

Effective Banner Ads

Banner ads are not created equal. Some are meant to be effective in conveying your message, while some are meant to be ignored. Low click rates are not necessarily the result of the medium but rather, the effectiveness of your banner ads in building brand awareness, generating click-throughs, and boosting sales depends on how it was created.

To make sure that your banner advertising dollars are spent well, your banners must be designed and implemented with the following characteristics:

1. Keep your message short and simple. You only have a few seconds to capture the attention of the viewer. Hence, you must be able to get your point across in a few words, as a wordy ad won't get read. Find the right words and images - including animated GIFs that allow short messages to rotate - to trigger action. According to a study by AdRelevance, too much clutter adversely affects the performance of a banner and negatively impacts on a banner's ability to brand. Concise ads are successful because they deliver a message or name that the viewer can remember.
2. Provide something interesting to viewers. It is not necessarily true that people do not read ads. People only read what is interesting to them - and sometimes, it can be an ad. Making the case for targeted placements, your banners will only be successful if you seek out people receptive to your message. Your banners will simply be part of the clutter to be ignored if you serve up your ads to viewers who considers your message irrelevant to them.
3. Give people a reason to click. Viewers will only respond to a compelling proposition. Your banners must be attractive or interesting enough to be successful in generating even the slightest flicker of response. People react favorably to banners that provide them a chance to win something. A banner where they can get something for free or a special discount also gets high click rates. Develop your banner's message around the most persuasive reason why people would want to go to your site, be it the information you provide, special offers and promotions, or products that can make their life much better.
4. Develop follow-through mechanisms. Leading users who clicked on your banners to your home page is acceptable if your advertising goal is to develop branding for your site. However, if you offered a special promotion or solicit a specific action from the user, you must create follow-through mechanisms for these users. A special page explaining the promotion in detail, for example, provides visual or messaging clues about what to do next. In addition, having a special page for each of your banners can help you determine which creative is more effective in bringing in traffic or sales.
5. Target your ads. Click-throughs alone are a poor indicator of the effectiveness of a campaign. The important metric is the number of qualified prospects that the banners solicited. If you are looking for audience for a site catering to baby boomers, a 15-year old who clicks on your banner is less relevant to you. A campaign targeted to a specific audience is likely to yield better results. A targeted campaign is geared to a specific audience, be it a certain demographic group or people working in a specific industry. You need to be more selective about where you buy ad space, preferably on those sites whose content dovetails with your specific marketing message.
6. Always test your banner ads. Before going full-blast in your campaign, you need to test your banners with a subset of your target audience. You should experiment with various banner designs to gauge the appeal of your promotional offers and the type of message that brings a high-interest customer. Most ad networks now allow advertisers to conduct a test run. With the falling cost of advertising, you can now buy 25,000 impressions for only \$25. This low cost can tell you a lot about how successful your banner ad campaign will be.
7. Banner ads must be part of your overall advertising strategy. Your marketing campaign will be effective if all its elements are sewn tightly together. Your banner ads must support your direct mail campaigns, and dovetail your email marketing. Test these campaigns head-to-head and judge them in terms of lead quality rather than quantity. Is your email newsletter sponsorship campaign bringing you more sales than your banners? If so, you must weigh the pros and cons of continuing each campaign, including the costs and response generated from each medium. Understand, however, that there can sometimes be a lag time between seeing the ad and actually responding to it.
8. Consider using rich media. Rich media banners, which include animation, sound and other special effects, can increase your response rate. These banners could facilitate e-commerce and may even lead to instant revenues. Some rich media banners have a built-in order area, expandable order forms, and even secure server technology to protect credit card transaction. Enliven, one of the leading rich media banner creators, claim that brand recall is about 34 percent higher than with a basic gif banner, and that over half the visitors spend from 30 seconds to as much as 5 minutes interacting with a rich media banner. The drawback, however, is that rich media banners will cost more to

produce and place; and they are not available on all web sites. Plus, unless users all go broadband, the banners can sometimes slow down web page loading times or even crash a page. If you have the resources, try incorporating rich media in a banner and test how it performs with standard banners.

The success of your banner ad campaign will depend on whether it drives users to action. Develop your banners with your users' needs in mind, constantly monitor its performance, and don't tire of revising it to improve your conversion rate. While banner ads is only one of the many ways to reach your audience, it can still be a very powerful tool if used properly.

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