

The Key To Effective Advertising

I've written before about the need to advertise and promote your company aggressively when business is soft. As many of you realize, there's more to the challenge of dealing with a soft business climate than just marketing aggressively. You also have to advertise, promote, and market *effectively*.

That's true even when business is good. If your ads and marketing programs aren't working for you, whatever money you're spending on them is being wasted!

Advertising Or Marketing

One of the first issues I think we should discuss is the definition of *marketing*. I've seen clearly over the last several years that many printers—especially quick printers—don't really know what the word means. I got a good laugh, in fact, at a seminar for a group of quick printers a while back when I put a slide on the screen that defined *marketing* as "something a quick printer thinks he or she can do to keep from having to go out and sell."

Marketing means more than simply sending out direct mail. I like to define it as "the broad business discipline that connects people with the products and services they require or desire." Advertising and promotion are only part of that. Product development, market research, direct mail, telemarketing, pricing, and even *selling* are also components of the overall discipline. So let's get our terminology straight. If you're talking about the specific sub-discipline of marketing called advertising, just call it that.

Four Capabilities

The next step in creating effective advertising for a printing company is to understand that advertising had four basic capabilities. It can generate orders. It can generate leads. It can provide information. And, it can project an image. That's a great deal of capability, but you have to understand that it can't do all four things at once. In fact, only one of these capabilities can be easily and effectively combined with others, and that's the capability to project an image.

For your advertising to be fully effective, your advertising and promotional materials have to be designed from the start with a clear objective in mind. If you want advertising to generate leads, you can't expect that to happen most effectively if you simply provide information. Advertising materials that seek to generate leads should feature a *response device* of some sort, a return post card, or a phone number clearly indicated, along with instructions to call it in order for something else to happen. The copy should clearly say "return this postcard or call this number to receive more information."

If you want your advertising to generate orders, the ads have to project a tangible offer. Many quick printers use discount coupons for this purpose. "*Bring this coupon in with you and get 15% off on your next order.*"

Coupon Considerations

I've never been a big proponent of discount coupons, by the way. I'd rather see a printer take a slightly different approach. I like the idea that you'd choose one or more specific "products," like business cards or stationery, and promote a specific offer, like *500 2-color business cards, your choice of colors, \$79.95*.

The reason I like that approach better is two-fold. First, it allows prospects to make a part of the buying decision on their own, without any time or effort expended on your part. They know exactly how much the cards are going to cost before coming in to discuss any other considerations. With a discount coupon, they only know that they'll get some percentage of the regular price. You still have to quote that price, and then the person may decide that it's more than they want to spend even after deducting the discount.

The other reason I prefer this approach is that it allows you more control over the ultimate cost of such a promotion. That \$79.95 price might reflect a 25% discount from your regular price for 2-color business cards. You can decide up front that you're willing to accept that on a relatively small order, or even a whole bunch of them. Would you be equally willing to give a 15% discount—especially after quoting a price that might reflect a built-in discount because of the size of the job—if a customer brought in a coupon to be applied to a \$5,000.00 order?

Image And Information

Your advertising doesn't *have* to be designed to generate immediate leads or orders. Projecting information or image is a completely legitimate objective in many cases. An established printer may need to do no more than to "keep the name in front of the marketplace" to keep business flowing adequately.

That might mean providing a continuing flow of informational advertising about products and capabilities. It might also mean consistent advertising that projects a desired image, like *the quality printer*, or *the biggest printer in the tri-state area*. And as noted, image projection can often be combined with the other capabilities of advertising. Just don't expect to get as many orders or leads from ads like these as you would if the ads were specifically designed for those purposes.

“Smart” Direct Marketing

The other important factor in maintaining an effective advertising program is to be able to know when it's working! That's one of the great things about what we've come to call *direct marketing*. What makes direct marketing “smart” is that it's easily measurable. What makes you “smart” is when you take advantage of that and measure your results.

I can't tell you what raw percentage of response would mean that your advertising is working. And response *rate* is not the whole story anyway. You really calculate whether your advertising is working by figuring out the cost of the advertising, and comparing it to the *value* that you gain.

For example, in planning an advertising program, you might calculate that it will cost you \$1000.00 per month to print and mail a particular lead-generating direct mail piece. In return for that investment, you may decide you need at least 30 leads to make it cost-effective. As long as you're getting at least thirty leads per month, the program is working to plan.

Response rates are most important in helping you to determine a trend. If you send out 1000 pieces in January, and get 114 of them back with the desired response, you've got an 11.4% response rate. If you do it again in February and March with consistent—or growing—response, your trend is very positive and you should keep sending out that mailer. When the response rate starts to drop month after month, it's probably time to try something different.

Advertising Works

Advertising does work for printing companies, that's been proven in the marketplace. It works best when it's consistent, and when it's designed for the purpose the printer wants it to fulfill. That's really the secret to effective advertising...a variation of *form follows function*.