

# Criteria for a good ad

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## **The Successful Ad Has a High Degree of Visual Magnetism**

On average, only a small number of ads in an issue of a magazine will capture the attention of any one reader. Some ads will be passed by because the subject matter is of no concern. But others, even though they may have something to offer, fail the very first test of stopping the reader in his or her scanning of the pages.

Ads perish right at the start because, at one extreme, they just lie there on the page, flat and grey, and at the other extreme, they are cluttered, noisy and hard to read.

An ad should be constructed so that a single component dominates the area – a picture, the headline or the text – but not the company name or the logo.

Obviously, the more pertinent the picture, the more arresting the headline, the more informative the copy appears to be, the better.

## **The Successful Ad Selects the Right Audience**

Often, an ad is the first meeting place of two parties looking for each other.

So there should be something in the ad that at first glance will enable readers to identify it as a source of information relating to their job interests – a problem they have or an opportunity they will welcome.

This is done with either a picture or a headline – preferably both – the ad should say immediately to the reader, “Hey, this is for you.”

## **The Successful Ad Invites the Reader Into the Scene**

Within the framework of the layout, the art director’s job is to visualize, illuminate and dramatize the selling proposition.

And the Art director must take into consideration the fact that the type of job a reader has dictates the selection of the illustrative material. Design engineers work with drawings. Construction engineers like to see products at work. Chemical engineers are comfortable with flow charts. Managers relate to pictures of people. And so on.

## **The Successful Ad Promises a Reward**

An ad will survive the qualifying round only if readers are given reason to expect that if they read on, they will learn something of value. A brag-and-boast

headline, a generalization, an advertising platitude will turn readers off before they get into the message.

The reward that the ad offers can be explicit or implicit, and can even be stated negatively, in the form of a warning of a possible loss,

The promise should be specific. The headline “Less Maintenance Cost” is not as effective as “You Can Cut Maintenance Costs 25%”.

## **The Successful Ad Backs Up the Promise**

To make the promise believable, the ad must provide hard evidence that the claim is valid.

Sometimes, a description of the product’s design or operating characteristics will be enough to support the claim.

Comparisons with competition can be convincing. Case histories make the reward appear attainable. Best of all are testimonials; “They-say” advertising carries more weight than “We-say” advertising.

## **The Successful Ad Presents the Selling Proposition in Logical Sequence**

The job of the art director is to organize the parts of an ad so that there is an unmistakable entry point (the single dominant component referred to earlier), and the reader is guided through the material in a sequence consistent with the logical development of the selling proposition.

A layout should not call attention to itself. It should be a frame within which the various components are arranged.

## **The Successful Ad Talks “Person-to-Person”**

Much industrial advertising, unlike consumer goods advertising, consists of one company talking to another company – or even to an entire industry.

But copy is more persuasive when it speaks to the reader as an individual – as if it were one friend telling another friend about a good thing.

First, the terms should be the terms of the reader’s business. But more than that, the writing style should be simple: short words, short sentences, short paragraphs, active rather than passive voice, no advertising cliches, frequent use of the personal pronoun you. A more friendly tone results when the copy refers to the advertiser in the first person: “we” rather than “the company name.”

## **Successful Advertising is Easy to Read**

This is a principle that shouldn’t need to be stated, but the fact is that typography is the least understood part of our business.

The business press is loaded with ads in which the most essential part of the advertiser’s message – the copy – appears in type too small for easy reading or is squeezed into a corner or is printed over part of the illustration.

Text type should be no smaller than 9 point. It should stand clear of interference from any other part of the ad. Column width should not be more than half the width of the ad.

## **Successful Advertising Emphasizes the Service, Not the Source**

Many business-to-business advertisers insist that the company name or logo be the biggest thing in the ad, that the company name appear in the headline, that it be set in bold-face wherever it appears in the copy. That’s too much.

An ad should make readers want to buy – or at least consider buying – before telling them where to buy.

## **Successful Advertising Reflects the Company’s Character**

A company’s advertising represents the best opportunity it has – better than the sales force – to portray the company’s personality – the things that will make the company liked, respected, admired.

A messy ad tends to indicate a messy company. A brag-and-boast ad suggests the company is maker-oriented, not user-oriented.

A dull looking ad raises the possibility that the company has nothing to get excited about, is behind the times, is slowing down.

What we are talking about is a matter of subtleties, but the fact remains: like sex appeal (which is not easy to define), some companies have it, some don’t. And whatever it is, it should be consistent over time and across the spectrum of corporate structure and product lines.