

Dumb advertising moves to avoid

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Small businesses on a tight budget often don't have money to throw around on their advertising. To get the best results, they have to make sure every ad they produce is effective. Advertising expert George Parker, author of *MadScam* (Entrepreneur Press, December 2006, \$19.95, www.entrepreneurpress.com) cautions all small businesses to avoid making these common mistakes.

Borrowed interest. Don't associate yourself with things that have no relevance to what you do. If you're in the roofing business, talk about roofing, show roofing, and explain how you're the world's unmatched authority on roofing. Don't show pictures of animals and babies. They might get people's attention, but they won't help you make a sale. Don't talk about your ancestors, where you grew up, or where you went to school -- unless you graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the National Roofing Academy. Stick to what you're best at -- roofing.

Event sales. Far too much local retail advertising falls into this trap. If you're going to have a sale, have a sale. What's the point of having a Presidents' Day Sale when every other retailer is having a Presidents' Day Sale on exactly the same Presidents' Day? Avoid running the same advertising and promotional themes everyone else is running. The worst example of this is when the Olympics roll around and everyone starts running ads with inane headlines such as "Blogs Electric is going for the gold" or "At VideoRama we're raising the bar to new heights." Remember, it's all about standing out, not blending in.

Ego trips. Don't put yourself in the advertising. You, your family, and your employees think you're great. But your prospective customers don't know you from a hole in the wall, and your smiling face isn't going to convince them you have the best stuff. Smart CEOs save themselves for PR. "Look at Donald Trump and Richard Branson of Virgin," Parker says. "They're everywhere, except in their own ads."

Different media, different ads. Don't run ads that bear no relationship to each other in different kinds of media. If a concept is good because it's based on an original idea, it should work in all kinds of media. Your core advertising message need only change if your business changes. You can certainly fine tune your advertising and messaging, but only to improve it. Don't change for the sake of change, Parker advises. Give your prospective customers the chance to see and be affected by it.

Advertising everywhere. Make your ad budget work harder for you by specifically creating ads that work in a limited selection of media, Parker says. If you have a limited budget, you can't afford to waste your money in generalist publications. Find the ones that appeal to the specific niche who will be the prime market for what you have to offer. Then create your ad content to suit.

Overdoing the ads. Do not create too many ads. Use your money to create a few really good ads. Invest in superior art work. Take the time to write (or have written for you) intelligent, pithy copy that people will take pleasure in reading. Make it interesting and informative. Write it so the reader will want to know more and will make the effort to do so by going to your web site, returning a prepaid reply card, calling a phone number, or even coming round to your place of business. For more valuable advertising advice, check out *MadScam*, now available at www.entrepreneurpress.com.

Dumb advertising moves to avoid by Bend Weekly News Sources