

Ask SCORE

By Willy Campbell

Learn the ABCs of Advertising

For a small business, taking the first steps into advertising can be an intimidating and mysterious process. Even though we see advertising everywhere, creating and using ads ourselves can seem alien and expensive. Understanding how the medium works and what it can and cannot do for a small business is tougher than it seems. And there is always uncertainty over results.

Think of advertising as one element of the broader area of marketing. You recognize it in many forms including magazines, newspapers, directories, online search engine ads, web site banners, radio spots, TV, billboards, flyers, direct mail and still others. Before you spend your hard-earned money on advertising, you will want to investigate what to realistically expect. Only then should you draw up a plan for moving ahead.

Ads can do the following:

- Attract new customers, prospects and leads
- Encourage existing customers to spend more on your product or service
- Build credibility, establish and maintain your “brand” or unique business identity and enhance your reputation
- Inform or remind customers and prospects of benefits your business has to offer
- Promote your business to customers, investors or others and slowly build sales

But here’s what advertising cannot do:

- Create an instant customer base
- Solve your cash flow or profit problems by producing an immediate sales windfall
- Cure poor or indifferent customer service
- Create benefits that don’t really exist or sell products and services that nobody wants

In short, advertising won’t guarantee quick sales for your product or service by itself, but it will get you noticed...if you do it right. That means you must know, as precisely as possible, the demographics of your target audience (visit the Moore County Chamber of Commerce) and craft a message about your product or service that will touch them. People buy to satisfy a need! You must give customers a compelling message to satisfy that need through you by their calling, visiting your web site or stopping by your business.

Your ad must also stand out in some way. It needs a “grabber”. If it fails to “grab” your potential customers, they are not likely to respond. Frequency is also key. A single ad in one place won’t do much. Getting people to see your ads as often as possible (within a budget) in different places will deliver better results.

To learn more about advertising your small business, contact the Sandhills Chapter of SCORE “Counselors to America’s Small Business”. SCORE is a nationwide nonprofit association of expert business counselors who provide free and confidential business counseling to small business owners. The Sandhills Chapter is very active in counseling, mentoring and presenting free business seminars. It is currently expanding these activities and is seeking motivated volunteers. You can reach the Chapter via the web at www.sandhillsscore.org or at 910-692-3926.

Remember – send your business questions to me at www.contact@sandhillsscore.org and don’t forget to provide a way to contact you. I may not be able to answer all of them in this column but every one will receive a personal answer from one of our Sandhills SCORE counselors!