



Successful Space

How to build a smart campaign

Some direct marketers spend thousands of dollars creating and placing space advertisements only to find their money ill spent. Can space ads be a successful part of your marketing mix? Possibly, but only if you avoid the pratfalls of failed efforts. This medium is worth testing, but how can you learn their secrets and execute successful space campaigns year after year? By breaking down the anatomy of the space ad and building a smart campaign inside and out.

Strategy: The Bones of the Space Ad

While creative is an important component, a successful space ad must begin with solid bones. Long before the creative team works its magic, you must build a sound strategy by answering these crucial questions:

What is the role of the ad? In most cases, a space ad is designed as a prospect tool. Whether the ad sells a product or generates a request for information, direct marketers have learned that a response creates a "tryer" not a customer. There must be a back-end plan to create a profitable customer. Most importantly, there must be measures in place to dictate how you are going to track response and measure success.

What can I afford to spend? Many successful space ads are not meant to create positive contribution to profits. Remember, if the primary role of your space ad is to prospect, you need to calculate how much you can

afford to spend to acquire a new customer. Most direct marketers want a one-year pay-back; thus, they initially are willing to lose money knowing they will convert a percentage of tryers to profitable customers in the future. So, the success of a space ad should be analyzed over time.

What are my options? The world of available space reaches far and wide. Magazines, Sunday supplements, free-standing inserts, newspapers ... all are viable options. At this point, affordability is crucial. Most marketers will translate "what they can afford" to "cost per one thousand possible recipients" (cost of the placement divided by reach, or total readers). Understanding your affordable options along with having a clear picture of your target audience will help you dramatically narrow the field. Other factors to consider include:

✓ **Negotiating cost.** Many space options are available at remnant pricing, negotiated by specialized brokers. You can pay as little as 10 percent of the total cost if you're willing to buy leftover space the advertiser can't sell. Many direct marketers have found that this is the only way they can afford a space ad program.

✓ **Negotiating placement.** Where your ad is placed in the magazine, newspaper or supplement also is a critical factor to success. Ideally, you always want placement on the right-hand side of a spread, preferably at the top of the page. You even can

negotiate what else goes on the spread in which your ad is being placed.

✓ **Testing.** Some formats allow you to test offers or creative within the run or within a region. While it's tricky to measure, it's worth trying if it doesn't add too much to the cost.

✓ **Timing.** If you are planning a space campaign for the first time, never choose your "down" season to place an ad. Instead, place it during the month your customers are most active. Once you've developed a winning ad, only then should you test into your non-peak seasons.

Creative: The Heart, Soul and Pretty Face of the Space Ad

Once you have the bones of the campaign assembled, it's time to move on to the next phase. Simply put, most space ads fail because of poorly executed creative. If you don't follow this vital list of essential creative tips, your ad WILL NOT work.

Offer, the heart of the ad. Your offer should be compelling and easy to translate. Because the offer is so critical, consider testing two or more offers to find the one that generates the highest response. An offer is made up of two distinct components:

1. **Product or service.** Whether you are asking the reader to make a purchase or to request more information, it's critical that you position your product as something extraordinary, easy to

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explain and unique. It also helps if the product looks interesting or can be photographed in an interesting way. If you are a cataloger, be sure your product closely represents your merchandise concept, so back-end orders will appeal to those aforementioned tryers.

2. Pricing and terms. As a rule, the higher priced the offer, the more diffi-

Copy, the soul of the ad. Without a compelling headline that immediately stops the reader, your ad will have little chance for success (unless it's replaced by a super-compelling visual). The remainder of the copy also is important, but with limited space, every word must count. Only include the most important benefits, a simple explanation of the

1. If possible, it's better to create within a vertical format rather than horizontal. The eye typically starts at the top of an ad and gravity will pull it down. This allows the designer to place information in an order that makes sense to the reader.

2. Consider the medium in which you're selling. Observe what else is being advertised in the same space, and design your ad to stand out.

3. Make sure the headline stands out, is easy to read and, preferably, is at the top of the ad where the eye goes first.

4. Use one strong visual. If you don't have a product, use your headline as the attention-grabbing visual. If it's a product, make sure it's an interesting image that necessitates a second look. You have seconds to pull the eye in, so the bigger the better.

5. Show the reader everything he would receive, especially the free stuff.

6. Make the copy as easy-to-read as possible, using short sentences, bullet points or selective use of a bold-face font that allows critical copy to stand out. The more visual you can make the copy, the better chance it will have of getting read.

7. Add a coupon to enhance response. This is a proven technique that will make or break a space ad test.

While a coupon is not always used, it says to the reader, "I'm asking you to do something."

Creating a successful space ad can be a daunting task, but if you construct it using this anatomy lesson, the payoff can be worth the effort. Testing is the key, and once you've created a winner, it can be used in many formats again and again. ■

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For more than 10 years, Cushman's has used this ad to generate prospects at a positive contribution.

cult it is to generate response. For a one-step ad, it can be difficult to sell anything over \$49, unless you offer terms (e.g., three easy payments, extended credit). Notice that it's \$49, not \$50. Consumers are very sensitive to price thresholds. Always squeak in under a whole number. When determining a price point, consider analyzing price points that have worked in past prospecting efforts. Using the word "FREE" as part of your offer usually will draw a better response. The free element can be an add-on product or shipping—as long as it has a perceived value associated with it.

offer and easy-to-understand directions on how to place an order. Always position the offer as a deal, and never be afraid to state it more than once.

Design, the pretty face of the ad. The designer should not begin working on an ad until all the previous steps are complete. The goal of the designer is to create a "stop-the-reader-in-her-tracks" layout that will guide the reader through the decision process. Here are a few proven design tips successful direct marketers have used in the creation of direct response space ads.