

scott c. purvis



# which ad pulled best?

9th edition

philip ward burton

# Which Ad Pulled Best?

Ninth Edition

**40 Case Histories on How to Write and Design Ads That Work**

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Indiana University



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### WHICH AD PULLED BEST?

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\*Example number(s) in boldface.

# The Who-What-How of Testing Printed Advertising

The 40 pairs of advertisements you will find in this book were tested by the prominent research organization, Gallup & Robinson. They are real ads, tested as part of an actual research program, and the lessons that are drawn are also real. In the following material you will learn the methodology employed in the testing. Next, you will learn the research techniques used by two other well-known research organizations, Readex and Starch. This will familiarize you with other types of methods that are used. In addition, there will be a general discussion of research, various methodologies, criticisms and virtues, and finally, guidelines for advertisers and agencies that stem from research findings.

## **ADVERTISING RESEARCH IS A RELATIVE NEWCOMER**

In the early days of advertising there was almost no research—keeping records of inquiries produced by advertisements was about it. Then came the depression, when cost-conscious advertisers demanded to know the factors behind the success or failure of advertisements. Thus, you might say that meaningful scientific research began in the 1930s.

Advertising research has been controversial from the start. It is *still* the subject of debate among advertisers, advertising agency people, and researchers themselves; there is no system on which all agree. Still, many areas of guesswork for the early advertisers have been eliminated. From research, we now have guidelines that, if followed, give advertisers much more assurance of obtaining good readership, communication, inquiries, and/or sales.

Today advertising research is used by most leading advertisers and is well integrated into the business processes they use for managing their advertising investment and making it more effective.

## **GALLUP & ROBINSON METHODOLOGY**

Gallup & Robinson pioneered many of the research techniques that have become standard for helping advertisers and agencies evaluate the effectiveness of their advertising in the marketplace and gain a better understanding of the advertising process. The systems have been used to evaluate over 120,000 print ads and 60,000 television commercials.

The examples that are used in this book were tested under Gallup & Robinson's Magazine Impact Research Service (MIRS). Its specific objective is to assess in-market performance of individual ads or campaigns relative to previous history and the performance of the competition within specific industries or product categories.

To accomplish this objective, the MIRS system permits users to assess their own and competitive advertising in the context of actual consumer and business magazines either as the ad naturally appears or as it has been tipped into a test issue. The sample size for a typical consumer survey is approximately 150 men and/or women, ages 18 and older. Qualified readers are located by continuous household canvass in 10 metropolitan areas geographically dispersed across the United States. Respondents qualify by having read two of the last four issues of the test magazine or others in the same classification, but they must not have read the current issue.

The test magazine is placed at the respondent's home, and the respondent is interviewed by telephone the following day. Readers are given no advance information of the nature of the interview but are requested to read the magazine on the day of placement and not to read it on the day of the interview.

During the telephone interview, respondents are asked preliminary questions to determine readership. A list of ads appearing in the magazine is read, and respondents are asked which ad they remember. For

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each ad the respondent claims to recall, he or she is asked a series of open- and closed-ended questions. These are called the impact questions and include:

1. You may be familiar with other ads for \_\_\_\_\_, but thinking only of this issue, please describe the ad as you remember it. What did the ad look like and say?
2. What sales points or reasons for buying did they show or talk about?
3. What did you learn about the (product/service) from this ad?
4. What thoughts and feelings went through your mind when you looked at the ad?
5. The advertiser tried to increase your interest in his (product/service). How was your buying interest affected?
  - Increased considerably
  - Increased somewhat
  - Not affected
  - Decreased somewhat
  - Decreased considerably
6. What was in the ad that makes you say that?

The impact questions yield a rich quality of verbatim testimony that is used to produce three basic measurements of advertising effectiveness.

1. *Intrusiveness (Proved Name Registration)*—the percentage of respondents who can accurately describe the ad the day following exposure. This measure is an indicator of the ad's ability to command attention. For comparative purposes, the percentages are adjusted for space/color unit cost and issue level.

2. *Idea communication*—the distribution of respondents' descriptions of the ad's selling propositions and of their reactions to the ad. This measure is an indicator of what ideas and feelings are communicated by the ad.

3. *Persuasion (Favorable Buying Attitude)*—the distribution of respondent statements of how the ad affected purchase interest. This measure is a relative indicator of the ad's ability to persuade. For corporate advertising, the persuasion measure indicates the extent to which the ad made a strong case for the advertiser.

In addition, a series of special questions about how people react to the advertising itself and to the brand is also asked of people who remember the ad or who do not remember it but were reexposed to it during the

interview. Each interview concludes with a series of classification questions.

Because different product categories have different interest levels the norms of performance can vary by category. For this reason, Gallup & Robinson uses category-specific norms. The extensive coverage of MIRS provides a wide range of sex-specific, normative data for most product groups.

Each ad impact report on client and/or competitive advertisements contains the following:

- Copy of the tested ad.
- Intrusiveness (proved name registration) measure.
- Idea communication profile.
- Persuasion (favorable buying attitude) measure.
- Standard and customized evaluative and diagnostic measures.
- Norms.
- Verbatim testimony for the ad.
- Sample characteristics.

MIRS also allows for testing an ad that is not published in an MIRS schedule magazine. The advertiser may tip into a test issue so that the test ad appears as if it ran naturally. The technique is useful for pretesting an ad or for providing extra posttest opportunities.

In addition to diagnostic information that explains how performance can be improved, the MIRS system yields evaluative measures of intrusiveness (recall) and persuasion. Intrusiveness is measured by Proved Name Registration (PNR) and is the ability of the ad to stop and hold the audience's attention to the advertiser's name. Persuasion is measured by Favorable Buying Attitude (FBA) and is the ability of the ad to increase buying interest or generate favor for the product, service, or idea. It is important to note that intrusiveness and persuasion are not correlated with each other.

## READER INTEREST STUDIES

Readex, an independent mail survey research firm, has been designing and conducting readership research for print communications since 1947. The firm conducts about 400 studies per year for over 240 different publications.

Readex offers three off-the-shelf readership studies: Red Sticker II™, MESSAGE IMPACT®, and Ad Perception™.

Red Sticker II is closest to a "classical" ad readership study. It provides measurement of both ads and editorial. This study asks readers three questions of each item studied: Did you see it? Did you read it? Did you find it of interest? "Interest" in advertising is considered, by Readex, to be a fundamental element in the selling process. The firm says that to sell a product or service a prospective customer must first be made aware of the opportunity (seeing), and sufficient interest must then be developed (reading) to motivate the prospect toward the sale. "Interest" equals a considered opinion of the material seen and read.

MESSAGE IMPACT is a more in-depth study that combines qualitative readership dimensions. This study type is designed to answer the questions most often asked by advertisers and agencies.

- Ratings for an ad's stopping power are calculated. Readers are asked to rate an ad on attention-getting ability, believability, and information value.
- Readers are asked to list action taken or planned as a result of seeing the ad or offer feedback on their impressions of a company's image.
- A transcript of verbatim comments is provided, including comments on the ad's message, the feeling the reader received from the advertisement, or the reader's perceived image of the company.

Ad Perception provides quantitative feedback on the three basic elements of effective ads. Readers evaluate each ad by indicating whether or not the ad was attention getting, believable, and informative. The attention-getting score refers to the visual stopping power of the ad. The other two scores (believability and information value) refer to the message found in the copy of the ad. A successful ad is usually believable (credible) as well as informative (in terms of specifications, applications, etc.).

Results for each of the above study types are published in readership study reports, usually available three to five weeks after the study closes.

Reports for Red Sticker II and Ad Perception are broken into several sections. First is information on the purpose and method. This is followed by a traffic flow-chart, a list of high scoring ads, scores for size/color categories, scores for product/service categories, and graphical presentations of historical averages for both size/color as well as product/service.

For MESSAGE IMPACT, reports have four sections of information: purpose and method; reader ratings ("This ad" compared to averages for product/service and size/color categories); reader actions ("this ad" compared to averages for product/service and size/color categories); and reader verbatim comments.

Readex has chosen to specialize in surveys through the mail. A readership survey mailing usually consists of (1) an alert letter, (2) a survey kit that includes a cover letter with a questionnaire or a duplicate copy of the study issue, plus a business reply envelope, and (3) a reminder mailing. Completed surveys are returned to Readex for processing.

Advantages of the Readex methodology are:

1. Lowest cost per completed interview among all survey methods.
2. Suitable for large samples.
3. Large geographic scope plus geographically representative.
4. Eliminates interviewer bias.
5. Respondents answer at their convenience; allows more time to answer thought-provoking or technical questions.
6. Encourages candid responses by assuring anonymity.

### ROPER STARCH WORLDWIDE, INC.

For many years the Starch advertisement readership service has been used widely by a variety of advertisers. Because the Starch service uses recognition testing, this means that respondents are asked what they actually read in a publication instead of what they "usually" read.

In conducting the research, Starch interviewers first qualify respondents as having read the publication used for test purposes. After this, they check the advertisement reading of the respondents. When all the interviews are completed, the results are totaled and readers are put into one of three categories.

1. *Noted.* These are respondents who have merely remembered seeing the advertisement but can't identify the product or advertiser.
2. *Advertiser associated.* In this case, the readers have seen the advertisement and have read enough to be able to identify the product and/or advertiser.
3. *Read most.* Here the readers have read 50 percent or more of the advertisement's reading matter.



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As part of the service, Starch provides cost ratios of the advertisements and ranks them in terms of the dollars expended to obtain readers. An advertiser can find out how much it costs to merely get an advertisement seen, seen and associated, or read most. These figures have different meanings for different advertisers. For instance, a soft-drink advertiser who uses little body copy is more interested in advertiser associated than read most, but the advertiser of an expensive automobile might want to achieve a high read-most figure.

### MOTIVATIONAL RESEARCH

Motivational research utilizes a series of free-flowing conversations by typical consumers in the course of which they hopefully will express their true feelings about the service or product being investigated. Such a report may describe the kinds of associations engendered. These might be obtained through psychological testing that uses projective techniques such as free word association, sentence completion, or picture responses.

Out of the foregoing will come analyses of what the findings mean to advertisers, because interpretations must be furnished to explain the significance of consumers' stream-of-consciousness conversations or the associations discovered in administering the tests.

Motivational research investigators usually proceed on the assumption that they do not know what their research may uncover, because irrational or sub-rational behavior, drives, fears, and desires may lie behind people's reactions to the product or situation being studied. Out of the study may come reasons that respondents could give the ordinary researcher, but probably will not.

Most motivational research is concerned with the subconscious or preconscious level and has been prompted by the feeling that asking people directly how they feel about something will fail to uncover how they really feel underneath. Although motivational research—or MR, as it is known—is still practiced, it is no longer the fad it once was when the advertising industry thought it provided a sure formula for creative success. However, many of today's focus groups use methods that flow from this work.

### INQUIRY TESTING

*Inquiry tests are made by keeping track of the number of inquiries produced by each advertisement. For example, an advertiser offers something free, or at*

nominal cost, and then sees how many people are interested enough to follow up on the offer. A second advertisement making the same offer will then be run and resulting inquiries counted. The results from the two advertisements can then be compared on the basis of inquiries produced.

In order to be certain that results come from a specific advertisement, the advertiser inserts a key number in the coupon, or in a paragraph near the bottom of the advertisement in which the offer appears, and suggests that respondents write in to take advantage of the offer. "Keys" have taken many forms, such as a post office box number, a street address, a room number in an office building, or a telephone number, and can be changed each time a different advertisement is run.

Inquiries are sorted according to the advertisement that produced them as they come in. Records are kept of how many inquiries are produced by each advertisement run in each different publication. Such records show not only which advertisements are producing the most inquiries, but also which publications.

In the case of direct mail advertising, a record can also show which inquiries are most valuable in developing sales. When mail order advertisers get an inquiry (say, a request for a catalog), they follow up with literature designed to make a sale. Then, as sales are made, they relate the number and size of orders back to the inquiry and the advertisement that made the first contact. In this way, mail order advertisers keep track not only of which advertisements produce the most inquiries, but also which locate the best prospects—quite often there is a difference.

Although sales don't necessarily match inquiry returns, and inquiries alone don't say much about the far greater percentage of people who saw but did not respond to the ad, such returns can be a good indication of the interest developed by a given advertisement. Comparisons of inquiries produced by different advertisements also indicate the relative interest created by each. This is especially true if some qualifying device is used in an advertisement, such as requiring people asking for the booklet, sample, or whatever to pay out some amount—anywhere from a few cents to several dollars—in order to obtain the offer. Such a requirement tends to discourage those not truly interested.

An advertisement itself can be a qualifying device. If it delves deeply into the subject of the merchandise for sale, it is likely that only firm prospects will read the whole advertisement down to the point where the offer is made. Then there are those advertisements that

contain “buried” offers, the kind made in the middle of the body text. In this case, no coupon will be included in the advertisement.

## SALES TESTS

For many advertisers, even those not in the mail order business, sales provide the real test of effectiveness. Publishers, for example, have found it profitable to sell directly through published advertising, and a number of products elicit sales directly through long television commercials. Additionally, with today’s data capture capabilities at supermarkets, companies are increasingly able to see the sales consequences of their advertising.

## COPY TESTING IS NOT INFALLIBLE

Like all research, errors occur in copy testing because there are so many variables that throw off results. Here are some possible problems affecting test validity.

1. Differences in the publications used.
2. Differences in page locations in the publications used (despite some experts’ claims that page location is unimportant).
3. Variations in reading habits, inquiry mood, and buying activity at different times of the year.
4. Natural variations resulting simply from the law of averages.
5. Differences in the general interest in the product or service offered. This can vary among different products in a line or for the same products at different times of the year.

If all these factors are present in a copy test, results can differ widely without the copy being changed. Thus, the more these factors are kept constant between two ad studies, the more valid the comparison. Eliminating all variables from copy tests is almost impossible—no matter how ingenious the testing method, some variance is always possible—so controlling for them is important.

## GUIDELINES FOR COPY REVEALED BY COPY TESTING

As you will hear over and over again, no single formula works successfully all the time in creating advertisements. Indeed the challenge is how not to become conventional and stereotypical while still being accessible.

The general guidelines that copy testing have given rise to simply indicate what has worked in the past and what is most *likely* to work in the future. If heeded by the person writing copy, the principles stemming from generalities may result in techniques and approaches that will be more right than wrong.

Following are some of the guidelines suggested by copy testing.

1. *Offer a major benefit.* Benefits take different forms—a product most people want; a product easy to get; a product worth paying for; a product priced as low as possible.

2. *Make it easy to see and read.* Despite all the findings of copy testing, this advice is frequently ignored, even by the most sophisticated advertisers and advertising agencies. Picture the benefit clearly, simply, and as large as possible. It should be presented with easy-to-grasp language—simple, convincing prose supported by a layout that is easy to follow.

3. *Establish audience identity.* Make it easy for viewers to see themselves in pictures on the screen or in illustrations in the publication. The copy, too, should involve the audience by giving ideas on how to use or profit from the benefit. In short, establish a relationship between the audience and the benefit.

4. *Attract by being new.* Advertising’s strongest weapon is news—new products, new uses for products, new benefits. Accordingly, the most powerful advertisements include something novel in the benefit that offers new reasons to buy. Even old ideas presented in a new way can be compelling. Successful advertisements fit the news approach by using action pictures, modern settings, active language written in present tense, and word pictures.

5. *Be believable.* Sadly enough, when different vocations are rated according to honesty and credibility, advertising people are rated near or at the bottom. Brag and boast copy and extravagant and slick copywriter phrases are primarily responsible for this perception. To achieve believability, don’t make unreasonable claims. Avoid the blue-sky approach in describing benefits. Supply proof for claims. In pictures and illustrations, show the product realistically; don’t doctor it so that there is a difference between the product in the advertising and that in the hand. This same observation also holds for what you say in the copy.

6. *Stress what is unique.* Advertising people express uniqueness as a “point of difference” or

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“USP”—unique selling proposition. Both terms refer to an attractive feature available solely in the advertised product and/or promoted as an exclusive benefit. The difference could be tangible, such as performance styling, price, size, or ease of use, or intangible, such as how the product might be perceived by others. Any experienced copywriter, when asked to write about a product or service, will ask: “What’s different about it?” That is the starting point of the creative process.

7. *Be fresh.* Even more than being creative, an ad should be fresh. People tire of seeing the same stale stories, images, or techniques. Merely being fresh, however, without any of the above is wasted.

8. *Reward the reader for his or her time.* Whether it is new learning, reinforced conviction, or some form

of purposeful entertainment, the person should feel rewarded for the time spent with your ad. That will enhance how people think of you and leave them more open to future messages.

What you have read in the foregoing only touches upon the generalities stemming from copy research. Still, each of these points is important and, if followed, will help you avoid some of the most common mistakes in writing copy. Remember though, more than any of the mechanical elements of an ad, what matters most is its creative whole.

# It's the Benefit: Analysis of Which Ad Pulled Best? Examples Reveal How to Make Advertisements Pull Better

The more impressive the benefit, the greater the result in advertising. That is the main conclusion that stands out in this analysis of advertisements compared in the *Which Ad Pulled Best?* examples. Whatever the example, the difference in the way people react to an advertisement can be traced back to the benefit: its believability, how important it was, and how compellingly it was presented to the people who read it.

It takes insight, of course, to determine the key benefits of a product. It may require systematic research or the more hazardous trial and error of years of experience to narrow the possible benefits down to the ones that are of the essence to a product's competitive advantage. Furthermore, it takes skill to transmit the benefit idea through all the media and techniques of mass communication, keeping it fresh over time.

When benefits are presented in the following ways, advertisements will, in general, produce better results.

## 1. Name the benefit. Be specific about it.

The more specific advertisements are the more successful ones. This holds true regardless of the type of publication, audience, or product. As an example, an advertisement headlined *Low-cost steam—Shop assembled and ready to use* pulled 100 percent more readership than *Steam That Satisfies*.

Similarly, of two advertisements illustrating the same foldaway table for stores, the advertisement headlined *Move up to \$100 in iced watermelons in 8 sq. ft. of space* sold 3-1/2 times as much merchandise as the one headlined *8 square feet of dynamic display*.

An offer for a recipe book that included a detailed table of contents drew 136 percent more returns than the offer that merely announced 64 pages packed with methods, recipes, and tips on freezing and canning.

Of two advertisements run under the heading *Relax in Daks*, the one in which the body copy described these slacks most specifically with "No belt, no pressure around the middle. Hidden sponge rubber pads keep a polite but firm grip on your shirt" produced six times as many inquiries as the vaguer "They're self-supporting, shirt-controlling, and leave the body perfectly free."

For a self-sealing envelope, the U.S. Envelope Company tested eight different headlines. Some of the approaches were *So sanitary; Novel; Different; Better; Humid weather never affects*. However, by far, the most successful headline read *Avoid licking glue*, which was the most tangible, specific benefit.

The headline, though, doesn't work alone. *It's amazing! It's sensational! It's exclusive!* This received twice as much response as *How to become a popular dancer overnight*. Although the winning headline consisted of generalities, the advertisement itself contained a specific element that the other did not—a detailed diagram of one of the basic dance steps.

## 2. The product is the big benefit. Tell what it will do.

The more successful advertisements lay greater emphasis on the product. Greater product emphasis coincides with greater success. This is demonstrated by the advertisement headlined *How to get good pictures for sure*. In this advertisement was a large illustration of the camera. It received nearly twice as many inquiries as the one with the same headline that pictured an attractive man and woman gazing admiringly at the very small camera in their hands. In the first advertisement, the product was the hero and held center stage.

What is true of art emphasis is also true of headline-idea emphasis. *Amazing new low-priced electric*

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*sprayer for home use makes painting easy* sold 66 percent more sprayers than did the more humanly interesting *Now Tom does every home painting job himself*. This is because the first headline focuses on the product.

In another example, the catchy but not readily grasped headline *Cool heads in hot spots won't let you down* lost overwhelmingly to the straightforward *Copper's blue ribbon ventilators for workers' safety, health, comfort, efficiency*. Although this headline won't win any writing awards, it does focus unmistakably on the product.

Sometimes other factors may negate somewhat the effect of product emphasis. An example is that of two advertisements for the same manufacturer, one of which was headlined *Thatcher's 98 years of heating experience means greater comfort at lower cost*. A stark, cold feeling was conveyed by illustrations of four different pieces of heating equipment. The headline for the second advertisement was *Indoor weather made-to-order without lifting your finger*. Here were shown a man and woman in an attractively decorated room, along with a subordinate illustration that featured the one piece of heating equipment needed to provide this "indoor weather." This second advertisement, which pulled three times as many responses, is not only more specific and more humanly interesting, but it also gives more evidence of the benefit to be attained by actual use.

Another example of exceptions to emphasis on product is furnished by a pair of advertisements for Koppers BMU. One is a highly technical discussion of the structure and physical properties of the product. The other, more successful, advertisement, while containing the technical information, features a different approach: Under a photograph of a piece of soap, a man's shirt, and a plastic dish is the headline *Make them whiter and brighter with Koppers BMU*.

### **3. Make it easy for consumers to visualize the benefit. Keep your advertisements simple.**

In one respect or another, simpler advertisements are consistently more successful. Example: For advertisers seeking direct replies, advertisements that include a coupon, thus making it easier for consumers to take action, receive a greater response than those without a coupon for reply.

In addition to looking at simplicity as being synonymous with ease, one can consider it an antonym of

complexity. In this sense, those advertisements having a single rather than a multiple focus come out ahead. Eastman Kodak, for example, ran an advertisement divided into four sections. The main headline was *See what you can do with your present equipment*. Each of the four sections featured a different company product. Another issue of the same publication presented a Eastman Kodak advertisement headlined *Because photography is accurate to the last detail*. This was illustrated with a group of mechanical drawings. The copy story was "The magic of photography turns hours of costly drafting room time into a minute-quick job of utmost accuracy."

This second advertisement received 25 percent more attention and 125 percent more readership. Why should this be? The first advertisement was dramatic in its layout, but it made the reader decide on which section to direct his or her attention and on which story to concentrate. Although this multiple-interest advertisement attracted largely the same notice, it lagged far behind the readership earned by the advertisement that developed a single, simple story.

Similarly, an advertisement headlined *Great new insurance plan pays hospital, surgical expenses* did not offer as many benefits as the alternative version, *Now great new insurance plan offers you protection for hospital, surgical, and/or doctors' bills and/or lost income*. Yet the former, simpler advertisement pulled twice as many inquiries as the latter advertisement, indicating that it is sometimes a mistake to tell too much.

This principle still holds even in very small advertisements. A small, one-column advertisement illustrated with only a large bottle read *On our anniversary we're offering you Welch's Grape Juice at a new low price*. When, to this single theme, the company added a party flavor - children in the illustration wearing party hats and the headline *We are playing host to the nation on our anniversary with the greatest price reduction in Welch's history*—it lost readership.

Simplicity also results from unity of concept when a single theme is developed in headline, artwork, and copy. Two advertisements run for a perforator by Cummins Business Machines offer examples. One had a charming illustration of a young mother putting a cookie jar high on a shelf, out of the reach of her mischievous-looking, young son. The headline read *Mr. President—remove opportunity before—not after—fraud*. The second advertisement had no true illustration. On a bold background in white letters made of dots, as if done by a perforator, was the headline *You*

*can't erase a hole. These tiny holes can save you from serious loss.*

In the first advertisement the analogy between the kind and thoughtful mother and the kind and thoughtful employers, each looking out for those dependent upon them, is not farfetched. But in the second and far more successful advertisement, no inferences, however apt, have to be drawn between separate concepts—the entire advertisement consists of one simple, clearly developed idea. Also, the language of the first advertisement is less specific—necessarily so, because a detailed discussion of cookie jars would bear little relation to the perforator being advertised. The point is, then, that not only the simplicity of any single concept, but also the relationship between the product and the consumer, makes the benefit evident.

#### **4. Emphasize the benefit as much as possible. Use large space.**

Small space advertisements can work very well. Talk to the average copywriter, however, and you'll soon find that he or she prefers to work with larger space units. In the larger space you can tell readers more about what the product can do for them. You can use a larger illustration to show more clearly what the product is and how it works. You can use more text material to tell why it is worth the purchase price. You can use larger type to make the copy easier to read and give the headline more impact. A more forceful overall impression can be made by increasing size alone.

Of a group of advertisements almost identical except for size, the larger ones will almost always do as well or better than the smaller versions. However, the cost per reader for inquiries or sales is often higher for large advertisements that use size only for size's sake.

Large space will not work wonders if the content of the advertisement is poor. Technique might also be a factor causing a smaller advertisement to outpull a larger one. "Technique," in this instance, may refer to such factors as stronger headlines, more clever themes, or more striking, attention-getting illustrations.

Evidence of the efficiency of smaller advertisements is provided in detail by the *Reader's Digest*, which naturally has an interest in convincing advertisers that their smaller advertisements can compete with bigger versions in magazines of conventional size. Although the *Digest* research is impressive, there are in many advertisers' minds distinct visual advantages to working in larger formats.

#### **5. Don't obscure the benefit. The cute, the catchy, or the tricky may not work.**

Being cute, catchy, or tricky is subordinate to conveying consumer benefits. Example: A transit card showing a squirrel saying *Take chances? Not me. I'm saving today* lost out to a more direct, more product-oriented card picturing a man saying *My bank—to 1,700,000 Canadians.*

Then, too, there was the lack of success of a comic strip treatment used by a maker of medical supplies such as adhesives, bandages, and back plasters. In tests against three different conventional advertisements, one of which was all type, the comic strip approach was a distant loser. Comic strip illustrations for advertisements about shaving and house painting also showed up badly. The lesson is that a technique associated predominantly with entertainment is often not suitable for selling certain types of products. An advertiser who is considering the use of such a technique may find it desirable to run some tests to see how appropriate it is for the product.

This does not mean that the catchy picture or phrase should summarily be rejected—on the contrary, reader-stopping headlines and tricky illustrations have been outstandingly successful. Without such advertising there would be a gray sameness to advertising as a whole. That's the reason there's room for the "different" approach used by the Franklin Institute. When they changed formats from a conventional approach to an offbeat one, the difference in results was striking. In the conventional display advertisement, the headline said *Work for Uncle Sam*. An advertisement that imitated a classified ad in which the small type was encircled far outshone the display ad. *Get on Uncle Sam's payroll* was given a bold, black line pointing to a coupon offering further information. This was an appropriate, simple way to sell a training course.

#### **6. Get personal about the benefit, but don't get personal without a purpose.**

It is generally accepted that formal, impersonal, and passive phraseology is undesirable for mass advertising. You are reminded constantly by copy experts to be—in most advertising—personal and informal. Still, being personal isn't always the key to interest and readership. For instance, an Eastman Kodak headline *Because photography is accurate to the last detail* was less personal but more successful than the one beginning *See what you can do with. . .*

## Which Ad Pulled Best?

Once again, the advertiser should consider the individual circumstances, because the “be personal” advice can’t always be applied. A writer of advertising to doctors or engineers will sensibly avoid too much familiarity in addressing such readers but will use “you” and “your” freely in writing trade advertising addressed to retailers.

Much depends upon whether the conversational feeling is appropriate for the advertising you’re writing. If it is, then informality is desirable—certainly the case for much consumer print advertisements and all radio advertising.

Using “your” or “you” prominently doesn’t necessarily guarantee anything. For example, 17 advertisements doing so were tested against 17 others that did not. Eight of the “you” advertisements were successful, but nine of the other ads were, too. No earth-shaking

conclusions may be drawn here, but the figures back the point that the mere inclusion of personal words is no certain route to success.

### **7. The benefit is not always rational.**

In addition to the tangible benefits from using the product, there may be intangible benefits. This is especially so for many products where the physical differences between it and its competitor are not that great. The taste of two colas may be preferred by similar proportions of the population, but the meaning that Pepsi and Coke have to their loyal users varies significantly. How an ad conveys and reinforces that meaning, through its words and visuals, can be as important as some product’s tangible benefits.

# What to Do to Get Attention, Create Desire, and Get Action When You Write Advertisements

For many years, advertising has been thought of as being part of a process that begins with creating Awareness, then strengthening the awareness to build Interest, which then becomes Desire, which leads to Action. This is often called the "AIDA" model of advertising effect. More recently, many alternative views of advertising's role have been offered. Today almost everyone recognizes that AIDA is a greatly oversimplified description of the process. Advertising effect is not necessarily linear, individual steps may be skipped entirely, and emotion-based response, which many feel lies outside the AIDA model, can be more important than the cognitive-based response. Despite this evolution, AIDA remains a useful way to think about advertising performance. Its different steps are relevant because all advertising should be successful on at least one of them. Important also is to understand that the individual components of an ad do not influence each of the AIDA dimensions equally. The aspects of an ad that may go toward building awareness are not necessarily the same ones that go in to building interest, desire, or action. So, in this context, we turn to AIDA to help us think about advertising effect.

In the AIDA model, attention and interest factors are closely related in advertising. First, you attract the attention of possible readers; then you invite them to read the message by switching quickly from mere eye catching to interest building. Most frequently, attention and interest are developed through headline and illustration treatment. After that, the first paragraph of copy is simply a transition from the ideas conveyed by the headline and illustration, to additional support for the message.

## ATTENTION

In order to tell anyone about something, you first must get attention. This is true in personal conversation,

mass communication, and advertising. Attention is meaningless, however, if it is not directed toward the product you're selling. Thus, it makes sense to properly draw the attention of the flip-and-run reader or the dial-turning television viewer to your message.

Advertisements that draw reader attention directly to a product benefit capture that interest more solidly than those that use attention-getting techniques merely for the sake of getting interest per se. Accordingly, a headline is more likely to attract attention if it promises a shortcut to a housewife scanning the shopping news. In a business publication, an illustration that visibly portrays a manufacturing cost cutter will be more likely to attract the attention of management-minded readers.

## Importance of Attention Getting Varies with Audiences

Although attention getting has an effect on advertising results in all media, it is more important in some media than in others, especially in situations where you don't have a captive audience.

Consider a highly rated television show that holds you captive up to the moment the commercial flashes on the screen. Your attention is more assured than in the magazine where the nature of the consumption process is to move on to the next page. In both cases, though, it may vanish quickly if the message doesn't offer an immediate promise of reward. Attention getting is more important to the television advertiser who uses a station break following the final commercial of a preceding program or whose advertising appears in an extended pod of other commercials. Such an advertiser cannot rely on the same degree of captivity as the final one above.

Magazine and newspaper advertisers have a great problem in capturing reader attention. Because there is nothing of the captive audience here, such advertisers



fight for attention, especially when they face competing advertisements on the same or adjoining pages.

### Physical Elements Play a Part

Size, color, and unusual treatments attract attention, but a mere increase in size, the addition of color, or a switch to more unusual illustrations may not be enough. These techniques are successful in attracting attention only if they make the promise of a benefit more apparent to the audience. For example, we know from research that a dominant element such as a big illustration will increase attention. Still, to make this increased attention meaningful, the illustration should be relevant to the product and/or interests of readers.

Inevitably, we return to the principle that the content of communication is more vital to successful rapport with readers, viewers, and listeners than are the mechanical means of expression. It is what you say and show that provides the key to attention—the ideas, the suggestions of value, the promise of benefits to be received. Headlines and illustrations are simply tools for projecting that value.

### INTEREST

Attracting interest in your advertising depends on both the tangible aspects, such as physical attributes, and the intangible ones, such as appealing ideas.

The advertisements whose physical attributes do the best job of translating attention into interest are the ones that are mechanically the easiest to read. Such advertisements are organized so logically that information is easy for the reader to grasp. Picture-caption advertisements illustrate the point, as do those set in easy-to-read typefaces and those from which all distracting elements have been cut.

Still, the value of a physically perfect advertisement will be small if the ideas are mundane. It is the ideas conveyed by the first elements of an advertisement that either build or preclude sufficient interest for the reader to want to dig deeper into the message.

You will find some advertisements that clearly demonstrate to the reader the benefit of finding out what's good about the products and how they will fit his or her needs. These advertisements are high in general interest, promise a story, suggest an answer to a universal problem, touch the reader's self-interest, look as if they contain specific information of great interest, and contain believable illustrations of the product in action.

### DESIRE

More than anything else, the purpose of an advertisement is to create a desire to own the product or use the service being advertised. As you will see from the researched advertisements in this book, most of the highly rated ones start immediately to build desire into headlines, illustrations, and introductory copy. Once again the importance of headline and illustration becomes apparent. One respected advertising agency head, in fact, told his creative people, "Put *everything* in the headline." To him, the reason for placing copy under a headline is to make the headline more important, rather than draw attention to, or get results from, the copy itself. Few will agree that copy is *that* unimportant, arguing that it reinforces the ideas offered in the headlines and illustration. Copy, they say, reassures readers in many, and often new, ways that the product will benefit them to the point of convincing them to think about it in a more favorable way than they had before.

Results accrue from a composite of the effects created by headlines, illustrations, and copy. Yet the key almost always lies in the first impression conveyed in headlines and illustrations. If you can determine which advertisement the readers feel offers the greatest benefit, you will have found the one that achieves the most results.

Specific, relevant, unique, believable, and wanted benefits are the touchstones of desire creation in successful advertising.

### ACTION

Although immediate action is usually not expected from an advertisement, ultimate action and/or beliefs is always anticipated or hoped for. Because action is especially sought in mail order, or direct response, advertising, let us consider action in these terms.

In addition to direct sales, one measurement of effectiveness is the number of inquiries received. Inquiries come from people who presumably are good prospects. One way to spur inquiries is to use a coupon. Although couponed advertisements will generally outpull couponless ones, this is not always true—a couponless advertisement may have offered a benefit more relevant to the kind of people who were logical prospects for what was offered in the coupon.

You will also find instances in which smaller advertisements produced more inquiries than larger ones, and some cases in which larger advertisements were