

Advertising in a Nutshell

The bottom line of all advertising efforts is an obvious one: to attract customers and bolster sales. But often, small business advertising is wasted on a shotgun approach that doesn't focus on the company's best prospects: those who are ready, willing and able to purchase the product or service. In an attempt to reach "everybody," these advertisers either miss their true market or spend far more than necessary to reach it.

Once you've targeted your market and know exactly who and where your prospects are, it's important to clearly identify what you want your advertising to accomplish. Specific advertising objectives include:

- Creating new customers
- Increasing usage
- Increasing order size
- Promoting replacement of functional but outdated products with technologically superior ones
- Improving brand name recognition
- Generating customer inquiries
- Creating sales leads through the use of response ads, coupons or toll-free "800" numbers
- Promoting special events such as sales, business openings or the introduction of new products or services
- Enhancing the overall image of the business

Generally, the most effective ads focus on customer needs or wants and emphasize the most desirable benefits of the product or service, such as convenience, style or durability. Other tactics include comparisons with competitive products, two-for-one sales, special one-day discounts and offers of free information.

The techniques you choose in your advertising will help determine the media you select and the exact message you communicate. One of the best ways to become familiar

with the tactics in your field is to collect your competitors' advertising materials and use them to stimulate your thinking.

The most important things to take into consideration in any ad are the audience and the offer. Who is the ad trying to reach? If the ad isn't presented to the right audience and addressed to them in their own language, then it isn't going to get noticed. And if the offer isn't something that interests them and gets them excited, then they're not going to take any action even if they do notice it.

Finally, make it easy for customers to respond to your ad. Tell them what action to take and include (depending on the advertising medium) coupons, an "800" number or business reply envelopes. And be sure to stand behind what you sell.

Deciding Where to Advertise

The mediums in which you choose to advertise will depend on the audience you're trying to reach, the geographical range of your business, where your product or service can be most effectively presented and your budget. In deciding where to advertise, keep the following considerations in mind:

- When and how often your message needs to be sent.
- How effectively the medium communicates your main selling points. Make sure any medium you choose allows you to present all the information customers need to make a buying decision or to request additional information.
- How much a particular medium costs, relative to the number of people it reaches.
- How many of the people seeing the ad fall within your target customer group. Getting your message in front of those who are interested in what you have to sell is pivotal to advertising success.

A final point is that advertising does not need to be brilliant or highly creative to be effective. The secret of successful advertising lies in its continuity—sending an informative, consistent message over time that motivates existing customers and prospects to turn to you when they are ready to buy.

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