

# What makes good advertising? 12 timeless principles based on the advice of famous advertising gurus

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**Abstract.** *What makes good advertising? It is an eternal topic with several opinions including online forums and people of the academia taking a stand. Some people think that there is a single answer to this question such as "42" in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams. Others say that the question is not so simple. This study aims to present what people creating advertisements think about the topic. Altogether 12 important principles will be discussed, all based on the advice of famous advertising gurus:*

- Good advertising sells.
- Good advertising is all about the customers.
- Good advertising promises something.
- Good advertising affects emotions.
- Good advertising differentiates.
- Good advertising attracts attention.
- Good advertising is newsworthy.
- Good advertising entertains.
- Good advertising is creative.
- Good advertising involves.
- Good advertising is simple.
- Good advertising is not ordinary.

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## Introduction

“- Do you know what advertising is?

- I haven't tasted it yet.

- It is not for eating. I'll explain to you what advertising is. People like to be happy.

I'm a painter.

- I see. That's advertising.

- No. Advertising is when people are talked into believing that they will be happy about something. I paint a picture of the island, newspapers write about the island, and entrepreneurs fall for it. It is called a resort. The wild tribe of white tourists worships a god called Baedeker and visits this place. It is called prosperity. Little Lagonda is going to be an island resort.”

Jenő Rejtő: *Quarantine in the Grand Hotel*

Daniel Starch, one of the forefathers of the science of advertising, explained in 1923 that (quoted by Dusenberry, 2005, p. 59):

“An advertisement, to be successful

- must be seen
- must be read
- must be believed
- must be remembered
- and must be acted upon.”

According to Leo Burnett, the founder of the ad agency of the same name, the way to create good advertising is to “Make it simple. Make it memorable. Make it inviting to look at. Make it fun to read.”

István Sas, the doyen of Hungarian advertising defines three “commandments” (Sas 2007, p. 33):

- drawing attention,
- distinction, and
- translating into a catchy genre.

However, some people say that a good advertisement even goes beyond the requirements mentioned above. Raymond Rubicam, one of the fathers of the Young&Rubicam agency, says “The best identification of a great advertisement is that its public is not only strongly sold by it, but that both the public and the advertising world remember it for a long time as an admirable piece of work.” (quoted by Ogilvy 2001, p. 196).

Péter Geszti, a writer of several excellent lyrics and remarkable advertising copies, has a similar view. He thinks that good advertising “does not only convey the message and achieve commercial success, but also becomes part of the public discussion.” (quoted by Sas 2005, p. 343).

As the answer is obviously not "42", it may be useful to expand on the approaches mentioned above, in order to see what makes good advertising.

## 1. Good advertising sells

After all, advertisements are all about selling. It does not matter how many people read them or talk about them, or how many awards they get at various advertising festivals; they are all about selling the product or brand.

As Walter Weir pointed out in the middle of the 20th century, "the best copy testing machine is still a cash register... It is always better to have a few people read your advertisement and buy your product than to have a lot of them read it and do nothing about it." (quoted by Schwab 2002, pp. 109., 220.)

David Ogily, possibly the world's most famous advertising professional, claimed (2001, p. 7.): "When I write an advertisement, I don't want you to tell me that you find it 'creative.' I want you to find it so interesting that you buy the product."

Victor O. Schwab, who was selected the best direct mail copywriter of the 20th century, states that "advertising is nothing but an expense (not an investment) unless it gets the kind of action desired by the advertiser." (Schwab, 2002, p. 14.)

Mark Silveira, the author of *Ordinary Advertising – And How to Avoid It Like Plague* says that good advertising results in good return on investment (2003, p. 15.)

Rosser Reeves, the TV advertising professional who developed the term Unique Selling Proposition (USP), uses even more straightforward words: "Let us say that ... you had started a company ... what do you want out of me? Fine writing? Do you want masterpieces? Do you want glowing things that can be framed by copywriters? Or do you want to see the goddamned sales curve stop moving down and start moving up. What do you want?" (Higgins, 2003). The Benton&Bowles ad agency went as far as to make "it's not creative unless it sells" their slogan.

However, other authors contest this opinion. According to strategic planning expert Jon Steel, the author of *Truth, Lies, and Advertising: The Art of Account Planning*, "advertising can rarely sell anything at all (...) the most it can do is interest someone enough to go visit a store" (Steel 2002, p. 141.)

In this sense, selling only means a "purchase" indirectly as the English word "advertising" suggests. The origins of the word lie in Latin: ad means "towards", and vertere means "to turn" thus, all in all, the term means "to turn someone's mind or attention towards something".

As Bill Bernbach, founder of DDB, the creator of the famous Volkswagen Beetle campaign says, "What you must do, by the most economical and creative means possible, is attract people and sell them. Now, this is difficult. This is sweat." (Higgins, 2003, p. 18.)

## 2. Good advertising is all about the customers

There is an old saying in the advertising business that says "the worm has to taste good to the fish, not the fisherman". Therefore Leo Burnett points out that "If you can't turn yourselves into a consumer, then you shouldn't be in the advertising business at all" (quoted by Steel 2002, p. 9.)

It is not easy, though. It is not even easy to put ourselves in the shoes of our friends once we meet them. It is even tougher to identify with strangers sitting in front of the TV, reading magazines, travelling somewhere, or just staring at the screen. Empathy is essential; you must "Adapt to who you are writing to, and try to think with their heads and see things from their point of view" (Pease - Dunn, 2001).

This was not necessary for a long time. By the sixties demand in the USA was so huge that Americans bought everything. We had a similar experience in Central-Eastern-Europe in the early nineties.

At the same time, Bill Bernbach says, "At the heart of an effective creative philosophy is the belief that nothing is so powerful as an insight into human nature, what compulsions drive a man, what instincts dominate his action, even though his language so often camouflages what really motivates him." (Steel 2002, p. xiii.)

Or, as Robinson explains in *The Manipulators - Unmasking the Hidden Persuaders -- The Conspiracy To Make Us Buy*, "The subtleties lie in how the product can be synchronized with the knowledge already existing in the consumer's mind. That's what it's all about. Do not try to change the customer. You have to make the product fit into his experiences. This is not the manipulation of customer habits, this is the manipulation of the product so that it fits into habits imprinted a long time ago." (Robinson 2001, p. 159.)

Therefore the most important question for consumers is "WIIFM", meaning "What's In It For Me?" (Pease - Dunn, 2001, p. 22.). This is the challenge that advertisements must meet.

Advertising professionals use a more complex term for the same idea, "customer insight", which is based on human behavior. This suggests that the most important point is not what the washing powder can do for the housewife, but what they can do together. If our concept finds this focus, they say "It's insightful" just the way they praised senior copywriter Nick Marshall in the movie *What Women Want*. (Meyers, 2000)

We may also connect this idea with relevance: the product (and its advertisement) must suit the target audience and the situation of consumers.

### 3. Good advertising promises something

"Promise, large promise, is the soul of an advertisement.", Samuel Johnson claimed as early as the 18th century. Two hundred years later David Ogilvy also pointed out that an advertisement that does not promise an advantage for the consumer will not sell the product – still, the majority of campaigns do not include any promises. (2001, p. 160).

One of the mistakes in this context is when advertisers communicate product attributes instead of the consumer benefit promised by the product, although they should only answer the most common consumer question, "WIIFM?", that is, "What's in it for me?" (Pease-Pease, 2001).

Talented advertising professionals have always been aware of this. A study on advertising psychology written by C.W. Frerk almost eighty years ago, in 1930, gave the advice (quoted by Sas 2005, p. 253.):

'Do not sell a piano; sell home atmosphere and intimate evenings.'

'Do not sell clothes; sell good style and appearance.'

'Do not sell shoes; sell comfortable walking and the joy of comfortable walking.'

'Do not sell a car; sell travelling, pleasure trips and beautiful landscapes.'

'Do not sell life insurance; sell the sense of family security.'

'Do not sell fruits; sell health and a life without medicine.'

'Do not sell books; sell the joy and advantages of a wealth of knowledge.'

'Do not sell theatre tickets; sell enjoyment, adventure and romantic impressions.'

'Do not sell advertisements; sell the way to more sales and income.'

'Do not sell things; sell ideals, feelings, self-worth, confidence and happiness.'

Of course benefits do not only include the things we gain by purchasing a specific product, or the reward we get, but also what we can avoid by obtaining it. For example, the reason for buying a deodorant product could be that "we will magnetize women" (gain), but also that "we will not have unpleasant body odor" (avoidance). Pease and Dunn explain this in their book *Write Language: the New Secrets of Writing Letters That Really Work* the following way (2001, p. 60.): "Everyone is motivated by one of two things: to win, or to lose the least". In an older and even more concise definition by Napoleon "Men are moved by two levers only: fear and self interest." (see Schwab, 2002).

### 4. Good advertising affects emotions

As the often quoted saying goes, "They don't buy facts". Of course this is more of a reference to the effect of good advertising on emotions – most people are emotional, although they tend to look for a rational explanation of their (purchase) decisions. "Nowadays, rational arguments in advertisements only serve to justify emotional decisions.", Marc Gobé writes in his book *Emotional branding* (quoted by Sas, 2005, p. 173.)

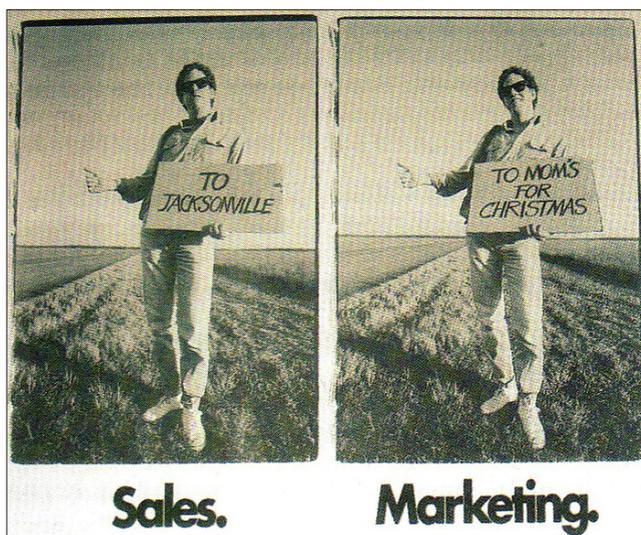
But to be honest, this has always been the situation. "In order to make a product successful, you need two things: it must function correctly, and affect emotions in the depths of the human soul", Ernest Dichter pointed out in the 1950s. "Don't sell shoes; sell lovely feet", he suggested (see Robinson, 2001).

Around the same time, Henry Huff claimed that "The job of the salesman and the advertising man, alike, is to lift his product out of the doldrums of the commonplace and into the realms of the real world. We do not sell houses; we sell homes. We do not sell shoes; we sell shoe comfort. We do not sell cosmetics, but sell beauty that cosmetics enhance." (Schwab, 2002, p.177.)

One of the most famous advertisements based on emotions was produced for the Evian mineral water brand. In the advertisement a bottle of Evian complained that the French seemed to have turned their backs on it and did not like it any more. For emphasis, a "teardrop" spilled from under its cap to indicate how much it hurt. The impact was unbelievable. The next day, French people bought up all stocks of Evian that they could find in stores. Was it a rational decision? No. Was it emotional? Yes.

Besides the idea itself, the colors, shapes, characters, the music and wording must also affect our emotions. It is no coincidence that the famous AIDA model includes a letter for emotions: its D is for desire. Moreover, the role of emotions has become so important that marketing books focusing on emotions have been published. The most well-known example is probably *Lovemarks – Future after brands* (2004 and 2006), where the author, Kevin Roberts, introduces the concept of lovebrands.

Others argue that the creation of successful advertising requires EQ (emotional intelligence) just as much as IQ. Even Horace, the Roman poet advised writers the same thing – he said that they should cry first in order to make their audience cry.



**Figure 1.** Good advertising affects our emotions.

Which ad is more convincing: the one saying "To Jacksonville", or the one saying "To Mom's for Christmas"? (Copyright by Crispin & Porter Miami advertising agency)

## 5. Good advertising differentiates

As professor of marketing Theodore Levitt said, typical products do not exist. All goods and services can be differentiated (see e.g. Levitt, 1968). Rosser Reaves agreed more than 50 years ago. According to the concept of unique selling proposition (USP) all advertisements must include a specific sales benefit that none of the competitors can match, and this unique selling point must be powerful enough to attract new customers. (e.g. see Trout – Rivkin, 2000).

For a long time they expected this power from the product itself. As a famous saying goes, "A talented product has more power than a talented pen."

Leo Burnett also highlighted that you must also find the inherent drama of the product – such as the reason why it is produced, or, more importantly, the reason why the customer buys it (Higgins, 2003).

For example, it is drama that the pizza is so cheesy that the cheese gets stuck between the box and the pizza. It is also dramatic that Heinz ketchup is not the one with the most tomatoes, but it is the slowest. The "slowest ketchup in the West" concept highlights the density of the ketchup as an indicator of its quality in a credible way. Or in the case of Guinness beer, the slogan "Good things come to those who wait" suggests that although the drawing of Guinness takes more time than that of ordinary beers, the result is also better.

Nowadays several people argue that the unique selling proposition does not lie in the product itself, but is created by the advertisement. Jon Steel, the author of *Truth, Lies, and Advertising* writes that "The parity between so many products in so many different categories makes it inevitable that the advertising becomes the point of difference, and that difference is as likely to be executional as strategic." (Steel, 2002, pp. 167-168.)

Therefore new terms are needed in addition to USP (unique selling proposition). Examples include UAP (unique advertising proposition) suggesting that the advertisement itself is unique (e.g. Milka and the cow), and UEP (unique emotional proposition) referring to the notion that differentiation can also be based on emotions.

The concept of ESP (emotional selling proposition) is also used similarly to the latter. Anyway, the point is to differentiate. As the subtitle of *Zag – The #1 Strategy of High-Performance Brands* by Marty Neumeier says (2007), "When everybody zigs, zag".

If we have a concept based on differentiation, it usually offers another major benefit: the idea will work on various tools and media in a similarly noticeable way, therefore we will be able to create a coherent and integrated campaign.

## 6. Good advertising attracts attention

To make consumers act as a result of our advertisement, we must make them notice the advertisement first. The most popular advertising models are all based on this idea. An early predecessor of the AIDA model was put into words by a businessman called E. St. Elmo Lewis (see Szabó, 1928). According to him, good advertising follows four steps:

1. Attract Attention
2. Maintain Interest
3. Create Desire
4. Get Action.

*How to Write a Good Advertisement* by Victor O. Schwab, originally published in 1960, provides a similar model, but with five steps (Schwab, 2002):

1. Get Attention
2. Show People an Advantage
3. Prove It
4. Persuade people to *grasp* this advantage
5. Ask for Action.

Steve Lance and Jeff Woll, partners at Unconventional Wisdom, a creative resource group, recommend the acronym 'AIR' in their book (*The Little Blue Book on Advertising*, 2006, pp. xiv-xv.):

1. Attention – get the audience's attention
2. Interest – hold their interest
3. Recall – make them recall the message.

According to István Sas, highly effective messages are based on the trinity and harmonically equal ratio of "attracting attention – information – convincing argument". (Sas, 2005 and 2007)

Anyway, all of these approaches suggest that first of all we must raise people's attention. Leo Burnett says, "if you don't get noticed, you don't have anything" (see Higgins, 2003, p. 26.)

At the same time, attracting attention must not be self-serving. According to creative director David Scott (quoted by Sas, 2005, p.127.) "When I want a high recall score, all I have to do is show a gorilla in a jock strap." This would probably attract attention and everyone would remember the advertisement. However, it is a major question whether they would identify the advertised brand and, especially, whether they would consider buying it.

Or there is the "... example of being able to attract people to an ad by standing a man on his head on a page. But that is not a good ad unless you're selling a product that keeps things from falling out of that man's pockets.", as Bill Bernbach says (Higgins 2003, p. 17.)

The same applies if dogs, children or women are displayed. If we see such an advertisement, we are most likely to remember it better, but they should only be deployed if there is a relationship with the advertised product, or their use facilitates acceptance.

Many advertisements attract attention, but we do not know what the subject of our attention is supposed to be. In the early nineties there was a legendary advertising spot for MŰSZI, a Hungarian IT company – a man with a hat came in, took it off, snapped his fingers and said, "MŰSZI". Everyone remembered (and still remembers) this advertisement, but no one knew what it advertised. There were several guesses, of course, but they did not even come close to what MŰSZI stood for – it was the short name for Mezőgazdasági Üzemszervezési Számítástechnikai és Informatikai Részvénytársaság (Agricultural Operational Organization, Computing, and Information Technology Company).

It is also worth to take the advice of Rosser Reeves, the father of Unique Selling Proposition (USP), explained in the sixties on the same topic: "First you should make the product interesting, not the advertisement. Unfortunately many copywriters do not get the difference" (Trout – Rivkin, 2000). But we may also quote Leo Burnett: "We want the customer to say: This is a great product!" instead of "This is a great ad!" (Higgins, 2003).

However, this does not mean that the product must be displayed all through a 30-second advertising spot (or it has to appear at all), and this does not mean that our press advertisement should not be more than a gigantic product photo. We create advertisements exactly because the product itself would not attract enough consumer attention.

It is interesting that there are cases when the aim of a specific advertisement is nothing else than raising attention. In such cases the advertiser may remain unknown for a while. These are the so-called teaser campaigns whose task is to attract the attention of consumers. The most well-known Hungarian example is that of the BEE brand. Back in those days the city was full of posters, and everyone was guessing what the brand could be. Most people guessed that it was a fashion brand, but later they found out that it was a special mobile service package for young people, developed by the service provider Pannon. But Dj Juice (another youth brand by Pannon) also had a similar campaign. The most interesting teaser campaign, however, was probably "Who knows Klára Széphidi?" ("Ki ismeri Széphidi Klárát?"). The whole city was guessing who Klára Széphidi could be. We did not get an answer, but in two weeks it turned out that Klára got famous thanks to Europlakát – the campaign itself belonged to the media owner company Europlakát.

## 7. Good advertising is newsworthy

"I do not regard advertising as entertainment or an art form, but as a medium of information." says David Ogilvy in the beginning of his most famous book ("Ogilvy on Advertising", 2001, p. 7). He adds that "If you are lucky to have some news ... announce it loudly and clearly." (2001, p. 71.)

Ogilvy was famous for gathering a lot of newspieces. Even the headline of his most famous advertisement ("At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock") was a sentence adopted from a professional publication called *The Motor*. (Rolls-Royce's reaction was typical: the chief engineer said, "It is time we did something about that damned clock.")

In this respect, good advertising professionals learn to think like a journalist, a reporter, and a newspaper editor, too. They must find out what stories can be considered as news that interest people, and how they should be packaged, including text, layout, highlighting, and paragraphs. This is also true because it would be wrong to think that our advertisement competes with other advertisements. No. It competes with the news, articles and programmes of newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the internet.

Therefore it is an advantage if our advertisement seems to be more of an editorial than an advertisement. Michael Newman, author of the book *22 Irrefutable Laws of Advertising: And When to Violate Them* goes as far as saying "All players of advertising – creatives, crew, clients – should go through daily papers each and every morning with an eye to find some hidden ammunition that could be turned into actual or tactical advertising." (Newman, 2008, p. 212.)

Of course daily papers in this sense are not limited to political dailies like *Népszabadság* or *Magyar Nemzet* as most people do not read these but tabloids. Therefore it is much more important to read through *Blikk* and the like, or check out the five most popular articles on the news site index.hu. These may all serve as inspiration to formulate an effective message about our product, or prepare an advertisement with news value.

### Figure 2. Good advertising is newsworthy

Ogilvy found the headline "At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock" in an article published by *The Motor* magazine. (Copyright: Ogilvy Advertising Agency)



The Rolls-Royce Phantom III Sedan - 111,500

"At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock"

What makes Rolls-Royce the best car in the world? "There is really no magic about it – it is merely patient attention to detail," says an eminent Rolls-Royce engineer.

1. "At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise comes from the electric clock," reports the Technical Editor of our journal. There must be some outstand improvements – ascertainable.
2. Every Rolls-Royce engine is run for seven hours at full throttle before installation, and each car is test-driven for hundreds of miles over varying road surfaces.
3. The Rolls-Royce is designed in an over-drive car. It is eighteen inches shorter than the largest domestic car.
4. The car has power steering, power brakes and automatic gearshift. It is a very easy car to drive and to park. No chauffeur required.
5. The finished car spends week in the final workshop, being fine-tuned. Here it is subjected to 98 separate checks. For example, the engineers use a microscope to look for scale-white.
6. The Rolls-Royce is guaranteed for three years. With a nine-month of dealer and participants long Coast to Coast service is no problem.
7. The Rolls-Royce radiator has never changed, except that when the Henry Royce died in 1933 the monogram RR was changed from red to black.
8. The coachwork is given five coats of primer paint and hand rubbed between each coat, before one coat of finishing paint is given.
9. By moving a switch on the steering column, you can adjust the shock absorbers to suit road conditions.
10. A picnic table, removed in French suit, slides out from under the dash. Two more swing out behind the front seats.
11. You can get such optional extras as an Ingersoll coffee-making machine, a draining machine, a hot, hot and cold water for washing, an electric stove or a telephone.
12. There are three separate systems of power brakes, one hydraulic and one mechanical. Damage to one system will not affect the others. The Rolls-Royce is a very safe car – and also a very steady car. It comes normally at eighty-five. It topped in excess of 100 m.p.h.
13. The Bentley is made by Rolls-Royce. Except for the sedans, they are identical motor cars, manufactured by the same engineers at the same works. People who feel difficult about driving a Rolls-Royce can buy a Bentley.

Rolls-Royce. The Rolls-Royce illustrated in the advertisement – i.e. principal parts of construction K123456.

If you would like the outstanding experience of driving a Rolls-Royce or Bentley, write or telephone to one of the dealers listed on the opposite page.

Rolls-Royce Inc., 10 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Circle 1144.

March 1935

## 8. Good Advertising entertains

This title seemingly contradicts the previous point, but it does not. In their famous book *Age of Propaganda*, Pratkanis and Aronson explain that even the viewing rate of news programmes on television depend on how entertaining people find them, and the acquisition of information is only a secondary viewer motive. Even the director of BBC, a public service media group, said that news programmes are entertainment programmes as well: "As a consequence, their choice of news at least partially depends on the entertainment value of each newscast, recording or story" (Pratkanis – Aronson, 2000, p. 172.)

We also find a similar pattern if try to understand what makes a man attractive in the eyes of a woman. Well, the sense of humor occupies a high rank among other characteristics.

"All advertisements are 'pushy' – and we meet them in the streets, on TV, and in newspapers. The messages of the seller reach consumers almost always when they are not interested in the advertising content. But if the message of the advertisement is 'packaged' in an eye-catching, witty, entertaining way, at least it will not provoke anger. Moreover, a really great idea may overwrite the disturbing effect and achieve sympathy", István Sas says (2005, p. 57.)

## 9. Good Advertising is creative

"The gist of advertising generated sales is creativity", says Michael Newman (2008, p. 286.) István Sas goes as far as to say, "In advertising, creativity is not an option but a duty." (2007, p. 37.)

A message is still not communication. Sas says, "The telling of raw selling intention is advertising, too (e.g. 'Gilt for sale at a low price'). The introduction of the product for sale is advertising, too (e.g. 'Here's the new Nokia E-684/b with hidden buttons'). The praising of the product is advertising, too (e.g. 'With all the achievements of the latest technology'). The proper placing of a brand name is advertising, too (e.g. Philips neons, Philips banners on a sports field, etc.) However, we do not consider these solutions real advertisements, because they are 'not creative enough'. Even non-experts feel that advertisements have some kind of a duty to package raw intention in some kind of an idea. Creative advertising translates raw information and transforms it into some 'more digestible' form" (2005, p. 171.)

Balázs Román, editor of the *Kreatív* magazine has a similar opinion: "Announcements are different from advertisements because the available space is only used for displaying a communicative message and they make no attempt at all to use creative expressions." (Román, Balázs: Leolcsózáva ("Called Cheap", *Kreatív*, Hungarian communications magazine, April 2008., p. 13.)

György Kaszás actually says the same (2000, p. 323.): "Advertising operates at a brand level and builds a world of communication, an identity. A notice, on the other hand, is a mere communication of a series of information, stuck at the level of a product announcement." He also adds, "An advertisement without creativity is like decaffeinated coffee, nicotine-free cigarette, non-alcoholic beer, or an emasculated man. Each of them lack the purpose for which they were originally created." (Kaszás, 2000, p. 336.)

But why is a creative idea so important? Because recalling the connection lying in the idea is definitely a much easier task for our mind than remembering logos, details, and raw information." (Sas, 2007, p. 55.) Moreover, "the first impression of an imaginative advertisement is able to reach the same effect as 8-10 repetitions of stereotyped advertisements." (Sas, 2007, p. 55.)

The main problem with unimaginative ads is that they must be broadcast or published a lot of times. As Einstein said, "Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." However, creativity "means that the message gets through faster, therefore it costs much less than an ordinary advertisement" (Newman, 2008, p.18.)

It is no wonder that Simon Dalglish, director of the Cannes Advertising Festival between 1980-1988, said (quoted by Sas, 2007, p. 189.), "It's not the battle of arguments anymore, but the battle of ideas."

Bob Kuperman, former DDB New York creative director points out that (quoted by Sas, 2007, p. 85.) "Really great ads have two things in common. One of them is that they are effective. The other is that during the campaign launch meeting someone stands up and says, 'You must be out of your mind!'"

Ogilvy's explanation of a "big idea" in his book *Ogilvy on Advertising* somewhat accord with the above (2001, p. 16.):

1. Did it make me gasp when I first saw it?
2. Do I wish I had thought of it myself?
3. Is it unique?
4. Does it fit the strategy to perfection?
5. Could it be used for 30 years?

Maybe there is not a lot of examples, but we can certainly find some: the orange man of Tango, the Marlboro cowboy, Singapore Girl of Singapore Airlines, the campaigns of *The Economist* business magazine, the „Absolut ...“ series by Absolut Vodka, etc. The original idea for the advertisement of the Absolut brand was "There is nothing that Swedes enjoy more than this, served cold." – suggesting that it is part of the healthy and joyful Scandinavian lifestyle. The layout included a Swede bathing in a lake, a towel, a watch, and of course, vodka. (see Kaszás 2000, p. 15-17.) However, the final choice was not this, but the "Absolut ..." campaign. It was not only more imaginative, but also extremely expandable. First of all, there

were the playful visual and phrasal associations with the vodka bottle (absolute beauty, courage, balance, magic, etc.) Secondly, there was the unique shape of the vodka bottle that could be recognized in objects, forms of nature, buildings and details of cities. But there were also political, societal and social issues. After a while even artists such as Andy Warhol got involved.

The campaign by the TBWA advertising agency was effective: in 1980 only 12 thousand bottles of Absolut were sold in the USA, but within ten years sales increased to 29 million bottles, and by the turn of the millennium they sold 58 million bottles a year (See e.g. Hamilton, 2000).

We must also mention a unique characteristic of Big Ideas: Ogilvy claims that they can grab the attention of consumers and convince them to purchase. And now we have returned to our original point: good advertising sells. At the same time, Ogilvy also adds that there is 1 great idea out of 100 advertisements. Most advertisements are more like „So what?“

But, as Miklós Michelberger, the author of the book *The Holey Cow* claims, “creativity in itself does not involve any additional costs. (...) To put it simply, you can use the very same budget to create first-class and awful advertising, too” (2000, p.14.)

What is more, creativity plays a key role here: “Creativity is the last real competitive weapon, the last legal tool that enables companies to gain an advantage over their competitors.” M. T. Rainey says (Newman, 2008, p. 269.)

Nothing illustrates this better than the so-called *Gunn Report*. Donald Gunn examined the world’s 200 best advertisements in 1992 and 1993 (ones that won the most awards in creative contests), and according to his analysis these ads were 2.5 more effective than their “average” counterparts – this means that award-winning advertisements do work and sell well. Mark Silveira agrees, and he adds that “if customers like the way you communicate with them, they will buy more”. (Silveira, 2003, p.50.)

## **10. Good Advertising involves**

Today, many people argue that involvement is a characteristic of “new advertising” which has been brought to us by the online world, since the name Internet also suggests interactivity. But they are absolutely wrong. Good advertising has always involved consumers in some way or another.

As Howard Gossage, a prominent advertising professional of the sixties, also known as the ‘Socrates of San Francisco’ said, “Ask the client what his biggest problem is, then write an ad asking readers to help solve it” (2006).

If we go further back in time, we can see that the English word ‘communication’ originates from the Latin ‘communis’ which means something common. So the point is that some sort of imaginary, conscious community is created between the

sender and the receiver, and, in an ideal case, the message gets to the receiver's mind as quickly as possible, thus making a great impact.

The Chinese were also aware of this thousands of years ago. As their ancient proverb says, "Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I'll remember. Involve me, I'll understand."

"Just Do It", a slogan by Nike, is also an excellent example. It involves consumers, and urges them to put on their running shoes instead of looking for excuses.

Neil French calls this "The Law of the Chat" (see Newman 2008) also often mentioned by István Sas in his books (2005 and 2007). In other words, people expect involvement, excitement, and relations – something left for the consumers' imagination, to let them solve the advertisement and say "aha". If the advertisement is funny, they may also say "haha", and if it is unusual, they may even have a "wow" experience.

A good example to that is the Playboy billboard with a female breast and the slogan "Guys, pray for rain." When it was raining, we could see the lady with a 'wet shirt' effect.

## **11. Good Advertising is simple**

"The easiest way to recognize an unexperienced advertiser is to see that he speaks very much. Talking too much does not attract people, but scares them away", László Szabó said in the 1920s in his book *The Science of Advertising* (1928).

As always in advertising, it is all about basic psychological principles. Are we annoyed by acquaintances who can talk for hours without taking a breath, aren't we? Well, we may listen to these people politely (maybe saying to ourselves "this is crazy"), but in the case of advertisements we probably switch to other channels, turn to other pages, or click on another link. This is even more valid in the era of information overload: we have no time for complicated things.

But everything seems to be getting more and more complicated. Al Ries and Jack Trout describe this with a graphic example in their book *Positioning* (1997): "The Lord's Prayer contains 56 words; the Gettysburg Address, 266; the Ten Commandments, 297; the Declaration of Independence, 300; and a recent U.S. government order setting the price of cabbage, 26,911". However, as they say, "The best approach in our over communicated society is the over-simplified message."

Of course it is not simple to be simple. At first we might think it is easy to write short texts, but, quite the contrary, it is easier to compose a longer piece of writing. It is no coincidence that Pascal wrote in a letter, "I am sorry I wrote you such a long letter; I did not have time to write a short one." (see Trout – Rivkin, 1999).

Of course simplicity does not only refer to length, but also to comprehensibility. It is not easy to be simple in this sense, either. Moreover, it is actually easier to be

complicated than to be simple. It is no surprise that Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of *Treasure Island* refers to the same idea: "The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean" (see Trout – Rivkin, 1999).

Let us think about reference books whose text becomes unintelligible after the third sentence. Or let us think about lecturers whose classes are so incomprehensible that we lose the thread in the second minute, and it seems that everyone around us feels the same. In such cases we tend to think that we are wrong and not clever enough, but this is not the case. The author or the lecturer are wrong, because they can only express themselves in a way that only they can understand – and even they fail to understand their own words several times.

While we usually give a chance to a reference book or a lecturer, we immediately put down papers and magazines, switch to another channel, or navigate to another web page if the advertisement is boring for us. Statistics show that we should spend 35-40 seconds to grasp the information content of an average newspaper advertisement, but in reality readers only spend no more than 1-2 seconds on an advertisement.

Therefore we need to help the audience with advertisements that are as simple and comprehensible as possible. As Sas says, we need to "be brief, but say the most. It may be the hardest task in the advertising industry – and the one that is the most difficult to master." (2007, p.159.)

But how can we achieve that? First of all, let us look at the example of writers whose works are considered easy to read. One of them, George Hemingway, says: "I use the oldest words in the English language. People think I'm an ignorant bastard who doesn't know the ten-dollar words. I know the ten-dollar words. There are older and better words which if you arrange them in the proper combination you make it stick" (see Trout – Rivkin, 1999). Winston Churchill explained the same idea briefly: "the short words are the best, and the old words best of all." (quoted by Ogilvy, 2001, p.146.)

David Ogilvy may have been the greatest copywriter of the world, but he did not think he was a good writer. However, he did think that he was the best editor in the world (Higgins 2003, p. 83.) He considered himself someone who could edit text until all redundant elements would be gone. The motto KISS ("Keep it simple, stupid!") was also attributed to him. (Ogilvy, 2001, p. 88.) Another apt simile by György Kaszás says, "Advertising is like a skirt: the shorter and tighter the skirt, the more effective it is" (Kaszás, 1996).

It is no wonder that "Brutal Simplicity of Thought" has become the philosophy of M&C Saatchi, one of the biggest global advertising agencies in the world, and "Relentless reductionism" is the motto of the Fallon advertising agency. This means that everything must be simplified in the extreme, and the specific idea must be communicated with as few elements as possible (see in more details: Fallon - Senn 2006).

Clients, that is, advertisers providing the money, often protest against this approach. As a result, most advertisements are garrulous: they want to tell everything, therefore they say nothing. When approving advertisements, they just "tick" product benefits on a list: their point is to see as many arguments supporting the product as possible. But this is not affecting the readers, listeners, and viewers of advertising in the least. Moreover, research suggests that in such cases, the result is the opposite of what was intended.

In *Persuasion*, a book by Horace Schwerin and Henry Newell, the authors describe how they tested two different versions of the same car advertisement (see Beckwith, 2003, p. 134.) One of the advertisements was simple and only mentioned engine power. The other said more. In addition to outstanding engine power, it also drew attention to the excellent design of the car, the choice of several models, and extremely economical fuel consumption. (This advertisement is mentioned by advertising agencies as "The Commercial the Client Will Love.")

After presenting the two advertisements, researchers asked viewers which advertisement version would make them trade in their car for the advertised car brand. 6 percent said that the advertisement about engine power would make them consider replacing their car.

And what about the second advertisement containing so much valuable additional information? How many people did it affect? Not a single one. Zero percent. "The More You Say, the Less People Hear" (Beckwith, 2003, p. 134.)

In other cases the client would like to present its wide range of products instead of providing as many details about a single product as possible. Their philosophy may be "If we have so much space, let's fill it". But this is not the way to success, either. Joseph Sugarman, the author of *Advertising Secrets of the Written World*, one of the most successful copywriters of the late 20th century describes the example of a watch manufacturer which hired him to create an advertisement. They wanted to feature nine different watches in the advertisement, but Sugarman advised to include only one. The client did not budge an inch, so Sugarman offered to create both advertisements and test them in the very same issue of *The Wall Street Journal*. The result was that the offer featuring only one watch generated six times as many calls from potential customers than the one presenting nine watches at the same time (Hafer - Sugarman 1998).

Therefore we can say that professionals creating good advertisements remove all unnecessary elements from their pieces. István Sas refers to none other than a story by famous Hungarian conjurer Rodolfo when presenting an advertisement placed in a fish shop window (Sas, 2005, p. 146.):

According to the story first they used the text "Fresh fish available here today".

Then they started thinking about it. Are we sure that all of this is necessary? For example, the word "here" is redundant. It is enough to say "Fresh fish available today".

Then they realized that "today" was not necessary either. Of course it is today. What remains is "Fresh fish available".

All right, but it is not usual to sell bad fish. So it is enough to say "Fish available."

But why should we use the word „fish“ in the window of a fish shop? Therefore "Available" remains.

Well, the word "available" does not make much sense in itself, so it can be left out, too.

All in all, there is no need for any advertisement.

The story above is definitely an exaggeration, but the planning and preparation of an advertisement requires a similar approach. According to Neil French, one of the prominent figures in the advertising world, we should always ask the following questions before publishing the advertisement, or even before we present it to the client (see Sullivan, 2003, pp. 75-76.):

- Can we make this ad work without a body copy?
- What about that tagline? Is it bringing any new information to the ad?
- Does the advertisement need a headline? Is it doing something the visual can't do?
- And that logo – isn't there some way we can incorporate it into the visual, decreasing the number of elements?

So the keyword is: simplify. Volvo communicates the idea of safety with a safety pin, Burger King refer to their hot sauce with a metaphor of a match, and McDonald's demonstrate the introduction of their cafés with a single coffee bean.

Lazar Dzamic wrote a whole book about advertisements that promote, publicise and sell without the use of words, only using images to convey their message. The book is titled *No Copy Advertising* (2001).

But we can also learn a lot from the way screenwriters sell their ideas to producers in the first round. At these times, they have to summarize their story in a short sentence. For example:

- ET: "An alien makes friends with a young boy from Earth in order to get home."
- Speed: "Die Hard on a bus" and
- Alien: "Jaws on a spaceship" – it is worth to check out how much the "facial structure" of the alien resembles the ones in the "Jaws" movies... what a suggestive title. (see Heath 2007).



Figure 3

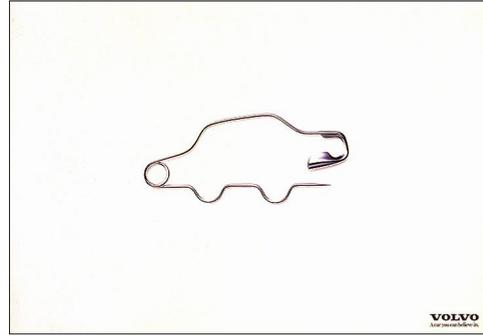


Figure 4

Figure 3, 4, 5. Simplicity is the characteristic of many excellent advertisements – just as in the case of McCafé, Volvo and Burger King (Works by Heye Group Germany, Dentsu Y&R Japan, and Saatchi & Saatchi Singapore).



Figure 5

## 12. Good advertising is not ordinary

What advertisements do you remember that you saw or heard yesterday or today? TV? Radio? Newspapers? Magazines? You probably cannot recall any of them, or just one or two.

Of course this does not only apply to the advertisements of today. Éva Móricz mentions reports published in the sixties by researchers at Harvard University: they found out that 85% of advertisements hardly affect the audience (Sas 2005, p. 103.) Victor O. Schwab said back in 1960 that "Dripping water on the back of a duck with an eyedropper – well, this is the impression that an ordinary advertisement makes on the average person." (Schwab, 2002, p. 101.)

The problem is not with extremely good or extremely bad advertisements. Once again: the problem is not with extremely good or extremely bad advertisements. The real problem is ordinary advertising. "Most advertising is neither awful nor great. It's something infinitely more dangerous. It's ordinary", says Mark Silveira in his book *Ordinary Advertising – And How to Avoid it Like Plague* (Silveira 2003, p. 18.)

71% of consumers say that advertisements should be "more shocking and surprising" to capture their attention (Newman, 2008, p. 19.) Well-known strategic planner Jon Steel points out that "Effective advertising necessarily divides people.

The advertisement should invoke an emotional reaction in order to make people notice it and think about it. The signs of reaction may vary individually. I think it is more beneficial if some people love the campaign, while others hate it." (Steel, 2002, p. 204.)

Unordinary advertisements are, of course, divisive, so they trigger emotions even during their creation. Bob Kuperman of Chiat/Day advertising agency claims that "All great advertising has two things in common: It's effective. And it's always preceded by a meeting in which someone says: „Are you crazy?" (Robinson, 2001, p. 270.)

Let us find an analogy – what affects us more: if we go back to a room where everything is just as tidy as before, or if we find a chair on the floor upside down? Obviously it is the latter that engages our attention immediately as it is unexpected and extraordinary.

Pease and Dunn (2001, p. 40.) present an interior design company preparing for the premiere of a new interior design model. Their idea was to create an interior that is all black and white, instead of using normal colors. They did not use any other colors, everything was black and white. Their radio commercial said: "Visit our brand new black and white interior design exhibition. Will you love it or hate it? Doesn't matter. What matters is that you come."

And the result was masses of people arriving, with sales agents prepared for extreme love-hate reactions waiting on the spot. When visitors left the room, the salespeople asked: "So how did you like our black and white presentation?" If the visitor replied "It was fantastic! I liked the decoration very much!", the sales agent went on saying "You know, this is one of the most trendy designs nowadays. When are you planning to build your own house?". If the reply was "What awful colors! Horrible!" then the salesperson said "You know, I'm not surprised by your reaction at all. After all this is an unusual design. What colors do you like anyway?"

Can you see how much uniqueness matters? In contrast, a further problem with ordinary advertisements is that they have to be broadcast or published repeatedly to get noticed. As Howard Gossage said some time ago, if a commercial is good, it is enough to broadcast it only once (Gossage – Goodby, 2006).

But, what is the situation in Hungary? György Kaszás claims that "Hungarian advertisements either make idiotic puns with no content, or overwhelm consumers with a dry, strict cascade of information explaining the explanation of the explanation in the copy" (2000, p. 152.) It also uses clichés, which make it mediocre. Kaszás says that average beer advertisements use one of the following arguments, or any combination of them (Kaszás, 2000, p. 133.):

- Cold beer tastes great.
- Fresh beer foams.
- It has an excellent scent and flavor.

- This beer is for real beer enthusiasts.
- This beer is tradition itself.
- This beer has been produced for X years in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany.
- It is produced using the original method.
- This beer is produced in Hungary according to the original license.
- According to the German Purity Law.
- This beer is good quality.
- Beer is the drink of a cheerful, loose atmosphere and similar companies.
- Beer brings friends together (usually three male friends).

Of course, the challenge in this regard is that advertisers often think that they are not ordinary. But they are, actually. The situation is similar to the crowd's reaction in the classic scene of the movie *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979). Brian says "You don't need to follow me. You don't need to follow anybody! You've got to think for yourselves! You're all individuals!" and the crowd responds: "Yes! We're all individuals!" in unison. Brian then says "You're all different!" And they reply "Yes, we are all different!" in unison. Just one thin voice says "I'm not..."

### **13. Summary, conclusion**

So what makes good advertising? As we can see from the above:

- Good advertising sells.
- Good advertising is all about the customers.
- Good advertising promises something.
- Good advertising affects emotions.
- Good advertising differentiates.
- Good advertising attracts attention.
- Good advertising is newsworthy.
- Good advertising entertains.
- Good advertising is creative.
- Good advertising involves.
- Good advertising is simple.
- Good advertising is not ordinary.

All this, of course, does not mean that the list of the 12 rules mentioned above could not be expanded with further items, or some of the existing items could not be combined.

Actually, one of the most important points of good advertising is that rules may be broken, but first you have to know the rules in order to break them.

The main aim is to create great advertising, and we must never forget the motto often mentioned by Jay Chiat, former CEO of Chiat/Day advertising agency: "Good enough is not enough."

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