

Say enough, but not too much

YOU'VE SEEN those ads — the ones that cram every bit of information they can into the space provided.

If it's a 5-inch × 7-inch magazine ad, these companies will fill all 35 square inches with text or images. The business's logo, the phone number, the web address, the headline, the subhead, the copy, the offer, three pictures of the product with captions for each, detailed information about the product, small print, even smaller print, and on and on

Maybe, just maybe, you have even created an ad like this for your own business. I won't tell.

The problem with these ads is they make potential customers weary. People look at an ad crammed with text, images and information, and they sigh, grimace or cringe and move on. The designers I work with are wary of clients asking to add one more image, one more call-out,

one more sentence, or — most common of all — “please make our logo bigger.”

Here are some things to remember when you are designing an ad, based on different kinds of ads:

1. Print ads (magazine, newspaper, etc.).

Remember, you are competing for people's attention and have only a moment to capture their interest.

Use an interesting headline, a short subhead (if needed), 2–3 sentences of copy, a call to action, and that's it. A single picture is sufficient.

White space is your friend. The more unused space you have in a print ad, the easier it is on a reader's eyes. You don't need to include every detail about a product; say enough to intrigue your target audience and get them to take the next step, usually visiting your website or calling you.



Ian Doescher

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And please, don't stress about your logo being big enough. Unless the rest of your ad is poorly written, potential customers will know what company the ad is for. Your logo is more important to you than it is to them.

2. Billboards.

I'm often surprised by the simple fact many advertisers forget when they create a billboard, namely that billboards are [»](#)





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most often seen as people drive past them.

Drivers going 30 miles per hour with decent eyesight have maybe 3 seconds to read a billboard as they drive by (assuming they are also watching the road). Passengers have maybe 5 or 6 seconds. That's not enough time to do much.

With a billboard, you should make your point as quickly as possible and make sure people know how to find you.

"Make sure people know how to find you," though, does not mean putting your phone number and/or web address on every billboard. In fact, the best billboards make it clear which company is being advertised, but leave contact information off.

If your billboard is intriguing, people will seek you out online. Capture attention with a good picture, no more than 6–8 words, and keep your logo or business name large enough to see.

3. Digital ads.

I'm thinking of image-based display ads, as opposed to Facebook ads where you add a description.

Like print ads, when you create a digital image ad, you should not fill the available space — which generally isn't much — with information. However, you have even less time to catch people's attention than you do in print.

We have all grown accustomed to ignoring header and sidebar ads on websites, so when you do catch someone's attention you should make the most of it.

Use a short headline, possibly a short subhead, and a button with a simple action (Learn More, Click Here, Shop Now, and so on). Don't use copy in a digital image ad — people won't stop to read it.

Advertisers should resist the temptation to put as much information in their ads as they think potential customers need to know. Often, a potential customer needs to know very little — connect with them about how your product or service will improve their life, and they will make the call or visit your website.

And then, you're in business! ©