. The strategy, although entertaining to the target male audience, failed to get guys to buy beer. In fact, sales actually went down after this very expensive campaign. Ouch.

Although great creative that drives sales is a brilliant combination, good creative isn't the only factor in effective advertising. An example is Walmart. Hardly the hallmark of creative brilliance in their print and TV campaigns, their advertising is nevertheless very effective. London Drugs is another example. Product and price advertising through regular flyer distribution in community newspapers is a proven vehicle to drive sales. Is the creative for Walmart and London Drugs memorable? Not particularly, but the ads drive sales and that's what makes them good.

Beyond a well-understood target audience and an appealing message, the media choices made can make or break a campaign. Internet advertising, a media vehicle much hyped before the dot com bust, has come of age. Now, rather than transferring traditional methods to this medium, the advertising community is applying new and creative strategies which would not be possible in other media vehicles. The interactive use of the internet to engage the individual consumer is one progressive example. Another revolutionary development is happening at the search engine Google. We now have the level of sophistication and technological capability to understand how it could change the context of media buying. It's called "internet-based contextual advertising". Contextual advertising serves up ads online to individual web page viewers. But here's where the spin changes. The ads viewed are based on the content the viewer is reading. The technology uses keywords associated with the advertisers products or services. This media is transparent, accountable and measurable. Google currently has over 150,000 active advertisers.

Truly effective advertising relies on the success of a well-defined and understood target group, clear objectives, a resonating message and effective media choices.

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