

Seven Keys To Advertising Success

02/01/2000 - Larry Mullins

Putting all your promotion and advertising efforts together.

Editor's Note: Since the October 1998 issue Larry Mullins has treated FURNITURE WORLD subscribers to a detailed analysis of the keys to advertising and promotional success. Many industry retailers have asked for a summary of these cardinal principles. The original text of each article can be found on www.furninfo.com, the "information rich" website of FURNITURE WORLD Magazine. They are located on the Marketing Management Index (from the right side of the first split screen).

LOST SECRET #1

The Principles that Make Advertising Work (See Furniture World, OCT-NOV 1998).

Today, most furniture advertising is put together by people who have not studied the principles of advertising. Billions of dollars are spent on furniture advertising annually that was created from scratch, by ad people and CEO's who operate on "intuition." The big hitters are counting on advertising dominance in air and print media to overwhelm smaller independents. They succeed, even though they generally run weak, poorly designed ads and inane TV commercials because of sheer volume - and because smaller furniture dealers don't run ads and commercials that are any better.

The secret of gaining market share in the current print media clutter is applying sound advertising principles and creating ads that get read. The next great leap in furniture retailing will be achieved by the entrepreneur who integrates technology, good market research and the generally forgotten principles that make advertising work. These principles include the Nine Great Headline Ingredients.

9 GREAT HEADLINE INGREDIENTS

- Mention the prospect and the prospect's interests.
- Promise Benefits!
- Use news that relates to the offer.
- Provoke curiosity - create a headline and a layout that makes prospects want to read the next line. Create a next line that makes prospects want to read the next-next line. And so on.
- Mention the product favorably.
- Ask a provoking question that compels an answer.
- Make a direct command statement, such as: "Sleep deprived? Read every word of this message."
- Declare a limited time urgency.
- Declare a scarcity of the product.

Make sure your copy supports your claims. Product points support benefits. Benefits support dreams - such as better health, and a better way of living. Never point out a product point without telling people what it does for them. Always have a "buy now" factor, a call to action or people will put aside your ad and think: "That's nice. Someday I'll buy that new mattress."

Always remember a customer must understand your offer within a few seconds. No one has time to wade through computer generated ads that look cluttered and confusing. With virtually a single glance your advertisement must communicate Who?-What?-When?-Where?-How? and Why? (See Furniture World, DEC-JAN 1999 for full details.)

WHO? This is more than dropping your logo on an ad. It is weaving your unique factors through an ad so thoroughly that your ad is YOU.

Too many ads look alike, and you could paste in one sig or another and no one would know the difference. Tell your unique factors, the things that make you better, years in business and integrity factors such as your promise of satisfaction. Add your price guarantees, free delivery, lots of lighted parking, awards, community service and other things that make you special. If you want your competition to love you, leave out your unique factors.

WHAT? Tell me quickly what the event or offer is because I'm busy. Will everyone read your ad? No, only prospects will. Remember the last time you needed tires? You saw every tire ad! Talk to people who are tired of their drab living room or sick of having a stiff back every morning.

WHEN? Simple enough. When are you open? Do you make it easy for me to shop? Tell me. Can my spouse and I both shop because you are open evenings? Play it up. Only a very small city merchant can get away with closing the doors at five every day.

HOW? Make shopping user-friendly. Special terms, layaways, add-ons, credit cards, qualify for no money down 90 days same as cash, extra trained sales persons on duty. Childcare? Overnight delivery. Brainstorm with your team on ways to make shopping easier for folks.

WHY? The cruncher, the "buy now" close. It may be a limited time offer, or a limited stock appeal such as a special purchase or closeouts. Also use "why wait?" For a few dollars a month you can proudly surround yourself with the beauty and comfort you have always wanted. Start your own checklist today and hold your advertising people to using it.

LOST SECRET #2

The Three Laws for Making Effective Decisions About Advertising Media. (See Furniture World, FEB-MARCH 1999.)

LAW 1: The medium is the messenger, not the message. All media work if they do one thing: deliver your message. If your message is compelling and timely, it will be effective. You only hurt yourself when you say: "Direct mail doesn't work for us" or "People don't read ads." (Remember the last time you looked for a house or a used car? Remember reading all the small print in classified ads?)

LAW #2: Media must work together. Print, air, mail and people media must be conveying the same message. Position them so as to help them complement each other. In a special event, for example, bounce radio off of newspaper: "See our large ad in today's journal." It works.

LAW #3: Don't shotgun... dominate! If you want "mind awareness" use small space reminder ads. If you want to do business, dominate. Even a smaller retailer can do this at specific times, with the possible exception of television. For most smaller retailers, however, TV is an overrated money-pit. Use targeted mailings. In these you are on equal footing with the largest retailers.

With a creative, exciting direct-mail program you can increase your business 20% or so. If you do not have a good mailing list start building one today.

NEWSPAPER: Newspapers are one of the few places where people actually look for advertising messages. Good, productive newspaper ads are difficult to do. They require a good writer who knows furniture and understands the principles of persuasion. Good ads require good design by an individual who is not "computer graphics crazy." They also take a good merchant who understands how to merchandise and who will invest in enough space and color to make his offer stand out.

RADIO: The mobile medium. Good for event support - but buy the less expensive evenings and weekends. Tie your commercials to an event. Drive-time radio is less effective than evenings and weekend advertising for furniture event advertising. Get the furniture prospects in their cars when couples are together and are out shopping. You don't necessarily need the most expensive stations. Find a good soft rock and a country western station and dominate them. Also good are "oldies" and talk radio stations.

TV: Many agencies push TV over difficult to create newspaper because there is a commission to be paid. For most retailers, TV is a luxury in which they cannot indulge. More and more clutter, fragmentation, and rising costs make TV out of reach. It takes 5 or 6 impressions to make a commercial effective, and this is costly. People listen to radio stations but they watch TV programs. They "surf". Many use the mute button during commercials. How many TV commercials do you remember from last night? If you buy TV, stay away from the expensive spots and get the daytime soaps and talk shows. Also, narrowcasting cable can be reasonable.

PEOPLE MEDIA: (See APRIL-MAY Furniture World, 1999.)

We devoted an entire issue to People Media last year because it is the most cost effective, powerful and productive media. Yet, most people have never heard of it. People Media has three significant phases:

- The messages YOU communicate personally to associates, executives and managers.
- The messages your associates, executives and managers communicate to each other and to their families.
- The messages your associates communicate to your customers, and what they communicate about your store to their families and friends. We can't really do People Media justice in a short space, so I urge you to read the April-May article.

LOST SECRET #3

How to Plan Wisely Before Beginning Preparations for the Sale (JUNE-JULY Furniture World, 1999).

"He who fails to plan plans to fail." Vince Lombardi may have said it even better: "I never saw an effective coach, or player for that matter, who was not a good planner and a constant learner." The key to powerful planning is to time frame the planning process. When you plan,

don't try to prepare. Complete a detailed activities calendar with delegated duties, time frames, and accountability.

LOST SECRETS #4 & #5

The Keys to Flawless and Timely Preparation for the Sale and The Discipline of Focused, Upbeat Execution During the Event (See Furniture World, AUGUST-SEPT 1999 for complete details about planning, preparation, execution, and time framing).

Essentially, time framing features five stages: Learning, Planning, Preparation, Execution, and Evaluation. Each activity must be done within its own time frame, and generally in sequence. The first three stages done completely and precisely result in the ability to execute with excellence. When it's "show time," it's too late to plan or prepare, you have to go for it and do the best you can. Time framing is a golden key to success.

LOST SECRET #6

The Need to Evaluate Results & Redirect Personnel After the Event (Furniture World, OCT - NOV 1999).

Every successful coach holds meetings after a big game. Do you? The idea is twofold. First, when a big event is over, there is a letdown. People need to be redirected and inspired. Second, there needs to be an evaluation of the event. How did we do? What can we do better? For example, did you pull traffic, but people walked? That always means they did not see what they expected to see. The advertising set up expectations. Maybe the store looked ho-hum. Maybe the prices were not perceived to be exciting. Note the list of questions in the October-November 1999 article, they are key questions to ask after any event.

LOST SECRET #7

The Irresistible Competitive Advantage of Superlative Service (Furniture World, DEC-JAN 2000).

Most women begin to dream about and plan their homes when they are children. Buying furniture is always a mega-event. We should never forget that everyone is offering "one year same as cash." That's table stakes today. Everyone has a price guarantee. Furniture values are the greatest in history, and everyone is very competitive. So what can you offer that others cannot? Confidence. You can teach salespeople dozens and dozens of methods and techniques, but addressing a woman's three greatest fears about furniture shopping will immediately pay off more than anything else you can teach. These three fears will not usually be directly revealed in focus groups, because the right questions are not always asked. The three deepest fears about shopping for furniture has nothing directly to do with price, selection, delivery or quality guarantees. These fears are related to an intangible, invisible ingredient of the sales experience: the service factor. These fears are:

- She will make a buying mistake.
- A pushy salesperson will convince her to buy something she does not really want.
- Everyone will look at her furniture purchase for years to come, and know she made a mistake.

The magic phrase for winning their confidence is: "Believe me, I am trained to help you find exactly the (living room furniture) you want and I will not let you make a mistake. And, trust me, you will be proud whenever any guest comes into your home."

This phrase works because it is simple, and any salesperson can understand and execute it. It is so important that it is done well because there is no way to guarantee it. Service is really like that. People know they are at your mercy when it comes to service. Selling service is selling the invisible, and you are in the service business. Trust is critical. But, once you give customers the gift of confidence, you have added value to your products that nothing else can come close to. Next day delivery, one year same as cash, price guarantees and all the other table stakes are good for the close. Building confidence is for opening the sales sequence and the shopping experience. If the opening is not right, and better than your competitor's, you will rarely get to the close.

What about the rotten customer who will take advantage of you? Let them. Never establish a service policy based upon protecting you from the lowest common denominator of customer. You are after bigger fish. Base your service strategy on honest, normal customers. Can you execute a broad promise of satisfaction successfully? Yes. Just remember the principle: Agree with your disgruntled customer quickly. The very first associate in your company who talks to them should use this magic phrase: "We want you to be satisfied. We will do what it takes. I promise you that." What about the rare nutcase customer who can't be satisfied no matter what? YOU deal with it. Case by case.

These are the "Seven Lost Secrets" of great furniture promotion. The articles over the last year or so contained the distilled knowledge of a lifetime of making furniture promotions work. They still work today. Even if you are successful, always think: "What would I do if I were a competitor to take away business from my company?" Then, you do it first.

Larry Mullins, President of UltraSales, Inc., has 30+ years experience in the front lines of retail furniture marketing. Larry's mainstream executive experience, his creative work for "promoter-specialists," and study of advertising principles has enabled him to continually develop new High-Impact strategies for independent furniture retailers that are sound, complete, and innovative. Inquiries can be sent to Larry care of FURNITURE WORLD at editor@furninfo.com.

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