

The Five Questions of Advertising

By Jennifer Franzen

Whatever you want to happen, advertising can make it happen faster, but a good advertising campaign is not something you just fall into. It is a calculated, well thought-out process of goal setting and implementation--it is a media plan.

The media plan begins with a few simple questions: Who do you want to reach? What are your goals for advertising? When is the best time to advertise? Where do you advertise? How do you set the plan in motion?

Who do you want to reach?

Your target market is the foundation of your entire campaign. You must first know who you want to reach before you can answer any other questions.

The target market is the present customer buying your product AND the potential customer who should be buying your product. Defining it may be as easy as talking with your sales force. Your sales force is in constant touch with this market. They know the customer, they talk to the customer, they know what the customer wants. They also know the product, they know who the product appeals to, and they know who will benefit from using this product.

The specifics of your market can be as broad or as narrow as you decide--the more specific your market is, the more specific your plan can be to reach that market. There are times, however, when you'll want to expand your market, in which case you would cover a very broad spectrum of prospective customers.

As a retailer you may be concerned with such statistics as homeowners vs. apartment/condo owners; the accessibility of your company to your customers; the lifestyles of your market--on the go vs. slow paced, impulse buyers vs. thoughtful buyers; or you may be concerned with the geographical area you want to cover--local, statewide, regional or nationwide.

Every target market is different and may vary from product to product, service to service. Taking the time from the outset to know your market (customers) can save you from wasting money on an inappropriate ad campaign.

What are your goals?

To advertise effectively you need to know what kind of result you would like to see. Setting goals in advance of your advertising campaign heads you into

the right direction and avoids inconsistent advertising. Haphazard advertising sends out jumbled messages and presents no concrete image of your company.

Goals might be: to increase your sales by a certain percentage, to increase sales of a certain product or service, to introduce a new location; to announce a new product, to keep your company's name in the public's mind, to enhance the public's image of your product or company.

Just as you have more than one personal or professional goal, it is possible to have more than one goal in mind when embarking on an advertising campaign. No matter what those goals are, it is necessary to develop your media plans around them.

When should you advertise?

Timing is a major factor in a successful ad campaign. Knowing when to place your advertising can mean the difference between success and failure. The time frame may be set according to the calendar year, your fiscal year or even special selling seasons and special selling days.

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Depending on your product or service, one time of the year may far outweigh other times. You may, for example, want to concentrate on spring or fall planting seasons. If your product is an item that would be applied every two or three months, then you may want to alternate months when advertising. Hitting special selling days such as Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, or Valentine's Day may help boost your sales at those ^{times} of year.

Knowing when to place advertising is directly related with identifying your target market. Knowing where your market is and what they will be reading, watching, or listening to helps to determine when to schedule ad placements.

It is very important to plan your calendar in advance due to the time it takes to produce an ad and also due to advertising deadlines. Deadlines vary, depending on the type of medium you choose for advertising as well as each individual publication--they all hinge on each of the medium's production schedules. Magazines space reservations may be required as much as 45 days in advance of the issue in which you plan to advertise. If you haven't planned far enough in advance, you may miss a valuable opportunity to place your ad.

Schedules can always be changed along the way, but laying a foundation is your best bet to avoid a missed opportunity.

Where should you advertise?

To effectively advertise, you must be in the right place at the right time to get the results you want. The basic types of media are print, electronic, and promotional items. Within these groups are several varieties from which to choose to deliver your message.

Print media consist of magazines, newspapers, brochures/flyers, direct mail, and outdoor billboards. Electronic media consist of television, cable television and radio. Promotional items consist of such premiums as balloons, calendars, pencils, rulers, thermometers, note pads--any such item which can be imprinted with your company's name, logo or message.

Magazines are designed to reach specific markets. When choosing a publication, look into its demographics. Does this magazine cover your target market? Are there others that might cover it more specifically? What is the circulation? Trade publications are always a good bet when trying to reach a desired professional group. If you are targeting a broader market, a publication pertinent to your product may be your best bet. For example, if you sell wildflower seeds but are not targeting professional horticulturists, then a lawn and garden maga-

zine or a women's magazine featuring easy home improvements may be good choices.

Television is a strong medium because it is both visual and audible. The demographics also are very diversified. The markets reached vary from program to program, hour to hour, station to station. Cable television stations are much the same as network television, except cable stations specialize the formats to serve a specific market. When placing a television commercial, be sure to research all possible stations and time slots for your best options. Realize that the greater the audience of a particular program, the higher the cost of air time.

Radio is much like television in that the demographics change throughout the day as programming formats change. The markets are not as broad, however, since each station appeals to a certain demographic. The rates are less than television's since the production costs are much lower. As with television, it is best to investigate all possible stations before making a decision.

The markets for outdoor billboards is very broad and diverse. Anyone who drives by is exposed to that sign. Of course, a billboard on a major thoroughfare used for morning and afternoon work commutes would reach a professional market, and a billboard on a rural route would reach a differently defined group depending on the area where the sign is located. Because it is difficult to identify a specific market when using outdoor advertising, billboards best serve a product or company with very broad appeal.

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Promotional items are always welcomed by potential customers; everyone likes getting something for free. The used promotional materials should be based on your individual budget. The results are indefinite with these items as the message is small and generally subtle. The greatest appeal of promotional items is that they serve as a constant reminder of your product and company.

Once you've explored each medium, narrow your choices down to the best possible options. You should choose the options which reach the biggest section of your desired target market and best serve to meet your goals.

How to set the plan in motion?

Once you've determined where you are going and how you are going to get there, the final step is to put the plan into action.

Buy into the media you have chosen by reserving space or time slots, develop creative ideas for your ads and create the ads. Always follow up on your advertising to be sure you are heading the way you had planned. If not, it's never too late to regroup and rethink the directions. There may have been an idea you touched on earlier that you should now explore, or the course of advertising may have presented new avenues worth looking into.

An option worth exploring is an advertising agency. An agency works with you much like a contractor.

You hire the agency to work for you and they hire all the people needed to execute your plans. From the initial creative sessions to typesetting, production, layout, printing and placement, an agency handled all the details of advertising. As professionals trained in marketing and advertising, an agency can minimize the risks involved in a new ad campaign. Some agencies have account reps trained in your industry--ask for them. Although agencies research any market before making their recommendations, it may save time and effort if an account rep already has a grasp of your industry's market and audience. Always remember the agency is working FOR you. Get recommendations from your colleagues and don't be afraid to ask questions of your account rep.

The Bottom Line...Budget

There is no set formula for establishing an advertising budget. Budgets will vary from company to company, campaign to campaign, but when it comes right down to it there are really two ways to do it. Either you get the best advertising campaign possible based upon the amount you can afford to spend, or you decide on the exact campaign you want without constraints and pay whatever it costs. Most businesses are not given the luxury of "no matter what the cost" spending. For companies operating on a tighter budget, it may be wise to set aside a certain percentage of gross sales to allocate for advertising.

There are many costs that must be considered when setting a budget. There is the cost of producing the ad, the cost of placing the ad and, if using an agency,



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the agency fees. The amount spent on a campaign is not directly proportional to the profitability of the campaign. You can spend a little and produce the same increase in sales as spending a lot--the key is to get the absolute best campaign possible for the amount you are spending.

Dividing your budget. Electronic media are more costly than print media, not only in production costs but placement as well. There are many factors that go into placement in the electronic media, including time of day, type of programming, length of commercial, station, and reach of the commercial. Print medium costs depend on the publication, the size of the ad, whether the ad is black and white or has color, and if any additional production must be done to prepare the ad for print.

Choosing media should not be done on a strict dollars and cents basis. A more expensive placement with a larger reach within your target market would be a much better deal than a cheaper placement with low reach.

At the point when you decided on the choice of media the budget should be divided in such a way that you are reaching the greatest percentage of your target market in the most cost-efficient manner.

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