

The Ads That Get Results

By Carolyn Hayes Uber

Are your ads getting the results that count? Providing a return on your advertising investment? Successful ads share some common traits. Evaluate your own company's advertising against the following criteria:

1. Results-getting ads have visual magnetism

Only a small number of ads in a magazine or newspaper will capture the attention of a reader. Some ads will be passed by because the subject matter is of no interest. But others, even though they may have something to offer, fail the very first test of stopping the reader. Ads perish right at the start because, at one extreme, they just lie there on the page, flat and gray. At the other extreme, they are cluttered and noisy and hard to read. An ad should be constructed so that a single component dominates it — an illustration or photo or a headline — but not the company name or logo. The more pertinent the visual, the more arresting the headline, the more informative the ad appears, the better.

2. Results-getting ads select their audience

Often, an ad is the first meeting place of two parties looking for each other. There should be something in the ad that at first glance enables the reader to identify it as a source of information relating to his or her own interests — a problem they have or an opportunity they would welcome. The headline or the visual — preferably both — should immediately say to the reader “Hey, this is ad is for you”.

3. Results-getting ads promise a reward

An ad will survive the qualifying round only if readers are given a reason to expect that if they continue reading, they will learn something of value. A “brag-and-boast” headline, a generalization, an advertising platitude or worn-out cliché will turn readers off before they get into the meat of the message. The reward an ad offers can be explicit or implicit, and can even be stated negatively, in the form of a warning or possible loss. The more specific the promise, the better. “Less Maintenance Costs” is not nearly as effective a headline as “Cut Maintenance Costs by 25%”.

4. Results-getting ads back up the promise

To make the promise believable, the ad must provide hard evidence that the claim is valid. Sometimes a description of the product's design, the operating characteristics or the services offered will be enough to support the claim. The copy should be written with a confident tone that suggests documentation to back-up the ad's claims is readily available. Comparisons with competition — either a specific competitor or the industry in general — can be convincing. Case histories make the reward appear attainable. Best of all are testimonials. “They Say” advertising carries far more weight than “We Say” advertising.

5. Results-getting ads have a logical sequence

There should be an unmistakable entry point so the reader is guided through the material in a sequence consistent with the logical development of the selling proposition. A layout should not call attention to itself. The layout is merely the underlying framework upon which the various components of the ad are constructed. The ad should end with the “signature” of the advertiser — trademark, company name, and how to respond to the ad — address, telephone numbers, email and web addresses.

6. Results-getting ads speak “person-to-person”

Ad copy is most persuasive when it speaks to the reader as an individual — as if it were one friend telling another friend about a good thing. The ad should never “talk down” and the terminology should be that of the reader’s business. But more than that, the writing style should be simple. Short sentences. Short paragraphs. Active, rather than passive, voice. No tired clichés, “cute” word play or \$5 words. Frequent use of the personal pronoun *you*. Like conversation, complete sentences are not necessarily required for a successful ad.

7. Results-getting ads are easy to read

The press is loaded with ads in which the most essential part of the advertiser’s message — the copy — appears in type too small for ease of reading, or is squeezed into a corner or printed over an illustration. Text type should be no smaller than nine points. If reversed, it should be bold and easily readable. The copy should stand clear of interference from any other part of the ad. Column width should not be more than half the width of the page.

8. Results-getting ads sell the service before the source

Too often, an advertiser will insist the company name or logo be the biggest thing in the ad, that the company name appear in the headline or that it be set in boldface or a color each time it appears in the copy. That is simply too much. It suggests the company is Us-Centered rather than Customer-Centered. An ad should make the reader want to buy, or at least consider buying, before telling them *where* to buy.

9. Results-getting ads are consistent

Each exposure to your ads builds the reader’s perception of your company’s brand — the unique combination of characteristics that can create a preference for your company. When your ads look different from one another, when the messages vary wildly, and worst, when the visual identification of your company as the source of the advertising changes continually, you have lost the opportunity to firmly plant your company’s products or services in the mind of the reader. This doesn’t mean your ads must all look alike and never change. But a change in the look of your ads should be planned and managed. A successful ad campaign is a collection of ads that reinforce each other and have a cumulative effect on the reader. The collective sum is greater than the individual parts.

10. Results-getting ads reflect the company’s character

A company’s advertising represents a primary opportunity to portray the company’s personality. The tangible and intangible things that make the company liked, respected and admired. Messy ads suggest a company that doesn’t have its act together. Brag-and-boast ads suggest a company that is not customer-focused. Inconsistency, with each ad looking different from the last, suggests the company’s products or services may also be inconsistent or unreliable. A dull-looking ad raises the question that the company has not kept up, is behind the times, and offers nothing to get excited about.

Carolyn Hayes Uber is an experienced marketing and publishing professional with thirty years experience in advertising and public relations. More information on speaking and consulting services can be found at www.carolynhayesuber.com.