

IN THIS ISSUE...

I. Beyond Image Advertising II. Macro Photography: Advice from a pro III. Lazy Eyes: How we read online

I. Beyond Image Advertising

FOR TWELVE YEARS I CREATED GOOD LOOKING ADS.

They were clean, stylish and impactful. But did they sell? We don't know. It wasn't possible to track their effectiveness. They were "image" ads that ran with a hope and a prayer that they would attract buyers. Almost all award-winning ads are image ads — beautiful, clever, or funny, with absolutely no track record of conversion to sales.

These days I want more for my clients. I want results. I want good looks, a good concept, *and* a good return on investment.

That's where direct response advertising comes in — asking the prospect to act right then and there. So you know if you've won the sale (or whatever 'next step' you're requesting) or not. Direct marketers have been testing and fine-tuning the elements of these ads for decades based on this feedback loop. So there's a mountain of research on motivational techniques that effectively convince people to trade their money for your stuff.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF COPYWRITING WAS BORN of direct response advertising. It's called "the language of marketing" and "salesmanship in print" because it systematically walks the prospect through to the sale using these proven persuasion techniques.

No doubt, knowing your audience and the benefits they want *most* is essential to writing an effective sales promotion. And studying the competition helps you position your product as unique and better in some way. Equipped with this motherlode of market research, the copywriter can mine the "big idea," or "unique selling proposition" — the concept for the promotion.

THEN, A SERIES OF MINI-SALES ARE WOVEN TOGETHER to win the reader's attention and interest, then sell benefits, credibility, value, safety, convenience, and urgency.

This kind of depth requires some verbiage (and space), making online marketing, "snail mail," and infomercials among the top media for direct response. But a copywriter working in *any* medium can boost sales by artfully incorporating these proven "building blocks of selling."

ANATOMY OF A DIRECT RESPONSE AD

A HEADLINE that engages your prospect and motivates readership.

DECK COPY (or A SUBHEAD) that expands on the headline in a powerful way and provides credibility.

A LEAD that sets the tone and momentum, arousing emotion and promising important benefits.

BODY COPY that fulfills the promise of the headline, is interesting and easy to read, credible, persuasive and concise. It must bring to life the strongest and deepest benefits of your product, appealing to the prospect's values and self-interest.

Great copy flows seamlessly through layers of selling points (benefits, logic, emotion and proof) speaking to the reader's feelings, needs, and desires. Use of subheads and bullets within the body copy improves its readability and clarity.

SIDEBARS that reinforce your message, but whose content might distract from the flow of your main theme. Sidebars can...

- present a bio, photo and/or credentials of your spokesperson
- feature publications, awards and media mentions
- share customer and/or expert testimonials
- provide case histories or an impressive client list
- highlight a compelling pull-quote
- show graphs, charts, before & after, and other "proof elements" to enhance credibility,
- offer a bonus or premium or demonstrate value

A COMPELLING OFFER, the single best predictor of sales success. Make it irresistible!

A SOLID GUARANTEE, minimizing risk for the buyer.

CLOSING COPY asking for immediate, specific action.

EASY WAYS TO RESPOND, ideally more than one.

A 'P.S.' to sweeten the deal or to add a sense of urgency. Only the headline is read more often.

II. Macro Photography: Advice from a pro

Ruth Happel Smiley has been photographing and recording nature for 25 years. Her photographs have been widely published in *Audubon* magazines and calendars, *National Wildlife* magazine, and many other nature magazines and books. Here are five of Ruth's tips for getting up close and personal with the natural world:

1. CAMERA POSITIONING: To deal with shallow depth of field, it's especially important to position your camera parallel to the plane on which you are focusing. If you're shooting an insect resting at an angle on a blade of grass, line up your camera with the body of the insect, or only part of it will be in focus. If you can't get the entire subject in focus, figure out what you want to center on, and make sure it's parallel to the back of the camera.

2. FREEZE FLASH: My simple point-and-shoot doesn't have much in the way of manual adjustments, but it does close down the aperture more when you use the flash, and that gives you a better depth of field to work with. The flash also helps to stop any movement.

3. EXPOSURE COMPENSATION: To ensure that at least one of your shots is properly exposed, adjust the EV (exposure value) setting of the camera, usually from -2 or 3 to +2 or 3. The danger with +EV and digital cameras is the tendency for "blooming": areas that are highly overexposed to spill into adjacent pixels. This can even lead to a nasty white line across your image, especially if it's shot at certain angles into the sun. However, I often try a range of EV values, especially when standard settings don't seem to be capturing the shot.

4. FAST OR SLOW: If you want to freeze the action, you need to shoot at a very fast shutter speed: 1/500 of a second or more. If you want to show something in motion, like flowers swaying in the breeze, you may want to shoot at a speed as slow as 1/15 or less (and mounted on a tripod, of course).

5. DEPTH OF FIELD TO ALTER THE COMPOSITION:

You can have a very narrow focus on just one thing, like a flower, and throw the background and surroundings out of focus. Or you can try to focus on several things at once, like a spider capturing prey in its web. Then you might want to have the sharpest focus on the spider, but make sure the prey in the foreground or background is reasonably sharp.



Lighting and exposure

The challenge in lighting close-ups is having enough light so you and your camera can focus, while evenly distributing the light to prevent shadows. With flashes, you get deep depth of field, and the extremely short bursts of light at close distances prevent camera or subject movement from blurring. But sometimes a flash will change the photo's color or cause an overexposure because it's too close to the subject. In these cases, it's best to provide another source of light.

Get creative. Use aluminum wrapped cardboard or mirrors as refractors, or set up a homemade miniature lighting tent to achieve diffused lighting. If you're inside, try different household lamps. Since you're using a digital camera, you have the freedom to experiment, check out the results, and then try something completely different.

Freedom to experiment

When it comes to close-up photography, digital camera owners have a huge advantage. You can review your results and make adjustments as you go along. The more new things you try, the better you'll get. Before long, you'll begin to intuitively know how to find the perfect exposure and just the right lighting. Get a little practice outdoors: read *Back yard photography* to learn more.

Macro photography is just the beginning of where your newfound knowledge of exposure and shutter speeds can take you. Buy a book on night photography and capture the city lights or the stars in the sky. Or experiment with blurring and freezing motion shots. Above all, be daring, and bold photographs will follow.



III. Lazy Eyes: How we read online

You're probably going to read this.

It's a short paragraph at the top of the page.
It's surrounded by white space. It's in small type.
No scrolling required.

To really get your attention, I should write like this:

- Bulleted list
- Occasional use of **bold** to prevent skimming
- Short sentence fragments
- Explanatory subheads
- Links to enhance credibility

Jakob Nielsen is a usability expert who writes on such topics as eye-tracking research, web design errors, and banner blindness. He champions the idea of information foraging.

Humans are informavores. On the Internet, we hunt for facts.

In earlier days, when switching between sites was time-consuming, we tended to stay in one place and dig. Now we assess a site quickly, looking for an "information scent." We move on if there doesn't seem to be any food around.

So how does the physical process of reading on a screen compare to paper?

Even in the days of green phosphorus monitors, studies found that there wasn't a huge difference in speed and comprehension between reading on-screen and reading on paper. Paper was the clear winner only when test subjects were asked to skim the text.

The studies are not definitive, however, given all the factors that can affect online reading, such as scrolling, font size, user expertise, etc. Nielsen holds that on-screen reading is 25 percent slower than reading on paper. Even so, experts agree on what you can do to make screen reading more comfortable:

- Choose a default font designed for screen reading, e.g. Verdana, Trebuchet, Georgia
- Rest your eyes for 10 minutes every 30 minutes
- Get a good monitor. Don't make it too bright or have it too close to your eyes
- Minimize reflections
- Avoid long lines of text, which promote fatigue
- One idea per paragraph
- Half the word count of "conventional writing!" (Ouch!)

Nielsen says we pluck the low-hanging fruit. We scan. If we don't see what we need, we're gone. His advice: Embrace hypertext. Keep things short for the masses, but offer links for the Type A's.

We'll do more and more reading on screens, but they won't replace paper—never mind what your friend with a Kindle tells you. Rather, paper seems to be the new Prozac. A balm for the distracted mind. It's contained, offline, tactile. William Powers calls paper "a still point, an anchor for the consciousness."

*Excerpts from a post by Michael Agger in **Slate Magazine**, July 2008
For full article with links to research, visit www.slate.com/id/2193552/*

PRINT uniquely engages the emotions and stimulates the senses with its classic strengths of permanence, tangibility, sensuality and physicality. The message feels real, it looks real, it springs from a real person, an intelligence to which one can relate, a human connectedness. And the result is something visible, touchable, an archive, a reference, a resource that does not arrive via thin air and will not disappear into thin air."

"Print feels more trustworthy and credible than other media, and the very tangibility and permanence suffuses the content — and the content creator — with a sense of authenticity."

*From **Graphic Design USA** reader survey, June 2007*

IV. Back Issues Online

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