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Testing Advertising

"Advertising should be treated as an investment and not an expense."

Advertising should pay for itself and also make a profit.. Advertisers must know how to evaluate their advertising to derive the maximum benefits from it, Key questions that need to asked are:

Is the advertising bringing in customers?

Are they buying?

Is the advertising paying for itself and making a profit?

Given below are some ways to test advertising so effectiveness can be evaluated.

Getting it right . . .

It is rare to get things right the very first time solely on the strength of gut feeling. Yet that is how many advertisers still do advertising. Getting it right the first time can happen, and does, but it is not the rule. To avoid the frustration of advertising efforts not bearing fruit, it is necessary to pretest advertising and to know how to do such pretesting.

Advertising takes time to work. All advertising is an attempt to develop a relationship with customers. Friendships and relationships take time to develop.

If the above sounds discouraging, please keep in mind that testing and being able to evaluate your advertising will make it effective in a much shorter time. Testing eliminates guesswork, wastage of resources and makes the advertising efficient.

Create a plan to evaluate advertising

The success or failure of any plan boils down to being clear regarding what, exactly, the plan should achieve. Advertising is done to get more sales, but the objectives should be sharply focused - for example “Increase share of market from 7 percent to 9.5 percent among the 18 - 25 working males.”

Objectives can also be multi-pronged, such as: Generate more traffic and increase sales. Increase the rupee value of unit sale. Attract better quality customers. Reduce the cost of creating a new customer etc, etc.

Advertisers may want to achieve all of the above. In that case; they should draw up a table of priorities: for example:

#1. Generate more traffic

#2. Increase sales among the late-teens and early 20s.

#3. Increase awareness among the B and A classes

Conceiving the plan

Let us borrow an analogy from medical testing -- the "control group." A control group is a known entity. It is the best an advertiser has been able to do so far. Even if current advertising isn't working, it will serve as the initial control group

Begin with current advertising and test against it. If it is a newspaper advertisement, it can be used to test the effectiveness of the core message in other media, for example, radio and TV and evaluate any change. If the radio advertisement is more successful, then that becomes the new control group.

Caution: Keep in mind that a onetime good response may be a fluke. Look for consistent improvement before you make the new group the control group.

How to format your test

Knowing your customers plays a key role in the success or failure of your advertising. The better an advertiser knows the customers, the easier it is to construct the message that works with them. This also means less testing in the long term.

Don't test only the price. Keep in mind that customers do not shop exclusively for price. Customers look for benefits that will improve their life in some way. They are happy to pay the price if they can see the value.

Each and every aspect of an advertisement can be tested. The overall look and layout, the illustrations and images used, the typography, the tone of voice, and of course, the environment in which the advertisement will appear. The model in a TV commercial, the tone and quality of the voice and delivery of the narrator, even the general ambience of a TV commercial contributes to or takes away from credibility.

This last is very important; because it is here that the major part of the money spent on an advertisement goes. For example, if a fixed position or time (position or time specified by the advertiser) and an ordinary position or time advertisement pulls around the same number of responses, there is no point in paying the premium for a fixed position or time.

The design and layout of an advertisement impact its visibility and noticeability. It is always wise policy to have the agency prepare at least three options for the design of an advertisement and pre-test to see which works better.

Can I test too much?

An advertiser can test too much and that is what should be avoided. The purpose of testing is to do as few as possible and learn from the results to make the testing pay off in the long run with profitable advertising.

Here are some testing guidelines to keep in mind when you design your test packages.

- **Testing can be an ongoing process.** How many times has your brochure or business card changed? That's a form of testing that never ends.
- **Don't try to test everything at once.** It's too hard to keep track against the control group. Find one item that you really think would make a difference to your customers and just test that.
- **If you are using direct mail to test you need about 100 responses for the test to really give you a good example.** Any response above 3% is very good.
- **Try telemarketing to test before you spend bigger bucks.** 100 phone calls will get as good a result as 1,000 mailers.

- **There will always be a chance that people who receive different offers may compare notes and wonder what's going on.** Be honest and tell them you are testing some advertising. They will understand. Always honour whichever offer the customer wants. Also always provide the customer with the item at the lowest price being tested.
- **Tests can be expensive.** Only use them to test the important things. Test the "offer", the "message" and the format and usually in that order.
- **The test may reveal some negatives about your business.** Learn from these numbers and make the necessary corrections.
- **Always "key" your ads.** That's the next item we will discuss.

How to know which advertisements are pulling customers

In order to know if advertising is pulling customers advertisers need track the advertisements. We do that by "keying" the advertisements. This simply means placing a code or identification mark in the advertisement being tested.

For print media advertisements or direct mail, coupons with a small code in one of the corners can be used to let us know what publication or mailing list was utilized. KT001 can mean the advertisement was placed in the Karachi Trumpet. March 2011 can mean the advertisement was mailed in that month.

If it is a radio or TV spot, the respondents can be asked to phone in to a dedicated number where calls can be recorded. **It is better to have "live" persons answering the call-ins instead of an IVR.**



The last word on testing advertising

The real secret of testing advertising is understanding your customers and their needs. The better you know them the easier and economical the testing will be. The purpose of advertising is to reach the right people with the right message at the right time. Understanding who they are and what they may want is the most important part of any advertising exercise.