



Developing Effective Marketing Materials: Newspaper and Magazine Print Advertising Design Considerations

Amy D. Ladd
Center for Profitable Agriculture

Introduction

Today consumers get information from so many forms of media that print advertising is often thought to be a less effective marketing tool than before. However, this is not true for all businesses. Print advertising can be effective if the message reaches its target audience. Therefore businesses who clearly understand who their target market is and how to reach them might want to include print advertising as part of an overall marketing strategy. A business should focus on developing an ad that will grab a reader's attention by appealing to their own self-interest by telling them how they will benefit from a product or service, while at the same time motivating them to take action. Developing an effective print advertisement is no easy task, but following a few simple rules of thumb will help make advertising investments a success.

Developing an Advertising Strategy

Before designing an advertisement, consider the following to develop an advertising strategy:

1. **Primary Purpose**
What is the primary purpose of your advertisement?
2. **Primary Benefit**
What unique benefit can you offer customers? What primary customer value or need can your enterprise meet?
3. **Secondary Benefit**
What other key benefits will customers receive from your products or services?
4. **Target Audience**
At whom (what target market) are you aiming this advertisement?
5. **Audience Reaction**
What response do you want from your audience (come to the operation, visit a website, call an information line)?
6. **Company Personality**
What image do you want to convey in your advertisement?

Types of Print Advertisements

Newspaper or magazine advertising generally consists of two basic ad styles, known as classified and display ads. Classified ads, also referred to as text ads, typically offer a product or service for sale and are commonly placed towards the back of a publication in a special section dedicated for sales and services. In contrast, display ads, also known as retail ads, can be found throughout a publication where space

allows. Furthermore, display ads may be all text, but more often include graphic designs and images. Some standard types of display ads include:

- Business Card Ad – a basic ad, that’s small in scale, which tells the reader who you are and the product or service you offer. It should include your contact information and may include your logo.
- Coupon Ad – a promotional advertisement used to increase sales by driving new customers to your business. Typically a coupon ad offers either a dollar amount or percentage off your merchandise, but might also offer a free gift with purchase. The discount is available only when presented by the customer at the time of the sales transaction.
- Sale Ad – a promotional advertisement that invites all the general public to visit your business to receive a discount on featured products, certain departments or the entire store.
- Spotlight Ad – a larger advertisement which focuses attention on a particular product or service you offer. It also might highlight a special event or new product that has not been available from your business before.
- Informational Ad – a journalistic style ad which reads more like a news article than an advertisement. This type of ad might also be written as a Q&A ad in which you provide professional advice on a topic your business covers.

Components of a Print Advertisement

A print advertisement consists of three main components including a headline, copy and signature. Additional elements commonly found in a print ad are subheadings, disclosures and illustrations. Let’s take a closer look at each component:

Headline

A headline is the most important element of a print advertisement. If it fails to grab the reader’s attention then the entire ad will likely go unnoticed. Headlines should contain 5 to 15 words which promote consumer benefits. Additionally, they may be presented as a statement, question, warning or as a news alert.

Subheading

The subheading is an answer or support to the question or curiosity that the main headline evokes and is designed to further draw the reader into the ad. It can act as a break between the headline and the body copy and makes it easier for the reader to skim the ad for pertinent information.

Body Copy

The body copy contains the description of the offer by highlighting the product features, key benefits and supporting facts. The copy should persuade the reader to take action and make a purchase. Keep paragraphs as short as possible using no more than four to six lines of type.¹

The use of subheads and numbered or bulleted lists can break up a sea of type, highlighting a number of ideas quickly. However, overuse of this technique will reduce contrast and balance therefore losing its effectiveness.

In the body copy talk to your audience and not at them as if you are addressing only one person instead of a mass of people. Use the words “you” and “your” while avoiding the words “we,” “they” and unclear generalities.

When writing copy remember to keep messages positive and avoid negative connotations or comments about competitors.

Grammar and spelling are important. Run the spelling and grammar check functions on your software. It is also advisable to have several other people read over your materials to find mistakes that might have been missed.

Signature

An effective advertisement should always include a signature. The signature is where the business name, logo and contact information such as an address, phone number and web site address are located in the ad. Placement of the signature is most often located in the lower right hand corner of the advertisement.

Disclosures, Terms or Conditions

When advertising includes special stipulations to the sale all disclosures, terms or conditions should be included in your ad. This is often referred to as the fine print located at the bottom of an advertisement. Additional offerings such as warranties, options, incentives, expiration dates or financing terms should be included in this section.

Illustrations

Though visual elements are not required, incorporating one will help draw attention to your ad. Research indicates that 70% of readers only look at the visual in an ad, whereas only 30% will read the headline. Therefore incorporating one into your design will help expose your ad to twice as many viewers.

There are various types of visual elements used in advertisements such as photographs, hand-drawn illustrations and graphic designed imagery. An ad may have a single visual element that is strong enough to stand on its' own or a variety of pictures to help convey a message. Furthermore some advertisements may not contain any large visuals elements, but use smaller less distinctive elements such as decorative borders, bullets or shapes.

When possible, visual elements should show action or a product in use rather than static. This design strategy is even more effective when the action features people or other living things. Additionally, using captions along with photos help promote the overall message of the advertisement.

Layout and Design Considerations

Before developing a print advertisement consider the following design principles:

The Rule of Thirds

When laying out your advertisement allow one-third of the space for the headline, one-third of the space for illustrations and one-third of the space for body copy and signature.

An example of how an ad may incorporate the rule of thirds can be found below:

Repetition is Key

For print advertising to be effective, a reader must be exposed to the ad as many as six to ten times before the message sticks. Too often businesses change their ad because they think their audience is tired of seeing it. However, the opposite is usually true and it is the business that has tired of the ad. Running the same ad over several weeks or even months will be much more effective.

Summary

For some target audiences, print advertising can be an effective marketing material when time is taken to carefully develop a proper strategy. Special attention should be given to the ad layout and other design considerations. When done correctly, print advertising will grab a reader's attention, appeal to their needs, communicate your company's unique advantage and motivate readers to take action, thus resulting in your advertising objective being met.

References:

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¹Hallahan, Kirk. *Writing Effective Print Ads*. Colorado State University. July 1996.