

Good vs Bad Commercials

Tired of wasting money on ineffective advertising? Here's how to craft hard-working ads that get REAL results.

Sunday morning. You pour yourself a bowl of cereal, head for the living room and reach for the remote. As you sit half-awake waiting for your favorite home-remodeling show to begin, a sudden explosion nearly blows you off the couch.

"THE COUNTDOWN IS ON!" a voice booms as flames fill the screen. This assault on the senses can mean only one thing — a sale is on at the local Clutterbuck Dodge.

As you fumble for the remote, the voice fires away at machine-gun speed:

- Home of the half-priced, easy-finance deal so good it's BETTER THAN GREAT!
- All with prices TOO LOW TO ADVERTISE!
- Whatever you're looking for, WE'VE GOT IT!
- Plus, take a test drive, and we'll enter you to win a FREE, 62-INCH TV!

Before you hit mute, you notice the announcer's voice has an echo, perhaps to imply that he's not only really, really excited, but also God himself.

The commercial ends and you turn the sound back on, wondering how Clutterbuck stays in business. After all, they've been making these grating commercials since you were a kid. You briefly ponder their sanity and then lose yourself in your favorite program. You don't give even a moment's thought to that old Dodge Charger languishing in your garage. It's due to turn over 300,000 miles any day now — and is almost certain to fail this year's emissions checkup.

How much are ineffective commercials costing your business?

While the above example is extreme, it highlights a common problem. Many business owners who shell out for expensive radio and TV spots aren't sure how to tell a "good" commercial from a "bad" one.

Knowing the difference is crucial, especially for small and medium-sized companies that take an active role in scripting and producing their own advertising. But it's worth noting that large corporations, savvy in-house marketing teams and even advertising agencies can (and do) produce commercials that are expensive flops.

In this report, we'll describe proven techniques for crafting effective spots that get results. We'll explore time-tested ways to evaluate your audience, motivate your consumers and avoid common pitfalls. While we'll focus on radio and TV commercials, you'll also be able to apply many of these principles to your print and web advertising.

Armed with this information, you'll be able to direct your company's campaigns, evaluate the work of your ad agency, and ensure your marketing dollars are spent on substance — not expensive fluff.

An ad's worth

As a marketing consultant, I've worked with my share of Clutterbucks — companies that have poured small fortunes into ineffective advertising over the years. Often, these clients are very confused. They've created a commercial they really like, one that's original, sophisticated, has high production values and even a few special-effects bells and whistles.

"Isn't it a great commercial?" they'll ask.

"That depends," I'll answer. "How well does it sell?"

All too often, they'll scratch their heads. Because like so many business people, they've bought into the myth that "good" advertising is clever, attention-grabbing and looks like it was shot on a Hollywood sound stage. But in reality, there's only one way to tell a good ad from a bad one:

Good advertising produces results

Every marketing piece you put out, whether it's a TV commercial, radio spot, direct mail, email blast or billboard, must move your audience to action. Maybe you want them to call your office or order a product from your website. Maybe you're trying to drive foot traffic to your store or increase subscriptions to your newsletter.

If your commercial accomplishes its goals, it's a good commercial. Period. Notice that I haven't mentioned concept, cleverness, visual appeal or artistry. That's because while such factors may appeal to your ego, they don't sell or motivate customers (at least not by themselves). In fact, a simple, inexpensive commercial can be very effective — good news for small businesses with limited advertising budgets.

It's not about you

Why are so many companies being sucked dry by ineffective TV and radio campaigns? Because all too often, we let our egos get in the way of good salesmanship. As a consultant, a big part of my job is to show clients how a good commercial can feed their business — instead of a bad commercial feeding their ego.

When clients describe a commercial they have in mind, the company is often the star. They talk about their products, their services and their history in the community. They speak of awards they've won, achievements they've achieved, parades they've marshalled. But while understanding your business's strong points is a great place to start, it's only a small part of the sales equation. Because fundamentally:

Effective advertising is not about you. It's about your prospective customers

If you want to move your audience members to action, you'll need to understand their needs, desires and problems. Then you'll need to show them how your products and services will give them exactly what they want and need. Understanding your consumers is so crucial that we've made it first in our six steps to crafting effective commercials.



1. Know your audience

Let's return for a moment to Clutterbuck's catastrophic commercial. What if instead of relying on special effects and vague promises, Clutterbuck offered you a workable solution to your current vehicle crisis? As the owner of a terminally ailing clunker, you might have responded to:

- A \$1,500 minimum trade-in offer (saves you the hassle of selling your old car)
- Dozens of vehicles still under warranty (you're tired of shelling out for repairs)
- Driving away today in a slightly-used Dodge (drastically increases your chances of getting to work on Monday)

Remember, the best ads start by reflecting consumers' thoughts, needs, feelings, desires and motivations. Before you script your next commercial, take the time to really get inside their heads. Some questions to consider:

- Who buys this product or service? Are they homeowners? Families? Small repair shops? Restaurants? Picture your potential market (or markets) as clearly as possible.
- What does the product or service do for them?
- Why do they need this product? And why do they need it now?
- What motivates your buyers? Are they trying to save money? Save time? Do they want to feel safe and secure? Learn something new? Feel more attractive? Or are they afraid of something? Fear is a real deal!

How do you get inside the minds of buyers? Ask them. Remember, market research doesn't have to be costly. Inexpensive tools like comment cards, focus groups and online surveys will help you better understand your consumers — and even identify overlooked marketing opportunities.

2. Highlight benefits

If there's a silver bullet to crafting an effective ad, it's the features and benefits equation. Before we dive in, let's start with a few definitions:

- **Features** are descriptive facts about your product or service. For example, this iPod uses advanced volume-control technology, or this Prius gets over 50 miles to the gallon.
- **Benefits** are what the product does for the user. For example, volume control protects your teenager from early-onset hearing loss, or this fuel-efficient Prius saves you up to \$1,000 per year at the pump.

People who are new to advertising tend to highlight the features of their products, services and company. But as you may have already guessed:

The key to creating an effective commercial is to emphasize benefits.

Remember, while your customers may think it's nice that your real estate firm has been around since 1903, that fact alone won't move them to list their house with you. **For greater effect, try pairing that feature with a benefit.** Show potential sellers how your 100+ years of experience can connect them with highly-qualified buyers and produce a faster, more profitable sale.



3. Make a promise

Why should hungry college kids choose you from among the myriad of pizza shops in town? What do you offer patients that other chiropractors don't? One way to stand out from the competition is to incorporate a promise into your commercial.

If you make a promise, you must be prepared to live up to it at all times. There is nothing more harmful to business than promises made and not kept. In advertising lingo, **a promise that describes your major advantage over competitors is known as your value proposition.**

Some famous value propositions you may recognize:

- "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight." (FedEx)
- "Fresh, hot pizza delivered to your door in 30 minutes or less — or it's free." (Domino's)
- "Melts in your mouth — not in your hand." (M&M's)

Crafting an effective value proposition isn't easy. It requires a nuanced understanding of both your audience and competitors. But because it's such a powerful marketing tool, developing a value proposition is well worth the time and effort, whether you work on your own or with a marketing professional.

4. Create urgency

Much like us, our customers have children, bosses, significant others, bills and annoying telemarketers clamoring constantly for their attention. So if they like your commercial, they may decide to pay you a visit — just as soon as the kids' soccer season wraps up, the taxes are done or the big raise comes through.

How can you get customers to act now — while your usefulness and promise are still fresh in their minds? **You emphasize the benefits of moving quickly.** In other words, you create urgency.

For example, if you run an auto repair service, show customers the benefits of changing their oil every 3,000 miles. You might talk about how frequent changes can extend engine life, save them money on gas and help them pass their emissions tests. To create additional urgency, you can discuss how summer driving (or dry-weather driving or cold-weather driving) puts additional stress on their vehicles.

Another way to create urgency is to make a limited-time offer. If you use this approach, be sure to let customers know exactly how long they have to act. For example, instead of announcing "the countdown is on," Clutterbuck could have used language like "this weekend only" or "you have until Friday." This precise approach gets customers mentally reviewing their schedules — and thinking of exactly when they can stop by.



5. Avoid clichés

“Sunday, Sunday, Sunday!” This timeworn advertising intro, originally coined by auto racing announcer Jan Gabriel, has been echoing through radios and TV’s for over 40 years. The phrase has in fact outlived Gabriel, who died in 2010.

“Sunday, Sunday, Sunday” is an example of a once-clever advertising motif that has achieved cliché status. A cliché is any saying or turn of phrase that has been overused to the point of weariness. To illustrate, imagine a commercial built around the following phrases. Notice a small cringe or eye-roll factor you read there?

- “The best thing since sliced bread!”
- “Selling like hotcakes!”
- “Good as gold!”
- “We’re slashing prices like never before!”

What’s the harm in clichés? To start with, they don’t sell. They’ve been attached to so many different products and services over the years; they no longer spark a useful association in the mind of the consumer. Notice also that most clichés are generic. They don’t highlight specific benefits that can solve your customers’ problems or meet their needs. And finally, clichés are boring. There’s no tangy language and useful detail for the ear to latch onto, so your audience ignores or forgets them.

You know more than anyone what makes your business unique and useful to your customers. Use your commercials to describe this in strong, original, evocative language that’s free of clichés.

6. Ask for action

Congratulations! You and your marketing consultant have just scripted an effective commercial that’s geared toward your audience, focused on benefits, cliché-free and gives the buyer a reason to act quickly. Now you can kick it over to the production company and prepare for hordes of customers.

Err, not so fast. As you’re putting your finishing touches on your commercial, make sure that you’ve included a “call to action.” This statement tells customers exactly what you want them to do and leaves no room for doubt. Also, you want to be sure to restate your value proposition:

- Call 888-555-2939 for a free, 30-minute consultation
- Stop by our showroom between now and Wednesday, and you’ll save an additional \$500
- Hurry in today...this sale must end this Sunday!
- Clutterbuck Dodge takes the worry out of buying a new car (note the restated value proposition)

The call to action is a great place to emphasize benefits and create urgency in the consumer’s mind. If possible, state your call to action twice and make sure it always appears toward the end of your commercial where it will have the most impact. And finally, **always mention your company name three times in the copy — your customers need to remember who you are.**



Clutterbuck 2.0

A few Sundays later, you're digging into your weekend Cheerios when the Clutterbuck Dodge logo appears on your screen. But instead of explosions, you see a ticking clock.

"You've got three days to get a great deal on your next truck!" The announcer, while enthusiastic, is no longer booming or echoing. Instead, upbeat music plays while the voice takes you through the benefits of Clutterbuck's latest promotion:

- Choose from a big selection of new Ram-tough trucks — half ton, three-quarter-ton and heavy-duty!
- Save up to \$12,000 off the MSRP!
- \$2,000 minimum trade-in!
- On-the-spot financing for approved buyers!
- Drive away in a Ram today!

As the camera pans across a row of shiny trucks, your thoughts jump to your dying clunker. Wouldn't it be nice to finally swap it for a pickup? Halfway through your show, you shut off the TV, start your Charger for the last time, and head across town to Clutterbuck.

simplify Your Advertising

Tired of wasting money on ineffective advertising? simplifyMyAdvertising is a full service Ad Agency that helps companies of all sizes and advertising budgets craft hard-working campaigns that get results. For a no-obligation consultation, contact David Brower, Chief Creative Officer, at 855-746-7543 (toll free) 855-simplify. You can also reach David by email at David@simplifyMyAdvertising.com.

About the Author

David Brower has over 20 years of experience in marketing, advertising and creative communications. He began his career in radio and television and became a highly-rated on-air personality and award-winning play-by-play announcer. He later served as VP and General Manager for a group of radio stations in Chico, California.

From 2001 to 2008, David worked as a Regional Marketing Manager for the nation's eighth-largest automotive group. In this role, he directed the creative and marketing activities of 29 dealerships in 12 states and oversaw an annual advertising budget of over a million dollars.

To learn more about David Brower and his company please visit www.PoppaLLC.com and experience what he calls his "family of creativity."



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