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How to Ruin a Perfectly Good Online Ad Campaign, Part 2



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How can you be sure your online advertising campaign will succeed? Start by avoiding the common -- and not so common -- mistakes that can drive an effective concept into the ground. Success or failure can be a matter of avoiding the ruts in the road left by those who have faltered.

Part 1 of this two-part series on online advertising addresses some basic errors that even sophisticated ad buyers can make: ignoring target demographics' tastes and sensibilities; using archaic assumptions when measuring the success of an online campaign; and failing to plan for follow-up activities such as fulfillment. Part 2 takes a look at some subtler missteps that can derail a strategy just as easily.

One good way to sabotage an online ad campaign is to assume that all the good keywords are taken.

Maybe the obvious ones are, but that doesn't mean a company shouldn't spend a lot of time on this step, Jeff Werner, director of communications for [WebVisible](#), told the E-Commerce Times.

"In search engine marketing campaigns, each word counts," he said. "New advertisers on the verge of investing thousands of dollars per year on a campaign should treat it like the real business investment it is."

Werner suggests the following exercise: "Ask yourself what is the single word that in your opinion would convert the best. Next, what if you could select only three words to describe the core of the business, product or service to a potential customer? Now expand that to 10 words. Then create a short paragraph. By the end of the exercise there should be a short list

of the most likely candidates. Avoid use superlatives such as 'experts' or 'the best.'"

Don't ignore commonly misspelled words, he added. They can be valuable terms.

People Are Talking

Another shortcut to failure is believing that the influence of word-of-mouth is vastly overstated.

One of the key goals of a Web ad campaign should be to activate word-of-mouth, William Madway, professor of marketing and business law at the [Villanova School of Business](#), told the E-Commerce Times. "Given this, your content must stand out in some fashion so viewers will want to spread the word to others -- and make sure the materials are easy for viewers to forward to others in various formats."

For example, videos should be available in both Windows- and Mac-compatible formats, he said. Widgets or buttons that enable visitors to forward content should be available as well.

Along the same lines, don't be afraid of user-generated content.

"Internet users are going to be shaping your advertising message whether you like it or not," Madway continued. "They are going to make comments on your marketing materials, whether [your campaign] appears online or offline. They are going to make parodies of your ads, whether you protect the content or not. They will find a way. Point of fact, this can actually be a good thing; think of the additional exposure and reach. So don't discourage user-generated content."

Allow visitors to leave comments, he advised. "Encourage a dialogue. If your brand is generally well-regarded, you'll find that the overwhelming majority of comments are favorable. Don't remove the negative ones unless they're obscene or truly slanderous. The presence of negative comments will convince visitors that the positive comments they find on your Web site are legit."

The bottom line is that one-way paid advertising doesn't always work on more conversational platforms, said Terry Dry, president and cofounder of [Fanscape](#).

"The truth is you have to use digital word of mouth to drive a true [return on investment] with the highly active users in these sites and communities," he told the E-Commerce Times.

Know Your Partners

Failing to check out the partners in an ad [network](#) is one more way to undo a campaign.

Ad networks tend to beef up their numbers with a wide variety of partnerships, Rodney Mason, CMO of [Moosylvania](#), told the E-Commerce Times. If there aren't appropriate safeguards in place, or if a client doesn't get everything in writing, an ad could appear next to content that's irrelevant or, worse, content that actually undermines it, he said.

Limit yourself to one social network -- if you're looking to fail.

"A lot of companies assume that if they build a presence on one particular social network that is sufficient to reach an entire audience," Hyder Rabbani, head of business development for [Brickfish](#), told the E-Commerce Times. "They presume the world will discover them."

To add another nail to the coffin, don't synchronize search marketing with display and offline initiatives.

A company will spend a lot of money "putting certain brand names, tag lines and offers in the market, and then when people go search for the same, the advertiser doesn't appear on the [search results](#) page because they didn't optimize for search, said Stephanie Rogers, director of contact planning at [Partners+Simons](#).

"This is a critical misstep, as it's been proven that you can increase reach and conversions by running search in conjunction with other channels versus running any channel on its own," she told the E-Commerce Times.

The Web is just one of many communications channels you can use to reach your target audience," Villanova's Madway said. "To accomplish your overall promotion goals, you most likely will need to use other channels -- media -- to reach the target, plus other tools such as public relations, direct marketing, and sales promotion. All of these elements need to work together to maximize effectiveness and efficiency."

Marketers should use the Web sites of the traditional media [vehicles](#) they're advertising on to increase the frequency of exposure to their advertising message, added Madway.

"The classic 'dilemma' of media planners is frequency versus reach," he noted. "Both are important -- but my philosophy is to make sure you dominate the media you opt to use. In other words, increase frequency until [the ad] produces sharply diminishing returns. Many traditional media companies are investing heavily to drive their audiences to the Web properties. Advertisers need to take advantage of this by being very visible on these Web sites. Plus, it should give you more leverage when negotiating rates for ad buys." [EOT](#)

[How to Ruin a Perfectly Good Online Ad Campaign, Part 1](#)

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