

“Facts are stubborn things...”

— John Adams (1735-1826)

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Designing Banner Ads that Work

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The old-fashioned banner ad continues to thrive and dominate online advertising, because it is inexpensive to design, easily understood, effective in contextual placements and gets a message across in a glance.

An effective banner can have a powerful effect on your advertising campaign; the difference between a triumph and a trouncing. As a former internet marketing director and online media buyer, I've been responsible for some pretty pathetic banners I thought were good. With experience, I have learned why some of my banners were failures. Here are the key elements involved in effective banner ad design.

Set Objectives

- Ad design begins with a precise understanding of the goal to be accomplished. Here are some questions you should ask yourself or your client. Once you have identified your goals clearly, you're much more likely to achieve them.
- What is your vision of the brand?
- What is your business objective for banners? [Branding, Lead generation, Sales]
- What personality do we want to convey for the brand?
- What types of imagery and communication do you feel are appropriate for the target audience?
- Where will the banners be running? [Type of site, site demographics, site content placement]
- Are there any file format restrictions including animation, looping and dimensions?
- What is the launch date of the banners?

Develop Succinct Copy

Copy in web banners should be concise and inviting. The idea is to grab clicks and then direct to a Web page where you can offer the visitor details. With an animated banner you have one frame of the banner to grab attention, sometimes two. A good analogy to a banner ad is the highway billboard. You have one to eight words to make your point. Anything longer is unreadable and ineffective as you whiz by.

Be Creative and Break the Norm

More and more people's eyes are trained to pass over banner ads. If an ad looks like the same old banner-type stuff, viewers won't give it a second glance. The best designers put their creativity to work to express a message in a way that breaks the norm. Something that surprises, shocks, suggests, seduces.

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Use Relevant Content and Images

Use images and animation relevant to your message. Tricking viewers with your ad won't pay off — the goal is to attract interested and qualified traffic to your website. Stay true to your brand. Use your brand color schemes, company logo and include your website URL — it is best that contact information is displayed on the final frame of an animated banner.

Use Animation

Your message really needs to be communicated through visuals, not just text. People respond better to images than to words. Animation is important to catch the eye and pull it towards the banner. Studies have shown that animation dramatically increases the click-through rate. But animation can go too far. People no longer fall for an ad that's too gimmicky or tries too hard to get attention. It's a branding issue. The more legitimate your product or service, the less you need to use wacky, flashy, obnoxious animation. Most Web sites, including ours, don't permit shaking, flashing or strobing effects and will limit the number of loops of animation.

Match the message with the mission

What is your objective? Is the audience expected to respond? If so, why and how? What elements would motivate the audience to respond to the advertising message? Include a call to action that most clearly defines your mission. Click Here, Download More Information, Register Today, Get More Information. More than just a cliché, the call to action in a web banner should complement the ad content and goals. Confusing copy will decrease interest in your banner. Banners that perform best offer something to the viewer.

Select or Design the Best Landing Page

The success of an online ad has only just begun when a visitor clicks on the ad — direct visitors to the most appropriate page on your Web site that will provide more information about the content in your message. If you are making an offer take them directly to the product or download page. It's even better if you create unique landing pages for campaigns which can allow you to further track the performance of the overall campaign.

“Get Clicks” should NOT be a mission... ever!
“Response” is a subjective NOT and objective measurement.
Producing a click-through is NOT a mission but rather a means to possibly achieving a mission.

Test Thoroughly

Nearly any online ad buy will allow you to run multiple ads in rotation within your campaign. Use this feature to test different ad designs or copy differences. Monitor and determine what works best. If you are running an ongoing campaign, don't start it and forget it... visitors will do the same over time. Keep your ads new, fresh and different to keep interest high.