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Do your ads paint the right picture?

I have had many teachers and mentors in my 3+ decades in sales. One of my favorites was Cecil “Ceese” Heyman. Ceese grew up in the “holler’s” of West Virginia. He looked a bit like Boss Hog and sounded a bit like Jed Clampett, but he was one of the best advertising salespeople I’ve ever known. One of the wisest things Ceese ever told me was: “Don’t forget to tell your customers *YOUR AD IS YOU IN PRINT.*”

Cecil would tell his customers:

“You put a lot of effort into making your place of business attractive and inviting to potential customers, does it really make sense to send a different message to the people looking at your ad? People who have never visited your business might get the wrong impression if the ad doesn’t accurately reflect your business. If you have a small, dingy cluttered ad, they may think that’s what your store is like. You have a great business, you need a great ad to tell people about what you’ve built here...wouldn’t you agree.”

Ceese’s strategy was to use the prospect’s pride in their business and their desire to project a positive image to sell a good looking ad. He reminded customers of the effect the ad would have on readers. Ceese understood that an ad is a tool to communicate information about a business that will entice potential customers to call or stop in. An ad should paint a picture of the customer’s business. The more complete the picture, the more likely someone will be motivated to do business with the advertiser (As long as the ad doesn’t become cluttered).

Here are five types of information shoppers look for in an ad:

Product/Service Information: This is the most basic information in an ad. It tells what the client sells, are they a jewelry shop or a plumber. The problem is that many advertisers’ ads read like a laundry list of products. Their ads are cluttered and difficult to read and frequently this information displaces other information which consumers need to make a buying decision. Generally it is better to focus on one or two product categories in an ad and present them attractively. If a client sells many products they can run a rotation of ads featuring various products.

Value Factors If the product information is the “what”, value factors is the “why”. They tell the reader why they should purchase the product/service presented in the ad. People want to know what sets the advertiser apart from

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the competition and what makes their product worth the purchase price. This is Selling 101, people buy benefits not features, yet this information is missing in many ads. I see many restaurant ads that list every single topping available on the pizza and all the salad dressings available but fail to tell me one thing—Does the food taste good?

Other value factors are reasonable prices (“Half off this week only”), advantages over competition (“Longest Warranty Available”), or other advantages such as safety (“Health Department’s highest rating”). Value factors are copy points which offer benefits to

buyers and convince them that spending their hard earned money with the advertiser is the smart thing to do...

Trust Factors We have talked about the “what and why”, trust factors are about the “who”. Specifically “who” am I thinking of doing business with? Can I trust this person, this company? Trust factors in an ad are things like “since 1972” (They’re not a fly-by-night company), “bonded and insured” (I’m protected) or “references available” (I can check them out). This type of information becomes more and more important as the investment required to purchase the product/service increases. Businesses in industries that have a bad reputation (like used car dealerships or contractors) will reap significant rewards by establishing their trustworthiness in the mind of the consumer.

One of the best ways to establish a positive image is to use local testimonials preferably using a photo of the satisfied customer. Readers can identify with the person pictured and this will mean more to most people than a ream of professional certifications.

Convenience Factors These are copy points that tell potential clients “Come on down...we’re easy to deal with!” Convenience factors include features like free parking, delivery, evening hours, financing available, credit cards accepted or 3 locations to serve you. Consumers are stressed and busy today. Anything you can do to save the reader time or to make their life just a little bit easier will make them much more likely to do business with your advertiser. Consumers often will even bypass a business that offers lower prices to visit a store which offers more convenience.

Action Information This information tells the reader how to take the next step. This includes the advertiser’s business name, their address, their phone number and their web address. Here again the easier you make it for the consumer, the better response the ad will generate. A simple map is better than

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an address alone and a reference point (“Across the street from city hall”) will help consumers find your client’s location. There is some research that indicates that saying something like “Call today” in front of a phone number actually causes more people to pick up the phone.

Using the five factors

As an advertising consultant you should discuss these factors with your advertisers. When you talk to people about what goes into their ad, you get away from discussions centered on the price of the ad.

One technique that I like to use is to analyze an ad using these factors. I copy an ad and divide it into a grid. Using this grid I calculate what percentage of the ad is dedicated to each of the factors. Often when I do this I’ll find ads that completely lack trust and value factors. These ads tell customers the what and who but not the why. This process often opens a customer’s eyes and convinces them to expand their program to tell a more complete story.

You can use this analysis technique to take business away from the competition. I will review a prospect’s ad in a competitive publication before calling on them. If they say “No thanks, I’m already in the daily competitor” you can say, “Yes, I’ve seen your ad, in fact I did a content analysis of your copy. I’d be happy to leave it with you so you can discuss it with your rep if you’d like.” This peaks the prospects curiosity and keeps the discussion going. Review the analysis with the prospect to demonstrate your expertise and your willingness to work for the client. You are positioning yourself as a true consultant. More often than not you will wind up with a slice of the client’s budget.

Conclusion

We are in the communication business. We try to communicate the value of our publications to our customers and we try to communicate the value our advertisers offer to their customers. It is important that we look at what our customers are saying in their ads. Remember the ads we create for our customers tell a story about their business. We must make sure we are telling their complete story. If we tell their story right, everyone involved, the shoppers, our advertisers and sales person, will get the happy ending they want.

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