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Title:
Closing in on Effective Advertising

Word Count:
1105

Summary:
You're spending a ton on advertising and you're just not getting the results you expected.
Customers aren't calling. Nobody knows who you are. Or worse yet, they're confusing you with your competition. Is it the writing? The design? The positioning? Here's an unusual approach to closing in on why your ads aren't working.

Keywords:
copywriting, copywriters, writing, advertising copy, ads, brochures, mailers, web content

Article Body:
Get out all the ads you ran last year. Go ahead. Tear them out of your magazines or newspapers (if you're lucky enough to have proof sheets, so much the better). Tear out your competitor's ads too—as many as you can get your hands on. Next, fold the company names, addresses and logos out of view. If the company names are in the headlines block them off with paper and tape. Now tape them up to the wall, putting yours on top, your competitors' below. Now back off, at least five feet. We're going to gradually close in on the most effective ad in the group (hopefully one of yours).

The "Eye Test" View

First, and this is very important, don't read any of them. Instead give them a quick, visual once over—what I call the "Eye Test." Do your ads stand out? Or do they dissolve into the mush of sameness? Remember, your audience will see your ad, not in a vacuum but with dozens of competitive ads in the same or similar magazines or newspapers. If your ads stand out, you're ahead by a length.

Step in, Feel the Image

Now move in a little closer to your ads. Close enough to get the feel or image they project Like a new salesperson who walks through the door, the first thing people react to is the overall image he or she projects. It's the same with

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advertising. The colors, the design, the typeface should be consistent with the image of your company. A tennis shoe salesperson can wear a referee shirt and a whistle around his or her neck, a medical sales rep can't. If your ads are in sync with the image of your company, you're a step closer to your audience—and a sale.

Are You Projecting a Consistent Look?

Next comes an equally important aspect: consistency. All your ads should project the same image. No, they don't have to have the same visual or the same headline. They should, however, look like they all come from the same company. After all, this image is your "familiar face" in the crowd. It's also something you worked very hard to create. And it's uniquely yours, no one else's. Just like a good salesperson who finally got in the door to make that first sale. You wouldn't dream of switching salespeople after that. If your ads look like they came from several different companies, your audience might assume your product does. If your ads pass this test, effective advertising is within your reach. Which is exactly where you need to be for the next step.

Arm's Length for Positioning

An arm's length away from your favorite campaign of ads. The object of this test is to see how well you've positioned yourself. Yes, you can now read your ads, but not for details. How you position yourself should be fairly evident by the time you finish the first paragraph. Positioning is basically how your audience perceives your product, service or company. For example, businessmen, engineers and students all need computers, yet each has a different idea of what computers can do for them. Advertise a computer to a businessman and you might do better to position it a management or accounting tool. Students might respond better to an ad showing computers as a writing and study aid. And engineers would be better persuaded to buy a computer if you positioned it as a design or research tool. In each case, the products are the same but the positioning generates the unique appeal for any given market. And the greater the appeal, the greater the sales. If you've done your research, your positioning should bring the reader a little closer to your ad and your product.

Move in to One Ad

We're now going to concentrate on one ad. So pick your favorite one and move in close enough to read it in comfort. The headline and visual should answer the question "what's in it for me." If it doesn't do that quickly and effectively, your audience may gloss over it without ever bothering to read it. Some of the best salesmen in the world start their pitch with a direct customer benefit—even

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before they introduce the product. They've learned that customers want to know right off what the product can do for them—the big benefit. If your product's benefit is buried in the body and your main visual is an un-involving product shot or a photo of earth floating in space, your ad won't go the distance. And the sale will go to your competitor.

The Revealing Close-up

Ok, time for the close-up: the body copy. It should "payoff' or back up the claim you made in the headline by forcefully and effectively communicating your product's key benefits. In essence, you still have to answer the Question "what's in it for me," but now you have more room to do it. You can be flowery, you can be humorous, you can even get technical. But you must convince the reader that there is a strong benefit to be gained in choosing your product over the rest. If you've done a good job, your ad goes the distance. What's left is what all good salesmen do before they leave.

Close in and Ask for the Order!

For this, you'll have to get in close to the bottom of your ad. Close enough to read your call to action, which should be short and direct, leaving no doubt in the reader's mind what to do after reading the ad—call, clip a coupon, circle a bingo card. It should also be clear as to what the reader can expect to receive—more information, arrange a demo, have a salesperson call, get a trial sample. The reader shouldn't have to get too close to read this either (don't put this or your phone number in fine print). Remember, when a salesperson asks for the order or gives his or her phone number, it's always loud and confident, never a whisper.

There are obviously many market, demographic and personal factors we haven't considered. But if you meet the key objectives we've introduced, your audience can't help but close in on your ad—and your product. And that's what effective advertising is all about.