

Business Advisor

Advertising 101

How to get the most bang from your advertising buck

by Jeff Bauder

Proper promotion doesn't come cheap. The cost of advertising your golf course is expensive enough without wasting the space that you have purchased on poorly designed advertisements that translate into minimal results.

After more than a decade in the advertising business one of the most important things one learns is that it isn't just a space for words and pictures that you are buying. You are buying space to promote an image that will attract customers. Whatever you do, make sure the ad is a good one.

As the publisher of a golf magazine and president of a marketing and design company, I have had the opportunity to design numerous ads for golf courses, both for my own publication and for others across the country. A lot of emphasis gets placed on the design of our clients' ads. We know that if a customer's ad isn't visually appealing, it will get inadequate results which in turn may prompt the customer to stop advertising with us.

It is a fairly simple business equation, but what tends to get complicated is the make-up of the advertisement itself.

The problem, it seems, is that some golf clients don't pay enough attention to the big picture when it comes to ad design. The way an advertisement looks is as important as what goes in it and, in actual fact, it is more important because an ad can be effective with no words at all. For every ten course owners and operators who have effective, creative ads, there exist ten others who don't seem to care what their ads look like. Given the dollars that get dumped into advertising space, owners and operators must care.

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Let's go back to the basics for a minute. There's a simple formula for effective advertisements defined by the operative acronym AIDA - Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. These are the critical elements for designing, good, creative ads.

Attention - Simply stated, you need to grab the attention of the reader. You have to remember that the reader did not acquire the publication for the purpose of looking at your ad, so you need to make your ad stand out. For golf courses, you need to take advantage of your product...the course. Use photographs of the course and the clubhouse. The eye is generally drawn to the darkest part of a page or the place with the most contrast; and full and textured photo of a

signature hole can provide this contrast. A catchy headline is also important for grabbing attention, but functions in cooperation with the next part of the formula.

Interest - Your ad has to keep the reader's interest. This is where the headline should make an impact. The headline (which doesn't necessarily have to go at the top of the page, by the way) can be used to keep the reader's interest and make him or her want to read on or glance through the rest of the ad.

Desire - There needs to be something in the ad that is desirable to the reader. For example, this is where effectively written body copy comes into play. By writing a short creative description - or designing a 'tag-line' for your facility - you can make the reader want to read on to find out more, or better still, the reader may be so intrigued by the description of the facility that he or she calls right away. The other way of doing this is through the use of bullet points. Bullet points used in moderation can be effective. Be sure to keep the descriptions short. Less is more, creativity is key, and never underestimate the value of 'teasers' - giving the audience a full description of what they can experience at your facility is never so good as making them want to go there physically to play.

Action - Finally, your ad should have a call to action. For example, include wording such as 'Call to find out why we're nicknamed...', 'book your tee time today', or 'Access the best golf around ' etc. The reader has just read your ad and needs to be told what to do next...so tell them.

This formula has been around for many years. It was taught to me in school, it is outlined in many advertising handbooks. And it is the basis for all other advertising and layout considerations.

The Approach

While the AIDA formula can provide you with the basics of what your ads should look like, it does not speak directly of the "creative", as it is known in the trade. It is this mysterious and elusive element that can make or break the success of your advertising campaign.

There are numerous approaches that can be used when advertising your course and they all centre around the message you are trying to send. If you are promoting a new two-for-one special, focus on the special deal, but have the ad designed in a way that emphasizes the offer in a creative fashion. If you are new golf course then your onus is on getting your name out, so an ad campaign that emphasizes nothing more than who you are is ideal.

The nuances of great advertising are fickle and hard to pinpoint. In this respect, the help of a professional graphic designer can be an essential tool to ensure your money is spent effectively. There are a great many graphics professionals or design houses out there that can sit down with you and plan some great creative designs.

Understanding some creative approaches can help you ensure that you are happy with the end results. There are basically five types of ads you should

consider using. They are; branding, promotional, campaign, information and shopping lists.

Branding

The best type of ad for a golf course is a branding ad. This is an ad that showcases the course and emphasises the name of the facility rather than focusing on all the little things the course has which your competitors likely have as well. Branding is essentially name-dropping. The goal with this type of creative is for the name to become recognizable to the golfing public. Don't let the message you are trying to send with good visuals get lost by cluttering up your ad space. It is understood that you have paid for your ad space and you want to use it all, but forty pounds doesn't fit very well in a ten-pound bag. Believe it or not, some of the most effective advertising involves no more than a photograph, a slogan and a logo.

Promotional

This type of ad is one that showcases a special or a series of specials. The key to making this advertising style effective is to space everything out carefully. Remember that you are not selling electronics - you don't need to get in your customer's face, you simply want to get his or her attention.

Campaign

If you are looking at running a season-long advertising program then campaign advertising is a good way to go. In this type of creative, you will have ads running on a regular basis that offer a similar message in each ad, but the creative would change from insertion to insertion, thus readers see a variety of versions of your ad that look different yet tell the same story. Over time, this advertising approach invades the consciousness of the viewing public and if done properly is very effective.

Information

This style of creative is pushing the envelope a little with regard to use of space. As a designer, no matter how much you try to avoid it, you will inevitably come across a situation where you have to try to fit a lot of copy into a small space. The trick is to try to be as creative as possible so the ad is still readable and effective. While this can be difficult and isn't my favourite type of creative, it can nevertheless be done effectively. A good yardstick to judge the effectiveness of the ad is to gaze objectively at the end product. If your eye doesn't know where to start and end, and all you see are words on the ad, then it is probably too busy and will lose impact with the reader.

Shopping Lists

This is the least effective type of creative available. Shopping Lists are exactly what they sound like, long lists of amenities, green fee rates, specials, you name it - that advertisers try to fit it into the space. Believe me when I tell you that you are not doing yourself any favours by using this type of creative. It is very

crowded and takes too long to read...Translation: 80 per cent of the time it will get skipped.

Nothing in this article will guarantee results. As much as marketing professionals try to tell you what makes a good, effective ad, it does not make certain that you will gain huge response to your new ad style. But re-vamping and re-thinking your ad designs to reflect a cleaner, more creative style, overwhelmingly will result in easier to read ads and a message that is easier to follow.

In a nutshell, putting more emphasis on how your ads look and less on how much you can squeeze into the box should result in better response down the road. But be patient - advertising is something that has to be done strategically over time; it may not work overnight... but that's another topic.