

Avoiding Common Advertising Mistakes

There are studies that show that the average American is bombarded with more than 5,000 advertisements every day. This tremendous amount of commercial babble leaves us somewhat overwhelmed, and for the sake of our sanity, we simply tune out most of them. We are extremely selective with regard to the advertisements we do pay attention to – and a good advertising is deemed one that can breakthrough our tough defenses.

The quest to breakthrough has led most marketers and advertising agencies to reach for the outrageous...the theory being that it doesn't matter how offended we are, or how much we hate the ad, as long as we remember it. Tudog wants to make it perfectly clear that this is absolute insanity, completely wrong, and just plain dumb. If your market is comprised of people who enjoy being outraged, then, by all means, you should be outrageous. Otherwise, we propose the use of humor, benefit statements, and genuine life situations to communicate the benefits your product is offering.

But, indeed we are getting ahead of ourselves. Before we discuss advertising mistakes, let us review the reasons to advertise and the advantages and disadvantages.

Why Advertise?

Advertising is a marketing tactic, and like all marketing tactics, the primary purpose of advertising is to raise awareness of, and create interest in, your product. Advertising typically accelerates a branding process and allows a company to assign certain attributes and emotions to its products more easily than many other tactical options. Similarly, advertising can be used to inform or educate the public, either by providing straight information or inferring to certain sets of information that the receiving public will be able to derive from the blend of graphics and text provided.

The Advantages to Advertising

As stated, advertising can serve to accelerate certain branding processes, creating an opinion about the company quickly. This is an advantage provided (of course) the message is correct and the style of advertising is appropriate for the targeted market. Certainly one of the advantages is that it can be targeted, providing advertisers with a wide range of exposure opportunities, some in very high volume channels.

Another great advantage of advertising is that there are options to fit a wide range of budgets. From television and radio, to bus stop benches and local newspapers, advertising offers not only budget options, but targeted marketing. With advertising, a company select how drilled down a target it seeks to reach, and then it can mind the ad vehicles that reach it. From degrees of wealth to special interests, advertising has a way to reach specific sets of consumers.

Finally, although we are resistant to advertising on a broader level, we are extremely receptive to ads containing items of interest. In fact, as consumers we are somewhat dependent on advertising to inform us of our options and opportunities, and provide us with the information we need to purchase things we want and need.

The Disadvantages of Advertising

Advertising has only 2 primary disadvantages;

1. It can be very costly.
2. It is very easy to make mistakes.

The cost factor depends on the tactics deployed and the channels utilized. This having been said, the return on investment (like many marketing tactics) is difficult to measure. When an ad campaign works fantastically, it is easy to call it a success. When an ad campaign does damage, it is easy to see it as a failure. But most ad campaigns fall somewhere between the extremes, routinely and consistently keeping the customer base aware of the opportunities and benefits being offered. This is much less glamorous than most people generally associate with advertising.

The mistakes one can make with advertising range from crash-and-burn to simply wasting money. Let's look at classic advertising mistakes (and how to avoid them).

Avoiding Advertising Mistakes

There are 5 classic advertising errors that you can avoid in your efforts to maximize your dollars. They are:

1. Space - Selecting a channel that does not provide sufficient space for the message you need to convey. If you need 30 seconds, you should be selecting a channel that allows you 30 seconds, and not a more appealing channel (with perhaps wider reach) that grants you (for the same money) only 15 seconds. Similarly, if you need a quarter page ad in a local publication, taking a classified size ad just won't do the trick. Advertising is about communicating and if you don't give yourself the space you need you will not be able to communicate the message you want. Half a message to twice the audience does not add up to effective marketing.
2. Message – Communicating a message or image that does not serve your company. Too often we are sold on “creative” ideas that seek to express not the values and benefits of your company and product, but rather the quirky, super-cool brainstorm of an advertising geek. Sure creativity is important, but the creativity has to revolve around the message and not the message around the creativity. If you get your message wrong, it won't matter which channels you use. Nobody will be listening anyway.
3. Target – Focusing on the wrong target could mean a set of consumers you wish you could sell to, rather than the consumer group that wants you to sell to them. It could also mean being so focused on one group that you fail to recognize potential in other sectors. For example, when Kellogg's switched its Frosted Flakes commercials away from children and toward adults it gained an entirely new market (that wanted to legitimately eat Frosted Flakes) while maintaining its core consumer base of children. Target is who you communicate to. Make sure you have identified the broadest market (willing to be receptive to a narrow message).

4. Placement – Utilizing the wrong channel for the market you are targeting. There are, for example, publications for practically every conceivable special interest. In addition, there are literally hundreds of options with regard to general media. Selecting the right channel requires an understanding of the target market and which channels they seek out for their product information. For example, a business seeking information about professional services may be more inclined to be receptive to an exposure in a business publication, just as a blues fan would be inclined to review an ad in Blues Revue magazine.
5. Duration – The time you give your ad campaign to demonstrate results. As we mentioned, true measurement of a typical ad campaign is not all marketing science claims it is. Nonetheless, what is certain is that ad campaigns need time to penetrate the minds (hearts and souls) of the consumer and if you pull your campaign too soon (or cut back on it too early) you will obstruct its capacity to perform. You need to make sure you begin a campaign with a clear understanding of frequency and duration, and once you make the commitment, stick with it (unless you see it is having a noticeable negative effect).

The art of advertising has been described as the “cave art of the 20th century”. Perhaps it is true that future civilizations will stumble upon some advertisements and conclude from them a great deal about whom and what we were as a society. Let’s just hope they don’t find the car dealership ads.