Looks vs Results

Dec 30, 2020

Making things look nice can take a long time, either due to lack of resources or [abundance of opinions](). This could delay launches, frustrate people, and waste precious energy. Those are high costs for startups or companies hoping to move fast.

Is it worth it?

Long ago I got fed up with delaying marketing campaigns because an email had to look nice. I tested styled versus unstyled emails and found that [making emails look nice was *not* worth it]().

After years of repeating some form of that test, and generally noticing that [simplistic and rough-around-the-edges designs don't seem to affect outcomes of enterprise software companies](), I developed a bias towards [simplicity]() and shipping things before they look nice.

From time to time I like to test my assumptions. Maybe looking nice matters more now than before, or maybe the effects I saw only

applied to email, or maybe I'm just looking for reasons to do less work?

For the latest experiment I ran two ads on LinkedIn, targeting executives at enterprise software companies, to see which of them got more clicks. One ad looked nice (or nice enough), like something a marketing team would spend a couple of hours to discuss and produce. The other ad looked like, well…

One is a beautiful work of art, the other is Option A and took $148 plus a few days of waiting.

Let's see how they performed:

Ad Name		Key Results	Cost Per Result	Impressions	Clicks	Average CTR
2 ads		-	-	9,966	36	0.36%
When "Big Cloud" Becomes the Competition Are you prepared to compete against AWS, Azure, and GCP? Read this guide. Creative name: Pretty Campaign: Ad Test: Pretty vs Ugly Creative ID: 122390683 · Sponsored Content · Single Image	...	12 *Website Visits*	$19.20	5,563	12	0.22%
When "Big Cloud" Becomes the Competition Are you prepared to compete against AWS, Azure, and GCP? Read this guide. Creative name: Ugly Campaign: Ad Test: Pretty vs Ugly Creative ID: 122390903 · Sponsored Content · Single Image	...	24 *Website Visits*	$11.23	4,403	24	0.55%

A
0.22% CTR
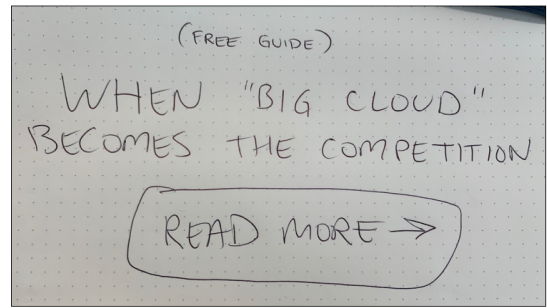
B
0.55% CTR
+150%

An ad that took me 15 seconds to create had a 2.5x better clickthrough rate than one done by a paid designer. If this were an actual campaign it would mean 2.5x more sales leads or user signups at a lower acquisition cost, on top of shipping faster with less overhead.

From time to time we need a reminder about what's worth the effort, and what isn't.

■

PS - Liked this article? I write one every month or so, covering lessons learned on B2B startup growth. Don't miss the next one:

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Phil • 3 days ago
Agree that sample B probably got more clicks out of curiosity and few want to spend their ad budget on worthless clicks.

That 0.36% CTR is low (though only 10K impressions). I actually think the heading is the problem. "When 'big cloud' becomes the competition" should have been something simpler like "When your cloud provider becomes your competition."

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Stéphane Recouvreur • 4 days ago
I think 1) the sample considered here is a bit too small and 2) it would be meaningful to see if it leads in actual leads, or if people click on the ad just by "curiosity". That being said, it's true that enterprise software clients don't care (don't know?) if a product is beautiful or not (*cough* Salesforce / Marketo / Eloqua *cough*).

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> **Grigoriy Kogan** Mod ➔ Stéphane Recouvreur
> • 4 days ago
> It passes the statistical significance test, so the sample is not too small: 🖼 View —
> uploads.disquscdn.com
>
> ⌃ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

> > **Stéphane Recouvreur** ➔ Grigoriy Kogan
> > • 4 days ago
> > Yes, you are of course correct. 😁 Just that at the end of the day, 12 v. 24 clicks tells me it could have gone either way...
> >
> > On another topic: do you get much luck prospecting via LinkedIn ads? I always find that the volume of leads is way too small to make it a good channel, and the quality is

just average at best. What's your take?

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Alexander • 4 days ago

Super interesting. I'm a bit skeptical of the results here, since B is so exceptionally "beautiful" that it really stands out. Would love if you could do a similar test with landing pages. One page super pretty, custom design, one page with standard bootstrap CSS.

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Guy Harel ➜ Alexander • 4 days ago

I agree with Alexander, I think that the "ugly" ad actually works because it's just so different and surprising. So my takeaway would be not necessarily "it's OK to be ugly" but "it's really good to be different and to stand out". This idea of putting up a hand-drawn ad is actually pretty original and novel, so IMHO it stands out because of its originality, not because of its ugliness.

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Grigoriy Kogan Mod ➜ Alexander • 4 days ago

I tried my best (least?) to not make it pretty. What's beautiful about it?

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Alexander ➜ Grigoriy Kogan • 4 days ago

I was being sarcastic, since you wrote it's a beautiful work of art :-) Sorry if that was unclear. I meant that it looks so bad that it would probably catch my eye in a LinkedIn ad, just by virtue of looking bad. Almost nobody would spend money to run an ad that looks this bad (other than for an experiment like this), so it stands out.

I think what would've been a more fair test would've been the same ad in Arial font.