It Pays to Advertise

No matter how wonderful your company's product or service is, if you don't advertise, nobody will know about it. The goal of any advertising program should be to cost-effectively reach the largest audience possible and attract new customers. If done correctly, advertising can be a wonderful investment for your small business; if done poorly, advertising can become a huge money sink.

Here are 10 important tips to help you plan, execute, and monitor your advertising program.

1. Go After Your Target Audience

An advertising campaign should be geared toward your niche market. It is a common mistake to create generic ads that do not speak the language or grab the attention of your potential customers.

Ask yourself what kind of customers you want to attract, and make sure your ads speak to them on a personal level.

2. Highlight Your Competitive Advantage

One of the keys to all advertising is to accentuate the pros of your company -- those factors that give you your competitive edge. Too many ads are clever but fail to sell the specific benefits of the featured product or service. Unless you highlight these benefits, your ad delivers no value to potential customers.

3. Establish an Image

You can recognize the McDonald's arches while whizzing by on the highway. Likewise, there are plenty of products that you recognize by their packaging or logo.

Image counts when it comes to advertising and promoting your business. Too many advertisers do not work to build a consistent image, and they're missing the chance to make an impression on prospective customers.
4. You Have to Spend Money to Make Money

There are ways to save money, but advertising is typically not the place to cut corners. Doing so will affect sales, and that affects the bottom line. Successful advertising may cost some money, but that is because it works.

5. Advertise in the Right Places

Your favorite magazine, radio station, or even television program might not be a favorite of your audience. Do some research about your target market to understand who they are and determine what they read, watch, and listen to. Then advertise in the appropriate media to ensure that you reach your target market.

6. Don't Allow Your Budget to Run Your Advertising Campaign

If you budget $5,000 per month for advertising, you've made it very easy from a bookkeeping perspective. However, if like most businesses you have seasonal highs and lows, you are spending too much money advertising during down times and not enough when you want to attract customers. Too many entrepreneurs do not budget according to their seasonal advertising needs.

7. Diversify

It is all too common for business owners to choose the best place to advertise based on price and potential rate of returns, and then stop. As is the case with investing, you do not want to put all of your eggs in one basket. Spread your advertising dollars around by choosing a variety of suitable media for your audience and budget.

8. Don't Try to Be Everything to Everyone

No product or service will appeal to everyone. Many business owners, including corporate executives, try to come up with ways to reach every market. Typically, this does not work. It can spell disaster for small businesses, who cannot afford to spread themselves too thin. Therefore, find your market and be everything you can be to that audience.
9. Test Your Ads in Advance

If you have the time or money to invest in focus groups, you should test your ads on other people. Do they understand and accept the message you are trying to convey? If not, get insight into how you could more effectively communicate your message.

There are other less-expensive ways to test your ads as well -- questionnaires, for example.

10. Monitor Your Ads

It is very easy to ask new customers or clients where they heard about you. As simple as this is, many entrepreneurs do not bother to do so. It is advantageous to understand which elements of your ads are most effective and which media offer the most profitable advertising opportunities for your company.