

*Ten ways to  
recognize a  
good ad*

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**I**t's a fact. Ads aren't required reading. So, as a marcom or advertising manager, you know your business-to-business ads must pack the power to attract, inform and persuade your audience. Moreover, since that audience is likely undergoing non-stop bombardment by competing messages, you know achieving those ends is no small task. It takes know-how on the part of your creative team—plus your ability to recognize what's good and what's not about proposed ads.

There are, of course, exceptions to most general rules. Still, the following questions and the answers they provoke can help you determine whether a proposed ad is likely to fulfill its marcom objectives or join the countless marcom messages that go unnoticed—that are often even deliberately avoided—every day. And they can help maintain focus and direction when planning advertising efforts with your creative team.

So . . . let's begin.

*Is it a product ad or*

*“corporate image” ad?*

**Y**ou often hear about “product ads” versus “image” ads. And, for practical purposes, there is a clear difference. The former ordinarily make specific claims about a company’s products or services. The latter attempt to create a favorable impression of the company as a whole, e.g., one having industry stature, superior resources, advanced technologies or other valued attributes. Often there is some overlap, but keeping these distinctions in mind during ad development can help avoid “fuzziness” in the resulting ad.

Remember, though, that in one sense every ad is an “image ad,” imparting to your audience some idea of what kind of company yours is. Is it organized or not? Does it seem to use straightforward, logical thinking? Does it exhibit a corporate personality that’s consistent? Or is it “schizophrenic” in character?

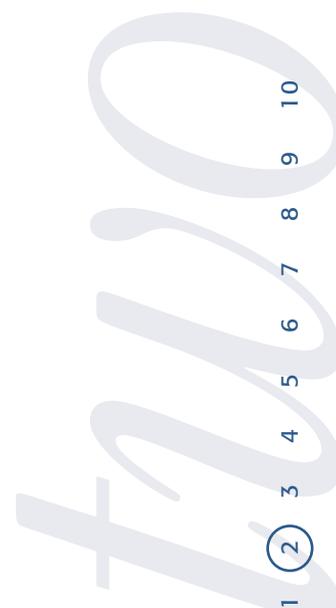
Bottom line? Whatever the objective, your ads should work together to create and maintain an attractive corporate “personality” that’s reasonably recognizable in every ad, reinforcing the image you want accepted and held by your current and prospective customers.

*Does the ad*

*“reach out and grab”*

*the reader?*

Typically, there's only a second or two in which readers can be enticed into paying an ad more than a passing glance. If an ad isn't visually appealing, if it appears as an arbitrarily assembled collage of headline, graphics, copy, logo, etc., it's a challenge few will undertake. To break through the clutter, an ad should attract readers with a clean, organized look and, ideally, with a captivating headline, attention-getting graphics, and easily read copy blocks.



*Does the ad offer  
instant relevance to  
your target audience?*

Great headlines and eye-catching graphics may draw attention, but they won't hold that attention unless a potential reader quickly decides, "This is a message clearly related to my particular business interests." So, whether the burden of making that point falls to the headline, the graphics or a combination of both, doing so—and doing so rapidly—is critical to capturing and keeping your intended audience long enough to absorb the ad's full message.

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*Does the ad immediately  
answer the “What’s in it  
for me?” question?*

Everyone has needs, problems, desires and, yes, fears. And when a solution seems readily at hand—they’re interested. So, via headlines, graphics and copy, most ads should respond directly or indirectly to one or more of those motivators. With the infrequent exception of those ads whose initial appeal is based solely on intrigue, it’s virtually always the promise of a solution that translates to higher readership.

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*Can you easily  
identify the central  
theme or point?*

**M**ixed messages aren't memorable. If your ad lastingly embeds just one major message in your reader's mind and provokes some related action, it's a success. In one ad, don't try to tell even the most patient reader everything ever known about your product or company. And don't make readers struggle to understand and believe exactly what it is you're promising them. Make your point, make it clearly, and sign off. Your audience will love you for it.



*Does the ad present a  
persuasive argument  
that flows smoothly  
from beginning to end?*

Claims of superior performance, dependability, cost-effectiveness and the like are part of virtually every business-to-business ad. Which is precisely why—without credible support—those claims mean virtually nothing. So go ahead and make your claim, state your promise. But back it up. With hard evidence. With clear examples. With demonstrable facts. Present them in a logical manner and summarize what they mean in terms of benefits to your audience.



*Do the ad's creative  
elements enhance or  
diminish the clarity  
of your message?*

Every copywriter, every art director, wants to be seen as “creative.” As David Ogilvy has pointed out, however, ads are not an art form. Nor are they entertainment. No, ads have a purpose, which is to sell—yes, sell—a product, an idea or a company. A conscientious creative team will try to present your proposition as imaginatively and with as much originality as possible. But, always, that creativity must serve—not obscure—the ad’s practical business objectives.

Incidentally, don’t underestimate the impact of the headline and copy. The right words—right in precision, tone, sound and rhythm—are powerful tools of persuasion. Contrary to popular belief, Confucius actually said, “A picture is worth a thousand pieces of “gold”—“gold,” not “words.” Recent, solid research shows words are really more powerful, more memorable, than pictures. So, ordinarily, an ad’s graphics should reinforce the headline and copy, not the other way around.

*Does the ad talk the  
reader's language?*

**S**ure, software engineers, purchasing agents, plant managers and CEOs may have different “hot buttons.” But they really are all human—well, most of them anyway. So it’s best to talk to them as one human to another, using plain, easily understood language. Despite what many academicians and the IRS appear to believe, writing is really nothing other than “talking on paper.” And reading is pretty much mentally repeating to oneself what’s been presented in print. Consequently, ad copy should typically resemble how one reasonably educated person would talk to another reasonably educated person. No meaningless jargon, no verbal pomposity, no insulting condescension.

## *What about humor?*

Undoubtedly, a light-hearted approach is almost always an asset. But, like garlic, humor is best used with discretion. You probably want your business and your offerings to be taken seriously. So you need to remain aware that there's a fine—and often critical—line between a light-hearted approach and an ad obviously focused more on getting guffaws than on getting your advertising claims seriously considered.



*OK, they got the ad's  
message. Now what?*

Unless yours is a company that can afford to develop ads designed simply to maintain a "presence" in the marketplace, you'd best propose that readers take some action. There's undoubtedly a lot more to your story, and that additional information should be made readily available via phone, fax, E-mail or the web. What you're looking to do with your ad is initiate some sort of dialogue between you and your prospects. And that's precisely where a "call to action" comes in.

*We hope we've helped*

Obviously, there's more that can be said about what constitutes a quality ad. Much can also be said about steps that can be taken early on to ensure quality ads are developed and produced in the most expedient and least expensive manner possible. In any event, we at Target Studios hope the insights provided in this brief guide assist you in keeping the effectiveness of your advertising at the very highest level possible.

Should you have any comments or questions, we'd be happy to hear from you.





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