



More Customers: **A Practical, Affordable** **Marketing Approach for the** **Service Business**

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Book Excerpt - Chapter 2

Free Sex **How To Write An Effective Ad**

Whether you're placing an ad in the newspaper or designing a flyer, your ad must catch the eye of the intended reader. Most advertising experts will tell you that the average person scans one entire page of a newspaper in less than one second. What that means is that your ad needs to stand out in some way among everyone else's ad. How do you do this without spending a fortune on full page advertising or multi color printing? You need to be creative and follow these simple steps:

1. **THINK LIKE YOUR CUSTOMER** — Don't think like a business person, picture yourself as the consumer. After all you are a consumer and you purchase services every day. Let's say you are looking for someone to build a screen room on the back of your house. What would catch your eye in an ad. Perhaps a picture of a screen room? How about the ad run upside down? What about a bold title across the top of the ad that says FREE SEX?

Design the ad in handwriting rather than print type. Run the ad in an unusual place, maybe an ad for lawn mowing could be run in the classifieds under office equipment for sale. You would think it was placed there by mistake, but you read it, don't you? Run several classified ads, in several different categories instead of one big ad. These are just a few of the techniques that have been used by small and sometimes big business to capture the eye of the reader. They work and they work well. Sit down with the Sunday paper and study the ads. Which ones grab your attention and why? Jot down the reasons the ad appeals to you for future reference.

2. **AD TITLE** — The title of the ad has got to entice the reader to read on. The words, FREE SEX, at the beginning of this chapter got your attention, didn't it? Sex has been used as means of attracting people's attention for years. Of course the ad had nothing to

do with sex but it worked. Be careful with such a bold eye-catching word. If you are selling a service to housewives or senior citizens, the word sex across the top of your ad may not go over well with them. There are many, many ad titles that can be used to capture the eye of the reader, your potential customer. The following are some ideas that have been used and can work for you too.

AD TITLES

***FREE-** The word “FREE” will always get the attention of someone. As humans, we are curious and we want to know what it is that’s free. This word is used so often in advertising that you would think the average consumer would get accustomed to seeing it and would ignore it. This is partially true but, used properly it can be an effective word. For example, Free Lawn Mowing, Get your Car Washed Free, Free House Cleaning, Free Your House of Bugs and Will Do It For Free.

***ASK A QUESTION-** a question across the top of an ad can also be quite effective and eye catching. Looking for a Screen Room? Tired of those Pesky Bugs? Is it Time to Paint the House? Are your Carpets Dirty? Does your Lawn look like a Jungle? All these titles are effective questions that have worked to get the consumer to read on. The reader will be drawn to read on and find the answer to the question.

***LIMITED-** “For a Limited Time Only” is another effective eye-catching title. The reader is going to want to know, what is it that is being offered for a limited time only? This phrase is often used in ads in the middle or end of the ad.

***WHAT YOU DO-** Don’t be afraid to use a title that simply states what you do. For example, Carpet Cleaning, Marble Polishing, Car Washing, Lawns Mowed, Air Conditioning Fixed, these are all effective titles. After all if I am looking for someone to fix my air conditioner, Air Conditioners Fixed, will grab my attention. A variation of what you do might be to include a question. “Leaky Pipes? We fix 'em” is an example of combining a question with what you do.

***BENEFITS-** Title your ad with a benefit. “Win the Yard of the Month” “Cure your Allergies” are great ads for landscaping and lawn mowing services. They list a benefit to the consumer. Notice the clever use of the word allergies. A large portion of the population has allergies, especially to grass (the kind you mow). This is a great way to get those people to read your ad. This can also work for other service businesses. Be creative and study your customers and you will be surprised what angles you can come up with. Ok I’ll give you one more. “Oh, My Aching Back” is not an ad title for a chiropractor, although it could be. It’s an ad for a moving company. Like allergies a large portion of people have bad backs and this title would grab their attention.

***YOUR COMPANY NAME-** If your company name in some way describes what you do then use it as the title. “Bob’s Plumbing”, “Mary’s Maids” and “Joe’s Air Conditioning” are all names that describe your service. On the other hand, if your name does not describe what you do, do not use it as the title. Johnson’s Enterprises, Smith and Sons, Smith and Associates should not be used as a title for an ad. Most small business

entrepreneurs are proud of their company names. They also like to see their name in print. That's all fine and dandy but, guess what? Your potential customers don't care if your name is Mickey Mouse Enterprises. Your name will not catch their eye unless your company name somehow describes what you do. Most marketing books will emphasize the importance of name recognition. This is why McDonalds, Burger King, IBM, Apple and other big businesses bombard the market with their name. This does not work for small business with a small advertising budget. Resist this temptation and you will find your ad response will increase.

Be creative and imaginative when choosing the title of your ad. Don't be afraid to try something new. If you think it will get your ad read, try it. One last title that I have found works very well is, "Don't Read This Ad". How many of those who read these words could resist not reading on? Give it a try.

3. ART AND CARTOONS — Take a look at the following ads. Which ad is more attractive?

Floors Lost Their Shine?

**Call the pros at ABC Floor Care and we'll
Floor you with our professional service**

**For a free estimate call
407-888-8888**



Floors Lost Their Shine?

**Call the pros at ABC Floor Care
and we'll Floor you
with our professional service**

**Call for a free estimate
407-888-8888**

The one with the cartoon, of course. The more art you can use in an ad the better. The human eye is attracted to pictures more than words. The old cliché, "a picture is worth a thousand words" also applies to advertising. Use art that is descriptive. If you install screen rooms, use a picture of a screen room. The average reader might overlook your title, but it will be difficult for them to ignore a picture. If you do use a picture make sure it is clear and easy to see. Remember, you want to be able to recognize what the picture is in under one second.

Whenever possible use cartoons in your ad. People look at cartoons. There are many cartoons that are available in art supply stores that can be used. Ask the salesman for cartoon clip art. Clip art is non-copyrighted art that can be used in your ads. What if you can't find a cartoon that fits your service? Hire an artist. Look in the yellow pages under art schools and hire a student to do some custom art work for you. It is very inexpensive, for \$100.00 or less an art student will do a dozen cartoons for you. Once you choose a good cartoon use it over and over again in all your ads. If you advertise continuously people will learn to associate the cartoon with your name and service. Have the cartoon painted on your trucks for added exposure. The same art student that drew the cartoon can probably paint the truck.

4. MAIN BODY — Lets discuss the main body of what your ad will say and more importantly, how to say it. We've already established a title to be placed across the top of the ad. This is to grab the attention of the reader. Now that you have their attention, you need to tell them more. The key word in this case is **BENEFITS**. The customer wants to know what they are going to get by calling you. When designing the main body of the ad continue to think like a customer. The reader could care less that you have fancy trucks or high tech equipment. He wants to know why he should call you and not your competition. Why should he call you? Give him a reason. That reason will be **BENEFITS**.

What kind of benefits should you include? Let's take a look at some possible benefits:

* **DISCOUNTS**- Discounts have been around for as long as the printing press. The discount can be structured in several different ways. A coupon included in the body of the ad or the entire ad itself can serve as a coupon. The coupon can be a percent off the regular service or it can be a free service. For example, a house painter may include **ONE ROOM PAINTED FREE** when the customer purchased three rooms or more. This system works effectively for carpet cleaners, but can be applied to all other service businesses. The coupon can also work to quote a price and offer a discount. **ANY HOUSE PAINTED FOR ONLY \$699** and **ANY SIZE LAWN MOWED FOR \$45** are examples of what can be offered in a coupon form.

WARNING: Be careful with discounts and coupons. Customers have a tendency to hold on to a coupon for a long time. I have had several customers pull out one of my coupons several years after running it. For this reason always place an expiration date on your offer. Give your discount some real thought and consideration. If you offer any house painted for \$699, would you be willing to paint a very large house for that price? A small disclaimer at the bottom of the ad is acceptable. **ANY HOUSE PAINTED FOR \$699***. The asterisk* would be placed at the price and at the bottom of the ad. The asterisk would appear again with a disclaimer that might read, *Included any one story, three bedroom home. Before you submit your ad have several friends review it. Have your wife or husband take a look at it. If you have kids of reading age, have them review it too. Have them try to find the loop holes. You'll be surprised what they might find.

***GIVE AWAYS:** If you used the word **FREE** in the title of your ad, you better tell the reader what it is he is getting free. Make it easy and simple. If you tantalized the reader with **LAWNS MOWED FREE** you better tell them how. One free lawn mowing with the purchase of a six-month contract might be your next line. Whenever you used the word free, tell them what it is that's free. I cannot emphasize this enough. Customers are used to getting ripped off and you want to be clear with your offer. Don't try something sneaky. You'll get in trouble.

Tell them why they need to call: This is a good place to list several benefits that will grab their attention. How long have you been in business? Customers look for businesses that have been around for a long time. "In Business for 25 Years" is good, but "Serving the Greater Chicago area for 25 Years" is better. If you just opened your business but you have worked for someone else before, you might want to use something like "Fixing Air Conditioners for the past 30 years". You're not lying you're telling the reader you are experienced.

Do you offer 24 hour emergency service? Carpet cleaners, plumbers, restoration services etc., generate a lot of emergency business. If you offer emergency service, tell them you do. If a customer has an emergency they are going to call the ad that has emergency service listed — I guarantee it. A big plus would be to add a response time. Instead of **24 HOUR EMERGENCY SERVICE**, you may want to say, **24 HR EMERGENCY SERVICE — FASTEST RESPONSE IN TOWN.**

Customers like to shop around and get competitive bids. **WILL BEAT ANY WRITTEN OFFER**, is one way to get them to call only you.

They still may check several others but are less likely to call dozens of your competitors. Be prepared to offer a lower price. A better way to say it may be **WILL BEAT ANY LEGITIMATE PRICE IN TOWN.** Do you offer additional services? If you do, list them in your ad. If you are in the lawn mowing business, you might also offer lawn spraying, yard clean-up, mulch etc. If you don't tell your customers, they may never know. This is especially important if you are a handyman service.

Are you licensed and insured? If your city, state or county requires a special license for your type of service, advertise it. This informs the customer you are legitimate and adds some credibility. Another good idea is to print your license number in the ad. Are you insured? It's surprising how many service companies are not insured. This is a big plus in commercial work.

If you don't carry insurance, you might as well forget commercial work.

How does your service differ from your competitors? If you're a carpet cleaner maybe you offer dry cleaning instead of extraction or vice versa. Think about what you offer that is an advantage over your competitor. You need a competitive edge. Once you find it, advertise it.

Copy what works. Have you ever noticed certain ads in the newspaper that appear every week, month after month? Why do you think they appear so frequently? Because they work. Study these ads carefully and borrow from their success. If it works for them, it could work for you. Be careful not to crowd your ad. Too much information in an ad can make it hard to notice and read. The purpose of your ad is to get the customer to call you, nothing less nothing more. A well laid out ad will do the trick.

5. AD ENDING — Your ad should end with your phone number and your business name. If you have an 800 number use it. I have found that 800 numbers in the service industry are not that beneficial. Unless you are servicing areas out side of your calling area, an 800 number is not necessary. Make sure your phone number is clear and easy to read. Do NOT use italicized or calligraphy fonts for your number. Most people will look at the very bottom of the ad for your phone number. Put it there and make it easy to find. If you're a small one or two person service you may want to try placing your name, not your business name, alongside your phone number. CALL BOB AT 000-0000 can work wonders. This technique lets the customer know that he is dealing with a small company. This is important because many customers dealing with service business prefer to do business with small operators. They know that the small operator is struggling and will be there to take care of any problems that arise. They respect the working man trying to make a living.

What about your business name? If the name of your business is not descriptive of your services, place it at the bottom of the ad. Do not make it too large. Typically your business name should not be larger than the font size of the main body of the ad. One of the major mistakes made by most service businesses is to place their name on top of the ad. As I mentioned before, the customer doesn't care a hoot about your name. Swallow your pride and place your name at the bottom of the ad.

Writing an effective ad is not difficult if you follow the tips I have presented above.

WHEN, WHERE AND HOW OFTEN?

When is the best time to place an ad? Where is the best place to display it and how often should you run it? The success of your ad will depend heavily on all three of these questions. A great ad means nothing if your potential customer doesn't see it. The following hints will help you select the When, Where, and How Often to place your ad.

WHEN

Have you ever noticed there are more ads and inserts in the Sunday newspaper than on any other day? There's a good reason for this. More people read the Sunday paper. If you watch the paper carefully, you will also notice that there is generally more advertising in the winter months than there are in the summer. The summer is vacation time for many Americans and we spend more time outdoors during the summer months, which means we read less. These little observations can save you hundreds and even thousands in wasted advertising cost. Study your service carefully to determine when is

the best time to advertise. If you're in landscaping, your peak months are going to be Spring, Summer and Fall. Don't advertise for landscaping during the winter months. On the other hand if you plow snow, advertise in the winter.

No matter what services you provide there are certain trends that can be predicted. These trends can be seasonal as we described above. They can be based on disasters. The roofing industry in Florida had to turn business away due to hurricane Andrew. Carpet cleaners were flooded with business (no pun intended). And of course the building and construction business was booming. Unfortunately, hundreds of fly-by-nights and scam artists take advantage of the disaster victims. Do not try to make a fast buck, people will remember. Disasters are a time to help your community as well as build a good reputation. Stand out from the crowd, offer discounts to disaster victims. This is one way of showing the community you are a legitimate business and not one of the con artists. Since hurricanes, floods, tornados etc. can not be predicted it is difficult to place your advertising before the damage. Newspaper ads can be run within 24 hours of their deadline. Flyers can be printed in less than an hour. Contacting Insurance companies is another great idea. The best time to advertise is when you don't need more business. I know what you're thinking, if you didn't need more business you wouldn't be reading this book. That's true and the point I am trying to make is advertising takes time. People may clip your ad and stick it on their refrigerator for several weeks or months. I will never forget a customer of mine who presented me with a coupon that I ran two years ago. Customers save ads and take time to react on them. If you keep your ad running hopefully you won't experience a slow time. The key is to keep the ad running no matter what and the customers will come.

WHERE

Newspapers, magazines, trade journals, bill boards, signs, flyers, card packs, yellow pages, etc., are all effective media for placing your ad. Where you place the ad is important, and subsequent chapters in this book will describe the details of each of these medias.

HOW OFTEN

One of the biggest mistakes small service businesses make is to run their ad for a short period of time. They place the ad in the newspaper for one week and sit back waiting for the phone to ring. Guess what? The phone doesn't ring. In order for advertising to be effective it must be in front of the consumer's eye constantly.

Let's take a look at why this is important. Suppose you are a home owner having trouble with your maid service, lawn service or any other service. You pick up the newspaper and see an ad for another service. You make a mental note, read the rest of the paper and by Monday morning the paper is in the recycle bin. During the next several weeks you decide to fire the maid or lawn service and you remember seeing the ad in the sports section on Sunday. You pick up Sunday's paper and start to look for the ad. Get the idea? It is a well known fact amongst the advertising world that frequency is more important than any other factor with your ad. If it's run long enough people notice it. It can be the corniest ad ever conceived, but guess what, people remember it.

Take a close look at your budget and plan to run your ad for at least three months or more. I have found six months is best. If the ad is successful continue to run it. You can obtain some good discounts by running your ad for a given period. It is better to run a small ad for several months then to blow your whole advertising budget on one big full page ad. I know—I've made this mistake. Frequency works not only in newspaper and magazine advertisement but also in direct mail, flyers and all types of media. If you send a direct mail piece follow it up with another one in several months and then a third.

Frequency is the key in advertising—believe me it works!

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