

Five things great ads do that bad ads don't

Effective ads start with what's on the page or the screen, but the critical part is what goes on in the mind of the person reading the ad.

Great ads use headlines, visuals and copy to build engagement with the reader. High reader engagement produces stronger responses, and the most effective ads consistently deliver on five key aspects of engagement:

1. Brand salience
2. Brand affinity
3. Relevance
4. Clarity
5. Reasons to buy

The first three aspects have to do with brand perceptions, what readers think and feel about the brand, while the last two are about the utility of the ad, how readers make sense of and use the message.



Brand salience

Familiarity with and understanding of the brand is the starting point. The aim is for the consumer to think of and consider the brand when making purchasing decisions, and ads do this by building and reinforcing memories linking the brand to the purchase category.

Brand affinity

The emotional response to the ad. Emotions are a core element in motivating consumers to buy, and ads that generate a good feeling towards the brand produce better responses than ones that don't.

Relevance

Relevance refers to how appropriate the brand is to the reader. Readers may be aware of brand, and like the brand, but they'll only go on to buy if they answer the question "is this the right brand for me?" with a "yes".

Clarity

Put simply, how easy is it for readers to make sense of the ad, to understand what's on offer? Ads that are easy to follow generate better responses. Conversely the more effort it takes to understand the ad, the more likely readers are to move on.

Reasons to buy

Content matters, and the most effective ads are ones that give the reader a reason to buy, use or find out more about a product, and that highlight an important feature.

Our research shows that while clarity lifts purchase intention, reason to buy is more important. In fact "reason to buy" is more highly correlated with purchase intention than any other factor.

This is contrary to a belief in some circles that what the ad actually says is irrelevant: readers respond better to ads that give consumers a reason to buy.

Keeping these five factors in mind provides a useful reference point for evaluating the creative: “does this ad link my brand to the category?”, “does it prompt a positive emotional response?”, “is the message relevant to the reader?”, “is it easy to understand?” and “does it give them a reason to consider buying my brand?”

Ads that tick all of these boxes will engage readers more intensely than ones that don't. The key creative elements to concentrate on are headlines, photo/image, and eye-catching layout/design, and well-written copy.