

8 tips for producing advertising that sells

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In 1983, advertising legend David Ogilvy wrote about his experiences on a number of famous ad campaigns and commented on different aspects of the business in his book *Ogilvy on Advertising* . In the book, he gave a rather lengthy list of qualities he believed were essential to creating a successful ad campaign. He called it “ How to Produce Advertising That Sells.” Let’s look at just some of the main points made by this master advertising legend, as they’re still on themoneytoday -- and apply to any kind of promotion you may be involved in.

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1. Do your homework on your product. In order to create advertising that sells, you have to do your research first and then let that guide the way you write about your product. Begin by finding out everything you can about the product itself. What are its features? What are its advantages over its competitors? What are some interesting facts about how it is made or the ingredients that go into it?

Learning all this can help you hit upon the “” around which you will build your ad. It was this kind of research that helped Ogilvy come up with one of the most famous ad headlines of all time:

" At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock."

He didn't even write that headline himself. It was an actual line from a company report that his research turned up and his instincts recognized as a "big idea."

2. Do your homework on your competitors. If you research your , you know what kind of advertising statements and methods are standard in your niche. This knowledge enables you to adapt some ideas that you like for yourself as well as to recognize a different, more revolutionary approach you could take to stand out.

3. Survey consumers of the product. Learn how they think about it. Find out what language they use when talking about the product, what aspects of the product matter most to them, and what kind of promise you could make about the product that would appeal to them.

You shouldn't guess at any of these things. You can get the facts through surveying prospects and doing your homework on the product and your competitors. Once you have the facts, you can craft a piece designed to appeal to your best prospects.

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4. Get your positioning right. is about deciding who your audience is, whom your ad should appeal to and what advantages you need to stress about your product so it will appeal to your . The example Ogilvy gave is the approach he took to advertising a product that was just coming out called Dove soap. He could have positioned it as the perfect cleanser for men's dirty hands. The better positioning, which he used, was as a moisturizing soap for women

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with dry skin. This approach turned out to be highly successful and is still the basis of the company's ads today.

So how can you know how to position your product? Consider who your best prospect is and gear your ads to that person. Don't try to please everyone -- you can't. A dress shop might position itself as the trendy place where teenagers and young women in their twenties shop, or a sophisticated store for upwardly mobile professionals, or the place where mature matrons of a certain income level buy clothing for special occasions and cruises. You'll never appeal to all these audiences, so you must choose which one will work best for you. Then your advertising should be positioned to reflect the kind of business you are and the type of customer you want to attract.

Always write in the language and terminology of your core audience. Your concern shouldn't be whether your copy may be too sophisticated or simplistic; it should be whether you're using the right language for the right audience.

5. Choose the right brand image. When you think of brand image, a number of famous examples come to mind. You may think of classic advertising figures, such as the Marlboro Man, Orville Redenbacher, Colonel Sanders, Queen Latifah selling CoverGirl or Andie MacDowell in ads for L'Oréal. The idea is to have some recognizable image associated with your product that supports its positioning. It's often a person, but it can also just be the product itself, like Coca-Cola, which is a brand image recognized around the world.

Could you or someone else at your company represent and speak for your products and services? It needs to be an appealing and/or authoritative figure. You could set this person up as the recognizable face of your company. Done correctly, it could increase and boost your business.

6. What's the big idea? Sometimes, through genius or just plain luck -- often based on tons of research that laid the groundwork for the "aha" moment -- someone comes up with a big idea. Ogilvy's Rolls-Royce ad was a prime example. So was representing Pepperidge Farm baked goods with an old-fashioned bakery wagon pulled by horses. Another great inspiration was the Jack-in-the-Box clown as a business executive in a suit. These are all brilliant ideas that have worked for decades to sell products.

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One colleague of mine always wore a cowboy hat in his promotions, and he put pictures of cowboy hats on all his literature. He wasn't a cowboy and wasn't raised on a ranch, but that hat was a perfect and highly recognizable representation of his maverick style. Maybe you can come up with something like that to represent what you do.

7. Identify the "positively good." It would be great if you could prove that your product was significantly better than anything your rivals can provide, but that's not always possible. Sometimes you and your competitors offer an equivalent product or service -- that shouldn't be a barrier to making your ads stand out. You don't have to convince customers that nobody else on the planet can rival you. You just have to convince them that your product is "

positively good.” If they believe you’re good, and they’re not so sure about your competitors, they’ll give you the business.

Focus on telling prospects how good you are. List in detail all your great qualities. Create confidence in the value of your product. You don’t have to mention your competition at all. Finally, don’t boast or brag with empty statements. Use facts and descriptions to confidently put the spotlight on what you provide.

8. Repeat your winners. If your promotional efforts are working well, keep repeating them until they stop working. There’s no need to keep reinventing the wheel. And don’t change just for the sake of change. At the same time, don’t get caught short if what you’ve been doing suddenly stops working. To avoid being caught in a bind like that, you should always be testing alternatives. For example, if you’re doing direct mail or online ads, as long as your control piece (your basic advertising piece against which you test any variations you come up with) is out-pulling anything else you’ve tried, keep using it. When a new piece out-pulls the old one, roll out to a bigger campaign with the new one.

In determining which piece is your winner, you must know whether the data you’re looking at is accurate -- bad data is worse than no data. Making this call is based on statistical significance -- simply put, you need to truly know you have a new winner before you get rid of the old one. Yes, we have to make decisions faster now than we did before, but that’s no excuse not to be disciplined about your data. More than ever, we must have data we can rely on.