
Building Better Sales through Smart Advertising

Make your Money go Further and get Better
Returns by Advertising Smart

Overview

This material was developed at Abe's SuperBudget VoiceMail between 1993 and 1994, by staff in collaboration with clients using the VoiceMail service in various ways to help their business or their private projects. Customer response to various types of advertising was measured, and generalizations drawn wherever possible.



Everybody's heard the saying, "it pays to advertise," but that payment can vary tremendously. With a scientific approach and a little guidance, you can make your dollars far more effective at bringing sales to your business. Much poor information abounds. You will find the Rules Of Thumb given here to be a reliable guide to profits.

Introduction

Although every business is unique, certain problems are the same. Because it is common for startup businesses to use answering services and voicemail services, over the years we have had the opportunity to consult with thousands of business owners, and some of the same questions come up again and again. For example, just about every business must accomplish the following targets (more or less in this order):

- 1. A potential customer must become aware of your company.
- 2. This potential customer must be attracted (tempted) to do business with your company.
- 3. The potential customer must be able to reach your business, either by phone or in person.
- 4. The potential customer must continue to feel that the transaction is good, and so agree to the business transaction.
- 5. The customer must obtain your product or service.
- 6. You must obtain your payment from the customer.

As you can see, the first three steps are generally obtained by means of your advertising. Before we go on to consider types of advertising and some useful pros and cons, let's examine a simple situation to illustrate how steps one to three might be accomplished.

An Example: How to Advertise

Our example will be the Acme Shoestring Stand, on the sidewalk at Market and Montgomery, San Francisco. Joe Acme, the proprietor, has just gone into business with a card table, two dozen pairs of shoelaces, and a notebook to write down sales.

He figures that since there are huge numbers of people walking by, and since most of them are wearing shoes, he should sell tons of shoelaces. However, at the end of the first day, only a couple of sales. Observing the potential customers, he notices that most of them don't look at his card table and the shoelaces.

Obviously, the potential customers are not being aware of Joe's company. So that's the first thing he must accomplish. So the next day he brings a large sign that says "SHOELACES!" This huge sign sits on the sidewalk so that people have to walk around it, and to be sure they notice it, he attaches a flashing orange light like they use on street repair signs.

Sales increase 25%.

Joe notices that lots of people, however, just walk around the sign — muttering — and show no evidence of pausing to consider the tragic state of their shoelaces, which in many cases are in a shocking condition, as anybody can plainly see. Joe concludes that, although people have become aware of his company, they have not become tempted to do business.

Now Joe has some hard thinking to do. What are the kinds of things that might tempt (motivate) somebody to consider some new shoelaces? He makes a list.

- 1. Some people pride themselves on stylishness, so perhaps they'd be intrigued by the latest thing or faddish fashions.
- 2. Other people are insecure, so perhaps they'd be tempted by knowing they were prepared for shoelace tragedy.
- 3. Other people can't resist bargains, so perhaps they'd buy if they thought it was an incredible deal.

So the next day he replaces the text of the sign. Now it says: "FACTORY CLOSEOUT ON SHOESTRINGS! Latest Fashions (as seen in Esquire Magazine). Play it safe and carry a spare. Buy two, get one free!"

Because Joe is now tempting people to consider shoestrings, sales rise another 25%.

He notices, however, that some people — mostly those who happen to pass by with their backs to him — pause at the sign, look up and down the street, and then walk on. Clearly some of these people are not clever enough to find him, although they've obviously considered the matter.

So Joe adds to his sign, in smaller letters: "Just step over to the Acme Shoestring Stand, right behind you on the sidewalk at Market and Montgomery, 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday."

Sales rise 25%.

Now although our example is simple, these same three elements will come up again and again. Advertising will in some cases sell the person as in direct mail advertising. But in many cases, you just want the advertising to sell the person on the idea of talking to you so that you can then sell them your product.

So here's what your advertising must do:

- 1. You must catch their eyes.

- 2. You must hook their interest.
- 3. You must tell them what to do next.

Types of Businesses

Before we go on, let's consider what types of businesses there are, because that will affect where and how we advertise. For convenience, we will divide all businesses into just a few classifications. The main questions are three:

Is your customer a business or a consumer? Companies who typically sell to business customers include office-supply stores, answering services, bookkeeping services, most wholesalers, most distributors, etc. Companies who typically sell to consumers include movie theaters, restaurants, dry cleaners, newsstands, gas stations, and grocery stores. One thing you notice immediately is that companies who sell to consumers may be more affected by their location than are companies who sell to businesses.

Does your business provide a product or a service? A product is a physical object. Joe Acme sold a product, shoelaces. A service is where you do something useful for somebody. Joe's neighbor on the sidewalk, the Downtown Shoeshine Stand, was a service company.

Do you (the owner) work alone or with employees? If you have no employees (or very few, and the office is not attended), then you have to think very carefully about how the potential customer is going to reach you, so that you can sell him on your service.

Let's examine some of the ways that these business differences translate into differing methods of advertising...

For example, if you sell to consumers, then you'll probably want to obtain the best location you can, in the middle of the biggest bunch of your potential customers as possible. Then you'll emphasize advertising such as external signs, Yellow Page ads stressing location (Convenience), and perhaps things like signboards, flyers with introductory offers, direct mail to the neighborhood, and media-flapdoodle events (such as searchlights, flags, balloons, circus rides, and such.) If you think this list is extreme, think about some of the car dealerships you have known.

On the other hand, if you sell to businesses, you might consider location, but maybe not. Many business sales are larger-ticket items, you might be using commissioned outside salesmen, and that means they could be dropping off brochures, catalogs, and special event no-

tices. You might be using direct mail, and it might not be targeted by neighborhood, but by the types of businesses you want as customers.

Also, whether you provide a product or a service to a large extent determines how you'll go about tempting the customer to do business with you. For example, if you're selling Cadillacs (product) to consumers, you can tempt them with statements about how their status in the neighborhood will increase. Being a physical object, their neighbors would see it.

If you were selling Accounting (service) to businesses, in most cases you'd be unlikely to sell them on their increased status in the eyes of colleagues; you'd have better luck talking about their increased control over finances, freedom from hassle and worry, and ultimate tax savings through professional counselling, etc. And notice that these temptations would not work as well for selling Cadillacs.

However, be aware that the specific points you use to tempt the customer may have more to do with the psychology of your 'typical customer' than it does with any inherent attribute of your product or service.

Major Tip #1: Find out where other companies in your business regularly advertise, and consider advertising there, too.

Here's why: People who are profitable in business don't repeat losing propositions. You'll notice that there are hundreds of plumbers and massage parlors in the Yellow Pages. Why? Because these businesses have learned that Yellow Pages work well for them.

Of course that's a double-edged sword. If there are hundreds of plumbers and you're a plumber, how will you get their eyes?

You don't see a whole lot of advertising for bookkeeping services in the Yellow Pages. A few, but not a lot. This doesn't mean it wouldn't work, but it does mean that it probably hasn't been so wildly successful as to convince all the other bookkeeping services to spend much money in that way.

If there are only a few bookkeeping services, would a small ad be adequate to get their eyes? Could you think up a good way to hook their interest? Might it be worth an experiment?

In general, if somebody else has already worked out what works, if the way is open for you to do the same thing, chances are pretty good that it will work for you, too.

Your First Step: What Business Are You In?

Around the turn of the century, the railroads were a powerful force in American Business. But not today. It is generally considered that their main error was in being mistaken about what business they were in.

In other words, they thought they were in the railroad business, and when railroads were beat out by the growth of highway shipping, well, adios. If they had only realized that they were in the transportation business, then those fleets of trucks you see on the highways today would bear names like Southern Pacific and Rock Island!

So what business are you in?

You want to define your business broadly in your dreams so that you don't become limited by the limits of the picture in your dream. The fellow who started the original San Francisco Roommate Referral Service had to move to a larger office shortly after opening. He hadn't pictured how successful his business would be, and didn't have enough room for all his customers!

Here's another example. When we started, before we began to specialize in voicemail, we used live operators, charged a lot more money, and we thought of ourselves as an "answering service, in the business of answering telephones." But over the years, as we talked to more business owners, we began to offer more of the services that owners reported they needed.

The services we finally offered included: making appointments, taking restaurant and little-theatre reservations, quoting prices, sending brochures, pagers of all kinds, mailboxes (business address service), UPS package receiving, mail forwarding, 800-Number rentals, order-taking, MasterCard authorization, patching calls to clients (call-screening), dispatching messages and orders to remote printers, and other things as well. In short, we were limited by thinking we were in the business of answering phones. In actuality, we provide better service to clients when we took a larger view ("the instant office"), and provided more services.

However, a warning: "Beware Bigness."

It's very American to think that we should expand, expand. But it's not always the best business decision, when you consider that your life is the reason you run a business.

Your size and activities should always be modified by considerations of what kind of life you want to have. And in some cases, small and simpler is better. (For a detailed discussion of this approach to creating a good business and a happy life, see our special report enti-

tled “Insider-Method Business Creation,” available via free download from www.abesvoicemail.com or www.action800.com.)

Something similar to this example happened to us. We were an answering service offering many services, and one day we purchased a voicemail company, whose services seemed compatible. After several years of experimentation, we discovered that in the voicemail services, we had a better knack for delivering the highest possible value to our customer.

So over time, we chose to divest the live-answering services to another company and we began to specialize in voicemail services. As our projections had suggested, when we specialized and focused more narrowly, we actually became both a smaller and a more successful business!

Your Second Step: Who is your Customer?

Before you can devise a successful strategy of tempting a customer, you must know who he/she is. You don't tempt the Priest the same way you tempt the Wino. You want to know things like:

- What gender is he/she?
- How old is he?
- What “class” is he? (Upper, middle, lower?)
- How does he dress?
- How much money does he earn?
- How much schooling has he had?
- What's his occupation?

Of course these items in themselves are not necessarily important, but when you begin to clearly picture these things you begin to picture the typical customer. Never mind that you may have a wide range of customers; you will still benefit by visualizing your “average” customer.

If you can gather this information by actual survey of your own clients (and potential clients), great! Also, some businesses have been able to extract useful information from the U.S. Census figures (try the library). Or, you might spy on the customers walking into your competitor's store. Or survey them!

If your customer is a sure bet to read a certain magazine, the magazine will have free demographic information for you, if you tell them you're considering advertising there. If your customer owns a certain consumer device, you might be able to get demographics from the

manufacturer of the device, who probably surveys that sort of thing. If your customer lives in a certain part of town, you might be able to use data from the Contacts Influential list (try the library) to determine general income levels, etc.

Even if you just sit down and write what you think your customer is like, you're probably better off than doing nothing to picture the typical customer!

Once you have listed every attribute you can think of that might be important, you should try to answer this question:

“What Sort of myths and legends would appeal to this person?”

Think in terms of dramatic, dreamlike images, as well as in terms of ordinary reality. For example, suppose that your target customers are all crop-duster pilots. You might surmise that they'd be affected at the emotional level by legends of the Old West, of the loner who blows into town, and who then drifts on. If your customers are bankers, you might surmise that they'd be emotionally swayed by visions of the patriarch, honored by all at the head of a long table in the vast mead hall.

Now you're starting to visualize your customer.

Your Third Step: Consider the Benefits

Do you know the difference between a “Feature” and a “Benefit?” A Feature is a fact about your product or service. Example: Our voicemail service uses the best equipment in the world. That's a fact. And you know what? Nobody cares! Features don't sell things! Because the customer is really only interested in what it's going to do for him. So he doesn't care if we've got the best equipment in the world.

A Benefit is how the customer will be better off. Example: Our voicemail service gives our customer an inexpensive and powerful way to handle calls, so the benefit is: We'll save his money, and give him greater control over his affairs. You'd better believe he's interested in that!

Now we come to the link between Features and Benefits.

We'll give him greater control of his affairs (benefit) BECAUSE our voicemail system is easy to control with touch-tone commands and provides message-gathering around the clock (features).

If you want to sell the customer, talk about Benefits. If you want him to believe you, tell about the Features of your company that allows you to deliver that Benefit.

Tell just enough about your company's features to support your claim; but be sure you don't get all excited and start spouting off about

your wonderful equipment. Your customer will fall asleep when the conversation departs from how he personally will benefit from doing business with you.

Many people in Sales feel that there are only a few basic Benefits. The ones we've been able to identify are these:

- Saving Time
- Saving Money
- Making more Money (not the same as saving, in the mind)
- Greater Convenience
- Freedom from Worry (or hassle)
- Greater Status (image)
- Expansion
- Novelty

Now that you can picture your typical customer, (a) go over this list and imagine what Benefits he'd react to most strongly, and then (b) think about what Features of your business will deliver the Benefit to the customer.

Types of Advertising

The list below is by no means complete, but hopefully it may make you aware of advertising alternatives available to you.

1. Word of mouth

This is one of the best forms of advertising because it costs nothing, and takes no time. Keep records of how new customers heard about you (highly recommended!). You may discover — as we have — that when a potential customer comes through recommendation, he is more likely to sign up than people who come via other advertising.

The problem with word-of-mouth is that it's out of your control: How do you increase it? Although you hope that satisfied customers recommend you, there's no guarantee. You may get results by asking your customers to recommend you, but maybe not. Your customers have other things to think about. You might find that direct incentives — such as discounts to your existing customers — may be effective at increasing their recommendations. You have to experiment.

For example, we offered a free month of service for referrals, and we got pretty good results, until we began leaving a personal 'thank

you' message every time we gave out the free month. Suddenly word-of-mouth doubled! Our customers liked getting the free month OK, but they also liked hearing they were appreciated!

And in some cases, probably receiving the message was the only way they ever became aware that they'd received a free month!

Generally, you'll be better off asking your customer for a Referral — right now, before he forgets about it — and if asking doesn't produce results, try offering an inducement. We found that the best time to ask the customer for referrals was right after he signed up.

In general, your best approach is probably to use other advertising methods as your main process, then ask for referrals and follow up on them, and take any spontaneous word-of-mouth as a gift.

2. Location and external signs

Especially important if you sell to consumers. Supposing that you are in the middle of a bunch of prospective customers, what can you do to make them aware of your business and your product or service?

So first let's consider external signs. In general, the bigger it is, the better it will work. Raw size and getting their eyes is MUCH more important than how lovely and elegant it is! Let's repeat that. The raw size and getting their eyes is MUCH more important than how lovely and elegant it is.

In other words, if you had to choose between them, it would be better to have a BIG UGLY sign than a small lovely sign. Why? Because if your sign fails to catch their eyes, nothing else matters. If you were giving away free money, but they never saw your sign, they wouldn't come in.

After you've done everything possible to catch their eyes, your sign must hook their interest, and so you put something on it that would appeal to your target customer. And if it's not obvious, tell them how to proceed in order to do business with you; this could just be a label such as “UPSTAIRS.”

Only then do you worry much about what the sign looks like, but at this point the Rule of Thumb is — As much as possible, make the sign and the exterior of your place of business look like the kind of place where your target customer would want to be.

Let's dwell on that a little. Most business owners have clear ideas about what they want “their place” to look like.

But that's really backwards.

You will profit by considering what your customer thinks “his place” should look like. That means, for example, that if your customer is down-and-out and looking for something cheap, your place

better not look too fancy, or he may balk at coming through the door, because “it doesn't look cheap.”

A little story. When we opened Geary Boulevard office (a major thoroughfare in San Francisco), we paid \$1000 for a large illuminated clock in the window. It had only our name and phone number. In 5 years we only got 2 signups from the clock. Although thousands of people saw it — every day — we failed to tempt them. Great public service; lousy advertising.

Now maybe some people saw it and signed up later and never told us. Maybe. But it's not good to think this way. If you're asking them and they don't report coming from a certain ad, probably it didn't happen.

3. Stationery, business cards, etc.

This is not advertising and it won't make you any sales. However, it could cost you some sales! So do invest enough time to make sure that your stationery looks like the kind of company your customers want to do business with.

Don't spend a fortune on custom logos: consider using standard typefaces. If your customer is el cheapo, you may be better off with a rubber stamp. He'll feel he's doing business with *his kind* of place.

But why not put advertising ON your stationery? This IS advertising, and could make you some sales. Why not? Over the years you're going to send out thousands of these pieces of paper, so why not make them work? Put a motto or a slogan, or your tempting deal right on every letter, every business card, every envelope! Tempt people with your message!

4. Yellow Pages

You should have, at the least, the free listing in your business classification. Because suppose somebody is aware of you from somewhere else and they want to look you up. They may look you up in the white pages, OR they may look you up in the yellow pages. Naturally, either way, you want to be there so they can find you.

But should you invest in (a) displays ads, (b) column ads, (c) column logo ads, or (d) bold print in the column?

Step One is to determine what other successful businesses of your type do. If they do advertise in the Yellow Pages, you need to consider whether and how you can compete with them in the Yellow Pages. The first problem you must solve is: How can you catch the customers' eyes?

If there are 14 pages of competition, will the customer ever see your ad? If they don't see it, your tempting message doesn't matter. Here are some ideas...

The column ads, although they cost far less than display ads, may work about as well as a display ad. When reading the column ads, readers start with "A" and go more or less down the line. By the third page, most readers have bought.

Extra lines in a column listing, or use of a "logo" ad, can make your listing stand out on the page. In this case you might be wise to choose your logo to be the most useful graphic device you can. For example, if you make your logo say "Bob's TYPING", with the word "TYPING" real big, it will make the word "TYPING" stand out from a whole page of typing services. (By the way, Bob's Typing Service already does this in San Francisco, so you probably shouldn't try to use this exact logo.)

If you can get a good position and you have the money, display advertising may work for you. Whether the ad will bring in more than it costs largely depends upon whether people will naturally think of the Yellow Pages when considering your type of business. Yellow Pages are a natural for answering service because people think "Voicemail ... telephone ... yellow pages". Likewise "Outcall Massage ... telephone ... Yellow Pages". Likewise "Call the plumber ... telephone ... Yellow Pages". But it probably wouldn't work for the movies, which is "See a movie ... movie listings ... newspaper".

If you talk to a directory sales rep, he will trot out some handy charts showing how responses go up when you buy a larger display ad. Although this is a true fact, it's misleading.

Your real interest is not to maximize sales from a specific medium at any cost, but to maximize sales from your advertising budget! So if your budget is \$50 a month, then when thinking about yellow page dollars, think about how to get the most sales for your \$50!

For example, listings usually give greater bang for the buck, so if you service more than one area, why not buy more listings, as opposed to purchasing one large ad in the main area?

In our company, we ran this very experiment and measured the results. (It can take more than one year to truly measure this, because you can only try a new approach once per year!) We discovered that we got TONS more response from a small budget in many books, compared to a larger budget for a single display ad in our primary market. You will have to test for yourself.

The deadline for San Francisco yellow pages is usually around May, and the ads placed then come out in a book in September. You must then pay for your ad for one year, whether it works or not, be-

cause the book is on the street. Pacific Telephone will let you escape payment if you shut down the phone number, don't transfer it to anybody else, and don't engage in that type of business in the same calling area.

The deadline and book-issue date in other areas is different, because the Pacific Bell Directory Company uses one team of Yellow Page Reps, and moves them from place to place through the year. If you have the opportunity to test and refine your ads before the deadline it would be beneficial, because once the deadline passes, you can't change your ad for over a year.

Warning #1: If you do choose to use a display ad, Pacific Bell Directory will do graphics for you for free. They give it away because many buyers are too busy or intimidated by graphics, and these customers think free graphics is a good deal.

It's the worst deal in the world.

Pacific Bell's goal is not the same as yours. Their artist's goal is to do graphics that won't show through that cheap paper. Your goal is to get the eyes of your customer. For god's sake, get some good graphics. Don't spend thousands of dollars for a year of display ad and then make it worthless to save a couple hundred on graphics.

Warning #2: During the divestiture of the phone company around 1983, it was widely publicized that Yellow Pages is a very lucrative business. Consequently, a large number of companies try to publish other 'Yellow Pages' such as Ethnic Yellow Pages, your Neighborhood Yellow Pages, and even the Better Business Bureau tried to get into the act.

I ask you, do you keep a whole bunch of different yellow pages around the house? No? Well, nobody else does either. We all keep the 'real' one, and trash the rest. Save your money.

5. Newspaper.

There are many varieties of newspaper advertising, and many different rates. Among the major ones are display advertising, classified ads, business-to-business classified ads, and the various Sunday Sections.

In analyzing newspaper advertising, it may be useful to first consider the types of newspapers:

The Dominant Daily. In San Francisco this is the Chronicle. It has the largest circulation and the widest audience, and the highest advertising rates. It's a good place to advertise to reach business buyers, and to pull large numbers of responses for certain traditional consumer classifications such as jobs wanted, rentals, real estate for sale, garage sales, etc.

The Alternative Weekly. In San Francisco this is the Bay Guardian, or its competitor the SF Weekly. They each use the same formula. This reaches a large number of 'alternative' readers, but a far smaller total number of readers. Consequently their rates are less. Good for reaching smaller numbers of 'alternative' readers, and for 'alternative' services like massage, and for personals ads.

“Advertiser”-type newspapers. For example, the San Francisco Advertiser, or in Los Angeles, the Recycler. This is full of ads and carries no real news. Ads are cheap. Very good for selling secondhand stuff at reasonable prices. These are often a good value. Given away free in supermarkets.

Legal papers. These specialize in legal notices such as Fictitious Business Name Announcements, dissolutions of Partnerships, etc. They don't carry much news, except some that have an attorney readership. Might be useful if you want to sell something to attorneys.

Neighborhood and Arty papers. These might be worth a try if you have a shop in the neighborhood and sell to consumers, or if you sell to artists or art-buyers.

School papers. Bet you know who reads these! Students have lots of disposable income for entertainment, clothes, auto maintenance, travel bargains, etc. Plus, the ads are dirt cheap.

Should you use display or classified? Probably it's not really a this-or-that proposition. Common thought is that the classified ads may appeal to a different reader than the displays. Probably you'll have to test to see which works best for you.

Since different papers have different readers and different numbers of readers, the question is: How many of your typical customers read Paper X, and of these customers how many of them will see your ad?

Also consider getting the paper to do an article on you. If you've selected the local neighborhood newspaper, for example, think about what's unique or important about your business to your neighbors, and how you help/affect the neighborhood.

1997 NOTE: Some of the newspapers are starting to reflect their classified advertisements on their Internet sites. Although this seems not to be truly powerful yet, Internet marketing and searching are still young, and conceivably the purchase of newspaper classified ads might be useful to you as an easily accessible way to get your goods listed so that web-surfers can find you.

The question is: How many will find you? And the way you discover the answer is by asking folks how they heard about you, and tallying the results. (See more on Internet below.)

6. Postering. Variation #1

Poster distribution to bulletin boards. For many small startup businesses, postering can be an excellent method of advertising. It doesn't cost much, posters stay up a lot longer than the daily newspaper, and a lot of people can see it.

You must consider whether your typical customer will read a poster. If you sell to high-income real estate brokers, your poster in the laundromat won't work. If you sell to housewives, young people, consumers, grassroots businesses, students, or coffeehouse types, posters may be a great way to reach your market. Our local postering companies are called The Thumbtack Bugle in SF, or the Daily Staple in East Bay, or Marin Postering in Marin County.

We highly recommend a book called 'Guerrilla Marketing — Secrets for Making Big Profits from your Small Business' by J. Conrad Levinson (Houghton Mifflin). In addition to containing many clever marketing ideas, it's one of the few books that discusses postering and how to best use it.

Postering Variation #2

Flyer handouts on the street. This can be an outstanding method for introducing a new store or revitalizing a store which people don't seem to be aware of. These often work best when coupled with the idea of BIG NEWS! or INTRODUCTORY OFFER! or DISCOUNT COUPON! to get people to come to the store once. If you can get them to walk in once, and if you sell a repeat product, if they're happy, they'll return.

You may wish to offer your discount (to new customers only). It may be useful to include an expiration date. That way they think 'Use it or Lose it' and hopefully they'll act on your offer instead of putting it off and maybe forgetting.

You can target this to various types of customers. If you sell to consumers, hand them out in shopping malls, on shopping streets, or near restaurants. For business customers, give them out downtown where the offices are. Likewise you can target specific classes of customers: housewives during the day at the supermarket, students on campus, commuters at day's end near downtown parking lots.

Postering Variation #3

Flyer delivery to homes. Naturally this is for consumers, neighborhood-oriented, or homeowners. Gets pretty good attention because they get picked up when the customer is relaxed at home instead of at work. You'll see this used a lot for catalog-on-newsprint items, such as a sale in your neighborhood hardware store. A favorite of pizza shops.

Postering Variation #4

Flyer attachment onto cars. Pros and Cons here. If the car is owned by your customer and he's tempted by your offer, how convenient! If the car is not owned by your customer, what a nuisance! But once again, you may be able to target your customer readily. For a location-dependent business like a copy-shop, florist, movie-house, or restaurant, this might be a good bet.

Postering Variation #5

Dropping stacks of your catalog or monthly calendar to lounging locations. This is often used for repertory theaters to distribute their monthly calendar of features, or for nightclub calendars. You leave huge bunches of the calendars in places where people lounge around such as coffeehouses, and at places like supermarkets.

The customer can take it home, and it advertises both today's event and next week's, plus it serves as a reminder in the home. If you have periodic events, consider it. Or if you have an inexpensive catalog that people will read, consider it.

All of these postering variations involve directly carrying an advertising piece to where the customer physically is. They can be extremely effective, especially for neighborhood businesses, grassroots businesses, or new businesses. If you need to build up some foot traffic, try a postering variation with an inducement for the customer to come in.

If you use basic Postering (Variation #1) on bulletin boards, it's well worth your while to use tear-off tags. They greatly increase your response from customers. You don't have to put up the posters yourself or try to supervise student labor: you can hire a postering service, such as the Thumbtack Bugle. Because they provide all these postering services for many people at a time, your cost may well be lower than hiring your own labor, and they're certainly more reliable. The Bugle may still offer a free Poster Design Kit, or even poster-design services, so your poster will get good results.

7. Concert Brochure

Give these people some money if you want to support their endeavor, but don't plan on it bringing you any business, unless — perhaps — it's a very expensive concert, and you sell very expensive merchandise, and you can arrange for the eyes of the concert-goer to actually dwell upon your ad.

Likewise, the Policemen's Association, etc. These are charitable contributions, not advertising. You will recognize this situation when you receive a phone call from somebody who will say, "This is Officer Bailey from the Policeman's Association, how are you today?" (pause) "(YOUR NAME), we're getting together the brochure for the Annual Circus for Little Children, and we were wondering if you could help us out."

We want to let you in on a little secret. That's probably not really Officer Bailey. Give them money if you wish, but don't in your wildest dreams think it will bring you business.

8. T-Shirts and Baseball Caps

Because these are so expensive, they are rarely given away free just to get somebody to talk to you! (Even people who are not your customers need clothing.) For this reason they're usually sold. Now you could sell them at your cost and think of them as walking billboards.

Ask yourself, is it worth the trouble? Or you could sell them at a profit, in which case, if they fail at advertising, who cares? Probably they're best thought of as a promotional device for within your employee baseball team, or for the customers for a neighborhood bar, etc. In most cases, it's not really advertising.

If they are attractive to your target customer, they may be very effective as a "sweetener", as in "sign up today and get this beautiful 4-color T-shirt with a picture of Elvis Presley!" Or in the midwest, people really do like to get a free baseball cap at their local John Deere dealership. And if your product is expensive enough (like a tractor or Cadillac), perhaps you could give them away, profitably.

9. Handout Novelties

These are small objects of some utilitarian value which are given away, such as imprinted pens, matchbooks with advertising, key rings that glow in the dark with your message, or calendars to go in your wallet, on your desk, or on the wall. Some of these work, many don't.

Insurance companies have good results sending out desk calendars for their business clients. It keeps the broker's name on the cli-

ent's desk so the client doesn't forget the name of his insurance broker. The last thing that broker wants is for his client to go to the Yellow Pages to look him up, because the client might just get some other quotes, and wind up doing business elsewhere.

Bars have good results with matchbooks. It's traditional. Since the drinker is going to beg matches of the bartender anyway, why not make all those thousands of matchbooks do some work. Besides, if the guy can't remember where he was, he can't come back again, so let's remind him.

Imprinted pens and such may be good for door-to-door salesman in office buildings, to help get them past the receptionist. This depends upon the image of your business. You may be better served by wearing a dark suit and acting a bit stiff. Such things may be of more use to maintain the goodwill of existing clients. Christmas gifts, for example, of something small that can be sent in a card 'just to say Thanks!' When considering these give-aways, consider: How many times is there any connection between the object and your business?

If you try any of these -- because you have carefully considered and you think they would appeal to your target customer and that they would make him talk to you -- then experiment with a small batch, and track the results.

10. Radio

One of the nice things about radio is that the stations usually have well-developed demographic descriptions of the listeners. So if you've done your homework and have a good demographic profile of your target customer, it means you have pretty good odds of choosing the best radio station.

But this doesn't necessarily mean that your ad will pull. Because the cost of an adequate experiment may be high, here is a darn good place to apply Major Tip #1. If you have seen other companies -- of the same type as you -- consistently advertise there over a long period of time, then it's worth a try.

In general, please avoid sacrificing your tempting message for the sake of humor. Especially avoid the joking punchline that negates or takes attention away from what you sell. If it's your first time, you might try the drama format: We hear somebody state a problem (such as your target customer has), and then we hear how successfully somebody solved that problem using your product or service.

Chosen wisely, radio is an intimate medium, if your target customer is actually listening to the radio. Sound effects or music in the ad may make it more effective.

If you experiment with radio, choose the slot you think most likely to have your customer listening. Don't fall for the radio "bargain" of 20 "spots" for only \$14.95. They'll run during wee hours like 3am, which is worthless unless you run an all-night burger joint, or sell a remedy for insomnia. These 20 spots won't test the medium at all.

Also beware of the ad where the DJ reads your copy. Sometimes DJ's don't like the ad, or try to create humorous entertainment, at the expense of your advertisement.

11. Television

This is sort of like radio, except more of the same. Cable and small local stations sometimes give you a way to target specific demographics, but the greater expense of broadcasting TV means higher cost of ads. If you consider network TV it means you have a very wide audience for your product, almost certain to be consumers rather than businesses, and you either plan to sell a ton of a low-priced product, or your product is somewhat expensive.

Television may well be the best medium for what's called 'image' advertising, which usually consists of a series of exciting pictures and music. This sequence of images usually hooks directly into the unconscious myths in the consumer's head, and usually says very little about the actual product itself.

Because of air-time cost, production-cost, and the more sophisticated consumer analysis, TV may well be impractical for the smaller, local business.

12. Direct Mail

Direct Mail is powerful and has workable applications for a wide range of businesses. It is also one of the types of marketing that has been tested and analyzed the most, with the result that you can buy many excellent books that tell you step-by-step how to go about it to get good results.

Let's make a distinction between Mail-Order and Direct Mail. Mail-Order is where you place ads which people see and then they mail you money or call you with a credit-card. Direct Mail is where you send a piece of mail to somebody ... and they mail you money, or they call you on the phone to see if you can sell them your product. They have a lot in common.

If you want to learn a lot about advertising, we recommend that you get a book about Mail-Order and a book about Direct Mail. Mail-Order will tell you a lot about writing effective ads. Direct Mail will tell you a lot about writing effective letters and brochures. Both will give you a wealth of invaluable tips about how to put together a

tempting offer, how to target customers, and how to test your advertising for effectiveness.

If you sell a product in a store, you might consider whether you could also sell the same product via the mail, especially if you manufacture the product, or import it or have some other exclusive on it.

An excellent Mail-Order book is 'Building a Mail-Order Business' by William A. Cohen (John Wiley & Sons). An excellent Direct Mail book is 'Sell It By Mail — Making your Product the One They Buy' by James Lumley (John Wiley & Sons). Either of these books are well worth the study. We say get both.

Suppose now that you have been advertising — somewhere — for a while, and in the last year, 3000 people have come into your store. Suppose that you have spent \$6000 on your year's advertising. You have spent \$2.00 for each of those people who showed up. Some of them bought, some didn't. But one thing is certain: This particular group of people has demonstrated interest once, and so they're extremely likely suspects for future sales. Now tell me, do you have the names and addresses of these 3000 people?

After all, you paid \$6000 to find out who they are. They're likely to buy in the future. Can you call them up and invite them back into the store? Can you send them a "Spring-Cleaning Savings Certificate?" If not, you threw away \$6000.

Major Tip #2: If at all possible, when people show an interest, get their name, address, and phone number (and if appropriate email or fax) so you can continue to communicate with them. If you send them just about anything, it will work.

If you send them something terrifically tempting, it will work well. And it will keep on working, year after year! This is why professional marketers and businessmen make the statement that, in many businesses, your mailing list will become the most valuable asset you possess!

13. Billboards

These can be viable forms of advertising, and prices vary quite a bit. The primary considerations are (a) can people actually see the billboard long enough to perceive your message and be tempted, and (b) is your typical customer among the group who is seeing it?

Because viewing time may be brief, your image and message must be well integrated, so that in the act of perception the message is delivered. The message should require no figuring out, no logical chain of thought. Color and the emotional tone of the message may be as important as in the "image"-type advertising used on TV.

Consider the physical location thoroughly. Are drivers rounding a dangerous curve where they must concentrate on other cars? If so, even if they could glance at your message, perhaps their emotions would be elsewhere. Or, if you're selling dream vacations, could you illustrate them at the point where commuters are typically stuck in a traffic jam?

Billboards are often successful for vacation offers, bank loans, radio stations (turn it on right now!), automobiles, and alcohol (let's get a drink!). Because of their high visibility to large numbers of people, they are also favored for political campaigns.

Here's a tip. If your billboard contains the words "this exit" or some "traffic sign"-type of phrase, its effectiveness will increase. A driver's eyes tend to examine such phrases.

14. Magazines

Like radio, the magazines usually have lots of useful demographic information about their readers. As TV has become dominant as an entertainment medium, the trend in magazines has been to depart from fiction and to focus on specialized readership bases to which TV cannot cater. For example, you'll notice that magazine stands now group the magazines by category: women's, men's fashion, news, automotive fishing, motorcycles, computer, small business, martial arts, rock music, etc.

This means that if you sell a product or service in one of these categories, here is a ready-made readership. Avid readers often read (or at least scan) every page of these magazines. Even small ads can work well, as long as they (a) grab the eyes, (b) hook the interest, and (c) tell the reader what to do. Remembering that classified ads in general give you more bang for the buck, be sure to test classified even if you're also testing display ads.

Magazine ads also offer the powerful benefit (described in your Mail-Order book) of allowing you to accurately measure ad effectiveness, and thus refine ads to maximize profits.

When you see "write to Dept. 5-T" in a magazine ad, it's to allow the marketer to measure how many people responded to that ad. Don't discount how useful this can be. Even a small company can spend a lot of money annually on advertising; it makes a tremendous difference to profits to have clear guidelines to drop weak ads and to repeat ads that pull well.

When you think of magazines, it's common to picture the ones on the rack at the magazine stand or drug store. However, there is another whole class of magazines that you'll never see here. These are

the trade magazines and newsletters which pertain to a given industry.

For example, in our industry (voicemail), there are two small magazines from the National and State Associations, plus a newsletter, plus a third-party magazine, plus an "Advertiser"-type mini-newspaper full of ads, plus a bunch of trade publications from the 'telecommunications' industry which have lots of stuff about telephone switches and special computer programs.

If you sell to businesses, it may be well worth your while to compile a list of the major industries comprising your customers, and to discover what trade publications already exist within that industry. How to go about it? For starters, ask knowledgeable people (managers) in that industry about association newsletters, trade publications, internal newsletters, etc.

Secondly, trade publications which accept articles written by freelance writers are usually listed in an annual book called "Writer's Markets," a reference work for writers. Here the trade publications will describe their readership for you.

Supposing that you find a trade publication that targets your customer well, in addition to advertising there, you might consider getting an article placed about your company.

Are there innovative things you offer, or could you describe your company's growth as a success story? You could hire a writer to do the job for you, or write it yourself using a pseudonym. Photos actually help. If you take this route, you could have pages about your company, and pictures, plus it gives legitimacy that no ad conveys.

If there are no trade publications — or even if there are — consider starting your own!

If you have the time and skills, this can be amazingly powerful, and sometimes not that expensive. You don't have to be a national publication if you can only serve California; the extent of your newsletter is something you can control.

If you want to have the appearance of stories, try interviewing business owners within that industry, then edit and print the interview. You'll find it easy to arrange, the material is often enlightening, and other owners will usually read it!

Creating your own publication is something like direct mail because you send it to a targeted list. It's something like Mail-Order because you can place your own ads in it, and you can test those ads for effectiveness. It's something like a separate business because you can sell advertising to non-competing vendors in the same market. And you can lock out competition.

An example: A man in Anaheim had a small business selling telephone accessories such as headsets to answering service bureaus. He started a cheap mailer designed like an “advertiser” newspaper, using the cheapest newsprint, one-color printing, primitive graphics, several of his own ads, one article gleaned from a defunct publication, and a few classified ads (el cheapo) placed by his friends selling used equipment

His first mailing brought more orders than the cost of the mailing, so he kept it up. Now bureau owners began to place more classifieds. Soon major manufacturers for the telephone answering service industry began to place full-page display ads (still black and white) for a very pretty penny to him, but cheap to them!

Now he makes as much from the publishing business as he does from his original business, and his original business has zero advertising expenses because his advertising is free!

Another of our customers buys and sells specialty musical instruments. It's purely a passionate hobby, but he runs the project in a professional manner. He runs small ads in specialty publications, referring those interested to his voicemail number, which gives a long presentation offering them a free subscription to the newsletter. He then stores the names in a database, and makes up a single-page newsletter every three months. On one side it has a music lesson. On the other a list of instruments for sale, plus tiny notices about news of interest to this specialty community.

Very simple, very straightforward. The free newsletter provides the vehicle to buy and sell instruments; the buying and selling of instruments provides funds with which to produce and mail the newsletter.

15. Press Releases and Public Service Announcements

Here is free advertising! News-type publications have to report news. Can you state some facts about your business which would be considered news? And which would be of interest to the world in general? If so, you can send press releases to periodicals and newspapers, and they will print it for free! Some natural applications include public lectures, grand openings of consumer-type businesses (especially when accompanied by dog-and-pony shows, with balloons), and programs of dance, music, or theater. In short, entertaining events.

Running a business isn't news; opening a business with flagpole sitters and free balloons may be.

When you do the same thing via the radio, it's a Public Service Announcement (PSA). Radio Stations are required by the FCC to air a

certain number of PSA's every day. Yours could be one of them. This raises the issue of how many of your typical customers will hear it at the broadcast time selected, and whether your customers would be tempted. If you think so, it could be worth your time to send out Press Releases and PSA's. A free Press Release Design Kit is available from the Thumbtack Bugle in Oakland; they can also do the production and mailing for you.

16. Bus Card Ads, Subway Billboards

These are somewhat like billboards, except instead of targeting drivers, they target bus-riders and subway-riders. The bus card ads can contain "Take One" cards, which should increase your response as do tear-off tags on posters. Furthermore, when the bus company doesn't have another card with which to replace yours, your card may stay up long beyond the paid-for time. For subway ads, if you can select the stop, you may be able to better target customers.

17. Surveys

Although it's not exactly advertising, consider surveys as a marketing tool to be considered as an alternative to advertising. For the same money as scatter-gun advertising, you may be able to obtain actual on-the-street or over-the-telephone surveys. If done correctly this can give you a list of people who are qualified prospects for your product or service. You can then follow up with a sales call or visit.

An example: A business and trade school in the Los Angeles area was suffering from low enrollments. They hired several students to make evening phone calls, and surveyed family members about whether anyone in their family would have any interest in continuing trade education. Because it was a survey, the initial questions can be qualifying questions.

In families where a prospect existed, an appointment was made for a Sales Call (called an "Advancement Analysis"), and then the prospect was signed up. Sales soared.

Note that in this example, no advertising was done, other than a follow-up brochure where sales were not initially closed. So be aware that "advertising ... response ... sale" is not the only way to go about selling. Surveys, telephone sales, and canvassing (door to door) are non-advertising marketing methods.

18. Audiotext and 'Recorded Information' Lines

These usually consist of a telephone number which provides useful information. At the simplest you have a tape machine on the line. For example, for a time the Avenue Ballroom ran a "Dial a Dance"

line which told all the dance events happening around the Bay, naturally including those at the Avenue Ballroom. Here you're providing a community service, which tangentially promotes your business. The 'Information Line' approach can be promoted in many ways that a for-profit service cannot.

The newest wrinkle in Information Lines is called Audiotext, which means a phone line which gives voice information which can be selected by the caller, using touch-tone commands. For example, if you maintained an entertainment phone line, perhaps the caller would select "Marin" or "San Francisco" or "East Bay" by means of touch-tone buttons, and would then hear about events in that particular area. This type of service requires some pretty fancy (read expensive) equipment and special telephone lines, but you can rent the service inexpensively from our company.

Our company, Abe's SuperBudget Voicemail (and Action 800 Nation-Wide VoiceMail), can provide this service in San Francisco, East Bay, Marin, Sonoma County, and San Jose (or with an 800-Number service, nation-wide). You'd rent a telephone number and use of our recording equipment. It's easy to use, costs little, and is available to your customer around the clock. You can update your timely information from any touch-tone phone, and your account is password-protected so that only you can update the information.

Almost any Information Line service can be adapted to an Audiotext presentation, and it gives your company an air of substantiality because it's only common among larger companies. If you're running a smaller company, by using Audiotext (also called the 'Audio Brochure'), you imply to the customer's mind that your company is substantial.

In addition, with careful programming, you can weave a lot of promotional material into the Audiotext selections, and you can tempt callers to spend much more time listening to both free and promotional material than is sometimes the case with printed ads or brochures.

Important Tip: Realize that any paid-for advertisement can be expanded by means of spoken sales presentation when they call you. So if you use message-taking voicemail to catch your inquiries, be sure to weave some presentation into your outgoing message. Unlike a home answering machine, voicemail service usually has a feature built-in where the caller can interrupt the outgoing message. So if it's your mom, she doesn't have to wade through your sales pitch each time. But if it's an inquiry, he's already interested, so he'll probably listen to the pitch all the way through. Any human who hears some-

thing twice is more likely to (a) remember it, and (b) buy it. So having them listen to your voice is nearly always a plus.

19. World Wide Website

The web is growing fast, and for many businesses, may represent a valid avenue of obtaining business. Especially if your product does not require face-to-face delivery (informational reports, our voice-mail services, software sales, telephone consulting, sex lines, sales of any text or pictures, sales of any product often shipped (by catalog mail-order firms) such as Harry and David's pears, computer parts, music gear, books, some men's pants and shoes, steaks, gift baskets, records and CDs.

In this case, an attractive and professional website may become your catalog, leading to orders placed by mail, phone, email, or fax. You do not need a lot of flashing lights or 'the latest thing'. Your initial objective is merely to avoid looking like a dork, but that means that a beginner's 'Home Page' may be inadequate to present you well.

Website design and construction is amazing in that it's quite easy to construct an amateur-looking one, and surprisingly difficult to construct a professional-looking one. This is partly because to do so requires mastery not only of one software package, but typically of a dozen or more different software packages to create all the different parts of a typical business website (such as www.abesvoice-mail.com).

Web design firms are beginning to appear -- some are great, and many are terrible. The best way to choose is to view sites they've done and decide for yourself whether such an appearance will advance your cause. If you need a businesslike website done, we can recommend Lightning Labs Webdesign (San Francisco), who did ours.

Even though web design may be expensive, it may be far cheaper to you than the time you'll invest learning how to do it yourself. Besides, like good artwork, you do it once right and it will work for you for a long time.

One benefit of websites is that their actual operation is usually fairly cheap. A heavy-duty class of service (like The Well in Sausalito with a powerful 'T3' connection) can cost \$100 monthly. But a mom-and-pop service (like Cruzio in Santa Cruz) is way cheaper -- just be sure they've got a good grip on technology, and are good enough business-people to stay around!

And since some parts of websites may require specific support from the server (such things as 'Shockwave', 'Front Page Extensions', 'Real Audio', 'Acrobat PDF files', and such, you might want to defer

your hiring a site until your website is planned, so you can inquire whether the server supports the particular features you require.

The web has several unusual features:

1. A good site that makes people respond usually has some 'content', meaning it's not just a pretty face. Something about the visit to the site needs to be felt as 'useful' to the web-surfer or he'll quickly depart (and remain unimpressed by his first impression of your company), and once having left he has no reason to return -- after all, he 'knows' there's nothing interesting there!

2. A good site that makes people respond usually has a certain amount of 'public service' attitude. The web term for this is often 'free stuff'. So on Action800's website, we've obtained these useful business reports. It cost us some time and money to obtain and prepare them, but we figure they'll do a lot of good. Because most humans (prospects) deep down figure that somebody who does them a service might be a good person to do business with.

3. An 'interesting design' is actually necessary, not just desirable. Bland webdesign -- meaning long columns of text, very wide and difficult to read, unbroken forever -- not an interesting site, compared to some of the flashier sites. Such a site suffers by comparison. And even if there's great content there, it may just be too boring for folks to stick around long enough to discover! So all your great content, maybe even your 'free stuff', never gets used nor appreciated.

The main thing is to break it up. Have some text, but have short and readable copy, and break it up with subheads, tables, charts, and pictures. If you can arrange it, fancier devices such as downloads, movies, animations, music, and sound effects can all contribute to your target customer's first impression. Remember, he will largely buy or not buy based not on logic, but on his total sensory impression (especially his first impression).

Because the web is inherently 'multimedia,' you'll be using the medium wisely to take advantage of these effects. Do you need lots of bells and whistles? No, just enough to break up the boredom of long columns of text! Once you've broken it up and have a pleasant-appearing layout, that's enough.

And by the way, your customer still needs to know about your web address if he's to see your website, so add it to all advertising materials. Anywhere your address appears, so should your web address. For example, on stationery, business cards, brochures, audiotext recordings, etc. In fact, you should insert it into many ads which may not have your normal address, such as newspaper or radio ads or directory listings. Because if you can take them out of that medium, you

just carried them away from any competitor's ad sitting next to your own!

And likewise, on your website, add cross-advertising mentioning the other ways a customer can reach you. If you have voicemail audiotext, be sure to make it known on your website. People have different preferences - some person who might not buy from seeing your website might buy from hearing your spoken presentation.

And vice versa. And for all humans, repetition of your sales presentation gets you closer to a sale. In some measured tests, it's been learned that the average sale occurs after the customer's 9th exposure to your sales message! In general, the more doors you open, the more people walk into your place.

20. Other Internet Promotional Methods

The Internet is not just the web. The web is only a part of the Internet. There's more you can do in addition to having a website.

You can join an appropriate 'mailex' list, which is like an electronic magazine consisting entirely of letters to the editor. You and your fellows send email to this one central address, which in turn sends each email to everyone on the list. Usually these are Interest Groups. For example, bass players usually subscribe to 'the Bottom Line' mailex list. Then they can yak it up with the group. It's like a coffee klatch except everybody can be scattered all over the world.

If you join in and provide supportive info for members there, you can usually discretely mention that you run a related business. Anything sounding like advertising is usually regarded as poor taste, and doesn't work well. But just as you talk among your buddies, you mention your business, and those interested tend to ask you about it.

For example, one customer of Abe's VoiceMail writes and publishes a newsletter for Touch-Style Musicians (playing a guitar or bass by tapping on the strings). He doesn't take much part in the related mailex list, except when he has a new issue. Then he posts a polite notice that such and such an issue is out, and contains such and such, advising anyone interested to contact him for further details.

He gets a steady stream of inquiries throughout the year from these occasional postings.

Next, consider that there are many web-surfers out there who might be customers, but they've never seen your published ads nor your stationery, so for them to hear about you, they'll have to find you.

Finding things on the Web is done by using one or more 'search engines.' so it behooves you, if you have a website, to get yourself listed in these search engines. How to do this is beyond the scope of this re-

port, but if you hire a webdesign professional he should be able to do this for you as a paid-for service, which will probably be cheaper than spending the necessary time to learn how to do it and doing it yourself.

Lastly, there are specialty advertising venues unique to the web. One such consists of small site advertisements about your company but which appear on someone else's popular website: A click-through delivers them to your website. This specialty advertising is offered by specialty companies on the web. You could be that little ad.

Or try advertising running on some free service used by web surfers. For example, the PointCast Network broadcasts various types of selectable news which is displayed very nicely on their downloadable free software. Only thing is, there's a little box on the display which shows a different ad every minute or so. Again, a click-through takes them to your website. You could be that little ad.

Do these work? Probably at least sometimes. If they seem appropriate, you'll have to test.

21. Give Seminars

The seminar business can be profitable in itself, or it can be a doorway into your business. The H&R Block company does this brilliantly. Each year in the fall, newspaper ads offer a seminar 'Learn How to Do your Taxes'. The seminar is quite cheap, and people trust them.

They then deliver a detailed and excellent seminar, using the office they usually maintain year-round in large metropolitan areas.

What do they get out of it? Well, they're actually using the seminar as a way to scout for the next season's Tax Preparers! Those students who do well will be offered jobs. So this is Block's annual recruiting method. The job applicants pay for their own interviews and training!

Many consultants in the personal-growth industry find that giving seminars, usually advertised in the Alternative University free newspaper, is a great way to generate a small amount of cash, but also they're receiving publicity, and those who sign up go on the mailing list and become hot prospects to purchase the one-on-one services of the consultant. Naturally, the subject of the seminar is always related to the for-sale services of the consultant.

If you don't have an Alternative University newspaper in your town, consider giving free seminars through the local library system, or a related activity -- being a featured speaker at the local Kiwanis or Lions Club luncheons. This talk is actually a short mini-seminar, and the dynamics are about the same. The program chairperson of these service clubs is always hungry for speakers, and so it's not difficult to

arrange to speak. One nice thing about giving free talks or seminars is that you can then promote them for free to news and radio using Public Service Announcements.

More Ideas to Boost your Business

The following list of promotional ideas was contributed by Joel Koosed, formerly of the Avenue Ballroom, 16th & Taraval, San Francisco (The Fun Place to Learn to Dance). As you will see, many of these are low-cost or no-cost.

1. Make each customer a "Bird Dog." Give them an incentive to bring you new customers. For example, give them some of your business cards, tell them to write their name on the back, and whenever you get one of these cards from a new customer, give your bird dog a premium or commission.

Or try "Bring-A-Friend" Night. Use two-for-one specials, so your regular customer gets your product or service for free for bringing in a new customer (or they can look like a champ by giving the free one to the pal or they can split it).

2. Give a free workshop or seminar or party, announced via public service announcements. For example, the original San Francisco Roommate Referral Service has given seminars on "How to Find a Place to Live in San Francisco", which got the company name on radio and attracted many prospective customers.

3. Produce a monthly newsletter and send it to your mailing list as a way to keep your name in your customers' minds. The Avenue Ballroom newsletter has news about dance competitions, featuring news about local dancers for the entertainment of the regulars, plus a calendar of events and information about specific events. It's written in a light and breezy tone, hard to resist.

4. Hold a special event, tied into current events of the day as a good angle for news coverage — Elvis Presley's birthday, First Day of Spring, etc. The more creative or offbeat the current event, the better your chances of tweaking the media's interest. Be different.

5. Invite special-interest groups to your even, or provide them with group discounts. For example, an entertainment facility that serves no alcohol might find it attractive to give discounts to Alcoholics Anonymous members. A catering service might approach an apartment complex known to contain high-income singles, and give a discount on an in-clubhouse reception.

6. Invite bona-fide experts in your field to use your service or product for free. It doesn't pay to have the experts ignorant of your company. They can often bring you tons of business.

Writing Copy & Copyrighting

The major rule in writing copy is that sells is to put yourself in the place of your typical customer, and write to his needs, desires, and dreams. Write continually about the benefits to him, and support it with short details about the features of your Company. Here's the formula ...

“You get this super benefit! Yes, we use our exclusive feature to give you benefit and benefit ... and, you benefit from benefit as well!”

In general, the more you tell the more you sell. But break up the text into short paragraphs. Long ones look forbidding, and invite people to skip over them.

Use short, tempting subheads every now and then. People often glance over the material, and their eyes are caught by short subheads that interest them, which causes them to read that section.

For example, in a brochure about a lawn-mowing service, you might have subheads such as “proud of your lawn,” “easy, convenient service,” “lower cost maintenance,” “free book on lawn care” and “Money-back guarantee.”

Remember to identify and concentrate your efforts on your key (potential) customers - 20% of your customers typically produce 80% of your profits. Determine your marketable differences, and stress these differences in your ads.

In several studies, it's been found that the more you use the word 'you', the better it sells. So after a first draft, see how many sentences you can recast, using the word 'you'. Also, certain words have been found to cause people to respond rather well. You've seen these words in ads many times. They include “new”, “improved”, “proven”, “discover”, “better”, “guarantee”, and “tested.”

Often copy 'reads' better when it is not grammatically correct. Like this sentence fragment. Hey! Not a bad example! If you're using radio or an Audio Brochure, use 'ear' words and 'eye' words. Make sure it sounds good; create word pictures that also have a good sound.

Remember to write like your typical customer speaks. If he's rich and educated, perhaps you're better off writing somewhat stiffly. If he's cheap and dumb, you get better results writing sort of simple.

It's wise to protect your advertising by copyrighting it. This is very simple to do. On the ad, put the copyright symbol with the year and

your name. Like this: “(C) 1994 Action Marketing”. If your ad appears in a publication which is itself copyrighted, such as a magazine or Yellow Pages, you need not bother. Otherwise, it's worth it, because if you “publish” 3000 copies of your ad without a copyright notice, you have put it into the “public domain” and anybody can use your text. Oops!

Graphics

Graphics have a specific purpose in the design of any advertisement, but that purpose can be different in various types of ads.

In a crowded graphic environment, such as a bulletin board (posting) or the Yellow Pages, you must catch the reader's eyes but there's lots of competition for their eyes. Brutal graphics will usually work better than subtle graphics. For example, you want GREAT BIG WORDS IN YOUR HEADLINE. Because the overall size of a flyer or Yellow Page ad is limited, this may mean using a short headline, so the letters can be big.

For example, advertising “TYPING” in 3-inch letters will get their eyes better than “wonderful Typing Service now in your neighborhood” in 1-inch letters. The assumption here is that anybody with a need for typing will be sensitive to that single word; anybody else will never register that they saw it. (Bob's Typing uses a poster like this.)

This trick has been used in magazine classifieds for years. Mail-Order vendors of corn remedies put the single word “CORNS” in large letters in their ad. Folks with sore feet notice the ad. That's why these ads sometimes read a little brassy, as in “TOO FAT?” or “SKINNY?” People with feelings along these lines will notice a single word on the page. In the same way, a very short headline can be useful in display-type ads if it allows you to make a BIG headline.

Don't worry about making your graphics pretty. Concentrate on getting the reader's eyes. Remember, first you catch their eyes. Then you hook their interest. Only after you've solved these problems do you think about whether it should look pretty or ugly or modern or old-fashioned or cute or refined.

If you wish to use a picture, the human face and especially the human eye has a powerful attracting power for a viewer's eyes. Similarly, mandala-like designs can draw the eye. Three-dimensional drawings can help to lead the eye INTO the picture, as can shadowing of letters so that they appear to float above the page. Arrows and

arrow-shapes built into the design can also help to draw the eye into the ad.

Of course it won't do you any good to get their eyes if you don't then go on to hook their interest, and that's nearly always done in the headline. So if you can't think of a picture that's related in some way to the need your headline will fill, you may be better off to have a big headline to get their eyes and also hook their interest.

Generally speaking, the more black ink you can put into the letters of your headline, the greater attracting power it has to snare readers' eyes. And to aid their perception of your tempting offer, you want the type style to be very readable. General rules: A headline in upper and lower case is easier to read than all caps. Avoid complex typestyles such as Olde English. Avoid cutesy styles.

After you have hooked their interest, you must tell them what to do. Now this is a little oversimplified. Usually before you say "Call Us NOW!" you have some copy which may include confirmation of your headline's promise and elaborates various benefits to them of this product. In addition, you might give some "proof" such as graphs, features, logic, or testimonials. You may include a "risk-reducer" such as a money-back guarantee or a trial period. You may offer a "sweetener" for them to act right now, such as a free pair of pantyhose if they show up this week. You have to maintain their interest, and offer lots of reasons for buying. Generally, the more you tell, the more you sell.

The text you write will occupy some space. This is therefore a graphic element as well. At the end of this block of text, you tell them what to do. Send in this coupon. Call this number. Come to the Theater on Tuesday at 8PM. This What-To-Do part should be large. The text part can be as small as you like, because if you've hooked their interest they'll read it even if it's small. Then to make your command (what to do) stand out, you make it bigger.

After you've got the above part designed, only then do you think about the look it should have. If you have to choose between pretty and big letters, for most businesses, big letters will work better. And remember, when you think about what look it should have, it's not what you the owner think has the right look for you; it should look like what your typical customer will think is the right look for him.

Always choose ink color and paper color to give a high contrast, which makes the words readable. Nothing works worse than say, dark brown ink on medium brown paper. You may think it's color-coordinated, but it's hard to read and it puts people to sleep.

There also seem to be sex-related differences in color preferences between men and women. For example, women tend to like pink and

men don't. It's hard to generalize here, but you should consider the sex of your typical customer when selecting colors. It may be worth a survey of typical customers.

As you write ads remember that humor nearly always hurts you. Either it goes over somebody's head or they misunderstand ... and you've lost them. In general you'll do better with something simple. After all, do you want just the smartest customers, or would you prefer to have all of them?

In a brochure used in Direct Mail or in response to telephone Inquiries, the graphics serve a different purpose. For starters, you should think of the brochure as having only ONE sales surface — the inside surface. The graphics on the front has the major purpose of getting the potential customer to open the brochure and read inside!

You might best think of it as a series of tiny sales. First you sell the guy on opening the envelope. Inside he finds a letter and a brochure. You sell him on reading the letter and you sell him on opening up the brochure. In the letter you sell him on calling you or buying your product. In the brochure you make the same sale, but with more proofs such as charts and pictures and testimonials.

We say the letter is more important than the brochure because more people will read it. Although you want your letter to resemble a typewritten letter, it should have a headline or graphic which puts forth your offer in tempting terms. So you don't necessarily use your logo at the top. Instead, put something that sells them, and especially gets them to read. Use a long headline if that's what it takes.

The front page of the brochure must tempt them to open the brochure. Inside, you sell them on your product or sell them on calling you, using many graphic devices. For God's sake don't make it real pretty, with lots of lovely white space. If you do, their eyes will enter top left, make a big clockwise circle in the middle, and then exit lower right, and there went your chance. Instead, put in all the things that attract eyes.

Over here put a picture, and use the caption for a sales message. Over there put some graphs with a selling-message caption. Put little mini-headlines here and there; any one of these could catch the eye and get them to read that part, and that might be the part that sells them. It may be best to think of the one sales surface as a desktop, on which are several smaller sheets each of which makes a different sales message, and they're lying in a jumble that makes you look it over rather carefully just to make sure you've figured out what it is.

In newspaper classified advertising, the main graphic elements you get to use are (a) CAPITAL LETTERS and (b) the length of your ad in the column. Since length is proportional to cost, you're best

served by making it no longer than needed in order to sell. The capital letters, usually on the first line, have to do the eye-grabbing, so it has to act quickly.

You can choose a single emotion-charged word that will appeal to your typical customer (such as “SKINNY?”). Or you can try to cast your offer into a couple of words. Or try to make yourself different from the crowd around you. Once again, here is a lousy place for humor.

Sometimes you can play off the crowd around you. For example, when another voicemail company placed classified ads saying “VOICEMAIL SERVICE” we placed ours saying “BETTER VOICEMAIL SERVICE.”

In general, the most common mistake made in graphics is to make things neat and pretty with lots of white space. Even highly-paid graphic artists will often lead you astray here; they've been educated by books written by artists instead of by businesses who have measured sales figures. The artist often wants “his” product to be pretty. However, eye-catching graphics — even if junky — with lots of words and little white space nearly always sells better.

The main thing is to remember what you need to do:

- 1. Catch their eyes.
- 2. Hook their interest.
- 3. Tell them what to do.

Testing Advertising for Cost Effectiveness

Some ads work lots better than other ads. But which ones? Sometimes just one different word can make 100% difference in customer response, as has been proven in measured tests. The only way you can determine which is the word that works the best is to measure response.

When we talk about measuring response, be sure you're measuring the response you want to see more of. For example, if you're after sales, it's better to measure sales as opposed to inquiries. An ad which pulls lots of calls which don't become sales probably doesn't help you.

In some media, it's hard to measure. For example, Yellow Pages. You place an ad, it's 5 months before it appears and then it can't be changed for a year. The next year you try a different ad, but maybe the market has changed, or your processing of inquiries is better. It's hard to compare the two ads. And it's usually impractical to run two Yellow Page ads.

So test your advertising materials where you can test them. For example, run two different classified ads on alternate weeks in the Sunday paper. Use two different phone numbers, or have them ask for “Joe” or “Bill,” so that you can tell which ad they're responding to.

Or run two different display-type ads as posters in alternate months. And so on. The key is just to run similar-sized ads before the same audience and have the responses coded so you can compare them.

Likewise, compare the response you get per dollar from the different advertising media. In our business, every time we talk to a prospective customer we ask them how they heard of us, and we tally that information. Every month, we divide the dollars we spent by the number of sales we got, and we do this separately for each type of advertising. This method tells you, over time, where your dollars are best spent.

This will also provide a Rule Of Thumb 'figure of merit' for your thinking. For example, if your best four advertising methods all produce a signup for less than \$20, then you can test new advertising methods against this figure of merit. If the new advertising method gives signups for under \$20, it can stay; otherwise, out it goes!

Bibliography & Helpful Material

Here are 3 books that should prove invaluable to you:

1. “Guerrilla Marketing — Secrets for Making Big Profits from your Small Business” by J. Conrad Levinson (Houghton Mifflin). Discusses many approaches to Marketing not mentioned in traditional marketing texts, yet which may be appropriate for a small business. Includes discussions on posterage.

2. “Building a Mail-Order Business” by William A. Cohen (John Wiley & Sons). Has terrific information about writing advertising, especially about headlines (which account for 75% of an ad's effectiveness).

3. “Sell It By Mail — Making your Product the One They Buy” by James Lumley (John Wiley & Sons). Very perceptive discussions about brochure layout, about structuring your offer, and about sales letters.

Other resources for helpful information may include:

1. The U. S. Government Printing Office. They have tons of publications, some of which cover similar information to this document. Many are pure and useless crap, but some are useful. All are cheap. In

major cities there is an office of the Printing Office. They also print listings of publications.

2. Small Business Administration. Has lots of useful information, and tons of useless garbage as well. There's an organization called SCORE where retired guys from various businesses will help you, for free. You're taking potluck whether the guy knows useful stuff that applies to your business, but if he avoided going broke in his, that's saying something.

3. Other owners of similar businesses. Many newcomers to business believe that other owners eye them like jealous pashas. Often it's not true. You usually aren't considered much of a threat. However, to make sure that you aren't misled, go to someone who's not a direct competitor. They are a wealth of information, and generally generous in sharing. It's generally good management to avoid reinventing things, because it's usually more efficient to use a solution somebody else worked out. Try it. You'll see.

4. Trade Associations. We've often heard, in our industry, small and generally unsuccessful companies say, "I'm not going to pay those dues; we can't afford it." Then you go to the conventions and you see few members who are small and unsuccessful. We believe that the more successful companies join up because it aids success. Where else can you find such an assortment of successful brains to pick?

Your Advertising Program

When you have determined what business you are in, and formed a picture of your typical customer, selection of appropriate benefits and formulating a tempting offer becomes much easier.

Then you determine, through demographics (and maybe guesswork), what advertising mediums might reach your target customers. After gathering research on advertising costs in these media, you'll select a couple of media for your first experiments.

Using the simplest principles of graphics you construct your ads. Your study of Direct-Mail and Mail-Order books has given you hundreds of practical tips for building ads that work. Perhaps you make the actual ad yourself; perhaps you hire an artist. But don't let them do the original design. You know more about your offer and your customer, and you may know more about sales graphics than most graphic artists.

You place two versions of your ad in each medium, and you measure the results. Consequently, you know which ad gets better response, and which medium is more cost-effective.

Now you begin the continual process of refinement. You compare a different version of your ad against your bestseller. You adapt your campaign to a new medium and begin new experiments. You're now using a systematic approach to advertising, and your sales will most likely begin to systematically increase.

Major Tip #3 — If your sales come in on the telephone, answer it!

Answer it promptly and professionally! If you've spent hundreds or thousands of dollars to get this guy to call, don't fail to answer promptly and professionally. If you can't answer, get an answering service or a voicemail company or a good answering machine.

Which is best? Depends.

For emergency situations and in certain 'image' situations, the live answering service may be best ... as long as you make sure the operators are generally pleasant. One consistently nasty operator can cost you a lot of goodwill.

For answering inquiries, generally the voicemail service pays off, because it will deliver an effective sales message, just the same way, all the time. Also under the principle of keeping it cheap (which usually pays off in small business), voicemail works far better.

Neither the answering service nor the voicemail service can ever make your sales as well as you can, but 95% of all callers will leave callback information, if the operator or your recording is pleasant. Naturally, it's a little easier to ensure that your recording is pleasant.

About our Company

If you require information about our voicemail services, contact either Abe's VoiceMail or Action 800:

Abe's SuperBudget VoiceMail™

Post Office Box 969 •• Fairfax, CA 94978 USA •• recorded information: (415) 435-7501 San Francisco, Marin, Berkeley, Oakland, Richmond; (408) 882-5000 San Jose, Cupertino, Santa Clara, Saratoga; (707) 793-2100 Santa Rose, Sonoma, Petaluma, Novato.

Internet: www.abesvoicemail.com

Email: gooddeal@abesvoicemail.com

Action 800 NationWide VoiceMail™

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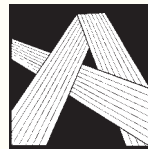
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