

Some Techniques for Creating Ads

Adapted from 'The Craft of Copywriting' by Alastair Crompton

It will help you very much, when you are making your advertisement, if you know beforehand *how*, it will be read. This matter has been the subject of much research, and the answers are quite specific. There is a definite **route** the eye takes over each ad. Let's say the reader is skimming through a newspaper or magazine. He turns the page, and there is your work, full of promise, waiting to catch his attention: *What happens?*

First, his eye goes to the **picture**. Then he reads the **headline**. Then he moves down to the **bottom right-hand corner** of the advertisement to see who is paying the bill. And, generally speaking, that is as far as most people get with most advertisements.

Cash down the drain

Of the thousands of advertisements seen every day, the researchers estimate that the average man or woman remembers between seven and ten. It's obvious how important it is to master the craft of ad-making, so that instead of doing work by so-called "instinct," you use the techniques available to make sure your ads get into the top ten.

Let us suppose you have caught the customer's eye; he's scanned your picture, headline, and logo and is still interested in what you have to say. Where does he look next? If you are using a squared-up photograph as your illustration, and if you have set a **caption** under it, possibly in a small italic face, as is used in a number of newspapers, the reader's eye will go to this caption next.

If you have still kept him interested, and if you have used **crossheadings** in your ad, or **small drawings, charts, or graphs**, the eye will scan over these next, picking out the salient points of your argument. Finally, if you have kept his attention throughout this eye-journey, and if he has been stimulated into wanting to know still more about what you have to sell, your reader will start on the **body text** proper.

That, according to the best research, is how people read advertisements. Now let us go back to the beginning and see what it can teach us about the craft of making ads.

Use square pictures

People look at pictures before they read headlines. Surely then, the more of the story the picture tells, the more you will have communicated immediately. It's worth remembering that newspapers and magazines most often use squared-up photographs. Since they are the kind of illustrations people are used to seeing most, and since they also offer you the best chance of good reproduction, you would be well advised to use them whenever you can. Cut-outs are quite unusual, so use them only when you have good reason.

The importance of headlines

The second stop on this eye-journey is the headline. As a copywriter, you should make no mistake: **The headline is the most important part of your advertisement.** If it doesn't communicate, your ad won't communicate irrespective of how powerful a picture you have used or how tastefully the layout has been done. Spend more time working on your headline than any of the rest of your words and to take great care over what the headlines says

There can be times when a headline does not need an illustration; but there can *never* be a time when an illustration doesn't need a headline.

What makes headlines good?

First, they should always work *with* the picture. They should tell you one part of the story, while the picture tells the rest. Sometimes a headline can make no sense at all on its own. And a picture on its own can be a mystery. When the two come together, however, the whole story is revealed--with punch and originality.

Never use a headline to repeat what the picture is saying. And never simply illustrate a headline. *Let the two parts do their own half of the work*, so when you see them as an entity the story comes across quick and clear, the way it should on a poster. Every good ad should be able to stand as a poster; the reader should never have to dip into the small print in order to understand the *point* of the story.

The average reader spends about $1 \frac{1}{2}$ seconds on most advertisements. That's all the time you've got to shout: "We've got something for you!" And you must get the readers' attention in a manner that is **relevant** to your sales message. As Leo Burnett once said: "I can get attention by having a man come downstairs with a sock in his mouth. But it's a rotten ad unless that sock is totally relevant."

Apply polish and buff hard

One good tip to remember when you are polishing a **headline** is to throw out the present participle. "Watch sales *going* through the roof" can be trimmed to "Watch sales *go* through the roof" with no loss of meaning or impact. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the *ing* is unnecessary in headlines (or body copy for that matter). It's a good idea to write in the present tense. However, never forget that effectiveness doesn't depend so much on the way you make your promise as on the promise you make.

The next stop for the eye is the **bottom right-hand corner** of the ad. This is where the client's name generally goes, as a signing-off note. Logo-types can speed communication here, but you can also use the space to wrap up the whole of your sales argument in a slogan. I'm not saying that every good ad should have a slogan; often a good case can be made for omitting a baseline altogether, but there are times when it can help. If you do decide to write one, try to see that it isn't just a mildly witty pun but that it urges the reader to go deeper into the ad.

Tell what you can't see

The next stop in the eye-journey is at the **caption** under the picture. First, be sure to say something the reader can't see; never describe what the eye can "read" for itself anyway. Explain any action that is taking place. Name the characters you are showing, especially if one of them is a well-known personality. If at all possible, get the name of the product or service into the caption. If you have a black and white shot, indicating any important colour can be useful. And finally, try to use the caption to direct the reader into the text. For example, a caption could be "*Harry Blank winning the world motor-racing crown. Read below how X oil helped.*"

Let us assume that the reader is still with you; he will then move onto your **crossheadings and smaller illustrations**. Make sub-heads punchy and factual. Facts sell, generalizations and puffs don't. If you use charts, make them simple and direct. If you have a small photograph tucked into the body copy, caption that as well, using the same techniques. In graphs and diagrams, use comparisons, name competitors, quote what experts or independent testers say, or use testimonials from satisfied users.

The smaller print

Finally, the eye reaches the beginning of the **body copy**. What are the best techniques to use here? Good body copy *starts in the middle*. Never begin-by repeating any of the story the reader has already surmised. Go right to the heart of the proposition, and go with a punch. Never open with the name of the product - that's dull. Don't start talking about yourself; talk about the reader and his hopes and desires. And start with a flip: an upbeat phrase. I once read an autobiography that opened with the sentence: "Mom and Dad were married when I was three". How's that for inviting the reader to read on?

Remember that the whole purpose of the advertisement is to make people act, even if that action is simply to stop them thinking one way about the product and get them thinking about it in another way. To convince anyone about anything you need need facts. Facts presented clearly, sympathetically, and with inexorable logic - and leavened with a little emotion - are best of all.

The wit to woo

The secret of a good advocate is that he gets attention and then tells his audience facts they don't know. He tells them in an interesting and unexpected way. Remember, you should never set out to write an ad without mustering all the facts.

What makes people read

There are about seventeen subjects that make people read. And you will probably find ten of them every day in every popular newspaper.

Animals	Jokes (cartoons)
Babies	Money (how to make it)
Cars	Royalty
Disasters	Scandal (gossip columns)

Entertainment	Sex
Famous personalities	Sports
Fashion	Wars
Food	Weddings
Fortune-telling	

The copywriter can use most of these subjects to help him get over his message. So if you have to talk to young women, you can reach them very simply by using a pretty baby. If you have to talk to young men, often a way to their hearts is through a racy car.

Here are some techniques you can use to write your ads

The *why* technique

WHY is an excellent word to use in a headline:

Why American commercials are better than British commercials.

Why I drive a Porsche.

Brand X motor oil is best for your car. Here's why.

An explanation to my fellow managing directors why I must ask £100 for a pair of shoes.

The Inch War. Why Ryvita helps you win.

Why Sarah Jane gets the boys and Sally Anne can't.

And so there is a reward for reading. "Why" allows the copywriter to present a reasoned argument and list all the benefits the product has to offer. "Why" makes your ad *interesting*.

Ad Example 1

Say a manufacturer comes to you with a new **toothpaste** that doesn't just shine your teeth, but also contains a really good mouthwash; so you may not need to use Listerine any more, or at least, not so often. Since that's a hard-to-beat sales pitch by itself, you could be excused for simply taking a picture of an attractive woman, with sparkling teeth, and punching out your promise in giant type: "*We put a mouthwash in new Fresho*". Your ad is clearly on strategy (it's probably quoting the strategy). You've made it plain who you're talking to and the promise comes out loud and clear. But clever and imaginative it isn't. And that is where "why" comes in.

Instead of the plain picture of the woman, you photograph her this time with a man. Their arms are entwined; their eyes are locked together, their lips are open (to demonstrate some of that sparkle, of course). You could be excused for thinking they're on the point of a kiss (sex makes people read). All you do now is change the headline by one word: "*Why we put a mouthwash in new Fresho*". This time your ad is talking.'

Ad Example 2

Let's assume a **car manufacturer** has sold 10 million cars and wants to announce the fact. You're on solid ground to start with because you actually have something to say. No one could quarrel if you took a nice shot of the car, maybe being christened by a champagne bottle or something, and capped it with a bold headline: "Ten million Britons drive a Blank". On strategy, it makes its point, it is talking to drivers; but it's boring.

But let's say the same ad was broken into various pictures that *demonstrate benefits* of the car; the way it corners, the way it economizes on fuel, the way it can carry a lot of people and luggage. You change the headline by one word: "*Why* ten million Britons drive a Blank," and your ad is immediately more interesting and more effective at doing a selling job.

Ad Example 3

A manufacturer comes to you with a **washing machine** that has some good features, but a pretty stiff price. You decide to add some snob appeal and ask a well-known society lady to give the machine a testimonial. Then you shoot the product in a classy home, with the famous lady beside it and you say: "Annette Nuttie prefers a Brand X washing machine". OK, you've carried out the strategy. But judge for yourself how much more incentive there is to *read* the ad - even if you keep the picture exactly as before if you rephrase your headline thus: "Why Annette Nuttie, who can afford any washing machine in the world, prefers Brand X".

The *how* technique

If your client offers a very complicated product or service and you have a lot of different points to make, "how" lets you go through them all. But there is virtually no limit to the number of ways the word will work for you.

"How to write a best seller in five minutes". Who could resist a headline like that? In fact, it turned out to be promoting classified advertising space, and it went through the rules of writing good classified ads.

How to read a banana.

How to have \$250 extra in your pocket today.

How to cut your own hair.

How to turn the room in your head into a room in your home.

How to reduce your Income Tax by half

Ad Example 1 The cleverest way I've ever seen 'how' used was in conjunction with a stroboscopic photograph (that is, a picture where the image is repeated, each time in a slightly different position, so the shot actually records movement). The first image was of a puppy; then the images showed the dog getting older and older until the last one was of a fully grown animal. The artwork must have been compiled over the course of about a year, and you can imagine the impact that had. The headline simply said: 'How to raise a dog'.

The *where* technique

This is not so much the technique of using a word to begin your headline as thinking *of places* the product can be shown to its best advantage. Ask yourself questions such as: "Where will this product be most useful to the customer? Where will it perform at its best? Where is it most interesting?"

Ad Example 1 A client comes to you with a new kind of anorak. He says it's amazingly lightweight but also totally windproof. You can show it to best advantage, and it's least likely to work, at the peak of Mount Everest. But that's where it's most needed. So you shoot a climber on the roof of the world wearing your client's product and have him say: "This is how I know Brand X anoraks are best".

Ad Example 2 Motor Oils are under most duress on race tracks, so that's where the commercials are based.

Ad Example 3 A lady's foundation garment is least likely to be comfortable worn by a dancer doing a zippy dance routine, so that's where to demonstrate it.

Ad Example 4 A safety belt is only useful in an accident, so that's where to show it.

Ad Example 5 Say a manufacturer comes to you with a new wristwatch for women. Not expensive, but not unattractive either, and the selling point he wants to make is that it's waterproof. What about dropping it into a washing machine (one of those with a window in the front)? "If you get into hot water, will your watch give you the time of day."

The *who* technique

This is where you ask *who* you can use in your ad to make it more interesting. Not just a well-known performer, but characters from history, mythology, literature, the bible, fairy-tales, or even from your client's own staff. Good ads have been made around Heathcliffe from *Wuthering Heights*, Quasimodo, Neptune, General Custer, the old Cunard Liner passenger list, private individuals who've been in the news, popular sportsmen, even army officers.

A word of warning, however. In the past it was acceptable to run ads without the written permission of the person shown. This is now expressly forbidden.

Television actors

A popular technique these days is to invite a well-known TV personality to help you advertise. Although this can be very effective, it holds traps for the unwary. If you ever ask a comic to do a commercial, be certain he has a funny script. And don't expect always to be able to write that script your- self (you're a copywriter, not a scriptwriter). Arrange for own scriptwriter to contribute the gags.

If you do choose a star, be sure he or she has some kind of relationship to the product. It may be that you want someone your whole target-audience can identify with.

Ad Example 1

Cadbury's chose Elton John to promote their chocolate, the one with "a glass-and-a-half of full cream milk in every bar". Elton is right for mums and dads, but he's right for kids too; the one man who can span the generation gap. Great casting, and they get in the product claim about the milk. But they decide that the punch-line is '*tastes spectacular*'. And this calls for a white-grand-piano to levitate off the stage on rocket-boosters; not to mention a plethora of other computer-graphic techniques. With too many claims and too many explosive effects, Elton gets swamped. His personality, his voice and his piano (the things we really admire him for) are drowned in explosions of light and colour. So remember, if you pick a great star, give him a chance to be himself. After all, that's what you're paying for.

The *when* technique

This is where you place your ad in a *different time*.

Ad Example 1 An airline sold expensive overseas holidays on the grounds that they'd be a heck-of-a-lot more expensive in five years, so go while you can still afford them.

Ad Example 2 Barclays set their commercials in the future (thank you, *Blade Runner*) to highlight the claim that the computer-age does not mean the death of personal service and attention.

Ad Example 3 A beer was launched on the theme 'The Lusty Age is Back', with characters in Medieval costume, quaffing and carousing.

Ad Example 4 A chicken-breeder put the taste of his chickens 50-years-behind the times.

Ad Example 5 A fruit juice made a commercial based in the distant future to knock the idea of imitation flavourings and colouring (imagine what it must have been like not being able to drink the real thing).

You can go back to pre-history or out into the galaxy to add bite to your work. That's what I mean by a 'when' campaign.

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If you want assistance creating great ads, and words that people will remember on your brochures, websites and advertisements, contact Jump Marketing at merry@jumpmarketing.com.au