

Companies spend billions of marketing dollars each year ...

... to design memorable ad campaigns. But what does it really take to make your business's name or message stick in a prospect's mind? These methods will make your next campaign memorable:

Engage Prospects

The more time someone spends with your ad, the more likely he or she is to remember it. "Vivid processing leads to better storage of memory," says Elizabeth F. Loftus, University of California, Irvine, distinguished professor of psychology, author of 21 books and an expert on memory malleability. The best ads get the advertiser or brand into the minds of prospects as they consider different possibilities.

How can you get prospects to spend more time with your ads? According to Philip W. Sawyer, director of Starch Communications, a Harrison, New York, testing firm specializing in readership studies, the most memorable print ads have messages that grab the reader. Those ads include headlines that contain a benefit and a strong visual focal point, such as a close-up of a model looking directly at you. One large photo works best in magazines, while in newspapers, you can use multi-product visuals. A Starch Communications study on behalf of the Newspaper Association of America showed that when three-quarters of ad space was devoted to illustrations, recognition rates improved by 50 percent.

Add Color and Contrast

For magazine readers, high-contrast images also boost recognition. When Starch Communications tested two identical ads for Stolichnaya vodka—one with a white background and another with a black background—twice as many people remembered seeing the version with the black background, even though everything else in the ad was the same. Testing also shows that, on average, larger ads in print media are more memorable. However, a creative ad in a small space can be more memorable than a so-so one that takes up a full page. Some colors enhance memorability in print media—including sky blue, golden yellow and shades of blue-green. Red is a good spot color in newspapers, where Sawyer says color increases recognition by 20 percent. But there's new information about four-color ads in magazines: A few years ago, color ads earned 24 percent higher recognition scores than black-and-white ads. Now, full-page black-and-white campaigns are breaking through the clutter, and four-color ads have lost their advantage.

Communicate Frequently

Repetition is important to memorability. At the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, psychologist Mark E. Wheeler conducted a study of memory in which a word was paired with a picture or sound many times over several days to test subjects' recognition rates. He says exposure to information in different contexts helps you remember it. So when you see a message in different formats, such as a print ad, a billboard and a TV commercial, he says, "You associate the different impressions, and that helps you retrieve the information when you need it."

Use Memorable Benefits

Ads that grab and hold a prospect's attention are those that immediately communicate a benefit that answers the question, What's in it for me? The bottom line, says Sawyer, is that features aren't memorable—benefits are. "If you have a headline that states a benefit, people will read it, remember it and clip it out of the magazine or newspaper and hold onto it. And that's the trump card for everything."