

SIX TOP WAYS TO TRANSFORM YOUR ADVERTISING RESULTS

If your print advertisements are not working, this is what you need to do. If they are working, this will massively improve your response rate. If you're not currently advertising but planning a test, these steps will give you a powerful head start.

Print advertisements generally have four written parts — headline, support copy, call to action, and business name — plus a visual. Visuals are usually more important than copy because they're more effective in attracting readers' attention and can instantly present your product or service in a dramatic and motivating way.

Unless you're commissioning your own original artwork or photography, the visuals you'll use will probably be either drawings or photographs from your suppliers, or non-copyrighted artwork (clip art) supplied with computer programmes. So choose the strongest visual among them — the one that best draws the eye and explains what you're selling — and move on to planning your headline and copy.

1. CHANGE THE HEADLINE IN YOUR ADVERTISEMENT

You can improve the response rate to an ad by 50%, 100% or more, just by changing your headline. The headline is the first thing people see in an advertisement. It's usually the wording at the top of the advert. Why is the headline so important? Because it's the deciding factor in whether people bother reading the rest of your advert.

The most prominent piece of copy — your headline — must not only work with your visual, amplifying its meaning, but also attract attention with a word, phrase or sentence announcing a benefit that appeals to your target market. One expert wrote that a headline is that final, mind-changing, sales-clinching comment you'd make when leaving the office of a prospect who, until then, had responded with nothing but negatives. Others point to the enduring effectiveness of the standard headlines "Sale", "Free", and "Buy Now and Save".

Collect ideas that are right for you from your salespeople, from the ads in your file, and from advertising books. And remember it is not so much the words, but the ideas they express, that "sell" your message... then find words to convey it.

Think about what happens when you're scanning through a magazine or newspaper. Your brain is trained to pick out the stories and subjects that are of most interest to you. It does this primarily by scanning the headlines of the stories. Well, the principle also applies to advertisements. When writing a headline, you need to follow the same principles as the journalists writing the stories or features appearing in the publication. Your headline needs to be interesting or shocking or intriguing or whatever it takes to get people to read the rest of your advert.

If you're not sure about a headline, here are five types of headlines that work wonderfully and that you are free to use in your ads. Obviously you will want to alter the parts in brackets for your particular product/service:

- 🍷 Don't (*Buy a Car*) until you've read this Shocking Report
- 🍷 Seven Secrets of (*Investing*) that the Experts don't want you to Know
- 🍷 The Secrets of (*anything written here will get peoples' attention!!*)
- 🍷 A Superb New Kitchen to Transform your Home for £65 per Month!
(*If you sell a product with an easy payment plan, including the payment plan in the headline can massively increase your response*)

- 🍷 “I switched to XYZ products and my business grew by 200% in 12 Months”
(Using a testimonial in your headline can also set you apart from the rest)

But don't just be limited by these. Be creative, use your imagination. Brainstorm with colleagues and friends. Probably the worst thing you can have as your headline is your company name or logo. Who cares!?! Write a compelling headline for your advert and it will make a huge difference.

2. CHANGE THE MAIN COPY IN YOUR ADVERT

The copy in your advert should be a simple communication between you and the person reading it, ensuring that you clearly communicate the BENEFITS of what you are offering.

The copy explains the headline argument and adds any assurance readers might need to dispel suspicions raised by the headline, such as the assurance of “same great quality” when you're offering a “new low price”. Following this copy, as a sign-off, is a call to action urging the reader to respond. For example, “Call for an appointment today” or “Remember, sale ends 21st March”.

- TOP TIP 1:** Use the word ‘You’ as often as you can in the advert. It forces you to make it a personal communication to the person reading it.
- TOP TIP 2:** Include a list of five bullet points in the advert listing five benefits of your product/service. This proven formula works again and again. We love bullet points!
- TOP TIP 3:** Make sure that you clearly tell people what to do at the end of your advert. People need direction, e.g. “Call us immediately to order your ABC on (phone number) or visit us online now at www.....”

You would be surprised at how many people write really good adverts and then let themselves down at the end by not including a strong call to action.

3. TEST AN ADVERT THAT IS PURELY LEAD GENERATION ADVERTISING

This can give you a very powerful advantage. There are basically two types of advertisement. The first is designed to produce a sale. This is the most common form of advertising. The second is designed to get people who are interested in your product to get in touch with you. This is called ‘Lead Generation.’

Suppose you are an accountant. A traditional advert would talk about the services you offer in the hope that people become a client. If you put an advert in the local paper, 2 or 3 people might contact you. But what if you put an advert in the paper that DID NOT sell your services but instead encouraged people to contact you. For example, you could offer them a **free report** ‘Seven Top Tips for Reducing your Tax Bill by Hundreds or Thousands of Pounds.’ People could phone for their free report or perhaps download it from your website. This advert may produce 10, 20, 60 or more responses. While it may not produce an immediate client, it produces many more ‘qualified leads’ than the first advert. You can then begin communicating to these leads through phone, email or letter and you should expect to be able to convert a good proportion to becoming clients.

In an increasingly crowded advertising environment, many businesses are finding this type of lead generation advertising far more effective than traditional adverts. If you sell higher priced products or services, you can be more adventurous in what you are offering. You've probably seen the Disney adverts where they offer you a free DVD or video about their holiday resorts. This is classic ‘Lead Generation’ advertising. If it works for Mickey Mouse, maybe it will work for you!

4. TEST 'ADVERTORIAL' ADVERTISING

An 'Advertorial' style ad is just an advertisement that looks like a normal news story or feature that the publication would run. You've probably seen them. They look like a normal story, but they have the words 'Advertising Feature' (or something similar) at the top.

The advantage of these adverts is that more people tend to read them because they look interesting. The style (which is the same as a normal news story) also means you can have a compelling headline – and it also means the content needs to be interesting because you are writing it in the style of a news story or feature. This is still a fresh, exciting form of advertising and we highly recommend that you test it.

5. INCLUDE A GUARANTEE IN YOUR ADVERTISEMENTS

If your advert is aiming for a direct sale, including a guarantee can turn a loss-making advert into a profitable one. When you ask people to buy from you based purely on an advertisement, you're asking them to take on all of the risk. If they don't know you, they're risking money and time, as well as possible disappointment if the product is not all that you say it is.

If you are willing to guarantee what you are offering, the risk is massively reduced — and your response rate is likely to rise significantly. Your guarantee can take many different forms. It can be a 30-day guarantee, a lifetime guarantee or if you really want to boost response rates, let people try your product/service for free for a period of time and then pay.

If you offer a guarantee you will of course get a few people who ask for their money back. The thought of this often puts business owners off — but it really shouldn't. The number of returns is normally easily outweighed by the increase in sales that your guarantee will bring. As with all marketing, don't just sit there trying to decide whether a guarantee is a good idea. And don't just take our word for it. TEST IT! Run an advert without the guarantee — and the same advert with a strong guarantee... and then measure the results. There's a reason that so many large advertisers use strong guarantees — THEY WORK!!

TOP TIP 4: Go out and study the highly successful Direct Response advertisers. These are the companies that you see year on year running adverts that are designed to produce an immediate response. These companies have spent millions testing and fine tuning their advertising to find out what works. You could definitely benefit from using some of their ideas (although not their precise wording!) as you plan your own successful advertising strategy.

6. MAKING IT ALL WORK

The next step is to combine all these visual and copy elements into an eye-catching, easy-to-read advert formatted to the dimensions stipulated by the publication. It's best to study the ads in that publication in advance, and consider what your advert might look like in order to stand out on the page. Experiment with different layout ideas rendered in thumbnail sketches, and then fine-tune your advert to fit the layout you prefer. Obviously, it's highly advisable if not imperative, when you're doing adverts in-house, that the person composing your advert has design experience. Not only is skill required to make an advert look right, but the quality of your advert must compete favourably with others appearing in the publication.

It's also a good idea to prepare your advert well ahead of the deadline. This way, you can put it aside for a few days and then review the advert with a fresh perspective while there's still time to make revisions. As a final check, lay your advert on a page of the publication where it will appear and make sure it stands out from the articles and other adverts on the page.