



Secrets to Writing Better Ads

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The risk of print ads is that you are subject to the reader's ability to read. Will the reader of your ads hear the words in his mind as you intended them to be heard? Keep in mind that fully half of our population reads at a below-average level.

Am I suggesting that you invest only in TV and radio advertising? No. I'm merely suggesting that you pay special attention to the sound of the words you write, even when they will be "heard" only in the reader's mind.

1. **Open your sentences with unexpected verbs.** Don't write, "When you come to Don Honkus Ford, you'll...." Write: "Tap-dance those happy feet into Don Honkus Ford..." or "Maneuver your old monster down to Don Honkus Ford..." or "Sail like a Saturday to Don Honkus Ford." Nothing is so boring as the predictable.

2. **Be specific.** It was time to renew the Yellow Pages ad for a new client, a retail jeweler. I told him, "The Yellow Pages are a service directory for people without a preference. They're fine for service providers like plumbers and electricians and roofers, but a bad investment for retailers. What services do you offer?" After listening to him drone on about ring sizing (yawn) and watch repair (yippee Skippy, let me call the press), I asked, "Do you buy diamonds off the street?" The jeweler said, "Every time I get a chance, but those people usually go to pawn shops." I said, "Buying the diamond ring from a broken engagement is a service to the customer." I created a Yellow Pages ad with a huge

headline: "We Pay 22% More Than Pawn Shops for Diamonds." My jewelry client made a fortune as a direct result of that ad. Specifics like "22%" are more believable than generalities.

3. Write emotional scenes that are imaginable. One of my students, Steve McKenzie, wrote the following ad for a courageous client that owns a small coffee shop. The ad worked miracles: "There it is again. The buzz-buzz, agh-agh alarm that crow-bars my eyes, loudly. Is this a dream or real? What day is it? Am I still employed? Where is that button of snooze? To do, to do, so much to-do. It's sweat and Daytimers, soap-on-a-rope, aftershave, moose with no grunts in my hair. Gotta go-go, I'm driving, driven to the machine that I love, muchly. And there you are, all ground up, waiting to waterfall in my cup. It's you and your big red eye. It's me and my 5-gallon travel mug. It's a marriage made in a paper filter. Sip-sip yum-yum I'm zooming, awake with visions of flying pigs, and everything's possible. You did it. The roasting, the grinding; magical. Who, what, how? Louie's Coffee. I'm in love."

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4. Listen for the drumbeats. Which is better? "We'll get there when we said we would be there or you don't have to pay us" or "Always on time or you don't pay a dime"? The second phrase is the copyrighted slogan of One Hour Heat and Air Conditioning, one of the fastest-growing franchises in history. The power of the statement isn't in the rhyme, but in the meter; the drumbeat rhythm created by its naturally accented syllables. Meter makes words musical in the mind, even when the words are read silently. "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit. My client could not, would not, did not commit these crimes." "Bounty, the quicker picker-upper." Meter, not rhyming, is the secret of why we remember song lyrics more readily than ads. Do you want your ads to be as easily remembered as the lyrics to a song? Take the time to put your words in meter.

5. Ignore the critics. Everyone has an opinion about advertising. Most will tell you they prefer ads that are smooth, polished and professional. In other words, drab, boring and easy to ignore. But if you write an ad that has the power to move people, it's naive to believe that everyone will be moved the same direction. Don't let what I'm about to say scare you, but if you aren't receiving some negative comments and criticisms about your ads, they're not working as well as they should. Personally, I agree with advertising legend Leo Burnett, who said, "I am one who believes that one of the greatest dangers of advertising is not that of misleading people, but that of boring them to death."

Bottom line: Open with unusual verbs, be specific, write imaginable, harness the power of poetic meter and ignore the whining critics. Response to your ads will soar.

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**About the author:**

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