

This Works, That Doesn't, Here's Why MINI

An Article To Help You Build Your Business

Better Ads That Cost Less

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Do you run ads that don't seem to work? Do you feel like you just wasted all that money? You are not alone. Producing good advertising that pulls people into your store to buy is a real challenge — especially for us independents with small budgets.

If you can afford to do it, a multi-channel ad campaign will pull better than a campaign that uses a single medium. This time, however, we will focus on print ads.

Two Rules to Remember

You can save money on advertising by following a few rules. The first and most important rule: **You must measure or track every ad because that's the only way you'll know if it worked.** Print ads are real easy because you can use a coded coupon, and simply count the number of coupons returned. (TV and radio ads are tougher to track, but it can be done.) The next rule is just plain common sense, and only took me about 15 years to figure out: Ads are meant to bring people into your store. That means your ads have to give customers a compelling reason to come in as soon as possible.

Now, how many times have we spent a gazillion dollars on advertising (newspaper, coupon book, radio or whatever) but didn't make a strong enough offer? "I can't afford to give that much

away," we say. Think about it. The point is, we want customers to come in. Spend less on the ad, and increase the offer. **If the offer is good enough, they will come in.** If you test your offers (track coupons), you will know which ones work. If you can't make a real good offer, don't run the ad.

The question is, what is a good offer? Certainly it depends on what you are selling. I get the best response from a dollars-off coupon. The more customers spend, the more they get. I can hear you saying, "We can't afford to do that."

Here is my answer to that: Let's do some math. If you tell a thousand customers, "Buy anything in my store, and get X discount," then potentially a thousand customers may buy. But, if you limit the offer to a certain department or brand or item, you have just excluded those customers who don't shop in that department or buy those products.

Remember, the more restrictive the coupon or offer, the lower the response will be. A coupon for \$5 off anything in the store will always out-pull a coupon for \$5 off a certain item.

Getting Attention and Response

Ads need to grab the reader's attention. You need a strong headline such as "Save \$10" or "Free (fill in the blank)." If the reader doesn't see the headline, your ad is wasted.

These four requirements must be satisfied:

1. The customer has to see the ad.
2. The customer has to need what you are offering at the time you are offering it.
3. The customer has to remember that you have a special.
4. The customer has to have enough time to make use of your offer.

That's a lot of stuff your ad has to overcome. So, you need to run the ad several times in the same media for maximum exposure. You need to give the offer enough time to let the customer use it. The expiration date has to give customers a chance to get to your store. And please, please, please, use a coupon so you can see which medium performs best for your money.

Where to Advertise

Newspaper inserts that are distributed by ZIP code to target your geographical customer base are a great way to reach thousands of people near your store. Again, the more consistent you are with the inserts, the better your response will be. Resist the temptation to run ads in one-time editions or special editions. This may seem cold, but all the ads you run that say “compliments of” or “best wishes” or whatever are not ads, they are donations. We give lots of donations, but I know they are not ads.

Pennysavers and coupon books are also great places to run ads. Customers love those things. Many of you probably run ads in them already. Try running the same ad two weeks in a row, and e-mail me at dave@daveratner.com with the results of the second ad. Have you ever tried running ads in the classified section of the Sunday paper? It works! Everybody reads the classifieds.

The best part is, you can put the ad in the category you choose. Most papers have bulk rates for classified ads.

You can also advertise in your store. Here is a common-sense idea I learned from another retailer I met at a trade show. It is so simple, but awesome. Print up specials and offers good for next month, and hand them out to the customers who come into your store this month. Duh! What a great way to keep your existing customers coming back to the store.

Finally, I want all of you to subscribe to a magazine that will help you advertise better while spending less money. It is called, *Direct Marketing*. You can reach them at 800-229-6700. It is money very well spent!