

WHAT IS GOOD PRINT ADVERTISING?

by Karen J. Marchetti

What makes a "good" print ad? When you review creative work from potential resources, how can you identify good agencies, writers, and designers?

When the objective of your print ad (or print campaign) is a Direct Response objective - trackable traffic (retail or web), leads or sales -- the following key points will help you identify good magazine or newspaper advertising.

Every Ad Has Three Basic Goals

1. At its most basic level, a print ad first has to **attract our attention** - by literally stopping the reader. It is estimated that in the average newspaper, every ad competes with about 500 other ads for the reader's attention -- so stopping the reader is the first hurdle. Most readers are fairly disinterested when flipping through a newspaper or magazine, and usually don't read every item on every page.

2. Second, the ad needs to **draw the reader or audience in**. About six to eight times more people will read the headline than will ever read the rest of the ad. Why? Maybe the headline didn't deliver enough of a benefit for the reader to continue reading. Or maybe the first few sentences of the copy itself weren't engaging enough, and the reader lost interest.

3. Finally, the ad needs to **get the response**. The overall sales message has to be compelling enough to convince the reader to take the desired action. The best ads include SPECIFIC benefits so the reader is convinced they can't afford to miss out on your offer.

Readers See Ad Components in a Certain Order

With a print ad, we know that readers are usually attracted to items in this order:

1) headline, photo, photo caption (if there is one), or spot color

- 2) subheads, bullet points, underlines, bolds -- anything that stands out to the scanning reader (since most people scan, rather than read line-by-line, word-for-word)
- 3) the body copy (assuming they get that far).

The benefit headline and/or arresting visual, then, must achieve the ad's first basic goal -- that of attracting attention, or stopping the reader.

The main benefit expressed in **the headline must also draw the reader in to the rest of the ad copy -- the ad's second basic goal.** Engaging copy in the first few sentences of the body of the ad is crucial to keep the reader reading, along with subheads and other scan-able items to make the main points stand out.

The ad should make it clear what the reader should do to get the benefit promised - and there should be a **specific offer to motivate the reader to take action NOW -- the ad's third goal.**

How to Identify "Good Ads"

With the above points in mind, good print advertising might be judged on these three basic criteria, plus one additional general point:

1) Does the ad speak to its audience, and stand out on the page?

Does the ad "flag" the appropriate target customer in the headline, detail benefits relevant to the audience, or use an arresting visual? Watch out for headlines that use puns or a play on words. As the disinterested, scanning reader flips through the pages, he/she may not be able to figure out your "creative" headline. A reader will give your headline only precious seconds -- if they don't "get it" at first glance, they'll probably just flip right by it, rather than stop and try to figure out what it is you're saying.

2) Is the ad benefit-oriented? Does it tell the audience what's in it for them? This is what causes readers to continue reading your ad. The longer you can keep someone reading, the better your chance of response.

3) **Is it easy to get the main points of the ad?** Can the scanning reader easily figure out what's going on? Is it easy to respond - and clear what to do? Does the ad give a strong reason for the prospect to take action?

4) **Does the ad have a positive effect on your company's image?** Have you created an ad that will enhance your brand image (i.e., make readers think more positively about you) or will it erode your brand image (create a negative impression)? Every print ad should have a positive effect on the target audience.

Karen J. Marchetti is a Direct Response Advertising Consultant and Senior Vice President and Director of Client Services for Strategic Marketing and Advertising, Inc. She has taught Direct Marketing for the University of San Diego, UCSD, and California State University Long Beach, and is a judge of the Direct Marketing Association's international ECHO Awards.