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Writing That Means Business

4 Keys to Creating Successful Ads

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Key #1

Hook them with the headline

To paraphrase our real estate friends, the three most important things in advertising are the headline, the headline, and the headline. Studies have shown that the best content and graphical design in the world can't save an ad with a poor headline. If the headline doesn't grab them, people simply move on.

A great headline hooks the prospect in two ways:

They self-identify: Upon seeing the headline, the prospect understands this message is meant for them. The more specific the headline, the stronger the identification. Suppose you're marketing shoes to runners. Which of the following headline words will hook them most: "Sneakers" "Sports Shoes" "Running shoes"?

They see a benefit: Prospects are motivated to keep reading when they know there's a benefit to them to do so. Notice the difference between "Shoes" [no benefit] "Great shoes" [weak benefit - what does "great" mean?] and "Great shoes for less" [Ah - quality shoes, at a discount!].

Note: Two-for-one: "Great running shoes for less!"

You have just a couple of seconds to let them know they are in the right place ...

... and that it's worth it to keep reading.

Key #2

Focus on the prospect

You can accomplish this goal by making the advertisement body mimic the headline by emphasizing self-identification and self-interest.

Self-identification: Focus the ad on as narrow a group of prospects as possible. The more targeted the advertisement, the

more specific the language you can use and the more powerful the on-going self-identification will be. If you need to target several related groups in one ad, try to physically separate each group's message under a self-identifying headline.

Self-interest: This means emphasizing the benefits of your product or service to the prospect, not the features of the product or service. "Faster download speeds" is a feature; "Less time waiting for downloads to finish" is a benefit.

Finally, everything should be written from the **prospect's perspective**. This means organizing information in a way that's meaningful to the prospect; a classic mistake here is organizing product/service information along company organization chart lines rather than around customer problems and needs.

Note: Focusing on benefits and not features has been a "rule" in the ad business for a long time, but it's amazing how many advertisements fail to adhere to it. Focusing on benefits is often a quick and easy way to make your ad stand out in the crowd.

Key #3

Make a clear case

Make your **case** by making sure that the sequence of information from headline to call-to-action is a story that builds to a logical conclusion. Using emotional triggers is fine, but you have to engage their left brains as well.

Make your case **clear** by having a single, focused message and resisting the temptation to throw in extraneous information, no matter how interesting. If you have more than one message, you'll do better by having more than one ad.

Finally, be sure both the writing and the design make it easy for the reader to follow your line of thought. You are building a case: take it one step at a time, be consistent in how you label things, and use compelling connective words to pull the prospect forward. Above all, use simple, clear language: if you have to choose between clarity and cleverness, choose clarity every time.

Answer the prospect's overriding question:

WIIFM?

(What's in it for me?)

Cleverness is highly over-rated. Just talk to your prospect, friend-to-friend.

Key #4

Call to action

Now that you've built your case for **why** your prospect should do something, don't forget to ask them to do it! There are times when this "call" has to be muted or even just implied, but it always should be there.

When you issue the call, be absolutely clear as to **exactly** what you want the prospect to do next (call this number, go to this web site, etc.). If you can (and if it's appropriate), attach a benefit to them taking the action, and taking it soon. And above all, don't make it difficult (the ubiquitous 10-field fill-in-the-blank web form comes to mind as an obvious no-no).

Keys to a Call to action:

- Make it **desirable** to take;
- Make it **urgent** to take; and
- Make it **easy** to take.

In summary, compelling ads are like good stories: they hook you in the beginning, keep you reading through the middle, and move you at the end!

Make "what's next" desirable, urgent, and easy.

In tough times, make sure your ads are working overtime for you.

Get in touch, the consultation is free.

- Michael Kelberer